WISDOM BEYOND REASON

S. R. SHARMA

In this illuminating and thought provoking book, Professor Sharma — whose historical writings have made a mark alike by their recondite scholarship and penetrating vision — blazes a new trail...He has dealt here with the deeper problems of life which have baffled men at all times, and make us feel all the more desperate in the modern world...He hits a happy mean between the rival claims of the heart and the head, and points a way to the attainment of Peace — individual and social — through the fullest integration and fulfilment of human personality.

Abdul Majid Khan.
5. 4. 62.

WISDOM BEYOND REASON

By

S. R. SHARMA

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FOREWORD

By

SRI DILIP KUMAR ROY

LAKSHMI NARAIN AGARWAL

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WISDOM BEYOND REASON

Do not go merely by what you hear;
do not go by considerations based on
mere appearances;.... but act when of yourselves
you indeed know: "This is salutary, this
is blameless, this is approved of by the
wise, this being done, or attempted, leads to
well-being and to happiness."

—Bhikku Silachara

* * *

Finally Brethren,

Whatsoever things are true,
Whatsoever things are honest,
Whatsoever things are just,
Whatsoever things are lovely,
Whatsoever things are of good report,
If there be any virtue, and if there
be any praise, think on these things.

— St. Paul

* * *

Whatever is glorious, good beautiful, and mighty,
understand that to go fourth from a fragment of my
splendour.

— Bhagavad Gita

Wisdom is the fulfilment of reason, as service is the fulfilment of love. Seconds grow into minutes, time grows into eternity, as rivers flow and merge into the ocean. So man grows into God : perennially growing perennially expanding, perennially fulfilling himself.

—from the author's Epilogue

Dedicated

to

those who do not see eye to eye with me

but

choose to fulfil the best

in themselves

their own way

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Professor Sharma hardly needs an introduction. He made his mark, years ago, not only as a learned Professor of history but also as a competent appraiser of what history symbolises. And so he marshalled historical facts in his books not to highlight the pageant of "events"—but to bring out what we could learn, if only we would, from the lesson of human folly and wisdom. In a word, he is not one of those amateurs who are more interested in teaching history than in being taught thereby. To pinpoint what I want to convey I will give below an excerpt from a brilliant essay Bertrand Russell wrote recently on *History as an Art*:

> "I do not wish for one moment to suggest that the common man is unimportant, or that the study of masses of men is less worth pursuing than the study of notable individuals. I wish only to preserve a balance between the two. I believe that remarkable individuals have done a great deal to mould history. I think that if the hundred ablest men of science of the seventeenth century had all died in their infancy, the life of the common man in every industrial community would now be quite different from what it is. I do not think if Shakespeare and Milton had not existed

someone else would have composed their works. And yet this is the sort of thing that some 'scientific' historians seem to wish one to believe."

Fortunately for us, Professor Sharma is not such a 'scientific historian' vowed only to the 'study of masses of men'. He is more interested in those architects of human destiny who have created the basis of life's higher values in different fields. His two previous books, *Our Heritage* and *India As I See Her* will have illustrated what I mean.

But in the present book, *Wisdom Beyond Reason,* he has blazed a trail which may to many, who have known him as a historian pure and simple, seem not only new but startling as well. For he has broken out here into (to put it in his own words) a "queer confession." (Chapter I)

I say 'startling' for a double reason: first, because a historian does somehow stand out as a somewhat impersonal registrar of things personal or, shall we say, an inhuman collater of human facts—and here he is all too human and personal; and secondly, because the word 'confession' has a bad odour—at any rate for us, Indians, who prefer the doctrine of Grace and *lila* to that of man being born in sin and falling out of the Garden of Eden to be redeemed through repentance or a Christ's vicarious atonement for our sins. Confession, for us, is too intimately associated with remorse to allow us to feel happy about it.

Happily for the likes of us, however, Professor Sharma has confessed here not to his sins (of omission and commission) but to his spiritual aspirations and heart-searchings which have led him up through the labyrinth of reason to a wisdom beyond reason—the one goal of all mystic seeking. It is the vista of liberation which such wisdom affords that Professor Sharma speaks of continually in his account of the mystic voyage he undertook four decades ago which made him accept as "Reality" what is so apprehended "by so many seers of the Truth, so widely scattered in space and time....yet unanimous in their fundamental experiences and visions." And the deep sense of fulfilment accruing from this vista made him prefer "to live in the obscurity of such a personal conviction with the humility of faith in the Unseen and the happiness that hope brings" to being swept off his feet by "the strong currents of contemporary scepticism, rationalism and realism." (Chapter II) Furthermore, he is so persuaded because he came to realise through his spiritual conflicts that the summit-vision he aspired for could not be attained through "hidebound reason." One is reminded forcefully of a couplet of Guru Nanak's:

> "A chariot serves on land but when you reach the ocean, you know you'll need a boat or, if you'll fly, then wings, friend, you must grow."

The quarrel is as old as the hills—between the two pathfinders: reason and the senses, leading the realist materialist, *versus* faith and intution, piloting the mystic

mariner. Since the rise of science Reason (with a capital R) has come to usurp the altar of religion with the result that we have come to idolise the Mind as the supreme explorer and assayer of all knowledge. So the world stands today sharply divided into two camps: the mental man deifying the intellect and the man of faith bowing to spiritual experience—

> "For not by reason was creation made
> And not by reason can the Truth be seen....
> Reason cannot tear off the glimmering mask :
> Her efforts only make it glimmer the more."
>
> —Sri Aurobindo

Whereat the sturdy rationalist of today shrugs his shoulders and protests impenitently: "C'est donc vrai que nous avons fait une idole de Raison: mais montrez-moi une qui est superieur." ("It is, indeed, true that we have made an idol of Reason: but show me one who is superior." — Valerie)

There have been innumerable attempts down the weary ages to reconcile the two champions but, in the end, men have found it impossible everytime, and so the idolator of Reason and the man of God have, at long last, stopped parleying—agreeing to disagree, each bent on following his own light. Such being the case, a time must come to every serious seeker of Truth when, at the parting of the ways, he will have to bid farewell to the one to be able to follow the other to any purpose, since none can

hope to arrive anywhere oscillating between two irreconcilable gospels. Thus Professor Sharma too had, at the cross-roads, to make his choice. Happily for the likes of us again, he elected to hark back to the ancient call of the great mystics of every clime who spoke with one voice and parted company with the modern realist who hopes to see into the heart of ultimate Reality with the microscope of the intellect alone. But we who have found this microscope utterly inadequate *vis-a-vis* the fathomless mysteries of multitudinous Life cannot help but endorse his finding that "the call of the scriptures"—at one with heart's aspiration to explore the heights and depths of Life—"is not a call *away from* Life but a call *to* Life—not, indeed, to the activism of 'the blind led by the blind', but to Karma-yoga as the Gita propounds it." (Chapter IV)

The account of Professor Sharma's conversion is revealing not merely because he reveals his struggles impelled by an inner urge, but also because he is—his mystic leaning notwithstanding—a son of the modern age dominated by the intellect. So he quotes profusely multifarious modern thinkers of the East and West if only to stress how difficult it is to know which way one must turn to find the right guide. It is not easy to make one's choice because man, being a complex being, cannot help responding simultaneously to calls that are ever at tug-of-war as, for example, the call to activity as against that of passivity, inner living as against orgying in many mooded life, silence as against the full-throated expression of all the

cries to be heard, and so on. The nett result is that, do what we will, we cannot, at one throw of the dice, stake our all for one ideal as against the other, least of all for the laurels of contemplation as against those of siren life with her hundred lures. No wonder the 'introvert' feels himself somewhat out of the running in the mad whirl of modern life revelling in all manifestations of energy and vitality so pointless as a mere breaking of records or feats of endurance. But the modern mind will go on acclaiming all this stupendous waste of our capital enthusiasm, in the name of life even when what it acclaims is childish or even vulgar, in the last analysis. Professor Sharma has exposed the hollowness of this modern craze of activity for activity's sake. But the root of the trouble is that the craze which motivates the activity is not recognised as craze thanks to the machinations of a deep Maya making people dance to her tunes under the illusion that only the investment of such intoxications bring in dividends of tangible joy. The rest—like mystic contemplation or peace—they shun either as a frozen vacuum which is unhealthy or as a figment of the imagination whose bliss is of dubious validity: it is only the activist who knows what he is about, being the only realist.

But mystic experience is not what the activist-realist imagines it to be. The silence and the peace it entails are anything but intangible or imaginary. Only, while the boons of gushing life promoted by siren Maya are apprais-able by the untrained senses and gullible mind, those of authentic mysticism can only be appreciated by a psychic

perception, evolved through a long and arduous self-discipline. But even a little of this deeper seeing delivers through the deeper perceptions it brings in its train. The result is that one who has contacted the deeper Reality beyond the ambit of Maya is weaned by the higher Reality from his lesser loves. But as this liberation can only be brought about by a radical change in the stuff of human consciousness leading finally to a complete reversal of values, those whose consciousness is as yet untransformed, cannot understand the mystic values as against their accepted human values. So Professor Sharma, having had glimpses of the tranformed consciousness, cannot help but speak of "the irresistible call of this 'silence of God' " which, he feels, must conquer us all eventually "as we approach the sunset hour of our life."

Eventually—yes, but not here and now, even at the sunset hour. For the majority of men do remain unconquered, till the end. There is, however, no escape for them, since all who, at the sunset hour, die unconverted will have to be born again and yet again till they do reach beyond the Maya to the Lord of Maya: *mameva ye prapadyante mayam etam taranti te*—says the Gita: 'those who attain to Me outsoar the Maya. And everyone will have to attain Him, willy-nilly', because

> The life that wins its aims asks greater aims,
> The life that fails and dies must live again:
> Till it had found itself it cannot cease.
>
> —Sri Aurobindo

But those who are ripe here and now are given glimpses of the last Reality which engender in their turn the nostalgia to make the rare glimpses become less rare till, finally, the vision comes to abide.

This is what happened to Professor Sharma—and that is why he became "more and more engrossed" in his quest and felt urgently impelled to seek the company of the elect, the authentic mystics, who blessed and encouraged him "to tap all the resources of the Unseen."

In this compendious volume Professor Sharma has spoken with a rare sincerity and charm of the nourishment that accrued to him cumulatively as he went on resolutely "tapping" the Source even when the yield seemed slow and the discouragement of modern life hard to overcome. May all who truly want to win through to the Attainment give him a cordial hand-clasp felicitating him on his persistent refusal to be discouraged, keeping faith with faith; and may others, too, who, still groping, are unable to find a clue to the Light they seek, glean some helpful hints from this account of his mystic voyage which must, eventually, be undertaken by all seekers of the Ultimate Harbour, called by the supreme pledge of the Lord of the Gita:

Sarva-dharman parityajya mamekam sharanam vraja:
Aham tvam sarva-papebhyo mokshayishyami ma suchah.

'Laying aside all creeds and codes
Seek refuge thou in me:

Have no misgivings—from thy sins
I will deliver thee.'

January 12, 1957. DILIP KUMAR ROY

PREFACE

"Wisdom beyond reason" is a simple paraphrase, in modern terms, of the implications of the 42nd verse of the third chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita.* It reads :

> The senses are overpowering, but the mind is even more powerful; superior to the mind is the discriminating intellect or reason; and *beyond reason is wisdom* (personified as HE).

I have attempted in this brief essay to sum up my own conclusions as to what constitutes the wisdom to which reason points but fails to attain. I believe with Dean Inge that —

> If we see things as they are, we shall live as we ought; and if we live as we ought, we shall see things as they are.... Action is the ritual of contemplation, as the dialectic is its creed. The conduct of life rests on an act of faith, which begins as an experiment, and ends as an experience.

No philosophy is worth even the paper on which it is expounded, if it is not rooted in experience; and experience is intensely personal. So, too, is all I have written here. It is the fruit of my experience gathered—consciously or unconsciously—during sixty years from the soil of my earthly existence, ripened by the sunshine of inspiring examples, and nourished by the habit of deep contemplation. As Wordsworth said:

We live by admiration, hope, and love,
And even as these are well and wisely fixed,
In dignity of being we ascend.

If any among those who happen to taste the juice of this fruit find some delectation in its savour, the fruit-gatherer will feel in that shared happiness his greatest satisfaction.

I am deeply indebted to Sri Dilip Kumar Roy for his illuminating Foreword: I owe to him more than I can adequately express here.

January 22, 1957 S. R. S.

I

A QUEER CONFESSION

'CONFESSION' is a queer word with diverse implications. It might mean (a) admission of a crime in a law-court, (b) acknowledgment of a sin to a priest, or (c) a statement of one's religious belief.

This book is a record of my sojourn (as a sort of 'Time Traveller') on this interesting planet. Yet, it is no travel diary as ordinarily understood. I never left the shores of my country. Within its vast boundaries, too, there are tracts which I have not traversed; though like the 'Cloud Messenger' of Kalidas, I have witnessed some of its impressive landscapes : the imposing serenity of the Himalayas, the limpid waters of the Narmada mirroring the marble rocks near Jubbalpur, the turtle-infested turbid stream of the Jamuna at Mathura, the wild grandeur of the Jog Falls in Mysore, and the expansive quiet of the Southern Ocean whose waves lave the temple-steps at Kanya-Kumari. These samples sufficed to slake my thirst for sheer sight seeing. The earth may have fairer prospects to show elsewhere. But even the most extensive sojourn will always leave out some places unvisited, some of the superlatively attractive spots unseen. The eye is never surfeited with the heart-ravishing panorama of sight seeing, nor the ear with listening to the strains of soul-entrancing music.

Here, however, I am concerned with other views, other experiences, other problems—more vital and fundamental. Millions of travellers have preceded me on this planet, and millions more will come when I am gathered to my fathers. But cutting across time and distance I feel a kinship with all humans whose essential nature is everywhere and ever the same as mine. We are sharers in a common existence in a deeper sense than what economists, politicians, and statesmen comprehend in their schemes of 'co-existence.' They touch but the surface-life of humanity, hardly recognising its inner realities.

I do not suggest that all their altruistic idealism is misplaced, or that their well-meant endeavours are fruitless. Such humanitarian work must go on increasingly. More and more people ought to have their basic human needs satisfied. Collective efforts to achieve these ends must not be slackened. But that achievement is not to be assessed merely in statistical or quantitative terms. There are other human wants which call for other means and other norms.

Man seeks something more than food, clothing, and physical shelter. He needs a sense of security as well as freedom. He must have mental not less than material comfort. From this point of view, the UNESCO meets —or endeavours to meet—precious requirements, through the promotion of Education, Science, and Culture. Of

these, the objectives as well as methods of Science are well-defined. But the ideas and methods of Education are ever changing, because they are to be constantly adjusted to the needs and outlooks of successive generations. These can never be static; for life is dynamic. Culture is the complex product of both Science and Education. It comprehends all the Humanities as well. Nevertheless, in our modern world, we have set upon its brow the hall-mark of secularism. Religion, which played a vital role in its making throughout the historical centuries, is now relegated to a corner where, lingering like an unloved guest, it might die a natural death: 'unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.'

Sociology is a promising branch of the modern studies hovering between Science and the Humanities, and may be expected to give Religion an extended lease of life—at any rate in its outer social manifestations. But it, too, is exposed to the prevailing rage for analytical assessments and mathematical tables on which man is universally sought to be dissected. It is forgotten that Truth does not lend itself to such abstractions, and, most of all, MAN is too complex and concrete a being to reveal himself truly and completely to statisticians and other specialists who seek to know 'more and more about less and less.'

Philosophy and Literature are other intellectual

pursuits that touch man more intimately. Where the former is not too formal or academic, and the latter is not unrealistically fanciful, they serve to unravel some of the profoundest mysteries of our human existence. Nonetheless, to my mind, nothing appears to go to 'the root of the matter' so deeply and intimately as does Religion: correctly understood, it satisfies our intellectual as well as emotional nature more fully than any merely secular pursuit.

By Religion I do not here mean any sectarian piety or ritualistic behaviour which leads to conflicts such as have disfigured History with 'man's inhumanity to man',—all in the name of God! I do not also include in my view of Religion anything that acts as an 'opiate' that charms us into some sort of an escapist's paradise. 'Life is real, life is earnest,' and it is not to be negated in the name of any god or philosophy. My Religion prompts and inspires me to face Life with all its problems, including the sources of evil.

We should learn to look at Religion as we look at Science,—without malice. I am not inclined to reject Science as the parent of the atom bomb, though this monster-child—this *enfant terrible*—could not have been conceived but by the brains of scientists and delivered by the skill of technicians who (it is not to be overlooked) have also co-operated to make our modern world an

attractive place to dwell in. Both Religion and Science are fecund parents of good and evil: we can bury their monster-children without seeking to kill their innocent parents. Both could be equally well mobilised to serve the best interests of man by teaching them to obey higher commands than those of self-seeking priests and politicians. We can minimise — if not altogether eliminate— evil by rational control, without necessarily extirpating its human agents. If we aim at the total purification of man's outlook,— i.e. by the removal of all auto-toxins of selfishness,—we may hope to rebuild a Paradise on Earth, out of the very elements that threaten to precipitate us into 'the other place.'

Science may choose to work in its self-elected isolation as the condition of its fulfilment, but the field of Religion is Infinity itself. Science may exclude Religion, but Religion need not abandon Science. Both have the pursuit of Truth as their common ground, though each defines its own objective using a different term for it. Philosophers call that common ground Reality, and men of religion call it God. While the former are generally contented with trying to understand Reality through the exercise of their intellects, the latter would have nothing short of realising God with their entire being.

The tools of the scientist are the apparatus of his laboratory. They have a meaning for him, and their appropriate uses. In the eyes of an uninstructed layman, they have neither meaning nor utility. If the scientist — who (*qua* scientist) is a layman in the field of religion —looks upon the places of worship and their paraphernalia of 'bell, book, and candle' as equally sensible and appropriate tools helpful in the attainment of the ends that men of religion have in view, even as his own devices are indispensable instruments in his science-laboratory, there should be little cause for conflict between rational scientists and the religious minded. But when men of science step out of their self-restricted field of investigation and rail at those who are devoted to other objectives than their own, there is the queer phenomenon of 'the kettle calling the pitcher black'. If each respected the logic of his own accepted position, there is really no *casus belli* anywhere.

Mahatma Gandhi, a sincerely religious man, lately declared: "I used to speak of God as Truth; now I say, "Truth is God." There is no quibbling here. Tukaram, the doyen of Maratha saints, long ago expressed the same view in memorable words :

Satya parata nahin Dharma,
Satya tenchi Parabrahma.

'There is no religion apart from Truth : Truth is the greatest God.'

There could hardly be two persons—outwardly speaking—so contrasted as Gandhi and Tukaram. Yet, the identity of their conception of 'Truth as God' is very significant. Indeed, as the *Veda* anciently apprehended it : *ekam sat* : 'Truth is One.' This is also the conviction brought home to us in all the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* which is the greatest reconciler of all dichotomies. It is both interesting and reassuring to find its central teaching echoed in so unexpected a book as the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis, in 15th century Europe. The medieval monk writes :

> The man in whose eyes all things are One, who traces all things to One, he can be steadfast in his affections, and remain always at rest in God.

Does not modern Science, also, reduce all things to One? Has not the dualism of matter and energy been liquidated and dissolved in the "cosmic meditations" of the most recent investigators of the nature and structure of the Universe? Are the basic units of matter ("the imperishable foundation-stones of the universe"), reduced to "waves of probability", a surer basis for the entire evolution of physical and biological realities than, say, the Biblical belief that: 'In the beginning was the Word, and

the Word was with God, and the Word was God'? Or, the declaration of the *Mandukya Upanishad* that 'All that exists is verily OM: What has been, what is, and what will be, — is indeed OM'?

As a rational being, I have been led to these dizzy heights of speculation, from very nebulous beginnings, since my arrival on this planet. Like one who has climbed up to the summit of a high mountain, and feels like recollecting at least some of the main stages of his journey, I am inclined to recount a few of my outstanding experiences which have made me what I am at this moment.

Such an experience came to me recently when I went to Almora in the Himalayas. The sublime serenity of the surroundings sank into my soul to find a lodging there for all time. The snowy peaks rose one above another like surf-covered billows — blue, green and white—but suffused with an impressive silence which is unknown to the restless and noisy waves of the surging seas. And as dawn broke over the scene, the summits of those sublime ranges were lit by a golden glow, whose splendour seemed to leap from peak to peak, until the jealous mists and clouds conspired to drop a heavy or hazy curtain over parts at least of that glory.

Then I thought of the spiral uphill road which took me to Almora. The serpentine way fringed with forests of pine, deodar, and fir, winds intrigueingly through the mazes of the amazing mountains, with the Kali river for its companion, as it creeps into the ravines, leaping from rock to rock, now disappearing, now bursting into view in a delightful cascade ravishing the hearts of the onlookers. *En route* are Ranikhet in the Kumaon country, with its tiger-infested jungles, and Garam Pani—as I was told — with its springs of cold water in the hot summer, bubbling with boiling water during the cold winter season. It was at the close of October that I passed through Garam Pani, and the spring-water was already getting too warm for a comfortable drink.

My excursion to Almora was more than a picnic; it was a pilgrimage. Two remarkable books which I read inspired me to undertake it. The first of these was *Lead Kindly Light* by Vincent Sheean, an American, who interviewed Mahatma Gandhi on the eve of his assassination in New Delhi. The writer vividly described Trisula, one of the Himalayan peaks visible from Almora, and dwelt with enthusiasm on the spiritual associations and appeal of the place. The second book which reinforced the lure of the Himalayas was *Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita* by Sri Krishna Prem, an Englishman, now long in retirement at Mirtola (about 16 miles from Almora) —"Uttara Brindaban"—where he went more

than twenty-five years ago following his Guru Sri Yashoda Mai of Varanasi. He was formerly Prof. Ronald Nixon of Lucknow University, and educated at Cambridge. His spiritual "conversion" came about in a very remarkable way, and his exposition of the *Bhagavad Gita* bears testimony to his possession of what Sri Aurobindo has called the *pashyanti buddhi* or the "seer's intuition". The sage of Pondicherry remarked about him that "he has passed from thought into experience.... One feels here a stream from the direct sources of Truth." My desire to meet him, however, proved abortive. His retreat in the interior, far from the haunts of men, was inaccessible to me on account of my coronary impairment. But he was kind enough to reply to a letter I wrote to him after I returned home. Answering certain queries, he laconically observed : "There is no use fooling around with *pravritti* once you have heard the other call..... But *nivritti* doesn't necessarily mean the Himalayas."

There were other attractions for me in the eternal 'Abode of Snows'. From my boyhood days I had conceived the ambition to have a glimpse, however remote, of the highest mountains in the world. From this point of view, Almora was some sort of fulfilment of a long cherished dream. I also visited Mussoorie under the same impulse and had my fill of the grand prospects in view at Lal Tibba—some 7000 ft. above the sea-level. I there recollected the sentiments of Samarth Sri Ramdas—the

saint of Sajjangad—who declared : *vishranti vatate tethen : javaya punya pahije.* 'There is an ineffable serenity there; but to reach it one *must be lucky.*'

Hardwar and Rishikesh, *en route,* were to me irresistible because of their associations with Swami Rama Tirtha—the Pole Star of my aspirations since I was a schoolboy. I could there give full play to my imprisoned proclivities; and, for a time, I lived in my reveries more than in the actual world around me. Lachman Jhoola, Tapovan, Gita Bhavan,—and the pellucid Ganga flowing past, deeply, serenely, majestically—what a grand panorama! Contemplating the surrounding scene, one gets lost in the harmony of the hues of earth, water, and sky. There is a symphony in silence that dissolves the seer in the seen. An inner voice seems to whisper : "Be still, and know that I am God!" *Shantam, Shivam, Advaitam!*

At Hardwar—the 'Gateway to God'—the unheard melodies of Rishikesh yielded place to the heard voices of the pious herd. It is a veritable Tower of Babel;—the Babylonian 'Bab-Ili', too, meant the 'Gateway of the Gods'. Here men sing and pray and dance to the tune of loud cymbals. Everything here is symbolic,—so it seemed to me. Overlooking the Birla Ghat was an inscription from Manu :

Agbhir gatrani shudhyanti,
manassatyena shudhyati.

'The body is cleansed with water; but the mind is purified only by Truth.'

Then there is the curious custom of feeding the fish with fried grains, as they swarm towards the bank in countless shoals. Evidently it is symbolic of the charity one is expected always to practise towards all who come to us down the stream of life. Yet, most people indulge in it for the sheer amusement it affords, as a puerile pastime.

Finally, the illuminating ritual of launching floatillas of tiny lamp-cartons on the swift moving river, at nightfall. The flames get extinguished at various stages of their precarious voyage, — again symbolic, I suppose, of the vicissitudes of our ephemeral lives. How ambitiously we start on our romantic sprints called the serious avocations of life, and then, like the flame-floatillas of Hardwar, get extinguished without knowing where, when, how or why!

Howsolong one may love to loiter in lands away from home, or linger and lounge among the alluring landscapes, and solitudes and silences of the Himalayan heavens,— one is forced to return to the realities of humdrum existence, sooner or later in life. I felt I returned rather too soon. But there were lesser compensations in open-air strolls, especially a little before sunrise, when 'incense

breathing morn' beckons you from your bed for a tryst with God, in the solitude of silence, as commended by the ancient seers :

Brahme muhurte chotthaya
chintayet atmano hitam.

'Seek ye the welfare of the Soul in the early hours before sunrise (which is trysting-time with God).'

One such morning I was out on such a stroll. The Dawn was bursting on the eastern horizon. The beamless sun peeping through the mists, looked almost a replica of the full-moon. Then with his fingers of light, the bright orb gently brushed aside the curtains that half-shrouded and half-disclosed him. As I watched the silent show on the screen of the eastern sky, I do not know who prompted my lips to mumble the *Gayatri* which I had not uttered consciously during at least three decades preceding. But the text seemed to emerge from some source deep within me, although it was also evoked by the diurnal drama of the sunrise I was witnessing.

Om, tat savitur varenyam,
bhargo devasya dhimahi,
dhiyo yo nah prachodayat!

'I mediate on the glorious light of the sun; let him inspire us with true wisdom!'

I have ever since stuck to the habit of centring my

daily meditations on this pivot, so mysteriously brought home to me on that memorable morning. I now realise why our ancestors spoke of the sun as the soul of all that moves and moves not :

Surya atma jagatah tastushashcha

and also why they prayed : *tamasoma jyotirgamaya; tejasvinam avadhitamastu!* 'Lead us from darkness to Light; let us meditate on the source of Light.'

'Lead kindly Light' is not a vain prayer. 'Seek, and thou shalt find it,' is a truthful assurance. I am convinced that intense longing for enlightenment and guidance does not remain unfulfilled. There is a mysterious power in the universe which helps us along the path. I have never failed to receive the appropriate assistance, at the appropriate time, for the needed next advance. Sometimes the hint came from a casual remark made unwittingly by a friend in the ordinary course of conversation; at other times it was a book of whose existence I was not aware, but it reached my hands somehow just when I was ripe to profit by reading it; or it was a spontaneous 'brain wave' not induced by any conscious effort on my part; and most astonishing of all, a *Mahatma* comes to me without having ever thought of going in search of one; and instinctively I feel he is an embodiment of the Inner Guide in human form.

II

THE SUPREME SEARCH

Whence do we come ?
Whither do we go ?
Is ignorance the sum
Of all that we know ?

THOUSANDS have asked these questions before me, and thousands more will continue to ask them after me, either to themselves or to others, without waiting for an answer — like Pilate. The lives of millions upon millions on this earth show how little it matters whether one raises these metaphysical issues, or he doesn't. The attitude of most men and women is like that of Omar Khayyam : to 'take the cash in hand, and waive the rest.' To 'make hay while the sun shines' is, no doubt, a very practical and prudent advice. It is certainly wiser than 'crying for the moon',—especially in a dark night when 'the encircling gloom' mocks at all our 'petitions for light'.

For most 'realists' the 'wisdom' of Omar Khayyam appears to be the best policy. If fortune should smile on them, they too would sing :

Here with a loaf of bread
beneath the bough,

A flask of wine, a book of
verse, — and thou
Beside me singing in the
wilderness —
And wilderness is Paradise
enow !

Ah! 'If wishes were horses!' But, unluckily, horses are vicious, rather; and beggars cannot ride them. Proverbially, they cannot be choosers. Let alone Omar's 'flask of wine', few can command 'a loaf of bread',—though for most persons there may be a 'thou beside me' — crying rather than 'singing in the wilderness.' 'Give us this day our daily bread,' comes to the lips of such men more spontaneously than either 'Thy kingdom come' or 'Thy will be done.'

"To talk of philosophy to the starving poor is a cruel joke," declared Swami Vivekananda; and, like Mahatma Gandhi, he also added : "The god they most urgently need is bread." But that basic biological want being satisfied, both Vivekananda and Gandhi insisted, like Jesus Christ, that "man cannot live by bread alone." Nevertheless, for most people 'butter and jam' constitute the next two desirable desiderata to make bread more palatable... These may be considered symbolic of all "the good things of life" coveted by those who share Omar's attitude

towards 'the cash in hand'. Inebriated with that sort of 'realism', they, too, wishfully speculate saying :

Ah, Love! could thou and
I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme
of things entire,
Would not we shatter it
to bits — and then
Remould it nearer to the
heart's desire !

However, fortunately for us, there have been in this world other dreamers with other loves : the love that Buddha, Christ, and Gandhi preached and practised. Henry Drummond called it "the Greatest Thing in the world." It is common knowledge that even a dog is not satisfied with mere feeding and a comfortable kennel. It wants to be petted and loved by its master. Man, too, craves for the satisfaction of this divine element in his composition. His capacity to love and be loved is, indeed, infinite. He pursues it, and it pursues him eternally. In fact, love is the most universal of instincts among all sentient creatures. Even the ferocious beasts of the jungle manifest it, — towards their young ones in particular. The lioness licks and suckles her cubs with the affection that a cow shows to her calf, or the human mother to her fond child. It is interesting to watch the mother-bird feeding

her fledglings, and teaching them to fly. But human love transcends the basic animal instinct and rises to sublime heights, through conscious purification and endless expansion.

What is marriage without love ? What are children without love? What is family life without affection? What are society, country, and humanity, if we do not love them? Indeed, love is as the breath of our nostrils. We cannot live without it.

Buddha regarded this world as the home of all miseries — *sabbam dukham.* Still he wished to be born here again and again to relieve the sufferings of all creatures and to serve them. "Your treasure is where your heart is," declared Christ. That is also why our ancestors spoke of the mother and motherland as being worthier of respect than heaven itself : *janani janmabhumishcha svargadapi gariyasi.* The world as one family—*vasudhaiva kutumbakam* — is another noble concept which arose out of the same sentiment and regard for man as man — wherever he might live. This is no mere fancy of poetry, but the most substantial fact in our human existence. The entire world, despite its apparent conflicts and hatreds, is struggling to attain this harmony rooted in love.

Our failure to achieve that goal is not due to the idealists who talk of love, but because of those who refuse

to practise love in the name of 'realism'. This is the wolf that masquerades under a sheep's clothing everywhere. Ignorance, greed, narrowness, intolerance, suspicion, malice, —are the vicious brood — not of love — but of its antithesis, hatred. It is a *bahuroopi* which assumes many attractive forms : of 'my interests *vs.* your interests'; 'my country *vs.* your country'; 'my *ism vs.* your *ism*', etc. Nevertheless, the sinner is a potential saint 'in-the-making'. Even hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue. And if hatred appears to be the prevailing vice, we also witness, all over the world, how it seeks to put on the mask of love, — love of peace, love of freedom, love of humanity — the greatest good of the greatest number — and, finally, love of Truth itself. Mimicry is a form of emulation which demands the greatest intimacy. You cannot long mimic the language of love without being conquered by it. For love is all-conquering: *amor vincit omnia.* "Hatred is not eliminated by hatred", said Buddha; "hatred is overcome by love".

Love and hatred are like light and darkness. The admission of the one is the negation of the other. Love is constructive, while hatred is destructive. Love is freedom, and hatred is bondage. Love leads to happiness, and hatred to misery. If we desire the happiness of all, we should love all. And, indeed, if we love all, we should deny freedom to none. For love and freedom are inseparable. To withhold the one is to deny the other. Freedom

cannot thrive in the absence of love. The two together are the twin-parents of human welfare and happiness.

Likewise, neither love nor freedom could be split. We cannot love by halves, nor be free only in part. Partial freedom is no freedom, and half-hearted love is no love. A sense of wholeness and completeness should belong to both, if they are to be real. Wholeness is another name for harmony. Hence, if we are seekers of harmony, we can achieve it only through the factual experience of wholeness. This, indeed, is what we have been a-seeking—sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously—through all our struggles in history.

Human history has been characterised by some as a record of man's fight for freedom : religious freedom, political freedom, economic freedom, social freedom, etc. But all these are really partial phases or aspects of an inner struggle to attain the common objective, the common goal which all desire. That desire, as everyone knows, is the desire for happiness,—happiness that is complete, uninterrupted, and lasting. This, too, like love and freedom, must be sought for as a whole, and for all. It is the failure to appreciate this necessity of conducting the campaign on all fronts simultaneously, in the fullest consciousness of every soldier and unit that ultimate success depends upon a constant remembrance of the common aim of the co-operative endeavour, — that the struggle appears to be,

at times, unavailing, abortive, or futile. Humanity's war for the conquest of happiness will be won or lost as a whole. The basic desideratum is a spiritual conviction, not a mere mobilisation of the material resources.

From a material point of view, the world is, indeed, getting together more and more as one indivisible whole. In its outer manifestations, this healthy tendency is expressing itself in the form of various interrelated bodies in whose working economists and politicians, scientists and savants, from many countries are cooperating. But the consummation of their united endeavours is still hampered or impeded for want of a whole-hearted acceptance of love (rather than mutual suspicion) as the fulcrum of their dealings with one another. They meet as diplomats and not as sincere *men*. If there is love in their hearts—as there must be, since they are also human—it is only sectional or sectarian: for 'my country' and 'my people.' When they speak of world-welfare, they have an eye on some immediate advantage to be secured for their own corner of the globe, ignoring the feeling for the true brotherhood of man. Luckily, however, despite these myopic aberrations, the overall trend towards the evolution of a single human society—wherein every man, woman, and child shall be respected for his or her own sake—is appreciably evident in the World Health Organisation and various other purely humanitarian activities of recent times. An earthquake, flood or famine calamity is no more local-

but evokes sympathy and relief-aid from all parts of the world. To that extent the ideal of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* is being actually approached. These are the real triumphs of love — not as a saintly or poetical sentiment, but as a concrete and palpable fact. But this is not enough; a bigger stride is needed. It must be in the direction of redressing the claims of the much neglected heart.

Our generation, certainly, has nothing to fear from a possible starvation of the intellect. We have gone far enough along the vistas opened out alluringly by our reason. Now we are faced with certain monstrous problems with which we should not have been confronted, but for our fanatical devotion to the doctrine of materialistic realism, to the exclusion of every other faculty of our complex human nature. We might regain a little of our lost harmony if we could, or would, induce our intellects to listen to the wisdom of our hearts. For, as Cowper declared : "The heart may give most useful lessons to the head, and learning wiser grow without his books."

The heart desires union; the intellect seeks division. We need the services of both, but not the domination of either. We must have balance and harmony, and no obsessions of any sort. If the one is inclined to run away with our sanity, the other should draw in the reins, to save us from the disasters of reckless driving. The hour is, indeed, ripe for even reason to be chastened with the

promptings of the 'still, small voice' which has lain smothered so long, in the cacophony of more strident noises. The world has been pushed to the brink of a third catastrophic war, to avert which appears to be beyond the wits and capacity of its author-victims. The remedy must be searched for, not in the empty cupboards of bankrupt reason, but in the deeper recesses of the human heart where the ancient sages found rich deposits of the wisdom we most need.

That wisdom is nobody's monopoly. It is available to all who seek it. One needs no elaborate laboratory-equipment to discover and make it his own. It is writ large in the open book of Nature, and inscribed in the inmost depths of our being. Its accents are the alphabet of what is called Intuition. They could be heard by anyone who gets attuned to their appropriate wave-length. The ancient sages, all the world over, listened to these inner promptings because they believed in their capacity to guide them to the right path. They never faltered in their faith in the Unseen, merely because it was unseen. They had the courage to test it out in the crucible of personal experience. They rejected everything that was not genuine, or whatever proved ineffective 'to deliver the goods'. Those 'goods' were to them as palpable as our 'tangible realities' are to us. And they were, surely, happier than we are, and more at peace with themselves

and the world around them, although they lacked our paraphernalia of 'comfort and security.'

Our generation, too, is not lacking in courage, love of Peace, and adventure. Our wars, our propaganda, and our plans to explore the possibilities of reaching other planets like the Venus, Mars, and Mercury, are indicators of our keen desire to attain whatever we set our hearts upon. We are not deflected, or deterred from these objectives by the fact that, as yet, the only Venus we meet with is in our own parlour, the only Mars is on the battlefield, and the only Mercury is in our temperaments, or in the instruments that measure temperatures. Nevertheless we too are 'such stuff as sages are made of,' — intrinsically speaking. But, extrinsically, we are so preoccupied and obsessed with our 'factual realism', that — barring a few men of genius — we do not even admit the existence of realities undetected by our grosser senses. Yet it is encouraging to find an Einstein unequivocally declaring that "the cosmic experience is the strongest and noblest mainspring of scientific research." In that experience Einstein found "the presence of a superior reasoning power which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe." He also declared: My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds."

'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.' Humility is a rare virtue, especially among those who think they 'know all that is knowable.' But how much should a man know before he can know how little he knows! Newton, who discovered and formulated the laws of gravitation, which provided the foundations to modern physics, confessed that he was but a child playing with the pebbles and colourful shells on the shore, while the vast ocean remained unexplored before him.

"On the sea-shores of endless worlds," sang Rabindranath Tagore, "children meet and play!" He also wrote: "When I bring you coloured toys, my child, I understand why there is such a play of colours on clouds, on water, and why flowers are painted in tints — when I give coloured toys to you, my child."

It, indeed, needs the insight of a poet to see "the universe in a grain of sand, and eternitiy in an hour," as did Blake. Even for the epoch-making biologist, Charles Darwin, there was a meaning and significance in the processes of evolution, which his orthodox traducers failed to credit him with. "There is a grandeur in this view of life," writes Darwin, "with its several powers having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one. Whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning, endless forms, most beautiful and most wonderful, have

been and are being evolved." What an astounding view to be expressed by one who was denounced as a heretic!

Did not Shelley speak of life as "a dome of many-coloured glass tinting the White Radiance of Eternity"? But to detect this "White Radiance of Eternity"—the One "colourless" Reality behind the distracting "tints"—calls for other than our prismatic media of apprehension. Philosophers like Plotinus, mystics liks Jacob Boehme and Brother Lawrence, scientists like Einstein, and poets like Wordsworth and Tennyson, possessed the insight which was so characteristic of the seers of our own *Vedas* and *Upanishads.* My reading of their ensigns, and contemplation on the realities apprehended by so many seers of the Truth, so widely scattered in space and time, differing as the poles in the circumstances of their lives, yet unanimous in their fundamental experiences and visions,—inclines me to accept as Reality what is so universally attested and established. I prefer to live in the obscurity of such a personal conviction, with the humility of faith in the Unseen, and the happiness that hope brings, rather than allow myself to be swept off my feet by the strong currents of contemporary scepticism, rationalism, and "realism."

Everything seen and felt in this Universe is a window through which we catch a glimpse of the Eternal-Infinity. As Tennyson put it :

The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas,
the hills and the plains —
Are not these, O soul, the Vision of Him
who reigns ?
Is not the vision He? Though He be not
that which He seems ?

"Our destiny, our nature, and our home", Wordsworth declared, "is with Infinitude, and only there." But to realise it, we must be

Rapt into still communion that transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
While, with an eye made quiet by the power
Of Harmony and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

Then, indeed, we live "the one interior life in which all beings live with God, and themselves are God."

The 'Supreme Search' is the search for the Supreme. Its earthly manifestations are Love, Freedom, Happiness, Harmony — for which the whole of mankind is ever athirst. Though our blindly groping struggles fail to reveal their inner meaning and values, we yearn for Peace, Perfection, and Joy, because these are our original constituents.

"One has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end," says Rabindranath Tagore in the *Gitanjali.* We have been lingering too long in the "outer worlds", and it is high time that we turned our mental eyes to "the innermost shrine at the end." Lalla, the great woman saint of Kashmir, declared: "My Guru gave me but one instruction : *'From without enter thou the Inmost.'*—The whole purpose of life is to express God."

III

THE LOVE OF LIFE

OF all forms of love the most universal is the love of life. It is at the root of all our struggles for existence. Whether the aim of life is to "express God" or to be happy somehow, it is essential that one should live. Hence it is said : 'Hope lasts as long as life lasts.' Saints as well as sinners desire to live in order to be able to realise their respective ends. Though the animals and birds and fishes and worms may not be able to pray like man, consciously, for the gift of life—*mrityormaamritam gamaya*: "Lead me from death to Immortality!"—their 'instinct of self-preservation' expresses itself, nonetheless, in other unmistakable ways: such as flight from dangerous situations, or standing at bay to face an otherwise unavoidable attack, or finally, screaming and screeching, struggling and straining, fluttering and fuming, and vainly appealing with mutely eloquent eyes to the deadly enemy, or some other power, to save them from the calamity of death.

How the fear of extinction overtakes even some of the most thoughtful among scientists who devoted a whole life time to the biological study of 'life', is illustrated by the 'queer confession' of Thomas Huxley at a ripe age, when he wrote : "It is a curious thing that I find my dislike to the thought of extinction increasing as I get

older and nearer the goal. It flashes across me at all sorts of times with a sort of horror that in 1900 I shall probably know no more of what is going on than I did in 1800!" His great contemporary, Charles Darwin, astonished the world with his startling researches into the surprising manifestations of 'life'—from primeval protoplasm to man—and published his epoch-making theses on the *Descent of man*, the *Origin of Species, Natural Selection, Survival of the Fittest*, etc. His grandfather (who, too, was a naturalist) wrote books on *Loves of the Plants* and the *Laws of Organic Life*. And Sri Jagadish Chandra Bose removed the thin partition which divided the vegetable from the animal kingdom, and proved that plants, too, are silent but sentient participators in the life universal.

We also hear of carnivorous plants that entrap animals, reptiles, birds, or insects, and squeeze out their life, quite like beasts of prey lying in wait to ambush or waylay their unwary victims. Nature is, indeed, 'red in tooth and claw.' Life feeds on life everywhere : *mamsam mamsena vardhayet*. But biologists tell us that there is a 'method in all this madness', —a universal law as inexorable as any discovered by the scientists.

On the softer side of nature, we find the 'touch-me-not' and the sun-flower behaving as if they are as sensitive, or discriminating, as we claim to be. Does not the lotus blush in the moonlight, and the 'queen of the night' give

out her best fragrance under the same impulse, — as if both were equally affected by the delightful appearance of Diana in the sky? One life breathes in all, and all are happy to be alive! A medieval poetess, quoted by Rabindranath Tagore in his *Personality*, sings:

I salute the life which is like a sprouting seed,
With its one arm upraised in the air, and other
down in the soil;
The Life which is one in its outer form and its
inner sap;
The Life that ever appears, yet ever eludes....
The Life full of joy, and the Life weary
with its pains,
The Life eternally moving, rocking the world into
stillness,
The Life deep and silent, breaking out into
roaring waves.

What is this 'Life' "full of joy, and weary with pain"; —"a pendulam betwixt a tear and a smile", as Byron described it? We love it in happiness, and love it even in misery. The pitiable leper dwindling by the roadside; the attenuated tubercular (or cancer) patient in the hospital; the mangled and mutilated soldier on the battle-field; the dying beast in the jungle; — all desire to live. The fond mother, watching with anguish the unendurable

agonies of her long-suffering child, is still unable to bear the thought of its death, — is still anxious that it shall live, in spite of its afflictions. Our ubiquitous hospitals and lunatic-asylums are ocular proofs of our desperate determination to defy death and dementia, despite the living hell it means to those irretrievably consigned to their necessitous care. We detest death, though we know it is inevitable. We love life, though we cannot say why? Life challenges us to understand and fulfil it,—perpetually, persistently, perennially.

I dive into my dictionary and find an interesting array of essential ideas evoked by the elusive phenomenon we agree to call 'life'. It is, among various other things, 'animate existence', 'union of soul and body', 'the period between birth and death', 'a quickening principle in a moral sense', and 'eternal happiness, also He who bestows it', etc., etc. Nevertheless, we actually know as little about 'life' as the Blind Boy of the poet knew about "that thing called light." It attracts and eludes us; it sorrounds and suffuses us. It catches us in its toils and tentacles; but we can neither tear ourselves away from its tantalising experiences, nor explain or elucidate its enigma even to ourselves. Still, we long to live; and if we must die, we dream of a 'life beyond life.' Like Savitri, we would follow Satyavan's body into the very abode of Yama, and extort from him the boon of a renewed lease of life here on earth. Or, like Nachiketas, pester the God of Death

himself— unto the last—until he realises that there is no escape for him either, except through yielding up his secrets — the secrets of life and death — as revealed in the *Katha Upanishad*.

Nachiketas, the hero of this parable, is endowed with all the virtues that are needed to carry one over into the illuminating awareness of Reality beyond our sense-bound life. He has Faith, without which he would not have ventured on the great Quest; he has Courage, without which he would not have challenged Death to yield up his secrets; and, above all, he has Discriminating Wisdom, which enables him to reject all the blandishments — of power, pelf, pleasure and earthly prosperity — flaunted before him as substitutes for the Illumination denied to him. In the end, the Spirit of the Seeker triumphs over all the trials and temptations, and attains to the state coveted by all those who pray: *mrityormaamritam gamaya*—'Lead me from death to Immortality!'

Our 'love of life', on the contrary, comprises all that Nachiketas had the faith, courage, and discriminating wisdom to reject. Like prisoners enamoured of their prison-cells—content to be clothed and fed, or otherwise diverted, from the awareness of their bondage—we are satisfied with what comforts us here—materially, emotionally, and intellectually—without caring to look beyond

the gilded walls of our physical existence. Proud of our scientific inventions, we proclaim to ourselves that "if God existed anywhere at all, he should have come within the ken of either our microscopes or our telescopes." The Palamor Observatory is, verily, equipped to scan the spatial vastnesses of our universe up to distances requiring "a billion years of terrestrial time" to traverse. Microscopically, we have detected the minutest physical particles constituting "the imperishable foundation-stones of our material universe." Further reduction of these 'basic' particles has revealed to us "nothing more than electromagnetic waves of varying wave-length and frequency." The utmost that we are able to admit is that "all matter is made of waves, and we live in a world of waves." But Einstein was bold enough to observe, in addition : "To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling is at the centre of true religion..... He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead."

The greatest obstacle in the path of 'modern man' is his obstinate refusal to recognise realities which his "reason" prompts him to run away from. He is like a monarch who is betrayed by his own trusted prime-minister, and made to dance like a slave before his betrayer—

doing all his behests and not permitted to think of anything else, including his own royalty. If he should become somehow aware of the truth, that truth would at once set him free. Then he would know that the 'palace-revolution' was caused by a whole gang of conspirators who used "reason" as their instrument. Those traitors were the senses working behind a curtain of rationalisations, and deriving all their surreptitious satisfactions through their agent-victim—"reason"—which was really not conscious of the whole fraud designed by the senses against itself and their common master—the "I" in man.

Here "reason" might plead "not guilty." And I am inclined to condone its share in the crime. For the prime-minister's is an unenviable role. He has to satisfy several parties, both above and below. If he acquits himself well enough ultimately, he deserves all our sympathy and support. That consummation will surely come when "reason" is chastened by experience and purified by wisdom. The soul of "reason" is already in the smelting crucible, and the fires of experience are burning fiercely. It will not be long before the pure metal is separated from the dross.

According to the Jainas, the soul of man is contaminated by its contacts with matter. The aim of life is to free oneself from these sinful contacts. The Buddhists speak of *tanha,* or 'thirst for life', as the cause of our

bondage, and recommend 'freedom from all earthly desires' as the means of our deliverance. While the *Bhagavad Gita* inculcates the practice of detachment — *Anasakti-Yoga*—as the surest way to *moksha* or liberation.

But none of these appeals to 'modern man', because he loves life too much to suspect that anything is wrong with it at all. He feels that, if there is evil and if there is misery, they are a part of the game;—the price we have to pay for the overall happiness we derive from life. But this optimistic 'credit-balance' is not available to all, unfortunately; and there are many who are racked by unending worries, and some driven to madness, or even suicide, by what they despair to get out of life. Not that they, too, do not love to live, but they must have it all as they want. If we but care to look around a little, and think seriously about what we witness, it is inevitable that we, too, should feel like Buddha. We shall then "love life" and wish to live, —not for our own sake, but to serve others and relieve them of their sufferings. We shall also plead (like Ella Wheeler Wilcox, I believe,) for—

A little more kindness, a little less creed;
A little more giving, a little less greed;
A little more smile, and a little less frown;
A little less kicking a man when he's down;
A little more We, and a little less I;
A little more laugh, a little less cry;

More flowers to bloom on the pathway of life;
And fewer on graves at the end of the strife.

Or, like the Mahayanist monk, resolve :

However innumerable sentient beings are,
I vow to serve them;

However inexhaustible the passions are,
I vow to extinguish them;

However immeasurable the *dharmas* are,
I vow to study them;

However incomprehensible the 'Buddha Truth' is,
I vow to attain it.

Our enquiry has, so far, only shown that the "love of life" is both deep-rooted and universal; but it has not clarified the double mystery of 'love' and 'life'. A closer scrutiny would reveal to us the fact of their essential interdependence. They will then appear to us as synonyms, or as dual aspects of the same entity we call "I". For, as Yajnavalkya declares to Maitreyi, in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* :

na va are sarvasya kamaya sarvam
priyam bhavati; atmanastu kamaya
sarvam priyam bhavati.

'Our love of things is not for their own sake; they are dear to us for the sake of our Self.'

But what is this "Self"? The question is more easily put than answered. Nevertheless, if I say "I love life", I must know each term of my assertion,—if I mean anything at all. Sri Ramana Maharshi of Arunachalam was never tired of asking his disciples to inquire : "Who am I!" Carlyle, too, asked the same question in identical words,— "Who am I?", and added : "What is this *Me*? A Voice, a Motion, an Appearance; some embodied, visualised Idea in the Eternal Mind?" "The answer", he proceeds "lies around, written in all colours, and motions, uttered in all tones of jubilee and wail, in thousand-figured and thousand-voiced harmonious Nature; but where is the cunning eye and ear to whom that God-written Apocalypse will yield articulate meaning?" Shakespeare also makes Hamlet apostrophise :

> What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action, how like an angel! In appearance how like a god! — The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals. And, yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust ?

Still, on deeper reflection, Hamlet (stimulated by the ghost's appearance) feels that he is, after all, more than the "quintessence of dust."

> Why, what should be the fear ?
> I do not set my life at a pin's fee;

> And, for *my soul,* what can it do to that,
> *Being a thing immortal* as itself ?

That something which Shakespeare suggests to us, through Hamlet, as the substratum of what we are in reality, has been recognised by poets, philosophers, mystics, and men of religion all the world over, and at all times,— as *the entity called Atma* in the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*: and it is that which in a palpable form declares, "I love life." In truth, this Trinity of terms may be paraphrased progressively into : "I love *myself* as the only life I know" (*cogito ergo sum*); "I am the Goal, and the Way (love), and the Life"; "I and my Father are One"; *aham Brahmasmi, ekam sat,* etc.

The idea is not so very incomprehensible as it might seem to 'modern man', if he cares to go to 'the root of the matter.'

The universe we live in is like an onion. Hindu ideology conceives of it as an egg — *Brahmanda* or the 'cosmic egg.' Both are equally suggestive. The outer skin of the onion is grosser and thicker than each successive layer as we approach the core. There is no tangible seed or stone inside, as in a mango. The whole onion is suffused with its aroma — which some relish, and others hate. The world, too, is like that: layer within layer, all impregnated with joy or misery, as one reacts to it. But,

in substance (or biochemical analysis), the onion is found to be a store of vitamins — which are not visible to our naked eyes, but are capable of extraction through appropriate processes — and possesses the power to revive a person in a fainting fit. Are vitamins real or unreal?.... Are we sceptical about the "probability waves" and the "photons" of modern physics? They are real to the trained scientist, but unreal to the layman whose duller senses cannot cognise them. The *Brahmanda,* too, is an enigma: whether the hen or the egg (God or the universe) came first is not so very important as the acceptance of the fact that the chick grows within the egg which is one substance with the parent bird. Apparently it is born out of the duality of the 'hen and the cock'; but one cannot tell in advance whether the yolk will evolve into the one or the other. Potentially it is equally capable of becoming a cock or a hen. It is, therefore, amorphous like the pre-mordial 'world-substance' which is variously called *Prakriti, Mahat,* or *Maya,* by the Hindu philosophers. It is *anirvachaniya* — beyond verbal description or definition, but not absurd or fictitious on that account. 'As a spider spins out gossamer from its own body, and the fire sends out sparks in all directions,— so, too, from the Self go out the life-essences, the worlds, the gods, and all beings,' — says the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* : 'That Self is the truth of all that is true — *satyasya satyam.* The vital essences are also true — *prana vai satyam.* But the Self is the most real of all — *tesham esha satyam.*'

In a magnificent series of verses, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna (in chapter ten of the *Bhagavad Gita*) how He is to be regarded as the essence of all that exists, existed, or will exist : "I am the source of all; everything proceeds from me (8); I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of all things (20); I am the intelligence in thinking beings (22); among animals, I am the 'king of beasts'—the lion (30); I am everlasting Time (33); I am all devouring Death (34); I am the seed of everything that moves.... and nothing can exist apart from Me (39)." Not only is He 'whatsoever is glorious, good, beautiful, and mighty, but He is also a puzzling compound of 'the deceitful dice-thrower' and 'the truth of the truthful' (36). He is all that is good, and all that is evil: the wisest of the sages (24,26), as well as the vilest of the reptiles (28-29).

Consciously or unconsciously, our "love of life" finds expression in a million million forms: from the grossest to the sublimest; from the greed of the glutton to the visions of the mystic; from the hatred of a murderer (who kills another out of self-love) to the compassion of a Buddha; from the ferocious beast of the jungle to the innocent lamb that bleats as it tugs at the teats of its mother-sheep. Its character and meaning depend on what we understand, or value, as *life* and *love*. It may mean anything from body-consciousness to cosmic-consciousness. To Rabindranath Tagore: "Life is the rela-

tionship of the *That* and the *This*. The relationship of the unborn child to its surroundings in the mother's womb is intimate, but it is without its final meaning. . . . Yet it has limbs, which have their only meaning in the freedom of the air and light. . . . The personal 'I' must have perfect relationship with the Infinite Personality." In the *Gitanjali* he sings: "The same stream of life that runs through my viens, night and day, runs through the world, and dances in rhythmic measures. . . . I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment."

Similarly, to Wordsworth, who was equally sensitive to his surroundings :

> Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
> Like harmony in music; there is a dark
> Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
> Discordant elements, and makes them move
> In one society. How strange that all
> The terrors, pains, and early miseries,
> Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused
> Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,
> And that a needful part, in *making up*
> *The calm existence that is mine when I*
> *Am worthy of myself !*

The sense of harmony which Tagore and Wordsworth felt in their blood and bones — "made glorious by the touch of this world of life" — also made Tennyson sing:

Tho' world on world in myriad myriads roll
Round us, each with different powers,
And other forms of life than ours,
What know we greater than the soul?
On God and God-like men we build our trust.

IV

THE ATTRACTIONS OF ACTIVITY

TO live is to be active. And activity has attractions for us so long as we are alive. We are so constituted that we cannot but be active. As the *Bhagavad Gita* declares : 'Man does not win freedom by abstaining from action (iii 4); nor can anyone remain free from activity even for a single moment : for we are driven by our very nature to be always doing something (ib. 5); and even the maintenance of the body is impossible without activity' (ib. 8). The *Ishavasya Upanishad* would have us 'live a hundred years performing works : not otherwise shall it be with man.' The *Kena Upanishad,* too, contains the prayer : 'May my limbs grow vigorous, and let my breath, speech, eye, ear, and all the senses be also strong.' Then it asks : 'By whom urged does the mind turn to things, and the eye and the ear to their respective activities? What prompts man to speech?' The answer given in the next verse of the same *Upanishad* is : 'It is that which is the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech of the speech, and the breath of the breath.'

If the logic of the foregoing pages leads us anywhere at all, it is to this very conclusion. It goes to 'the root of the matter.'

Though we are surrounded by activities all around us, we have hardly the time to think about them, because each one of us is too busy and wholly engrossed with his own preoccupations. Even the temporarily unemployed are busy, either seeking fresh employment, or worrying about the miseries of unemployment. Politicians are busy seeking remedies for unemployment, while industrialists are busy devising 'ways and means' to reduce the number of employees tending their machines — in the name of *rationalisation,* which means improving or multiplying machinery in order to economise in men. Statesmen and economists are racking their brains to stimulate production and raise 'the 'standard of living' of the people, and increase the wealth in the land. Scientific and technical knowledge and skill are acquired as aids to augment this 'prosperity', which all seek and few really enjoy. The snag lies in competition — between individuals, groups, countries, classes, etc. — which has led to revolutions — proletarian or any other — that have, far from mitigating, intensified 'the struggle for existence.' This is increasingly assuming a military form, necessitating total mobilisation for total destruction. Nevertheless, the cry for "work, more work!" is going round in accelerated crescendos, as the most patriotic slogan to shout, in the interests of a "welfare state." All the while, no one is permitted to have the leisure which might enable him to think *"what really is the state of welfare?"*

But, through the corridors of the ages, comes to us a voice which calls for a halt; and it admonishes us to think. It does not say : "As you were, or right-about-turn!" It only commands us — or rather gently commends to us — "a little less hurry, a little more introspection." It warns us of the consequences of a blind choice; and advises us to discriminate between 'the *desired*' and 'the *desirable*'; between the merely pleasing and the really profitable. The *Katha Upanishad* declares : 'Living in ignorance, but calling themselves wise and learned, the befooled go round and round — staggering and stumbling — like the blind led by the blind.' And, in more definite terms, it says: 'The really good and the merely pleasing come to man. The morally courageous — after full and critical observation — exercise a wise discrimination, and make the right choice. The thoughtless run after the apparently pleasant, calling it the parent of prosperity.'

The choice was presented to Nachiketas in very alluring forms. Yama said : "Whatever is vainly coveted among mortals — like lovely maidens mounted on marvellous vehicles fitted with enchanting sirens, etc. — I promise you; do not enquire about death." But Nachiketas the wise replied : "These vehicles, dancers, and sirens, offered by you, last only for a day, O Death; the vigour of our senses wears away quickly. All enjoyments are ephemeral; keep them for yourself: *na vittena tarpaniyo manushyah*: "Man is not to be satisfied with wealth alone;

.... I ask for the greatest boon of all.... that which reveals the Real, — hidden away beyond death."

If we too care to think a little earnestly and deeply, and turn to some of these ancient texts for the illumination they afford us in our dark struggles, we might still recover the health and wisdom of the Spirit we have long neglected. But the first requisite for that is the recognition of the fact that our hide-bound "reason" is insufficient to lead us all along the way. It has its uses in our day-to-day activities, like the head-light of a railway engine running on its iron-track, during the dark hours of night. Its limited utility ceases with the dawn of a new day. The lights of heaven are a millionfold brighter than any we may contrive for our short-term journey. We have a destination, a home, beyond the railway terminus. To deny that is to declare oneself a homeless vagrant, an orphan, a foundling by the wayside. But the truth is otherwise, as the wise of all countries and ages have demonstrated.

Our love of activity is like our love of life. Its manifestations and implications are infinite. Its forms and motives may vary from the most selfless to the most selfish. One starts with the innocent behaviour of an infant, and, in the course of time, grows or deteriorates into the self-centred idiosyncrasies of old age. But this is not inevitable. It is equally possible for the child to evolve into a saint

or a philanthropist. It all depends upon the orientation given to the tender ego by the exigencies of life. The ripeness of age may express itself in the wisdom of a philosopher or the senility of a fool. All over the world, and throughout history, we witness a whole gamut of conduct ranging between the two extremes of egoism and altruism. But I am not dealing with that diapason here. That, too, is tending, in its own way, to some sort of concord transcending the discordant notes of our dichotomies. For the essential nature of man, and of the world, is not to end in discord and dissolution, but in a harmony that is to be fulfilled in self-realisation for all. That consummation awaits everyone, though the way to it may be long or short, just as one chooses. In all the activities that attract us, we are making our choice — from moment to moment: whether the end is momentary or more momentous depends upon the discriminating wisdom we bring to bear on it.

By 'discriminating wisdom' I do not imply the shrewd judgement which everyone exercises — each according to his best lights — in coming to a decision in the daily business of life: whether one form of investment is better than another; whether, in an election, one's vote shall be cast in favour of candidate 'A' or candidate 'B'; or whether one shall marry at all or remain bachelor. I do not mean even discrimination — which is more important from a moral point of view — between what is right and what is wrong. When national policies are determined, even this

consideration is waived today; otherwise there should be fewer wars. And, if war is inevitable, is it equally ineluctable that entire populations — comprising thousands of men, women and children—should be decimated? But every such holocaust is sought to be justified by "reason".

When one "nation" is at war with another "nation" the conflict is said to be "total". Nevertheless, honest scrutiny should reveal the indisputable truth that fateful decisions are taken not by the 'demos' or 'nation at large' — but by a few individuals at the top (often in secret conclaves called the "inner cabinet meetings") and then proclaimed in the name of all, or in defence of some high-sounding principle like "national freedom or sovereignty", "to make the world safe for democracy," or even "war to end all wars!"

It has always puzzled me why, if all wars as a matter of course end in peace, and the men who cause them regard themselves as the most *rational* of all human beings — since they are able to carry the rest with them (for the time being, at any rate) by an irresistible show of *arguments* — they should not settle all disputes by *rational appeal and argument* instead of Armageddon. For war, however glorified, is a brutal affair in which "reason" is put out of commission, and animals fight animals with an elemental fury, that an "unforeseen force" called chance

or luck may clinch the issue in one's own favour rather than in favour of the "enemy". Once we pull out of the frenzy, we yearn for lasting Peace, though we are at a complete loss : how to secure it permanently. Verily, "Peace passeth all understanding"!

Though "reason" ordinarily prefers "tangible realities" to "unseen imponderables", it cannot do so consistently and always. Political, national, economical, and social objectives are in the realms of "the unseen" until they are actually realised. We cannot live even for a moment without faith in the next "unseen" moment, and in our capacity to achieve our aspirations. We cannot even be certain that we shall be alive to attain or enjoy what we plan for,—either for ourselves or for the larger entity we call the nation or country. The best of the patriots, reformers, and revolutionaries—including the sincerest materialists among them who denied the existence of a soul or God—have died like the religious martyrs, in order to vindicate or make possible what their faith inspired them to consider "the only reality" worth living and dying for. History is replete with examples of their glorious sacrifices. Indeed every sacrifice—individual and collective—is a proof of the universal belief enshrined in the doctrine: "Who lives if England dies? Who dies if England lives!"

Every noble or ignoble activity to which man feels attracted is a call from the "unseen." There is something that irresistibly beckons the bandit to waylay an unwary traveller, or a dacoit to gate-crash into a millionaire's house, in order to realise the happiness he craves for in his heart of hearts. Otherwise, he would not stake his life and honour (which even a criminal cherishes in his own tribe) for the sake of the "unseen" gains he hopes to secure for himself and his dear ones at home. He, too, has his "reasons" and "loves" that drive, or lure, him into his nefarious adventures.

There is yet another craze for dangerous activity in our modern world, which is even more precarious than the trade of the adventurous burglar, but surrounded with a halo — all its own. It is that of the record-breaker. The air-ace may crash into the clouds and win posthumous admiration, by going up in a rocket-plane only to come down in ashes and dust. But he will not be deterred from his record-breaking flight, leaving all the other "realities of life" behind him. For him, this is not a 'flight *from* reality', but a 'flight *into* reality'. No one criticises him, or quarrels with him, for his choice of the manner of self-fulfilment.

In the course of his most recent assault on Mount Everest, Col. Hunt is reported to have remarked: "Why do we wish to climb Mount Everest — your mountain?

This is a very difficult question to answer. *It is an urge to find an answer to an unsolved problem. It is a challenge to our skill and experience."* At 11-30 on the morning of Friday, 29th May, 1953, writes Ralph Izzard, in his *The Innocent on Everest,* Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norkey "attained the knob of ice and snow which is the summit of Everest, two feet, if we are to believe the surveyors, above the 29,000-foot mark!" He further comments : "This was no more than another 'little patch of ground that hath in it no more profit but the name'— but what a name! It now represented the apex of the pyramid of experience, endurance, and sacrifice which it had taken hundreds upon hundreds of men over thirty years to build. For the first time in history the entire world lay beneath the feet of two mere mortals!" And why did they attempt to do it? What attracted them to the endeavour? Some one said: *"Because Everest is out there!"*

The universal phenomenon of 'the attractions of activity', I am illustrating here, is a manifestation of the identical feeling that the entire world "is out there." But it calls us and lures us — not so much because it is "out there", as because *we are alive to its attractions.* When the windows of our heart are shut, or our eyes are finally closed in death, there is nothing to attract us to any sort of activity. The world, too, is as good as dead or non-existing then, — that is, so far as we are concerned.

Attraction depends on there being some one to feel attracted, just as activity depends upon those who are ready to act. In the absence of the poet, the artist, and the lover, there could be no beauty of any sort anywhere. Hence, all forms of beauty and attraction are an evidence of the susceptibilities of the soul (or life) in man. Only the Sherpas are roused to reach the Everest; and only Napoleons are fired by the ambition to fight and conquer. The fascination we feel for our objectives is, therefore, a something within ourselves: *an urge to self-fulfilment.* It is what the *Bhagavad Gita* calls *svabhava* (natural inclination) and *svadharma* (inborn genius). We are never happy until we find channels for their fullest self-expression.

True freedom does not consist in having a sovereign government in our country. It lies in every man, woman, and child, being free to fulfil his or her destiny, as determined by one's *svabhava* and *svadharma* — in the etymological sense of the terms. Where that is not possible, there is no real welfare, by whatever idealistic name we might describe our state. The true aim for all is not "the greatest good of the greatest number", but the *highest self-fulfilment of everyone.* The universally prevailing tendency today is not propitious to this end. Any kind of regimentation, howsoever tendentiously rationalised, is the very antithesis of spiritual freedom.

We are unhappily caught in a maelstrom of world-trends where to swim along the current is easy — but suicidal; and to struggle in the opposite direction seems difficult, though it is wholesome and most necessary. To change the direction of our movement in the stream is not to get out of the struggle; in fact, it is to make it more strenuous. Here, too, the attractions of activity are not absent. They are, on the contrary, greatly intensified, though the field of action is more internal than external. Here, too, there is scope for Tenzings and Hillarys and Hunts; but they should turn the gaze inwards. There are Everests to climb in the 'Himalayas of the Soul' also— though they are not "out there", but right within ourselves. There are Sherpas of he Spirit who cannot be had for the asking. They need no elaborate equipment such as modern mountaineers have to carry with them. They travel light. They leave behind them all that impedes on the way. Like Shelley's Sky Lark, we might truly say of each such heroic aspirant :

Higher still and higher,
From the earth thou springest;
Like a cloud of fire,
Into the Blue deep thou wingest....
Singing ever thou soarest,
And soaring ever singest !

Nachiketas, the brave and wise hero of the *Katha Upanishad,* was one such 'blithe bird of heaven'. In all the *Upanishads* we have scores of such men and women who, while they did not turn away from the world, only changed the focus of their interests. What they demanded from the seekers of 'true happiness' and 'lasting peace' was a reorientation of perspectives. King Janaka of Videha was held by them as the supreme exemplar of 'discriminating wisdom'. Aspirants and learned men of all sorts went to him for instruction and guidance. He was no hermit or ascetic, but a man of affairs, though not a "worldly man". He lived as the *Gita* would have us live —*padma-patra ivambhasa*: 'Like a lotus-leaf in the water'. Or, as Sri Ramakrishna Parama Hamsa said: 'like butter floating on the water (of life), rather than like butter-milk getting diluted by it'.

The call of our scriptures is not a call *away from* life, but a call *to* life — not to the activism of the 'blind led by the blind', but to *Karma-Yoga* as the *Gita* propounds it. The essence of that philosophy of "right action" (as Buddha also inculcated) is contained in the two definitions of *Yoga* given in the *Gita*: *yogah karmasu kaushalam* ('*yoga* is skill in action',) and *samatvam yoga utchyate* ('equilibrium' is called *yoga*). It is not merely *satkarma* or 'doing good' as understood by the social-reformers: *pro bono publico;* but it is the dedication of our entire life to the fulfilment of God's purpose in us. This attitude

is well expressed in the thirty-fourth verse of the *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore with childlike simplicity :

> Let only that little be left of me whereby I may name Thee my all. Let only that little be left of my will whereby I may feel Thee on every side, and come to Thee in everything, and offer to Thee my love every moment. Let only that little be left of me whereby I may never hide thee....

All activities to which we are attracted,—which we egoistically appropriate to our own wisdom, initiative, and choice, and to which we are so attached,—really emanate from the One Source of Life in all its diversified manifestations : 'The Lord dwellth in the hearts of all', says the *Bhagavad Gita* (xviii. 61), 'and He whirls us round by the magic of His *maya*, like one mounted on a machine' (*deus ex machina*). The *Katha Upanishad* too declares:

> *Eko vashi sarva bhutantaratma,*
> *ekam rupam bahudha yah karoti,*
> *tam atmastham yenupashyanti dhira-*
> *stesham sukham shashvatam netaresham.*

'He who is the controller of all, hidden in the hearts of all, who makes the One appear manifold, Him — seated in the soul—the heroic alone recognise, and win everlasting happiness, — none else.'

The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad,* also, expresses the same truth in yet another form :

Eko devah sarva bhuteshu gudhah,
sarvavyapi sarvabhutantaratma,
karmadhyakshah sarvabhutadivasah,
sakshi cheta kevalo nirgunashcha.

'That Transcendent One, hidden in all manifested life, is the omnipresent Inner Self of all, and Director of all activities,—their detached witness and sole inspirer.'

V

THE PLEA FOR PASSIVITY

ACTIVITY and passivity are complementary like day and night. They are equally needed for life to go on with its expressive and recuperative functions. But, just as the duration of day and night at any given place depends upon its latitude and longitude, so too, the proportion between the active and passive phases of a man's life depends upon his mental and physical states. There can be no universal standard in these matters. Nevertheless, a few general observations are possible, which should stimulate some useful thoughts regarding their relative importance and value.

When mind and body are worked beyond their optimum range or capacity, Nature compels us to rest. If business, duty, or impulse, drives us to transgress the healthy limits, compensations are exacted from us to teach us wisdom.

Psychologists divide men into two distinctive types: 'extroverts' and 'introverts'. This dichotomy is more suggestive than real in any rigid sense. Man is too complex, elusive, and inscrutable to fit into any steel-frame category. The 'extrovert' and 'introvert' moods come over every individual at different moments, and in different circum-

stances of life. There are, no doubt, exceptions. Some are predominantly inclined to be always active, while others love to be mostly passive. Where the latter are not victims to sheer indolence or inertia — physical or mental — they are often given to much thought and reflection.

In ancient and medieval times, the number of those given to a meditative life was impressively larger than it is now. The attractions to lead an 'extrovert' activistic life are overwhelming today. Consequently, to turn to a contemplative life against the contemporary currents calls for much courage. To seek a retreat for that purpose in the Himalayas or some such secluded place —"far from the madding crowd" — is considered folly, if not also anti-social 'escapism'. But to advertise an Everest expedition, and to carry that out fussily, in order to beat the previous record, by climbing a few feet higher, or by yet another route to the same summit, is to be proclaimed a great hero. Such an act of heroism tickles both personal and national pride. It evokes universal admiration as well as emulation.

But the contemplative who silently withdraws into a silence unknown to those who seek the lime-light glory of a world "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing", is looked upon as a misanthrope. Nevertheless, the Prophets and Seers of all times and countries belonged to this category of contemplatives who sought retirement in the mountains or other equally sequestered spots. Once

they received enlightenment there, they did not "hide the light under a bushel", but came out to proclaim the Truth that revealed itself to them, — as did Buddha, Christ, and Muhammad.

One need not, however, be or want to be a prophet or a saint in order to profit by the blessings of silence and solitude. We do practice some sort of retreat—into ourselves, or our study-room, or laboratory corner — whenever we are faced with a serious problem. However much we may be attached to the busy life of the mill or market-place, we do desire to withdraw — if only for a while — into the privacy of a cabinet or closet wherein we might take counsel with ourselves. Such a close self-communion has its own peculiar pleasure as well as profit. Like Archimedes, many a scientist and thinker has jumped out of the tiny tub of his closet to cry 'eureka!' — wholly unconscious of his personal or social privacy. All creative work is, indeed, accomplished "in a state of nature".

The child is born in the peace and privacy of the parlour where two souls commune. They act like two eyes with one vision between them. The poet fabricates his finest fancies in the undistracted freedom afforded by the great silent spaces among the hills fringed with forests and framed by rivers or lakes. The mystic possesses a whole universe within his own being, where he holds com-

munion with himself. Therein the manifold is merged into a unity, and all the notes of the diapason are dissolved into a single harmony. The silence within meets the silence without, and the two become one symphony. That ineffable experience is no phantom of idle brains. Its reality is avowed by men in various walks of life, — not all of whom were mystics.

Alfred (Lord) Tennyson writes : "Experience with anaesthetic I have never obtained, but a kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has come upon me through repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were, out of the intensity of consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being; and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but the only true life. I am ashamed of my feeble description. Have I not said that the state is utterly beyond words!"

"The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience," said Einstein, "is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of science." From Plotinus to Tagore, it has been felt and expressed variously. How the idea of

Paradise itself gets transfigured in such a view is illustrated in the following citation :

> I believe [writes Tagore] in an ideal which sways over the earth, which penetrates it, the ideal of Paradise, which is not merely a creation of the imagination, but a final Reality in which all things have their being, and towards which all things press. I believe that this vision of Paradise radiates towards us in the sunlight, in the green of the grass, in the flowing of the river, in the joyousness of the young spring, in the deep peace of a winter morning, in the beauty of a human face, and in the depth of human love.

The active life has, undoubtedly, its own attractions. But getting intoxicated with it often leads to heart-troubles such as made the American publicist C.Y. Harrison (of New york) write a book curiously entitled: *Thank God for My Heart Attack.* "I had been, in my time," he writes, "a historical determinist. But all that was over now. My heart-attack had shown me, in the most dramatic way possible, that man dies soon enough without social cataclysm or war. A plugged coronary artery emphasised for me the fact that we must retrace many steps in our social and political thinking; that we must go all the way back to the individual; back far back, to psychological first causes, back into the mysterious labyrinth of the

human mind, before we can move forward again." He adds: "The solution of our social questions will not solve the greatest question of all — man's inability to live with himself. This is purely an individual problem; the problem of personal salvation."

Similar reactions to the hectic trends of our times have been registered by numerous other writers without waiting for the 'coronary artery getting plugged', or their life itself getting short-circuited. As John Cowper Powys writes in his suggestive book, *A Philosophy of Solitude* : "One of the chief causes of unhappiness in the world is that our mind is preoccupied all the while with its relations with other human minds. Free yourself from this; make the friendliest and kindliest retreat you can into *solitude;* and in a few moments your nature will have bathed itself so deeply in the cool baths of premordial Being that you will feel yourself able to return to the troubling arena of humanity with an inviolable and secret strength."

Paul Brunton was one such refugee from the whirligig of the Western world to seek the 'sanity of solitude' in the Himalayas. He came here *In Search Of Secret India*—as he calls one of his thought provoking books—and he found in the pervasive peace of our majestic mountains a sanctuary to serve his "novitiate in the art of being still". There he practised a "tranquil passivity" and discovered that "to travel through its calm solitudes, so far

removed from the tensions of peopled places", is "to travel into sanity and serenity out of an insane and uneasy world." His Master—Sri Ramana Maharshi—had taught him to look for Mount Kailas "within himself". He learnt there that "man's destiny is with God and not with the worms"; that "Nature is indistinguishable from God"; that "the *best starting-point from which to reform the world is undoubtedly my own self";* and that *"we shall have a pacified world when we have pacified hearts."* To achieve that end, Brunton recommends "a balanced introversion". "We Westerners," he writes, "have made a God of activity; we have yet to learn how to *be,* as we have already learnt how to *do."*

The number of the votaries of Peace is increasing in every part of the world. Every year sees evidence of more and more thoughtful writers expressing themselves in favour of the views sharply focussed in Brunton's *A Hermit in the Himalayas,* quoted above. For instance, Sir John Stewart-Wallace writing in the *Hibbert Journal* for January 1952, speaks of "the true mystic experience as a transcendance of the temporal in the eternal; a passing beyond the unquiet flux of becoming to the essence of timeless being in God." Alexis Carrel finds in the way of the contemplatives the means to the attainment of a higher human personality than we witness in our modern *milieu.* "Man integrates himself," he writes in his *Man, the Unknown,* "by meditation, just as by action. But he should

not be content with contemplating the beauty of the ocean, of the mountains, and of the clouds. He must also be the soul which marches forward along the mystic way and renounces itself in order to apprehend the invisible substratum of the universe." A like plea is made out by Kenneth Walker—another eminent medical man—in his interesting book : *Only the Silent Hear.*

The apprehension of 'the invisible substratum of the universe', however, demands from us a preparatory discipline and a re-orientation of our 'extrovert' tendencies. As Aldous Huxley writes in his *Ends and Means*: "Properly practised, with due preparation—physical, mental, and moral—meditation may result in a state of what has been called 'transcendental consciousness'—the direct intuition of, and union with, an ultimate spiritual reality that is perceived as simultaneously beyond the self and in some way within it. 'God in the depths of us,' says Ruysbroeck, 'receives God who comes to us : it is God contemplating God'." Coventry Patmore declares : "Mysticism is the most complete and definite kind of spiritual apprehension of which man is capable." Or, in Bergson's words : "It is religion poured white hot into the soul of man."

It is possible to multiply these evaluations endlessly. But, as J. B. Pratt remarked : *"We need to see the Unseen for ourselves; or, if that may not be, we need at least to*

feel a deep reverence for it." Such a "deep reverence" is shown towards these realities by Butler in his *Western Mysticism* wherein he declares: "whoever will read the accounts given of their experiences by the great classical mystics will find a coherence and quiet sanity in the midst of a mysterious elevation, and in the midst of exuberance of religious feeling, a dignity and sobriety, and a conviction of reality which is all deeply impressive; it creates a sense of spiritual life and experience on high levels, and seems even to command assent to its claims."

In order to be able actually to bask in the sunshine of that 'mysterious elevation', we should get perfectly attuned to the harmonies of Nature, like Wordsworh—

> Until the breath of this corporeal frame,
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living Soul.

But Rome was not built in a day : 'they, while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night.' The path of inward Peace is not less strenuous than that of outward adventure and exploration. It is characterised in the *Upanishads* as being difficult and 'sharp as the razor's edge.' 'Not for weaklings is the way to the realisation of this Atman', they declare: *nayamatma balahinena labhyo.* "This is not a journey for the feet", says Plotinus; "neither

need you provide coach or ship; you must *close the eyes and waken in yourself that other power of vision,*—the birthright of all, but which few turn to use."

The *Bhagavad Gita* speeks of the spiritually integrated man as a *yogi,* a *muni,* and a *sthitaprajna.* 'He is happy within, rejoiceth within, and is illuminated within; and having become one with the Eternal, he enjoys the Peace of the Eternal' (vi. 24). Arjuna is told by Sri Krishna that 'the *yogi* is greater than the ascetic, and superior even to the *jnani* (intellectual) as well as the man of action.' Hence, Arjuna is exhorted to be a *yogi* : *tasmad-yogi bhavarjuna* (vi. 46).

It is highly significant that the *Gita* places the *yogi* not only above the ascetic (*tapasvi*), but also the *jnani* and the *karmi.* Nevertheless, its definition of *yoga* is all-inclusive : *yogah karmasu kaushalam* ('*yoga* is skill in action'): *samatvam yoga uchyate* ('equality=equanimity is *yoga*'). There are other terms freely used in the *Bhagavad Gita* to elucidate its main thesis; but the above two phrases—*karmasu kaushalam* and *samatvam*—bring out the core of its teaching very succinctly.

Many an earnest seeker of liberation has taken to the thorny path of asceticism as an antidote against all the temptations that flesh is heir to. But the *Gita* unequivocally disparages all such practices. It declares : 'The

unintelligent ascetics who torment the assemblage of atoms called the body, verily torture Me (who am seated within them), for all their fiendish fanaticism' (xvii, 5, 6). The rationalist (hedonist?) condemns their misguided zeal as "escapism", but equally misses the mark. To drown oneself in an orgy of pleasures or purposeless activities is no wiser than the proverbial conduct of the ostrich burying its head in the dry sands—vainly trying to escape from the inexorable decrees of life and death.

The intellectual—academic—philosopher who pursues knowledge for its own sake (which is yet another sort of recreation or self-indulgence) is in no way better. The *Ishavasya Upanishad* declares : 'Those who are devoted to nescience—*avidya*—grope in darkness which is blind; and those who get engrossed in the pursuit of mere knowledge, flounder in a deeper darkness.'— *tato bhuya iva te tamo ya u vidyayam ratah.*

The *Jnana-Yoga* of the *Bhagavad Gita* is far removed from our secular intellectualism. It is conditioned by Faith—*shraddhavan labhate jnanam* : 'The man of Faith alone attains to true knowledge.' Christ meant the same when He declared : 'Ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make ye free.' But the *Gita* places the *yogi* above even the *jnani*: why? Because, no partial achievement—of the intellect merely, or of the will alone, or of the heart by itself—can take us to the goal. It takes

the whole personality of man—his complete fulfilment. The way to that consummation is not through static passivity—such as some dream of in what they erroneously call *samadhi*—but a dynamic spiritual alertness comprehended in the *Karma-Yoga* contemplated by the *Bhagavad Gita*. The comments of Sri Aurobindo on the popular conception of *samadhi*—quoted by Brunton in his *Beyond Yoga*—are illuminating : "Trance is a way of escape—the body is made quiet, the physical mind is in a state of torpor, the inner consciousness is left free to go on with its experience. The disadvantage is that trance becomes indispensable, and that the problem of the waking consciousness is not solved. It remains imperfect." Not so with *Karma-Yoga*.

Here all the faculties of man are brought into the fullest play,—but in the spirit of dedicated service—the *Anasakti-Yoga* of Mahatma Gandhi. This detachment is difficult to attain; but the *Bhagavad Gita* helps and encourages us to hope that it is feasible in practice : *abhyasena tu Kaunteya vairagyena cha grihyate*. In the next verse of the sixth chapter we are told : '*Yoga* is hard for those who are undisciplined; but it is attainable through self-control and devoted practice' (vi. 36).

The *Gita* emphasises the inward spirit contrasted with external formalism in all matters. It defines *samnyasa* and *tyaga* from this point of view. 'The goal,' it declares,

'is not to be attained by mere abstinence from activity; nor through renunciation as commonly understood' (iii. 4). But 'he who sees action in inaction, and inaction in action, is the truly wise among men.' Fully participating in all sorts of activities, such a man is, still, unified in spirit—*sa yuktah kritsna karmakrit* (iv. 18).

The ideal man of the *Gita* is ever active without, but always tranquil within. His inner serenity is not disturbed by anything that might happen to him exteriorly. He has all the qualities of a *sthitaprajna* or man of 'stabilised intellect'; he is a *muni* or 'silent man of wisdom'. "Those who know do not speak", said Lao Tse, "and those who speak do not know." 'He is unperturbed in sorrow, and in happiness unexcited; he is free from desire, fear, and anger' (ii 56). 'Being well disciplined, his senses under perfect control—a prey to neither attraction nor repulsion —he verily attaineth the Peace that passeth understanding' (ii. 64). Very pertinently, the *Gita* avers: 'For the unintegrated there is no wisdom; nor is there concentration for the scatter-brained. There cannot be any Peace for the unconcentrated; and how could there be happiness for the unharmonised?' (ii. 66).

It is clear from the foregoing that the most satisfactory ordering of our human opportunity could neither be in the reckless abandon of 'extrovert' activism, nor in the excessive indulgence of a self-centred 'introvert'.

"I am a man of peace," declared Mahatma Gandhi, "but I do not want the peace of a stone or of the graveyard." His entire life was the concrete manifestation of a man sincerely devoted to the *Gita*-ideal. He also demonstrated the truth of the dictum of the *Ashtavakra Gita,* neatly clinching the implications of the apparent dichotomy between *pravritti* (extroversion) and *nivritti* (introversion) :

Nivrittirapi mudhasya pravrittirupajayate,
pravrittirapi dhirasya nivritti phalabhagini.

'The passivity of the ignorant introvert may prove to be the parent of unwanted distractions; while the activity of the wisely regulated extrovert may yield the real fruits of renunciation.'

VI

A GOSPEL FOR THE GODLESS

FEW gospels have gone into the hands of so many people, as the *Bhagavad Gita* has done. Men and women, erudite and illiterate, young and old, read or recite it (learning its verses by rote); and even foreigners study it in translation or in the original—and write elaborate exegetical works discussing its implications. It has touched the hearts and minds of millions through the millennia; and its universal appeal is growing rather than declining with the flux of time. Here is, therefore, a phenomenon—at once literary, religious and philosophical—which calls for an explanation. It is a challenge to all thinkers,—whether they are believers, agnostics, sceptics, or atheists—to understand its mysterious popularity. An honest and dispassionate scrutiny will reveal the fact that the *Bhagavad Gita* is unique in its combination of the *sacred* and the *secular*, the spiritual and the pragmatic, in its penetrating exposition of the most vital problems facing man—irrespective of his race and religion. I propose, in this chapter, to consider a few of its salient features that should prove thought-provoking even to those who claim to be rationalists and atheists. There is inspiration here for all who accept that man's destiny is higher and nobler than what might be expected from his animal inheritance.

By the "godless" I do not suggest anything "ungodly" or wicked; I mean only those who *claim* to be unbelievers from honest conviction. They are satisfied with "reason" as a pragmatic guide, and they do not think it necessary to believe in or invent a "god" to solve their day-to-day problems. They are contented with morality and social justice and decency, and have no need for religion. Theirs is a humanistic approach to life, and they are disposed to be altruistic. They have faith in human welfare and the progressive realisation of an "earthly paradise",—if only we could attain our objectives without bloodshed.

But we have a dual nature within us : one would incite us to fight like the ferocious beasts; while the other warns us against the consequences of such a bloody contest. In other words, we possess a divided personality—socially and individually. The way to lasting Peace, as most people recognise, lies in the assertion of our better—and not beastly—nature. Nevertheless, life is a paradoxical compound of good and evil. We cannot have only the obverse or the reverse of a coin : we must need take both together. The bewilderment of Arjuna is typical of universal human nature; and the *Gita* is a sane and reliable monitor, because of its scientific objectivity. It helps us to act with "passionless reason" in all our trials and tribulations.

What a fine and noble character is Arjuna's! He is a hero of a hundred battles, yet reluctant to engage in man-slaughter—if he could possibly desist from it. But his last minute reluctance — for all his specious rationalisation—is an infirmity rather than a correct decision arrived at dispassionately. He is the unconscious victim of a fit of depression which we might diagnose as *psycho-neurosis*. It was as if a modern general, overcome by some generous impulse, at the zero hour before battle, refused to go into action, but started preaching like a pacifist or conscientious objector.

The war was not desired by the Pandavas. They had left no stone unturned to avert it. Sri Krishna had very eloquently pleaded with the Kauravas to concede the just claims of their cousins, without plunging into an unrighteous and suicidal struggle. But all endeavours to the contrary had proved futile, and war had become inevitable. Arjuna's weakness was, therefore, patent. To fight was—for one in his situation—a duty, a categorical imperative. At the end of the argument, he cheerfully reconciles himself and whole-heartedly participates in the fray. Thereby he fulfils his destiny—his *svadharma*.

Svadharma and *svabhava* are cognate terms in the *Gita*. They signify the essential quality or character of a thing or person. Thus, the *svabhava* or *svadharma* of

fire is to burn, and of water is to wet. Arjuna's *svadharma* as a *Kshatriya* was to fight in a just cause, a righteous war. He was a warrior by birth as well as vocation : by *guna* and *karma*. His *svabhava* (natural inclination) was different from that of a *tapasvi* (or ascetic), or of a *samnyasi* (or man of renunciation). Yet, he was temporarily in a mood to act like those recluses, rather than in the spirit of a true *Kshatriya*. Hence it was necessary to re-condition or restore him to his own native genius. Sri Krishna accomplished that task in a masterly manner.

Arjuna's problem was neither religious nor metaphysical, but *psychological*. His sense of duty and honour as a *Kshatriya* are, therefore, duly invoked. But it was also necessary to go deeper, in order to meet Arjuna's objections to the inevitable killing involved in the armed conflict. In doing so, it is well to note that Sri Krishna's approach is essentially secular and not scriptural. He points out to Arjuna that the thoughts of the irresolute are many-branching and endless; and ultimately they lead to self-destruction—*samshayatma vinashyati*. The orthodox sentiments of Arjuna are peremptorily silenced by the astounding declaration that "quoting scripture" is the last refuge of the foolish pedants : *vedavadaratah*—literally, 'those who swear by the *Vedas*' (ii. 42). In another verse, the *Vedas* are said to be as superfluous as is a well in a flooded place—to a person who is really

enlightened (ib. 46). Finally, Arjuna is admonished : *traigunya vishaya veda, nistraigunyo bhavarjuna*—'the *Vedas* are concerned with the three *gunas;* be thou free from their bondage' (ib. 45).

Satva, rajas, and *tamas* are traditional terms to denote the three states (*gunas*) of harmony, activity, and inertia. I have dealt with their correlation from another angle, earlier. Here my reference is intended only to point out that Arjuna is asked by Sri Krishna to go beyond the *Vedas*—to transcend the triad of the *gunas*: *satva, rajas,* and *tamas.*

The *Bhagavad Gita* is neither a bellicose instigator to war, as too often interpreted, nor merely a book of daily recitals, as the pious regard it. It is a treatise of practical wisdom rooted in a profound understanding of human nature with all its elusive qualities. If one is not distracted by its specific context and religious phraseology, he would find at its core an unfailing guide, as did Mahatma Gandhi, in the most trying situations.

I shall briefly illustrate this pragmatic character of the *Gita* from the individual as well as social points of view—ignoring other aspects for the nonce.

First, witness Arjuna in his impossible plight : an 'extrovert' caught in an 'introvert' mood. He sees only

evil omens everywhere—*nimittani cha pashyami viparitani, Keshava !* "The bow slips from my hand; my skin burns; I am unable even to stand up; my mind is in a whirl!"

Sri Krishna is amused with pity : *Kutastva kashmalamidam, vishame samupasthitam !* "Whence this obfuscation at so crucial a moment!" Then, he appeals to his rationality: "You grieve for those who do not deserve your sympathy; and yet speak the language of wisdom." Next, he invokes Arjuna's pride,—as one having a reputation to lose, etc.... But, finally, deals with Arjuna's dejection as a modern psychiatrist would treat his patient. That approach proves more effective than all the intellectual divagations tried earlier. Consequently, Arjuna is totally restored to normal sanity, and he goes into action with the utmost confidence : *nashto mohah, smritir labdha,..... karishye vachanam tava* (xviii. 73). "I am free from illusions, and having recovered my wits, I am ready to do your bidding."

The technique adopted by Sri Krishna is very interesting. Arjuna is, to begin with, assured of the friendliest interest in his genuine distress. "I tell you all this because you are dear to me" — *priyosi me !* Then, the 'patient' should have perfect confidence in his physician : *na me bhaktah pranashyati* — "My 'patients' never perish!" (ix. 31). Also, the remedy must be miraculous.

svalpamapyasya dharmasya trayate mahato bhayat — "Even a little of this regimen saves one from the direst calamity!" (ii. 40). Nevertheless, nothing is so vitally helpful as self-confidence. Hence, the *Gita* declares : "Don't you give way to dejection; save yourself by your own self-effort (auto-suggestion); for you are your own saviour as well as enemy" (vi. 5).

There is no desire to bamboozle : "I have disclosed to you this superlative secret; scrutinise it thoroughly, and, finally, do as you choose." — *vimrishyaitad asheshena, yathecchasi tatha kuru* (xviii. 63).

If Arjuna's were a simple case, the prescription may not have run into 700 verses. But the depth of his 'neurosis' made for the complexity and deviousness of his treatment. At one stage, Sri Krishna found it necessary to shock him into sanity, as some phychiatrists do with their difficult patients. The eleventh chapter reads like a radio news-reel, comprehending in its synoptic commentary the entire 'shape of things to come'—a terrifying pre-view of a four-dimentional techni-colour film shown to Arjuna—as a sort of stunt-picture—to prepare him for the holocaust of Kurukshetra. As a poetical composition, it is a masterpiece of Miltonic grandeur, in all its sculpturesque imagery. In it, Nature appears 'red in tooth and claw,'—overwhelming in its destructive fury. Arjuna glances therein at an astounding vision

of the worlds falling into ruins, and phalanxes of heroes running into the jaws of death. Like moths are they all being burnt to ashes in the universal conflagration, and still the unending stream keeps on rushing like rivers into the ocean! *yatha pradiptam jvalanam patanga vishanti : yatha nadinam bahavambu vegah samudramevabhimukha dravanti!*

Arjuna is made to realise that, verily, there is no escape from the maelstrom of Nature : *prakritim yanti bhutani nigrahah kim karishyati!* 'Bound by your own nature, O Arjuna!, and from your sense of duty you will be compelled to do what you now feel disinclined to do because of your delusion' (xviii. 60).

There is no real contradiction between this view of natural compulsion and the earlier exhortation to a triumphant self-reliance. We are at once slaves and masters of Nature: born subject as we are to its inexorable laws, we have, nevertheless, mastered them to the extent we have understood and learnt to obey them. The dynamism of aeronautics is as much a demonstration of our obedience to gravitation and the meteorological forces, as of our triumphs over them. The *Gita* recognises this paradoxical dualism, and through that acknowledgment, teaches us to rise above its dictatorship. It adds to our knowledge of materialistic science the wisdom of its understanding of human personality.

Even the votaries of Science today admit that — proud as we might be of its astonishing achievements (particularly, in its technological applications)—certain human values and interests have been neglected with tragic consequences. In short, progress has been purchased at the price of Peace — individual, social, and political.

Though the *Gita* arose in a political context, and is fully conscious of the social factors and compulsions, it was primarily addressed to Arjuna *as an individual.* Still it is not individualistic—if that implies any antinomy between the one and the many. Arjuna is admonished, first of all, not to ignore public opinion : *sambhavitasya-kirtir maranadatirichyate*—'To one with a sense of public esteem death is preferable to dishonour' (ii. 34). Then he is urged to act in the interests of social integration : *lokasamgrahamevapi sampashyan kartumarhasi* (iii. 20). For the many tend to emulate the example of the great ones who serve as a model to them : *sa yat pramanam kurute lokastadanuvartate* (ib. 21). Finally, the entire philosophy of *Karma-Yoga* (which Lok. Tilak regarded as the core of the *Gita — Gita-rahasya*) is based on the principle of individual self-fulfilment through the selfless service of society as a whole. Though that society is functionally organised according to the *guna* and *karma* —or *svabhava and svadharma*—of each individual (as previously explained), the essential quality of all its cons-

tituent elements is emphasised in the *Gita*: *striyo vaishya-statha shudrah tepi yanti param gatim* — 'Women, *Vaishyas,* and *Shudras* too, attain to the highest state' (ix. 32). Nay, in the eyes of a truly enlightened person, 'a learned *Brahmana,* a meek cow, a mighty elephant, a docile dog, and even an abject dog-eater'—are declared to be all equal (v. 18). The *sama-drishti* or 'equal-eye' inculcated in the Gita is far more fundamental than any democratic, socialistic, or communistic concept we know. Nevertheless, it is no remote empyrean that it holds out before the naive optimist, but an *earthly paradise,* to be achieved by our own selfless efforts — *here and now* : *ihaiva tairjitah sargo esham samye sthitam manah* — 'Even here on earth is everything to be created by those whose minds are established in equality and equilibrium' (vi. 19).

The 48th verse of the second chapter is by far the most synoptical in the *Gita* : 'O Dhananjaya!—lit. 'Wealth - winner' — perform all actions, rooted in your unified personality and unperturbed by either gain or loss—for *yoga* is equilibrium in action' — *samatvam yoga uchyate.* As pointed out elsewhere, *yoga* is also defined as 'skill in action'—*yogah karmasu kaushalam.* Everything in the *Gita* points to the fullest integration and expression of the human personality.

Arjuna's dejection—almost dereliction—started from his emotional unbalance; and his richest self-fulfilment came from his re-integration, through the alchemy of Sri Krishna's unique handling of his case.

The *Gita* is not a book of philosophical abstractions merely. It is an eminently practical treatise on auto-therapy also. Its emphasis is on self-help and self-reliance based on self-understanding—*uddharet atmanatmanam* (vi. 5) is its central tenet. 'That happiness is the purest', it declares, 'which is born of self-knowledge' : *atma buddhi prasadajam* (xviii. 37).

Most of our ills originate in our minds. To know the nature of our mental processes is, therefore, the first requisite of self-regulation. The *Gita* provides two invaluable clues to this objective. It warns us that what appears attractive superficially may prove deceptive in the end; while that which we dislike at first may be really wholesome (xviii. 37-38). Our 'extrovert' living is constantly exposed to such temptations, and repentance often comes too late.

We know the right, approve it too,
Condemn the wrong, and th' wrong pursue !

But why ? 'The excited senses of even a shrewd man,' says the *Gita,* 'impetuously carry away his mind — against

his better judgement' (ii. 60). Then it gives a masterly analysis of the stages of our fall: 'Musing on the sources of temptation, we feel fascinated by them; and getting engrossed unwarily, we are roused to anger when something happens to obstruct our pleasures. Then comes mental confusion which leads on to loss of self-possession. That results in the paralysis of reason which is but a prelude to ultimate perdition' (ii. 62-63).

On the positive side of self-recovery, the *Gita* is too keenly aware of human infirmity to expect or promise a miracle. It, therefore, recommends a gradual but persistent effort at self-regulation, through the firm exercise of Reason — *buddhya dhriti grihitaya* (vi. 25-26). It also assures us that the intractable and restless mind can be curbed and conquered by persevering practice and the cultivation of detachment towards men and things (vi.35). It prescribes a regimen — physical and mental — for the earnest aspirants, to be discriminatingly followed on the principle : 'to each according to his needs; from each according to his capacity'. It recommends breathing exercises, yogic postures, and dietic regulations — all calculated to aid in the attainment of mental peace — which all desire, but few know how to achieve. No one can hope to reach the North Pole if he keeps on steering towards the South. Rightly directed efforts, correct perspectives, and a proper outlook are imperative desiderata.

The *Bhagavad Gita,* from this point of view, provides us with a conspectus of stimulating thoughts which is hardly to be found anywhere else in so concise a form. For those who ask for more than what the rationalist is prepared to accept, the vistas it opens out in the realm of the Spirit are, indeed, endless. But even those who are contented with earthly horizons will — as, I hope, I have tangibly illustrated in this chapter — find in the *Gita* enough to absorb their intellectual propensities.

In conclusion, I believe that the world will be a better place to live in when men learn to 'see their own Self in all beings, and all beings in their own Self — with equal love for all"—*sarvatra sama darshanah* (vi. 29).

VII

THE VALUE OF VEDANTA

I now come to another part of my 'queer confession.' Looking back upon the three score years of my life, and reflecting on their *significance to me,* I am able to discover some "method in their madness."

For one thing, I never planned my life, any more than I planned the Universe. That was how this "madness" commenced. It was little short of insanity to have launched upon so hazardous a business with no forethought whatsoever. I was born in ignorance, even though it is possible to call it "innocence." I had no 'Intimations of Immortality' during my childhood, such as Wordsworth speaks of. It was all thoughtless and impulsive play, enlivened by a certain inexplicable attraction towards what I liked, and a revulsion from other things I did not like. It is curious how I came to like what I liked, and hate what I hated. Nevertheless, attraction and revulsion worked like the systolic and diastolic movements of the heart.

Then, like all sentient beings, I desired to be happy; though I never thought (or, perhaps, could understand) what that meant. I only knew that I was happy when I was happy, and sorrowful when I was sorrowful.

WISDOM BEYOND REASON

The capacity to discriminate between what is really good, or merely attractive, came to me very tardily. I have been a rather dull student in this University of Hard Knocks,—though somewhat oversensitive to certain impacts setting my soul on fire. I have now learnt — rather late in life — that there is a Wisdom which outshines our impulsive excogitations called "reasons."

Very often I behaved like Arjuna, as described in the first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*. I first decided what I shall or shall not do; then I proceeded to seek wiser counsels. Even then, I persisted (like Arjuna) in rationalising my inclinations (however unwise they were) with a specious "logic." Nevertheless, it was my great good fortune that God (like Sri Krishna in the *Gita*) was very affectionate and forbearing towards me (like the mother towards her erring child). At long last, I was brought round by Him : from despondency to devotion, from devotion to discrimination, from discrimination to decision, and from decision to duty — towards myself and my God (i.e., my Inner Mentor and Director of the whole Universe).

It is obvious that I have been always a "believer." It could not be otherwise. I was so conditioned by nature as well as nurture. Cumulative experience only underlined my unconscious inclinations towards 'introversion.' I was more like East than Brown at Rugby in Thomas

Hughes' famous classic : *Tom Brown's School Days.* Philosophy attracted me more than Science (for which I had no aptitude); and Mathematics having proved an "ass's bridge", I dallied with Literature — for a time — as a possible rival to Philosophy in my curricular choice at college. But, finally, I fell in love with History which appeared to combine in itself whatever I looked for in Philosophy and Literature. It was, with me, a sort of "natural selection",— my earlier bias for Biography and reflective writing — like Addison's Essays — having prepared me for such a culmination. Consummation came with maturity. Autobiography particularly fascinated me, from Benjamin Franklin's and John Stuart Mill's to Rabindranath Tagore's and Mahatma Gandhi's Experiments with Truth.

History has been, for me, a rich and vast store-house of human experience. I could therein find much that I missed in my direct contacts with life. Imaginatively, I tried 'to get under the skin', as it were, of such of the actors on the stage of History as attracted me,—whether they were realists or idealists : a Cavour as much as a Mazzini (but not Garibaldi); an Asoka and an Akbar in India,—or even an Aurangazeb. I tried to judge historical characters with the human interest that my contemporaries evoked in me; and I experimented with thinking of my contemporaries with a detachment and freedom of criticism, which their remoteness enabled me to exercise to-

wards men and women in history. That habit, meticulously cultivated during some forty years, watered the roots of my initial inclination to worship at the shrine of Philosophy.

I do not feel I lost much by this preference for History, as against the claims of academic Philosophy and Literature. For historical writing of the best sort embodies concrete human experience presented in artistic (literary) forms that inspire, instruct, and entertain, at one and the same time. That edification gains in substance from the conviction that here we are witnessing not a fictitious world of mental creations, but actual life such as we ourselves live, — in thought, emotion, and action.

It is true that History has a serious rival in creative literature of the order of Shakespeare's dramas. As L.P. Smith remarks in his *On Reading Shakespeare* : "He created a world of his own, and filled it with inhabitants of his own creation : with such a variety, indeed, and multitude of living beings, that he has been reproached with making the real world seem almost empty in comparison." But this realm is open to all, and it is not the private preserve of academic students of Literature alone. Besides, the appeal of History is (for me at any rate) fuller and more vital. It has all the enchantments of Literature, and more than the attracions of academic Philosophy. In fact, History is as deep and comprehen-

sive as Life itself; and all human achievements — in the realms of thought, emotion and action, — are imbedded in its capacious bosom. If Life is the father of philosophical reflection, History is the mother; and *Vedanta* is its quintessential cream.

What I value in *Vedanta* (i.e. the relentless search for Reality) is its very approach. I miss its completeness in every other (compartmentalised) study, — not excluding academic philosophy. The last may be comprehensive enough, intellectually speaking, but it fails to insist upon the living reality of direct experience as a crucial test. Professional philosophers are far from being paragons of "the practice of the presence of God." To that extent they fall short of *Vedanta.*

Science, too, claims to pursue Truth solely with the aid of "passionless reason". No doubt, it is rigorous in its objectivity, so far as it goes. But that virtue is also its weakness. It is too *passionately* devoted to "passionless reason" to be trustworthy as a guide to total Reality. Science, for instance, treats Intuitional Experience with the emotions of a step-mother. *Vedanta* alone, in my opinion, is really free to acquaint us with the whole of Reality, in all its implications : theoretical and practical, vital and experiential. In Tennyson's words that Reality is tantamount to :

One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off(?) divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.

The parenthetical query is my interpolation. It is a Vedantic corrective to the poet's "original sin" of conceiving as remote what is really immediate.

I believe that the microcosm of my life is an integral part of the macrocosm which is bound by "one law"; it is an "element" in that "divine event" towards which "the whole creation" is supposed to be moving. I say to myself with Emerson : "Nature shall be to thee a symbol. The life of the soul in conscious union with the Infinite shall be for thee the only existence."

My earliest inspiration towards this kind of Idealism came to me from Swami Rama Tirtha—at a very impressionable age—in my teen years. I was struggling then—like hundreds of other Indian students — against odds which the poet has euphemistically animadverted on in the consoling epigram: "slow rises worth by poverty depressed." Swami Rama was a brilliant alumnus of the Punjab University. He was determined from his boyhood, despite his extreme poverty, to 'make his life sublime;" and gave expression to his high aspirations in his illuminating letters to his master — Bhagat Dhanna Ram. Working

for sometime as a Professor of Mathematics in the Forman Christian College, Lahore, he later went into the Himalayas where he found himself in tune with the Infinite. Then he burst upon Japan and America as "a storm of Peace!" Finally, returning to India, two years later, he got drowned in the Ganga while swimming—at the tender age of thirty-two! That was in 1906, ten years before I matriculated. For well nigh two decades, thereafter, I was under the spell of that magnificent meteor which flashed through the sky of my youthful imagination, — blazing a trail of glory which I had the sensibility to admire, but not the grit to emulate.

Then followed my wanderings in the wilderness, when I drifted (not spiritually, but socially) in search of a haven, until I came to Poona in 1932. Looking back upon these twenty-five years since, I feel that the Divinity which shapes our ends — whether we are aware of it or not — was all along preparing me for the consummation I devoutly desired.

During this period of spiritual probation, the seeds of a "contemplative life" were slowly germinating within me. Whatever else I attempted — or just happened to me — seems irrelevant in the perspectives I was evolving. In my blind gropings for the Light, quite "accidentally" (as most would say), I hit upon the following lines :

janami dharmam na cha me pravrittih,
janamyadharmam na cha me nivrittih;
tvaya hrishikesha hridisthitena
yatha niyuktosmi tatha karomi.

'I know what is *Dharma,* but I lack the pluck to practise it; I know what is against *Dharma,* yet I lack the will to renounce it. *I therefore, wish to act as Thou promptest me, O Lord! seated within my heart.*'

I later learnt that this valuable verse is from the *Pandava Gita.*

'Thy will be done', is a most necessary pre-requisite to the realisation : 'I and my Father are One' — *aham Brahmasmi.*

There are obviously two entities not altogether amalgamated or fused in the intimate first person singular. For, very often, they appear to be at cross-purposes. My reading and "introspection" alike prompt me to say : "I am aware, and constantly aware, of this dualism within me."

There is a *Dvaita,* too, that is described by the Vedantists as the dualism of 'Self *vs.* not-self' — 'God and myself', or 'I and the Universe.' Sri Shankaracharya resolved this dichotomy by altogether denying its validity: "Brahman alone is real, the world is unreal", he declared;

"that which is vital within me is verily the Eternal Brahman." He attributed the delusion of dualism to *maya,* which he characterised as *anirvachaniya* or incapable of being defined in words.

I picked up these crumbs from the Vedantist's table when I had to teach what I did not myself understand, to those who understood less than I did. But it was all a part of the *maya* which is *anirvachaniya*! My own private verdict was in consonance with Lao Tse's wise epigram : "Those who speak do not know; those who know do not speak." Now, however, I am not much concerned with the art of "using ten thousand words to prove the futility of words!" I am content to concentrate on the strictly private pre-occupation of self-examination, which (as experience has taught me) yields far richer dividends.

To return to the dualism within myself : I can assess its nature fairly clearly, though I cannot liquidate it, even to my own satisfaction. But I live in the hope that to have detected the truant is halfway to his subjugation. A badly battered snake has little chance of survival; at any rate, it is rendered innocuous. I am, at the same time, aware of the perils of premature optimism. Eternal vigilance is, indeed, the price of real Freedom.

I have often watched myself falling asleep, and then witnessed an entire dream "reality" of, say, rushing through space on some sort of air transport to destination U.S.A. .... It is just an afternoon-nap, lasting about half-an-hour; but my vision is that of a voyage across seas and continents, — culminating in a re-awakening on my own bed, — owing to a sudden recollection that it is time for an important engagement which I could not possibly miss !

Opening my eyes, I become at once aware of another world, which too appears "real", quite as much as the "certainties" of the dream-world *during its actual duration* (of a split-second). The experiences of time, space, sight, sound, colour, feeling, thinking, talking, arguing, acting, — are all identical in both states : waking as well as dreaming. More than once, I have, in my dream, even seen myself dead or dying !

Then, there is also the more familiar dualism of my discriminating self : one part of it enticing to an action readily condemned by the other. Or, when I sit down and try to meditate, closing my eyes, there run through my mind two parallel streams of thought — like the Ganga and the Jamuna at Prayag—mingling, yet keeping apart, simultaneously. Aware of this surface-dualism, and yet hidden somewhere deep within me there is also present another alert witness who silently watches the entire show

with a detached and penetrating "eye", unaffected by the drama of the dualistic 'hide-and-seek' going on within me. The entire experience is analogous to witnessing a picture in a cinema-theatre. You come out of it, rubbing your eyes, jostling through the crowds at the "EXIT",—the 'screen-realities' mingling with the multitudes in and outside the theatre, for a while, confusing your witness-consciousness, and making the two as hard to distinguish as the separate waters of the twin northern rivers at their confluence. .... I who emerge into the daylight — out of the theatre and its momentary illusions and the jostling crowds — am independent of them all.

Verily, it takes two, as they say, to pick up a quarrel. I am convinced that our sense of duality — diversity—is the source of all the disharmony in the world. All personal, social, and other conflicts are rooted in the dichotomies within ourselves. Outer harmony, it seems to me, cannot be achieved by split-personalities. Inner integration — such as the *Bhagavad Gita* commends — that of the *sthitaprajna* and the *yogi* — is the real key to all our problems. Whatever promotes it is wisdom; whatever jeopardises it is folly.

If there be a quarrel between Monism and Multism among philosophers themselves, the ultimate Truth lies beyond their grasp. As the *Avadhuta Gita* says :

Advaitam kechidicchanti, Dvaitamicchanti chapare;
samam tatvam na vindanti dvaitadvaita vivarjitam.

'Some are attracted by Advaita, while others are drawn by Dvaita; but neither comprehend the Reality that transcends both.'

To seek that Transcendental Truth, by whatever means might suit us, is the one lesson that *Vedanta* inculcates. I feel that the *Bhagavad Gita* is the most helpful practical guide available to the Seeker on the Path to Freedom and Harmony. Its essence is also laconically expressed in a pithy aphorism by Patanjali in his definition of what he calls *Kriya-Yoga* : *Tapassvadhyaya — Ishvara-pranidhanani Kriya-Yogah* : 'Self-discipline, thoughtful study, and total surrender to the Divine, constitute *Kriya-Yoga.*'

VIII

FROM THE ALONE TO THE ALONE

'It moves, it moves not; It is far, it is near. It is within all, it is outside all.'—Ishavasya Upanishad.

I started my retrospect with the double-query : "Whence do we come? Whither do we go?" That presumed a plurality in the questioner, which is really unwarranted. The question, as a matter of fact, arose all within me—a single entity—and I went on, by the sheer habit of loose thinking, — to project my own ignorance on to "others", by adding : "Is ignorance the sum of all that *we* know?" I have now come to realise that all that ignorance pertained to myself only, and that there are really no "others" from whom to expect enlightenment. The answer must come from the questioner himself.

A like ignorance, verily, attaches to the title of the present chapter as well — "*From* the alone *to* the Alone". If the Alone is really One, there is no room for any *movement*—"from" and "to". Confusion becomes worse confounded because of the citation from the *Ishavasya Upanishad* paradoxically stating : "It moves, it moves not". What then is IT? Does it really move or not move? I suppose, the paradox or enigma could be resolved only by enquiring into the nature of IT, and knowing my relations with IT.

The *Bhagavad Gita* declares : 'When one perceives the diversified appearance of beings as rooted in ONE (or as an extension thereof) he becomes ONE with BRAHMAN' (xiii. 30). Going a step further, the *Mundaka Upanishad* says : 'He who knows that Supreme BRAHMAN, verily, becomes himself BRAHMAN.'

The relationship between the apparently 'multiple' and the ONE — "Authentic Existence" — is explained by Plotinus in terms of an 'Upper' and a 'Lower' level : "On the upper level — I am — united with IT, participant in IT's nature; but on the lower level — I am — in contact with the realm beneath." He also adds : "Before duality there must be unity." It is in terms of this apparent duality that Plotinus speaks of "the flight of the '*alone* to the *Alone.*"

In the light of the above, it becomes easier to understand what Christ meant when He said : "I and my Father are One", and "I am the Goal, the Way, and the Life." The *Bhagavad Gita* declares : 'The man of unified Vision sees all as ONE : the Self in all, and all in the Self.' The duality of the worshipper and the worshipped also becomes more intelligible. 'Thy will be done', and *Ishvarapranidhana* are no longer irreconcilable with 'I and my Father are One', or *aham Brahmasmi.*

'When thou prayest,' says Christ, 'enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.' By 'entering the closet', I understand 'diving into myself'; 'closing the door' means 'shutting off dualism'; and 'thy *Father which is in secret*' implies the Ineffable "Authentic Existence" — or the Absolute which is the 'Father' (Source) of all apparent diversity; and 'which is in secret' is *nihitam guhayam,* because our senses cannot perceive Him, nor can we apprehend Him with our intellect: *yato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha. (Tait. Up.)* From this point of view, prayer is the Soul's self-reminder of its being one with the "Authentic Existence". Sri Shankaracharya declared : 'Bhakti is the technique of Self-realisation' — *svasvarupanusandhanam bhaktirityabhidhiyate.*

But, even from the dualistic standpoint, or from any standpoint whatsoever, the efficacy or utility of Prayer is indubitable. As Alexis Carrel observes : "Prayer is not only worship, it is also an invisible emanation of man's worshipping spirit — the most powerful energy that one can generate. The influence of prayer on the human mind and body is as demonstrable as that of secreting glands. Its results can be measured in terms of physical buoyancy, greater intellectual vigour, moral stamina, and a deeper understanding of the realities underlying human relationships. A tranquillity of bearing, a facial and bodily repose, are observed in those whose inner lives are

enriched by prayer. Within the depths of consciousness a flame kindles. And man sees himself. He discovers his selfishness, his silly pride, his greeds, his blunders. He develops a sense of moral obligation, intellectual humility. Thus begins a journey of the soul towards the realm of grace."

Mahatma Gandhi was an *exemplar* of the practice of prayer in every sense of the word.

Most men are satisfied with temple ritual and a vicarious homage to God through priests or other intermediaries. I always felt that I could never marry Him by proxy; nor be satisfied with the mere ritual of wedding. I must be imbedded in Him and be able to imbibe Him. The dualism of the bodies must be dissolved in the *Ananda* of the Spirit. Otherwise, it is only a make-believe or self-delusion. Worship is like Art, and as Simone Weil puts it: "It is an attempt to transport into a limited quantity of matter, modelled by man, an image of the infinite beauty of the entire universe. If the attempt succeeds, this portion of matter should not hide the universe, but on the contrary it should reveal its reality to all around it." But there are stages in the communion:

> 'I am Thy slave so long as body-consciousness persists; when I am self-conscious, I am a part of Thy wholeness; but, when I become Soul-conscious, I am convinced that I am Thyself'.

When the third stage is reached the devotee sings :

'In Him all things subsist, from whom all things are born. He, indeed, is the All who is Omnipresent. I salute that Supernal Being who is the Soul of All.'

Swami Vivekananda declared : "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy — by one, or more, or all of these — and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or ritual or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details."

Of all the modes of worship — *mokshasadhana samagryam* — envisaged above, Mysticism appeals to me more than any other. It is an instinctive choice: the outcome of my *svabhava* and *svadharma*. Work, to me, has meant little more than reading, writing, and "teaching" (in the vocational sense); worship, in a formal way, I acquiesce in, only as a social obligation, when situations make it awkward to avoid. Like Simone Weil, I believe that *"contact with God is the true sacrament"*; and everything which promotes it is worship for me. Hence, I have no sanctum or shrine set apart for its practice; no time specially reserved for ritual in my diurnal routine. I desire to spend all my waking hours in the delightful preoccupation of "waiting on God." Other duties get fulfilled without fuss when I am able to forget that "the

well-being of the Universe depends upon my attending to its welfare." "It is not my business," said Simone Weil, "to think about myself. My business is to think about God. It is for God to think about me." She was not a consecrated nun immured within a medieval convent, but a silent social worker in war-riven France. She died on 29th August, 1943, in a sanatorium at Ashford in Kent (England),—as a refugee, *en hypomene*: "waiting in patience." She was born in Paris on 3rd February, 1909, and lived all her active life as a "heretic", persisting in her refusal to be "baptised", — unto the last. Nevertheless, she said : "We must feel the reality and presence of God through all external things, without exception — and in each detail, *including evil in all its forms*—as clearly as our hand feels the substance of paper through the penholder and the nib."

The problem or enigma of Evil is the bitterest pill in the phial of the philosopher. We all love to speak of God as benevolent. Nevertheless, we also describe unforeseen calamities as "acts of God." There is truth in both these attitudes. For God is good and evil (as we apprehend them) and yet different as well. The Vedantin who swallows the whole Universe in his Unified Vision, does not strain over the little gnat of evil : he takes in everything, — lock, stock, and barrel! Hence, Swami Vivekananda proclaims from the housetop :

"The only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls,—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship. He who is the high and low, the saint and the sinner, the god and the worm, Him worship, the visible, the knowable, the real, the omnipresent; break all other idols. In whom there is neither past life nor future birth, nor death, nor going, nor coming,—in whom we always have been and always will be one, Him worship; break all other idols." In his powerful poem entitled "Kali the Mother" he worships the Almighty in forms we would shrink from,— because we are enamoured of partial apprehensions of Reality only:—

Scattering plagues and sorrows,
Dancing mad with joy,
Come, Mother, come!

For Terror is Thy name :
Death is in Thy breath;
And every shaking step
Destroys a world for e'er.
Thou 'Time' — the All-Destroyer!
Come, O Mother, come!

Who dares misery love,
Dance in destruction's dance,
And hug the form of death —
To him the Mother comes !

This is no mere poetic mood; it is a loving acceptance of the total implications of all-inclusive Reality. As the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* declares :

> 'Verily, the Great Unborn Atman, the Ageless, the Immortal,—the Deathless, the Fearless—is Brahman; Fearless, indeed, is Brahman. He who knows this, even he, becomes Brahman the Fearless.'

That is why the Path of the *mumukshu* (lover of liberation) has been characterised by the *Katha Upanishad* as being 'sharp as the razor's edge and difficult to tread'; and the *Mundaka Upanishad* warns us : 'This Atman is not to be apprehended by the weak or infirm',—in body, mind, and spirit.

The one source of all fear and weakness is the illusion of dualism. Consequently, the only way to overcome them is to realise that "Authentic Existence" is One—not many. That One, being Alone, has none to fear. And the stimulating voice of the sages rings through the ages : *Uttishtata ! Jagrata ! Prapyavarannibodhata* ' 'Arise ! Awake ! in the awareness of the grace you have obtained !'

'Knock, and it shall be opened unto you !' is literally true. "If you would have the kernel," Meister Eckhart said, "you must break the shell". It is idle—even futile—to enquire into the origin of the shell, if one is really keen

on eating the kernel. About the reality of that kernel I never had any misgivings—at any time in life. "The soul only knows for certain that it is hungry," writes Simone Weil, "the important thing is that it announces its hunger by crying. A child does not stop crying if we suggest to it that perhaps there is no bread. It goes on crying just the same.... The reality of its hunger is not a belief, it is a certainty." The mystic, too, declares : "I no longer believe, for I can see and experience."

Being somewhat shy by nature, I could not announce my hunger with a cry that anybody could hear. But the inhibited cry could not be altogether lived down. I found consolation in 'the short prayer that pierceth Heaven' of which the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* speaks. I was too self-conscious to audibly proclaim my "hunger for God". Yet, paradoxically, I was acutely aware of the presence of others watching me — as if they had no other business of their own to attend to! I consequently shilly-shallied with all outward expression of my religious craving. But inwardly I grew more and more engrossed; and there I found company with the mystics who blessed me in ways that encouraged me to tap all the resources of the UNSEEN.

For a sample : the Bohemian cobbler-mystic Jacob Boehme came to me like heavenly manna when I made his acquaintance in Sheldon Cheney's fascinating book :

Men who have Walked with God. There I found him writing : "I earnestly prayed God to be wrapped in His Holy Spirit, and asked for His mercy. I asked that He would bless and instruct me, and deliver me from all that might separate me from Him. I asked that I might live, not in my own will, but in His. It was in answer to this seeking that sometimes the gate to His Majesty was opened to me. Then in a quarter of an hour I understood more than if I had been many years at a University. . . . Finally, the portals of the deep broke open, I attained the very centre of Being, and a wonderful light arose within my soul. It was a light wholly foreign to the man I had been. Therein I first apprehended the true nature of God and of man, and of the relationship existing between them,—a thing which I had never before understood."

What a revelation to one in my plight ! I read in Epictetus : "You must know that it is no easy thing for a principle to become a man's own, unless each day he maintain it and hear it maintained, as well as *work it out in life.*" As I pondered these words, the universality of the ancient wisdom came home to me with an added freshness. It was *Gita sugita kartavya* and *Abhyasa-Yoga* in other words; also, *sravana, manana, nididhyasana, satsamga, atmachintana,* etc., with *satatya* or continuous practice. I could do all this without fuss—unobserved even by those nearest to me.

From Plotinus I learnt the art of being an inner sculptor. "Withdraw into yourself," he writes, "and look; and if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful. He cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty, and *never cease chiselling* your statue until there shall shine out on you, from it, the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the perfect Goodness established in the stainless shrine."

The statue I am inwardly busy carving is still ill-shapen, crude, and even positively ugly in places; the marble is hard and all but intractable; but the sculptor has before him models to encourage and inspire him. I can do what others have done before me. In the 'Little Flower of Jesus'—since canonised as St. Therese of Lisieux—I discovered, in particular, a soul shy enough to attract me.

She lived in Normandy towards the close of the nineteenth century, and entered the convent when she was hardly fifteen years of age. She died before she was thirty. "I resolved to give myself up to a serious and mortified life," she writes. "When I say mortified, I do not

allude to the penances practised by the Saints. . . . *I made my mortifications consist of simply checking my self-will, keeping back an impatient answer, rendering a small service in a quiet way, and a hundred other similar things. . I know that true charity consists in bearing all my neighbour's defects, in not being surprised at mistakes, but in being edified at the smallest virtues.*"

That inner discipline, combined with an intensely burning Faith, brought about a miraculous consummation: "At last there dawned the most beautiful day of all the days of my life. . . . But I would not, and I could not tell you all. . . . Jesus asked nothing of me, and claimed no sacrifice; for a long time He and little Therese had known and understood one another. That day our meeting was more than simple recognition, it was perfect union. We were no longer two. Therese had disappeared like a drop of water lost in the immensity of the ocean; Jesus alone remained—He was the Master, the King. Had not Therese asked Him to take away the liberty which frightened her? She felt herself so weak and frail, that she wished to be forever united to the Divine Strength. And then my joy became so intense, so deep, that it could not be restrained; tears of happiness welled up and overflowed. My companions were astonished, and asked each other afterwards : 'Why did she cry? Did she have anything on her conscience?'. . . . And no one understood that all the joy of Heaven had come into one heart—exiled, weak,

and mortal—could not contain it without tears.... No, I repeat it—joy alone, a joy too deep for words, overflowed wihin me."

Her biographer observes : "She was ever the same—calm and full of joy." The Little Flower of Jesus used to say : "Since I have left off thinking about myself, I live the happiest life possible." But to other observers her life appeared full of trials and afflictions.

"Affliction," says Simone Weil, "is a marvel of Divine technique. It is a simple and ingenious device which introduces into the soul of a finite creature the immensity of force, blind, brutal, and cold. The infinite distance which separated God from the creature is entirely concentrated into one point to pierce the soul in its centre... He who remains ever turned in the direction of God while the nail pierces, finds himself nailed on to the very centre of the Universe. It is the true centre....beyond space and time, it is God. In a dimension which does not belong to space, which is not time, which is indeed quite a different dimension, this nail has pierced a hole through all creation, through the thickness of the screen which separates the soul from God. In this marvellous dimension, the soul, without leaving the place and the instant where the body to which it is united is situated, can cross the totality of space and time and come into the very presence of God."

IX

A QUIET CLOSING

'All things are unmanifest to begin with; manifest in the middle; and unmanifest again in the end; what room is there for regret there of? (B. G. ii. 28).

THAT which has a beginning must have an ending. The longest journey, just as it commences with the first step, also closes with the last. I started mine sixty years ago—as a manifested being—and now look forward to its *Quiet Closing*. After all, as Wordsworth said : "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,"—of that which we really are : 'Know that to be imperishable by which all this is pervaded', says the *Gita* (ii. 17).

We are, verily, "laid asleep in body, and become a living soul", only "while we see into the life of things." But that "seeing into the life of things" does not come so long as we are blinded by the blaze of "things". For the "living soul" is no "thing". As Kenneth Walker's recent book with the thought provoking title: *Only the Silent Hear* suggests, we can also "see into the life of things" *only in silence*. To attain this "seeing silence" is not easy, but it is worth cherishing. As Simone Weil declares: "Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness." Or, as Sheldon Cheney (author of *Men who have*

Walked with God) remarks : "When we exist in peace the mind is still, the soul is serene, the heart is tranquil; we move in harmony with the rhythm of the spheres: we partake of the sense of oneness of all that is. We are aware of the divinity of Being." "That silence", writes Weil, "is not the absence of sounds, but something infinitely more real than sounds, and the centre of a harmony more perfect than anything which a combination of sounds can produce. Farther more, there are degrees of silence. There is a silence in the beauty of the universe which is like noise when compared with the silence of God."

The irresistible call of this "silence of God" conquers us as we approach the sunset hour of our life. George Santayana, the American philosopher (who died in Rome in 1952, at the ripe age of 89) wrote in the evening of his life: "I have ultimately become a sort of hermit, not from fear or horror of mankind, but by a sheer preference for peace and obscurity. Fortune has become indifferent to me, except as fortune might allow me to dispise fortune and to live simply in a beautiful place. I have cut off all superficial society, reducing it to the limits of sincere friendship or intellectual sympathy — I am happy in my solitude and confinement."

The proper perspectives of maturity are thus set out in an ancient text :

Anityani sharirani, vibhavo naiva shashvatah;
nitya sannihito mrityuh, kartavyo dharma samgrahah.

'Our bodies are impermanent, and prosperity is only temporary; Death being ever at our heels, *Dharma* is the only treasure worth accumulating by us.'

The 'treasure of *Dharma*' is accumulated through 'plain living and high thinking'. The *Mundaka Upanishad* declares: 'Those who have Faith, discipline themselves in retirement; the tranquillised wise men, living on the frugal fare they are able to fetch,—pass through the bright portals of the sun to the Immortal and Immutable Being.'

The nature of that Being is thus revealed in the same *Upanishad* :

'Brahman verily is this deathless Being : In front is Brahman, behind is Brahman; to the right and to the left is Brahman. He is above as well as below; indeed, the whole Universe is nothing but the Supreme Brahman.'

These thoughts and reflections, I venture to suggest, are more appropriate to the aged and bald-headed than any recollections of youth, or speculations about death.

That which is past cannot be restored; that which is to come cannot be averted. But, as the same *Upanishad* tells us, 'Whatsoever state the pure-minded aspire after, or keenly desire, that will they surely attain.'

The practice of one-pointed meditation on the Brahman is, therefore, recommended as the natural consummation to be aimed at :

> 'Arming yourself with the mighty bow of the *Upanishad,* fix on it the arrow sharpened by concentration; and drawing the bow-string with the power of meditation, pierce the Immutable which is your target.'

This simile is further explained thus :

> 'The *pranava* (OM) is the bow, the self is the arrow, and Brahman is its target. When the bull's-eye is completely penetrated by the arrow, it becomes one with it : so should the Atman be merged in the Brahman.'

The trouble with most of us is that :

> The world is too much with us—
> Getting and spending we lay waste our powers.

But as Eckhart admonishes us: 'To be full of things is to be empty of God; to be empty of things is to be full

of God.' The 'emptiness of things' spoken of last is that of "the poor *in spirit*" as Tauler would have it. Not the poverty of material possessions, but a "detachment" in the spirit of the *Bhagavad Gita*. For those who can achieve this, "wilderness" will be verily "Paradise enow." Then shall we be able to appreciate in solitude "the charms that sages have seen in its face", without feeling nostalgic like the ship-wrecked Alexander Selkirk wailing:

> Oh, had I the wings of a dove,—
> Society, friendship and love,—
> How soon would I taste you again!

Rather would we like Tukaram, hold converse with ourselves :

> *Tuka mhane hoya manasi samvada,*
> *apulachi vada apanasi —*

and feel : 'All Nature is my kith and kin; birds and trees are my delightful companions; the sky is my roof, and the earth my bed. I am unaffected—for good or ill—and my mind is sporting just as it pleases!'

This is no mere lyrical mood of an ordinary poet. It is the soul-communion of the genuine mystic feeling One with All. In a remarkable series of mystical songs known as *Abhangas* (lit. "indivisible") Tukaram sings :

'Since You are all-pervading how could I feel myself separate? I have made the Infinite my home. The Formless has become my eternal abode. Now there is no need for the ego, as I have become One with the Immaculate. Extrovert activity and introvert passivity are melted into One, over the fire of Wisdom. Testing that amalgam in the crucible of experience, Tuka has become One with BRAHMAN. He has attained the acme of Health (Wholeness), and the ecstasy of it fills his entire Being!"

"The sound body lives in silence", writes Alexis Carrel. "We do not hear, we do not feel, its working. The rhythms of our existence.....fill the depths of our consciousness when we are in the silence of meditation. The harmony of organic functions gives a feeling of peace." He adds: *Isolation is the only hope of salvation."*

As Marcus Aurelius enjoins us to do, we could retire within ourselves whenever we would: *'No retreat is more peaceful or less troubled than that encountered by man in his own soul".*

'God may give you any type of body, give you birth in any country, in any condition, but pray for knowledge and devotion', declares Jagannath Das—a medieval Indian mystic. 'All countries are holy lands, and all time is auspicious time, all souls are worthy of grace, and all words are *mantras* (canticles). All work is worship for

one who lives a dedicated life. . . . God's worship is very easy for those who know what it means : the Universe is the *mantapa* (awning), the earth is the *peetha* (seat); the sun and moon are the lamps; the trees are the *chowries* (fans and fly-whisks); the sky is the parasol; rain is the shower-bath; the points of the compass are the garment; the Malaya breeze is the incense; all the corn of the earth is the *naivedya* (sacred offering); and lightning the best illumination.'

X

AN UNENDING EPILOGUE

AS nightfall approaches the birds fly home to roost. As the sun lowers on the western horizon and cool breezes blow, a calm descends on earth, and we turn to rest. The shop-keeper counts his cash and tallies it with the day's entries in his ledger.

But sunset is not the end of the world, nor is it the end of our existence. We go to bed with the next day's engagements under our pillows. We close our eyes with the certainty that we shall rise again with the dawn, and resume our diurnal round — *even like the sun!*

The seasons roll on and recede, but only to recur true to schedule on the annual calendar. There is an ebb and a flow in the tides of rivers and oceans. The moon's phases keep step with the rhythmic whirl of the countless choirs in the heavens.

The plants put forth their flowers and fruits and life is perpetuated, among animals and men, from generation to generation. Evolution moves on through the eons in endless cycles.

Life is punctuated with death, as the days are punctuated by the nights' nonces. The heart functions

through systolic and diastolic activities. Full-moon and new-moon alternate as Diana spins on her orbit perennially—.....

The microcosm and the macrososm are one in their constitution and vital energy. That energy is not a blind force, but the manifestation of a conscious Power which is the Reality comprehended by Vedanta as SAT-CHIT-ANANDA.

Our earth-bound existence is geo-centric in the microcosm, but cosmic in its infinite potentialities. Our clay feet cannot cover the cosmos with corporeal strides; but our Vision transcends Time and Space through intellect, imagination and intuition.

The sperm in the human womb throbs with the breath of the expansive Universe. *Brahman* is, indeed, That which grows, expands (from *brih* = to grow, to expand). *Tat-tvam-asi* is a factual dictum: 'That thou art' is the quintessence of the Upanishadic philosophy.

This is not a mere speculative abstraction, but a fact of living experience. For to live is to grow, to expand—not in body only but in Spirit also: from egoism into altruism; from oneself into an all-inclusive brotherhood. To be a *Maha-Atma* (Great Soul) is a half-way house to Godhead or *Paramatman*. That is the ultimate Goal and

Destiny of Man: his supreme and sublime self-fulfilment. That is Self-realisation.

Wisdom is the fulfilment of reason, as service is the fulfilment of love. Seconds grow into minutes, time grows into eternity, as rivers flow and merge into the ocean. So man grows into God: perennially growing, perennially expanding, perennially fulfilling himself.

Time has a termination, but Eternity is unending. The first drop that trickles through a mountain crevice has its birth, but it does not die when it flows into the ocean—with millions of other drops that are identical in their essence.

Like a traveller, I have packed my mental kit (in this book) on the eve of my further spiritual sojourn. This Epilogue is no complete inventory, but merely an incomplete index to the ineffable treasures I wish to carry with me. Judged by human scales the journey might appear long, almost unending. But when I have arrived, it shall be as though I had never travelled, but only imagined the illusory details of the "flight from the alone to the ALONE"!.....

APPENDIX

THE VISION OF THE GITA

The following extract on the "Vision of the *Bhagavad Gita*" and its setting is reproduced from my recently published book INDIA AS I SEE HER as of added interest to readers of the foregoing pages.—

INDIA, indeed, has a way of looking at life and its problems differently from the rest of the world. Her unique outlook, elaborately illustrated in the 100,000 verses of the *Mahabharata,* is succinctly and synthetically brought out in the 700 verses of the *Bhagavad Gita.* Here we have the syncretism of the Indian genius at its best. In it is the essence of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads,* and the Epics, and we may add, also of the best thoughts of the best minds of all times. In order to appreciate this, we must once again try and see 'a world in a grain of sand', as we did with the *Upanishads* in an earlier part of this story of India. Indeed, the Vision of the *Gita* was seen in a light whose character is thus anticipated in the *Chhandogya* which is one of the earliest of the *Upanishads*:

> There is a Light that shines beyond all things on earth, beyond us all, beyond the heavens, beyond the

highest, the very highest heavens. *This is the Light which shines in our heart. . .*

"I am the heart of all," declares Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita.* "If a man loves me, wheresoever he may abide, he abides in me." And, "He from whom all beings proceed and by whom all this is pervaded, by *worshipping Him through the performance of his own duty does man attain perfection."* In other words, as the Gospel avows: "I am the Goal, the Way, and the Truth."

The *Gita* is at once poetical and philosophical, metaphysical and religious, idealistic and practical. Its poetry is sweet, its philosophy profound, its metaphysics intelligible, its religion comprehensive, its idealism transcendental, and its practical wisdom stimulating.....

From Sankara (8th-9th century A.D.) to Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi in our time, there have been scores of commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita;* yet no two are absolutely alike! Often they seem to differ from one another as night from day; nevertheless they all agree on the practical utility of the *Gita,* which accounts for its universal popularity in and outside India. "When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon," wrote Gandhiji in 1925, "I turn to the *Bhagavad Gita,* and I find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow."

INDIA AS I SEE HER

An Appreciation

By

Sri Dilip Kumar Roy

Professor S. R. Sharma—who has made his mark already as a historian of distinction—has just brought out a new book: *India as I See Her.* He has written this remarkable survey from a point of view somewhat different from that of the average historian-pundit. His book is refreshing not merely because it is admirably cogent and informative but also and chiefly because he has laid bare for the serious reader of history the secret of India's genius which could assimilate so easily seemingly alien influences and produce a new synthesis, or, to quote his own words, her "flair for synthesis which is the keynote of her civilisation." He has presumably taken his cue from Sri Aurobindo who stressed again and again how the spirit of India could make her "the home of many living and pulsating centres of life, art, culture—a richly and brilliantly coloured diversity in unity," and how she "absorbed all and put upon all the Indian stamp, welded the most diverse elements into her fundamental unity."

Which is not to say, however, that Professor Sharma has just echoed Sri Aurobindo or the other eminent

Indians in his book (like Rammohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi, Pundit Nehru). He has shown in chapter after convincing chapter *how* India imbibed the alien cultures to produce a new synthesis at every step. For this demonstration through historical evidence he will, doubtless, be felicitated by all who (like the present appraiser) believe that India has a spiritual message for the world and that she is going (to quote Sri Aurobindo's prophecy) "to take her place as one of the preponderant States whose voices will be strongest and their lead and their action determinative of the world's future."

A thinker of the West once said that when India will have solved her problems the world's problems will be solved once and for all. But though this saying has been cited *ad infinitum* and *ad nauseum*, few historians have been at pains so far to probe deep down into the happenings in India with a view to substantiating it. That is why the present reviewer has found Professor Sharma so refreshing: because he is not merely a learned historian, but a man before whose penetrative vision things disparate and bewildering crystallise into a meaning and a significance which do not, alas, reveal themselves to those who have not "the eyes to see" the hidden import of phenomena nor the "ears to hear" the unheard melodies. It is to be hoped that all true lovers of the spirit of India will find Professor Sharma's latest book not only interesting and heart-warming but illuminating and convincing as well, and agree with his thesis—in the words of Pundit Nehru, cited in the closing chapter that—

"It was India's way in the past to welcome and absorb other cultures. That is much more necessary today, for we march to the One World of tomorrow where national cultures will be intermingled with the international culture of the human race."

AS OTHERS SEE IT

This is a bird's eye view—though detailed—of the outstanding landmarks in the evolution of Indian thought and history through the ages.

—*Indo-Asian Culture, Delhi.*

I consider the book as the best cultural introduction to the study of India. It is a marvel of compression. The style is quiet but compelling in its charm. No political, social and cultural event of any significance is omitted .....closely reasoned and forcibly expounded.

—Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao, M.A., D.Litt.,
Karnatak College, Dharwar.

India As I See Her is an important book not only because of its scholarly treatment and historical veracity, but more so because Professor Sharma brings to bear on his subject his deep insight into Indian life and gives an integrated picture of India's past laying bare before the reader the uniqueness of the creative idealism of India, which runs through her outer realistic history.

—*The Sunday Standard, Bombay.*

By the same Author

INDIA AS I SEE HER

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*THE CRESCENT IN INDIA

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