

and Lal Begi Melitar—the last a saint of their own degree.

The preacher arises and proclaims the new idea. He gathers about him men of all classes: the educated won to the service of his thought, the ignorant swept in by the radiance of his personality. Amongst his disciples distinctions of caste break down. The whole group is stamped with his character and prestige. Eventually, if it contain a preponderance of Brahmin elements, it may take rank with the best, carrying certain individuals up with it. But if it be composed chiefly of the scum of society, it will remain little considered; and yet, in the strength of its religious and intellectual significance may certainly claim to have progressed beyond its original point. Such is likely to be the fate of the present Christian converts. Those who are recruited from the lowest pariahs may acquire a certain prestige from their new faith and take a better place in the social scale, consequently, in centuries to come. At the same time we must not forget that forty or fifty years ago, conversions were made that undoubtedly involved great sacrifices, and the descendants of these Christians may lose rather than gain in the long run.

Taking the history of Hinduism as a whole, we observe a great systole and diastole of caste, the Buddhist and the present Christian periods ranking as well-marked eras of fusion, while the intervening centuries are characterised by progressive definition, broken every now and then by a wave of reform which thought itself a movement towards caste abolition, but ended simply in the formation of a new group. For this is the fact in which all would-be reformations in India find at once their opportunity and their limit. It may now be taken as proved that in order to affect caste widely the agitator would need to aim deeper than

the external phenomena, at underlying spiritual impulses.

If this theory of caste be valid, then, we find that the word signifies not so much mere rank in society as the standard of honour which is associated with rank. And as the private's conduct may be governed as much as his officer's by enlightened self-respect, we have seen that honour is something which applies to the whole of society equally. Even Tennyson, it will be remembered, pictures the country youth as outvaunting Lady Clara Vere de Vere in her pride of birth. The word caste, therefore, is by no means that antithesis of *democracy* which has been so commonly assumed.

Neither, amongst a people familiar with the process of self-organisation, would it prove any barrier to efficient co-operation. For the one essential to this power is an established habit of ignoring all points of mutual difference not germane to the matter in hand. What we call good-breeding, or what India calls *caste*, ought to make this easier. For any group of men met together for a common purpose find their individual rights secured to them in this way, and are free, by age-long acceptance, from any suspicion of another's desire to interfere with them. This is a basis of strength and not of weakness; so that it seems, if Indian men and women are not at present capable of combined action to any great degree, it is a matter of their own neglect of the habit, and not a necessary consequence of their institutions. We need not too readily accept the statement of such weakness, either, as infallible. My own observation has been that the Hindu people are capable enough of vigorous co-operation along the lines natural to them, those of the undivided family, the village community, and others. That inability which Europeans would show to face

these tests, they may be expected to display before ours

To be absolutely just, however, we must admit that the observance of caste law has entailed many foolish and irritating losses upon society during the last fifty years. We have seen that there are definite reasons, not wanting in cogency, why a man of good birth should not eat in all companies, or of food cooked by hands supposed less cleanly. Such rules, however, cannot be kept by those who, for any reason, cross the seas to Europe. This fact, more than any other detail, makes it a matter of out-casting to take the journey, and persecutions have sometimes ensued which are shocking to contemplate. A man may care little about the loss of station for his own sake, but the shoe pinches when he finds himself unable to make worthy marriages for his daughters; hence he will often submit to a heavy fine in order to buy back his position. This rouses the cupidity of ignorant and conventional persons who happen to have authority with the stay-at-home community, and such are apt to be unscrupulous in bringing about the ruin or recantation of any who resist their power. This is a series of events which does occur occasionally; but it need not be supposed that every Europe-returning Hindu who is kept at arm's length is a martyr. There is an element of distrust for the moral results of a visit to the West in the situation; and this is not altogether unreasonable. It is chiefly with regard to possibilities of political, practical, or technical education that caste deterrence is to be regretted, and it is obvious that as communities progress in the power of estimating modern conditions, they must recognise the suicidal nature of such an attitude. Yet it is curious to note here how caste may become thus a very real instrument of equality, for the power of the individual to advance is by this means

kept strictly in ratio to the thinking of the society in which he lives. This fact is characteristic. The good of caste, of race, of family stands first, and only second that of the individual man or woman in India. To take another plane. Let a man of the lower castes become wealthy, and he is compelled to educate men of his own rank to marry his daughters. Thus the group to which he owes birth, vigour, and development receives from him again the benefits of his life's work. This is the exact opposite of the European device, where the upper class absorbs money, talent, and beauty from the lower, while that is continually recruited by the failures from above.

The fact that every human force is polar in its moral activity needs little demonstration in the case of social pride. Every day we see this working on the one hand for the highest idealism, on the other for revolting egotism. Social exclusiveness may be condoned, it may even be robbed of its sting but, especially when coupled with personal exultation, it can never be made anything but vulgar-looking to the disinterested outsider. It is not to be supposed that Indian caste forms any exception to this rule of double effect. Nevertheless, it is well to understand the conditions of the sentiment, perceiving how inevitably this very thing repeats itself wherever two physically-distinguishable races are found side by side.

And it cannot be denied that great benefits as well as great evils have accrued from caste. It is an institution that makes Hindu society the most eclectic with regard to ideas in the world. In India all religions have taken refuge*—the Parsi before

* Parsi, Jew, Christian.—The Parsis took refuge in India a thousand years ago, fleeing before the Mohammedan conquest of Persia. There are ancient communities of Jews and Christians also from Asia Minor and Syria.

the tide of Mussulman conquest; the Christians of Syria; the Jews. And they have received more than shelter—they have had the hospitality of a world that had nothing to fear from the foreigner who came in the name of freedom of conscience. Caste made this possible, for in one sense it is the social formulation of defence minus all elements of aggression. Again, surely it is something that in a country conquered for a thousand years the door-keeper of a viceroy's palace would feel his race too good to share a cup of water with the ruler of all India. We do not easily measure the moral strength that is here involved, for the habit of guarding the treasure of his birth for an unborn posterity feeds a deep, undying faith in destiny in the Hindu heart. "To-day here, to-morrow gone," says the most ignorant *sotto voce* as he looks at the foreigner, and the unspoken refrain of his thought is, "I and mine abide for ever." Caste is race-continuity; it is the historic sense; it is the dignity of tradition and of purpose for the future. It is even more: it is the familiarity of a whole people in all its grades with the one supreme human motive—the notion of *noblesse oblige*. For though it is true that all men are influenced by this principle, it is also probably true that only the privileged are very conscious of the fact. Is caste, then, simply a burden, to be thrown off lightly, as a thing irksome and of little moment?

And yet, if India is ever to regain national efficiency, this old device of the forefathers must be modified in the process,—exactly how, the Indian people themselves can alone determine. For India to-day has lost national efficiency. This fact there is no gainsaying. Her needs now are not what they were yesterday. The Brahmins lose distinctiveness in these days of cheap printing and widespread literacy. But this only means that the country

requires multiplied methods of self-expression as the goal and summit of her national endeavour. She wants a greater flexibility, perhaps, a readier power of self-adjustment than she has ever had. But it ought to come in an influx of consciousness of those great spiritual tides on whose surface all questions of caste and non-caste can be lifted into new and higher inter-relations. Chief among all her needs is that of a passionate drawing-together amongst her people themselves. The cry of home, of country, of place is yet to be heard by the soul of every Indian man and woman in Hindustan, and following hard upon it must sound the overtones of labour and of race.

Then the question of whether to walk or not in the ways of the forefathers will be lost in the knowledge of the abundant power to hew out new roads, as those fathers did before them. Has India the possibilities still left in her own nature which can bring to her such an epoch?

There are some who believe that there is no task beyond the ultimate power of the Hindu peoples to perform. The nation that has stood so persistently for righteousness through untold ages, has conserved such vast springs of vigour in itself, as must ultimately enable her to command Destiny. The far-seeing wisdom and gentleness of her old constitution may unfit her for the modern world, but they are a sure proof, nevertheless, of her possession of sufficient sense of affairs to guide her to a full development once more.

For, after all, who were these old forefathers, with their marvellous cunning? What inspired them so to construct the social framework that every act of rebellion and invasion should end henceforth only in contributing a new morsel of colour to fit into the old mosaic? Ah, who were they indeed? We may well ask, for have we not all this time been calling

by their name one far greater than they, one infinitely more deserving of our reverence—the Communal Consciousness, namely, of a mighty patient people, toiling on and on through the ages up the paths of knowledge, destroying never, assimilating always, what they gain of truth and science, and hesitating only a little before fresh developments, because they are so preoccupied with the problems of the past that they do not realise that that stage is done, and that the sun is risen to-day on a new landscape, confronting them with fresh perils and unthought-of difficulties?

CHAPTER IX

THE SYNTHESIS OF INDIAN THOUGHT

When existence was not, nor non-existence,
When the world was not, nor the sky beyond,
What covered the mist? By whom was it contained?
What was in those thick depths of darkness?

When death was not, nor immortality,
When night was not separate from day,
Then *That* vibrated motionless, one with Its own glory,
And beside *That*, nothing else existed.

When darkness was bidden in darkness,
Undistinguished, like one mass of water,
Then did *That* which was covered with darkness
Manifest Its glory by heat.*

Now first arose Desire, the primal seed of mind,
[The sages have seen all this in their hearts,
Separating existence from non-existence.]
Its rays spread above, around, and below,
The glory became creative.
The Self, sustained as cause below,
Projected, as Effect, above.

Who then understood? Who then declared
How came into being this Projected?
Lo, in its wake followed even the Gods,
Who can say, therefore, whence It came?
Whence arose this projected, and whether sustained or
not,
He alone, O Beloved, who is its Ruler in the highest
heaven knoweth,
Nay, it may be that even he knoweth it not!

RIG. VEDA: Hymn of Creation.

I

LIKE the delicate charm that is common to honourable women; like the distinctive greatness of saints and heroes; like the intellectual breadth of a univer-

sity city; like all the finest things in the world in fact, Indian thought had remained till the year 1893 without a definition, and without a name. For the word *dharmma* can in no sense be taken as the name of a religion. It is the essential quality, the permanent, unfluctuating core, of substance,—the *man-ness* of man, *life-ness* of life, as it were. But as such it may assume any form, according to the secret of the individuality we are considering. To the artist his art, to the man of science his science, to the monk his vow, to the soldier his sovereign's name, to each believer his own particular belief—any of these, or all, may be *dharmma*. There is indeed another, and collective sense—somewhat akin to the English *commonwealth*, or, better still, perhaps, translated as *the national righteousness*—but even this does not connote a creed. It applies to that whole system of complex action and interaction, on planes moral, intellectual, economic, industrial, political, and domestic—which we know as India or the national habit. It was for this *dharmma* that the Rani of Jhansi fought. By their attitude to it Pathan, Mogul, and the Englishman, are judged, each in his turn, by the Indian peasantry. As head of this system, Judisthira, the Indian Charlemagne, received the name by which the people know him to this day, of Dharmma-Raja. And what this *dharmma* was, in all its bearings, is perhaps best laid down in the charge of the dying Bhishma to the future sovereigns of India, in the eighteenth book of the Mahabharata.

It is clear that such a conception is very inadequately rendered by the English word "religion." It is clear also that to dissect out and set in order the distinctively religious elements in an idea so definite at its centre, and so nebulous at its edges—claiming thereby to have defined the religion of the Indian peoples—would be a task of extreme difficulty.

It must have been in the face of just such problems that Max Müller exclaimed, "Ancient words are round, and modern square!"

As the forest grows spontaneously, of many kinds, each like all the others only in the common fact of the quest of light, and every plant having a complete right to regard its own as the chosen seed, so amongst the Hindu people, up to the twentieth century of this Christian era, grew faiths and creeds. Islam itself was scarcely an exception to this rule. For the spirit that makes a township, after learning English, differentiate itself sharply into Hindu and Mohammedan social cliques, is of modern growth. It appears to be a result of that false interpretation which reads the history of India as an account of the struggle between the two ideas. In the life of the villages there is no such strong distinction. In Bengal and Behar, the sons of Hindu and Mohammedan gentlemen grow up in the closest fraternity and fellowship. In the North-West Provinces they mingle their names. In the Moslem zenanas of the same districts the Hindu babies of the village are privileged guests. Every Hindu guru accepts Mohammedan as well as Hindu disciples. Every Mohammedan fakir is sought by Hindu as well as Mohammedan devotees. In the South, narrowly orthodox as the South is counted, the proudest feature of Trevandrum is the shrine dedicated to a Mohammedan princess, who forsook courts and palaces for the worship of Trevandrum's local god. Over and over again, in the political world, have the armies of Delhi and the nawabs been led to victory by Hindu generals; and in every Native State to this day will be found positions of responsibility and power assigned to men whose creed is that which the sovereign's is not. A more beautiful tribute was never surely paid than that spoken of the Mahratta queen: "she was peculiarly kind and

considerate to such of her subjects as differed from her in faith." But indeed the intolerance of Mohammedanism itself has been grossly exaggerated by Christian observers, who seem curiously incompetent to grasp the secret of an Eastern attitude. This intolerance could never, for instance, be compared with that of the Roman Church. The necessity of making a strong and competent nation out of a few warring tribes led to the enunciation of a brief and simple religious thesis; but the Prophet did not fail, in true Asiatic fashion, to remind his people that "God is the God of all creatures, not of one section only," and to exempt especially from condemnation all the alien religions definitely known to him, namely, Christianity and Judaism, "the peoples of the Book." Truly the quarrel of that stern spirit of righteousness was with unfaithfulness, not with other faiths, however strongly, under unforeseen military and political exigencies, it might seem to lend itself to the contrary interpretation. The fact that Mohammedans have sometimes held another opinion is no argument as to the teaching of their religion in its purity, and it must be remembered that "dog of an infidel" is an expression hurled as freely against Spaniard and Crusader, as ever against what Christians called a Pagan. No. The feud between Delhi and Ghazni was no more a battle between *Din* and *Dharma* than was that so long existing between France and England, the combat of the Catholic against the Protestant Churches. Even Sikh and Mahratta risings were only the psychological transfer of regional power-centres. The famous jewelled shawl of the Hindu State of Baroda was made quite naturally under the old *régime*, to be sent to the tomb of Mohammed at Medina!

Some air of the deserts, some tradition of the pastoral habit, some strong memory of Persia and Arabia, must indeed have come with the successful

SYNTHESIS OF INDIAN THOUGHT 141

invader to make the stay-at-home invaded resenting and distrustful. But the talk about cow-killing can hardly be taken as sincere, since in that case the arms of chivalrous Hindus would to-day be turned against a newer power. It must be understood as purely symbolic of the strained relations naturally existing between industrialised agricultural communities on the one hand, and on the other the militant sons of the desert accustomed to live by keeping and killing flocks and herds. But the same process that tamed the nomad into a member of a peasant community, and converted boatmen and tillers of the soil into Mussulmans, minimised in course of time even these differences of association. The familiar sight of the Mohammedan *bhisti*, holding his goatskin below the hydrant-mouth for water, and the Hindu water-carrier with his earthen pot coming in his turn, is an instance of the contrast as it now exists. Two different civilisations stand side by side, but they are friendly castes, not rival nationalities.

In the religious consciousness of Islam there is nothing that is without analogy amongst the faiths that have sprung up on Indian soil. Every one is tolerant of the idea of "the one true church," for it is held by Hindus to be a necessity of the early stages of religious development. Allah is of course the Personal God: but then the worshipper of Vishnu has always had to admit his brother's right to offer praise to Siva, though the name left himself unstirred. Why not Allah, therefore, equally? The Hindu uses images: to the Mussulman the image is abhorrent. True, but every Hindu hopes to escape some day from the necessity of using images. Who is not touched by the devotional custom of Hindu women, bathing the reflection of the Holy Child in the mirror and saying, "This which we bathe is not the image: neither is the

image He whom we worship!" Are not the saints for ever telling the idolater that even to name the Infinite Unity is sacrilege? And what Mohammedan saint has failed to say the same? The dispute about the image, in the light of such facts, becomes a mere difference of opinion as to the use of the concrete in the early stages of an education. Indeed, Hinduism itself has shown its power in modern times to throw out sects that decry the use of images as strongly as Islam.

Hence it would appear that the important points at issue between Hindus and Mussulmans are rather details of purification and domestic practice, than religious or doctrinal. This fact becomes increasingly evident as the higher phases of the two faiths are reached. For the more completely either is realised, the more perfectly is it fused in the other. Sufi-ism* leads the soul by love, and the Vedanta leads it by knowledge, love, or emancipated motive, as the case may be; but for both alike the theme is of a common goal, where all sense of difference shall cease, and the small self be swallowed up in the universal. Of each of the two faiths, then, it may be said, that it has nothing to lose and everything to gain by the more complete development of the other. Mohammed, Krishna, Buddha, Sankaracharya,† are not so many deplorable obstacles in each other's

* Sufi-ism.—A mystic set of Mohammedans. It rose in Persia, and at first suffered persecution, because the doctrine of the one-ness of the soul with the Divine sounded to the orthodox Mohammedan like a suggestion that a creature could be "partner with God." The Sufis now maintain secrecy as to their experiences and convictions. Their doctrines and those of Hindu Vedantism are practically identical.

† Sankaracharya.—"The father of modern Hinduism," often foolishly referred to as "a persecutor of Buddhism." A great saint and scholar. Born in Malabar, Southern India, 788 A.D. Wrote several famous commentaries, notably that on the Vedanta-Sūtra, in which he formulated what is known as the philosophic doctrine of "Adwaita." He is said to have died at the age of thirty-two.

paths, but rather widely separated examples of a common type—the radiant Asiatic personage, whose conception of nationality lies in a national righteousness, and whose right to be a leader of men rests on the fact that he has seen God face to face. Such souls cannot fail to recognise each other, and the Prophet was not slow to salute Moses and the Christ, the only examples of his own order whose names he knew.

Thus it is easy to realise that as long as Hinduism remained nameless and vague, the sense of difference between itself and Islam was also obscure, subject to all the mitigating influences of a common Orientalism, intensified here and there doubtless by political ideas, but tempered again by manifold social and economic bonds. And if, with definition, the Indian religions are to take on a more sectarian character, is it not clear that this is only in order to be joined again with the faith of Arabia, in a new and deeper consciousness of that which is their actual ground of union—the Asiatic synthesis of life?

It is not difficult to understand the mental outlook that is expressed in the namelessness of Hinduism. An immense people, filling a vast territory, unconscious of the completeness of their boundaries, or of any sharpness of contrast between themselves and neighbouring nations, were necessarily incapable of summing up their thought, to give it a name. A knowledge of limits and of difference there must be, before there can be definition, and it is only when India sees herself reflected as a whole in the glass of a foreign administration and a foreign language that she can dream of limitation. Besides, in things religious, what was there that was not included within the Hindu area? If, crossing the Himalayas and reaching China and Mongolia, men came in contact with unknown rites and superstitions, they

could always supply parallel or analogy from their home life and association. Strange and powerful goddesses were adored in China. But the worship of the Mother is so old in India that its origin is lost in the very night of time. What an age of common faiths that must have been that left us the Virgin Kanya (Kanya Kumari) as tutelary deity of Cape Comorin, and Kwannyon the Mother as the giver of all blessings, in Japan to this day! Who is to say which is older, *Kari*, the Mother-Queen of Heaven, of Chinese mythology, or *Kali* of Bengal? Even these conceptions, however, dating as they clearly must from the days of that matriarchate when nations and races were not yet differentiated—even these do not represent the earliest stratum of religious thought in India or in Asia.

All through the Old Testament, and throughout the story of the rise of Mohammedanism, we hear of "stones" as objects of worship. It is the black and mystic Kaaba, that is to this day the symbol of their unity to all the peoples of Islam. And throughout India still there are races of working folk who ask no better symbol of divinity than rude stones, selected with some care possibly, and then set up, singly or in a row, perhaps in an enclosure, perhaps not, to be regarded henceforth as objects of reverence. The people who use these emblems—for they cannot be regarded as images—may be anything, from sudras, or peasants, as I have seen them in the South, to Bhutias, or gipsy-like wanderers, as one meets with them in the Himalayas.

Everywhere in common life the miraculous elements are fire and light. And perhaps it is natural that oil, with its mystic power of leaping into flame, should be the characteristic offering in the worship of these stones. A Bhutiashrine will sometimes contain nothing but lamps. These are small and made of iron, like round-bowled dessert-

spoons at right angles to the handle, which is a spike stuck into the ground, and I have seen as many as sixteen or seventeen in one tiny temple. There was here neither image nor symbol other than the lamps themselves, and the pilgrim on leaving would tear off a shred of his garment, and tie it to a bush or a tree close by, there joining hundreds of tokens like itself of the wayfaring congregation whose spirits had met unseen in a common act of adoration. But the place, as is always the case with these peasant oratories, was where the view was finest, and the cry of the soul to commune with Nature most intense. Sometimes the sacred stones themselves are smeared with oil, for the very touch of the wondrous fluid that nourishes light seems to be holy.

To richer races in India only clarified butter is good enough for use in the service of the altar, and we of Europe require the great wax tapers. But can we not trace through all these a single common process of the sanctification of labour by the products of labour? "We worship the Ganges with the water of the Ganges, but we *must* worship," said a Hindu. Similarly does the peasant dream of the sacred oil, and the pastoral Toda* worship his cow-bells. Is it not true that if all could be blotted out in a moment from the human memory, the Eucharist and the sanctuary-lamp from Christianity, flickering light and fragrant flowers from the Mussulman grave, oils and fruits and incense from the Eastern worshipper, it would only be to spring forth fresh again to-morrow—corn, wine, and oil to the peasant, scented gums to the lover of gardens, the Good Shepherd the ideal of the herdsman, the ship of salvation the hope of fisher-folk? What are mythologies after all but the jewel-casket of humanity,

Toda.—An aboriginal tribe in the Neilgherries.

by means of which its wealth of dreams and loves and sighs in every generation becomes the unperishing and imperishable treasure of the after-comers? The mystery of the birth of faith is about us always.

All the great Asiatic faiths—that is to say, the world-religions—would seem to have been born of the overflow of something that may be called tentatively the Aryan thought-power, upon the social and religious formations of earlier ages. Taoism in China, Zoroastrianism in Persia, and Hinduism in India, are all as three different applications of a single original fund of insight and speculation, and Islam itself has incorporated Sufi-ism after reaching the Aryan region. Doubtless of all these India developed her share of the inheritance with the greatest freedom and perfection, but we recognise common elements in all alike.

II

As the basis of Indian thought rests deep in the very foundation of human evolution, so it has not failed, at each new point in the historic development, to add something to the great superstructure. The whole story of India may be read in a philosophic idea. The constitutional ceremonies of the kingdom of Travancore contain clear indications of the transition from the matriarchate which was probably characteristic of the old Dravidian* civilisation, to the patriarchate, which was Aryan. In the yearly

* Dravidian civilisation.—The country of Dravida is that in the south of the Indian Peninsula, and includes Malabar. The languages of this region are non-Sanskritic, and the architecture peculiar and imposing. Some scholars are inclined to suppose a common origin for the Dravidian, Babylonian, and ancient Egyptian civilisations.

village-worship of the heroic figures of the "Mahabharata" which is common throughout the South, we have what may be the effort of distant peoples to include themselves in the "Great India" of Bhishma, Yudisthira, and the national Epics.* The charge of country gunpowder which is fired off in the temples of the Southern Dekkan on festival days is sufficient evidence that orthodoxy was once aggressive, eager, absorbent of things new, fearful of nothing, and friendly to advance. It is a popular superstition that the East stands still. Children observe no motion of the stars. But the fact is that one generation is no more like another at Benares than in Paris. Every saint, every poet, adds something to the mighty pile which is unlike all that went before. And this is quite as true of the thought expressed in the vernaculars, as of the all-dominating culture contained in the classic Sanskrit. Chaitanya in Bengal, the Ten Gurus of the Sikhs, Ram Das and Tokuram in Maharashtra, and Ramanuja in the South—each of these was to his own time as the very personification of the national philosophy, relating it again in its wholeness to the common life. Each such great saint appears to the people as the incarnation, the revelation, of themselves and their own powers, and the church founded by him becomes a nation. Thus arose the Mahratta Confederacy. Thus arose the kingdom of Lahore. And far away in Arabia, Islam formed itself in the same fashion. For the law that we are considering is not peculiar to India; it is common to the whole of Asiatic life.

The Hindu world in its entirety, then, is one with

* In Southern India, rude figures of men and horses, of heroic size, are made of clay, hard-baked, and kept in enclosures outside the villages for annual worship. The illiterate worshipper explains these figures as likenesses of the characters in the Mahabharata.

the highest philosophy of Hinduism. The much-talked of Vedanta is only the theoretic aspect of that synthesis whose elements make up the common life. The most unlettered, idolatrous-seeming peasant will talk, if questioned, of the immanence of God. He recognises that Christianity is fundamentally true, because the missionaries are clear that there is but one Supreme. The question, What would happen could the nation be divorced for a single generation from the knowledge of Sanskrit? is only another way of asking, What is the actual dynamic force existing at a given moment in the Hindu people? What are the characteristic ideas that are now an inbred habit, past the reach of authority to substantiate, or disaster to shake? It is given only to great events and to the imagination of genius to find the answer to such questions. Yet some indications there are, of what that answer might be.

Buddhism was the name given to the Hinduism of the first few centuries of the Christian era, when precipitated in a foreign consciousness. What authority did it claim? What explanations did it give of the existence of the physical universe? Of the soul? Of evil? What did it offer to humanity as the goal of the ethical struggle? The answer to these questions will certainly have to be given in terms of ideas, or variants of ideas, derived from the pre-existent stock of Hinduism. And so, though the particular formulation may be regarded as heresy, the significance of its testimony on the point we are considering cannot be disputed. It must be remembered that there never was, in India, a religion known as Buddhism, with temples and priests of its own order. There was a tendency towards popularising truths that had previously been regarded as fit only for the learned, and there was an immense unofficial enthusiasm for a tower-

ing personality, doubtless, and for the interpretations which were identified with him, even as there is in Bengal to-day for Chaitanya. There came also to be a vast imperial organisation, highly centralised, coherent in all its parts, full of the geographical consciousness, uttering itself in similar architectural forms in the East and West of India, passionately eager to unify and elevate the people and to adorn the land. This Indian Empire was in full and living communication with China, Japan, Syria, and Egypt. It had traffic and commerce by land and sea. It sent abroad ambassadors, merchants and missionaries. And within its own territories it made roads, planted trees and orchards, dug wells, established hospitals, and insisted on the cessation of violence even towards dumb creatures.*

Just as the Protestant Reformation, releasing the mental energy of the people from thralldom to authoritative commentaries, has been the power within the rise of modern Europe, so the kernel and spring of the Asokan and succeeding empires was a similar assertion—not of the right of private judgment: this never required vindication in India: but—of the equal right of every section of society to enter the super-social, or monastic life. For we must not forget that in the East enfranchisement is always primarily religious and moral, not political. Power civic and national is there amongst the direct effects of the higher consciousness, never its cause. It is a man's right to renounce the world, and not manhood suffrage, which constitutes his equality with the highest. This sudden realisation of the spiritual life in all parts of society at once conferred on every man under Buddhism, whatever his birth or position, the right to make his opinion felt, the strength to exercise his full weight of moral in-

Asoka's inscriptions on the Dhauli rock, Orissa, and a Girnar in Gujrat.

fluence. The result was an immense consolidation and blossoming of nationality. Men felt that they walked on air. They were born to receive and pass on the great message of human brotherhood. They were to go out into *all* the world and preach the Gospel to *every* creature. What must not have been the faith and enthusiasm of the common people, when merchants, traders, and caravan-servants could suffice to make a permanent contribution to the religion of the powerful Empire of China? It was a great age, and only those who have seen the colossal fragments which remain of it to this day can form any idea of its wealth and vigour.

And yet Asoka's conversion had not been to a new religion, but only into the piety of his time. "I, King Piyadasi, beloved of the gods, obtained true intelligence ten years after my anointing." Hence the thing that we call Buddhism ends its career in India very gradually. He who has first visited Ellora* is surprised, on entering Elephanta,† to find the Buddha-like figure on his left to be Siva, and the Triumph of Durga on his right. At Ellora itself there must be a gap of centuries between the cathedral-like caves of the Thin Thal‡ and of Kailash.§ Yet even there we see the solitary figure of the teaching or the meditating Buddha give place by degrees to a rich pantheon of devas and guardian kings. But the hope and delight that are expressed

Ellora.—Buddhist cave-temples close to the north-western frontier of the Nizam's dominions. The town of Rosa, containing the tomb of Aurungzeeb, is close by; and the whole is a few miles from Daulatabad, the ancient Deogiri.

† Elephanta.—A series of cave-temples on an island in the Bay of Bombay, between the second and the seventh century.

‡ The Thin Thal.—A cave-temple at Ellora which consists of three tiers or storeys. Hence its name. The most perfect of the non-Brahmanical structures.

§ Kailash.—The most ornate and modern of all the cave-temples at Ellora. Cut with marvellous elaboration out of solid rock.

so freely in the architecture and sculpture, and in the cosmopolitan intercourse of the Buddhist period die away imperceptibly into the rich imagery of the Puranic age,* and the manifold social and political problems of Sankaracharya and the age of chivalry.

The common tendency of Brahmins and yogis had been to hold out the emancipation of the whole nature through self-discipline as the goal of endeavour. This doctrine came to be regarded in a loose way as characteristically Hindu. The Buddhist conviction was, on the other hand, that the same goal was to be reached, not so much by a gradual ripening of the self, as by ceasing from the illusion of egoism. Nirvana, not Mukti, became the watchword. The fact that these two ideas are related to each other as the obverse and reverse of a coin, cannot have escaped the contemporary mind. But its own generation must have given a more antipodal value to the divergence than is obvious to Western thought at the present day. • It would seem to them to include all possible theological differences, and it is not unlikely that this fact contributed largely to the belief so explicitly stated in the Gita, and so markedly Indian, that all religions express a single truth.

In the period of the Upanishads, the conception of Brahman—the one real appearing as many—had been reached. This implies the doctrine of Maya, or the illusion of things, as popularised under Buddhism. It is clear that in this theory the whole question of the origin of evil is put aside. Evil and good are

The Puranic age —The Puranas are the third class of Hindu sacred literature, the first being the Vedas and Upanishads, and the second the national Epics. They consist of a series of books of very mixed character, of which the representative specimens were written between the sixth and twelfth centuries. Hence this period is spoken of as "the Puranic Age."

alike shadows on the wall, cast by our sense of personal convenience in magnified and distorted form. The saints recognise neither pain, insult, nor self-interest, being swallowed up in the joy of God.

The cyclic manifestation of the Cosmos—never created, but eternally self-existent, self-destroying, self-repeating—was another idea sown broadcast by Buddhist teachers. Here we have an interpretation that is significant of the immense scientific energy that has always gone hand in hand with Hindu religious speculation, making the spirit of research inherent in the spirit of devotion. Perhaps had orthodoxy offered the same resistance to science in the East that it did in the West, Indian investigation would have appeared more imposing to-day in the eyes of foreigners. But the only thing that the Indian priesthood has conceived itself set to guard has been the social system. It has opposed nothing save social aberrations. Knowledge has gone unhindered. And it will not be difficult to show that the much vaunted science of Moorish Spain was neither more nor less than the tapping of Indian culture for the modern world.

But perhaps the most significant of all points in the Buddhist propaganda is its assumption that the word of the Blessed One Himself is all-sufficient authority. Hinduism recognises only one proof, and that is direct perception. Even the sacred writings give as their sanction the direct perception of saints and sages, and the Vedas themselves declare that man must reach beyond the Vedas. That is to say, the books allege as their authority that realisation out of which they were written. The Jains refuse the authority of the Vedic texts. But there is less divergence between them and other sects of

Hinduism than would appear on the surface. Common language and the historic acceptance of the race alike, lead up to the last great pronouncement on the subject—"By the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times."

"It is Veda," we say in India of a statement which we perceive to be profoundly true. It is held in a general way that there are two classes of Scripture, one Vedas, the other Puranas. Vedas are eternal truth. Puranas are characterised by containing stories of the creation and destruction of the world, tales of the life and death of holy persons and avatars, accounts of their miracles, and so on. These elements are commonly mixed up, but can easily be disentangled. Thus, when the Christian Gospel says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul," it speaks Veda; but when it says, "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king" it is only a Puran, and may contain some elements of error.

And so, if the word be rightly defined, it may be said that the Vedas themselves are the sanction of Buddhism, of Mohammedanism, of Christianity, and of Confucianism; but it may at the same time be claimed on behalf of India that there, and not in the West, has this fact been understood.

Some of the greatest of French and English thinkers hold that the history of the West is made into a unity by the evolution of science and its progressive application to life, from the sixth century before Christ to the present day. These thinkers maintain that Greece, Imperial Rome, and the Catholic Church have been the three integral formative influences of what we call the European mind. To the student of Oriental history it appears

equally clear that the history of Asia is that of a single living organism, of which India may be taken as the heart and focus. Regarded thus, in relation to its surroundings, the culture to which we give the name of Indian thought becomes likewise a unity, as clear, as continuous, as consistent in its development as is the evolution of the scientific idea in the West. Considered as an appanage of Europe, India is meaningless; taken in and for herself, and for that to which she rightly belongs, it need not surprise us if we find her the essential factor of human advance in the future as in the past.

III

India is the heart of Asia. Hinduism is a convenient name for the nexus of Indian thought. It would appear that it takes some thousand to fifteen hundred years to work out a single rhythm of its great pulsation. For this is about the period that divides the war of the Mahabharata from Buddha, Buddha from Sankaracharya, and Sankaracharya from Ramakrishna, in whom the immense pile reaches the crowning self-consciousness. Of the long prehistoric evolution that went to the building up of Mahabharata, Great India, the heroic age, we can say little, for nothing is left to us, save the legend of Sita and Rama, out of the night of time. Yet we know that this period must have been long. Three thousand years seems not too much, if enough, to allow.. Behind this again loom up the millenniums spent on the tableland of Central Asia, that head-water of world-civilisation where Aryan man entered the patriarchate, and closed the account of his first combat with Nature, having tamed the beasts, learned the use of tools, domesticated corn and fire,

produced the fruit-trees, and divided the week.* Of the sublime dreams, the poetry and song with which he consoled himself during those ages of herculean struggle, the fragments known as the "Rig Veda" still remain. And we learn therein how broad was his outlook upon Nature, even as that of the mind that declared "and the evening and the morning were the first day." How long did it last? Was it ten thousand years? Were there another five thousand before the war of Mahabharata However this be, the enthusiasm of succeeding periods strikes us as extraordinary.

There is no question that the characteristic product of the civilisation that succeeded the Great War was the forest-universities, notes of whose sessions have become the Sutras and Upanishads. But we must not forget also that during the same period the Vedas was written down, and the searching scrutiny of society initiated which was later to result in those accumulations of reverent and sympathetic interpretations now known to us as the Laws of Manu.

It is only with difficulty that we realise the sense of vastness to which the thinkers of this period strove to give expression. The Celt, it has been said, strives ever towards the infinite of emotion. The Hindu, in the same way, cannot rest content, short of the infinite of thought. We see this, even so early as the hymns of the Rig Veda. "When darkness was hidden in darkness, undistinguished, like one mass of Water," opens the great Anthem of Creation. Still larger is the sweep of the Upanishads—"they that see the Real in the midst of this Unreal, they that behold life in the midst of this

* That learned and fascinating book, "The Arctic Home in the Vedas," is destined to work a revolution in our ideas on this subject. If the author's theory be correct, it would appear that Aryan culture was not acquired in Central Asia.

death, they that know the One in all the changing manifoldness of this universe, unto *them* belongs eternal peace—unto none else, unto none else." The Vedas were the capital with which Aryan culture began its occupation of India, and these immense and subtle generalisations of the Upanishads represent the first achievement of the national mind in its new place. Surely this is the secret of the striking fact in Indian history that all great eras of rejuvenescence, such as Sankaracharya's, and even minor movements of reconstruction like Guru Nanuk's, and Ramanuja's, have had to go back to the forest sutras and place themselves in structural continuity with them. In this light we begin to suspect that the war of the Mahabharata itself represents the apparent exhaustion of Vedic inspiration at the end of the first period, and the restoration of pristine vigour by force of Krishna's personality.

The twilight of Indian forests in the pre-Buddhist age is resonant, to the historic ear, with chants and prayers. But the succeeding epoch leads us into the busy life of villages and cities. For the ballads and songs of the people are crystallising now into the great Epics. Their religious activity—stirred by the sublime spectacle of a life that represents the whole of Upanishadic culture, the national dream in its completeness—occupies itself with gathering together, and weaving into a whole, all the religious ideas innate amongst the masses, and those peculiar to the Indian environment. There is a sudden accession of force given to such practices as pilgrimage and relic-worship, and Brahmin intelligence is more or less unconsciously preoccupied with the interpretation of images, symbols, and rituals, in relation to those truths which had been the first realisation of the race. The distinction and larger scope of this Buddhist period lay to a great

extent in its political, commercial, and sub-religious elements, in letters, arts, and sciences.

Certain evils must have come in the train of the ideas then elaborated, essential as they were to prove themselves in the long run to the completed fabric of Hinduism. We can understand that monastic notions may have attracted too much of the national energy out of the safe paths of domestic virtue, with a tendency to bring about not only the depletion of family life, but the disintegration of morality itself. No doubt it was at this time, and to meet this error, that the song of the ideal sang itself so clearly, first through the lips of Kalidas,* in his "Birth of the War-Lord," and again, in the final recension of the Ramayana, as the love of Sita for Rama, that glorified wifehood, before which the renunciation and faith of the cloister grow pale.

From the point of view of purity of doctrine, we can believe, too, that the very breadth of the welcome extended to religious ideas of all kinds, especially in the closing centuries of this age, had led to the undue emphasising of the popular notions, to the inclusion of an unnecessary multiplicity of symbols, and possibly to the interpretation of symbols already existing in rude or gross ways.

But agitation against abuses has never been the method of Hinduism. Rather has the faith progressed by lifting repeatedly in moments of crisis the banner of the highest ideal. Already, in the era we are considering, this organic law of the national genius, the law of the avatars, was well known. "Whenever the dharma decays, and when that which is not dharma prevails,† then I manifest

Kalidas—the poet.—One of the famous "nine gems" of the Court of Vikramaditya, of Ujjain. Kalidas may have lived in the sixth century A.D. or earlier. He wrote the play of "Sakuntala," which so deeply touched the poet Goethe.

† Literally, the a-dharma—non-dharma. The prefix is privative. See p. 138.

myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the evil for the firm establishment of the national righteousness, I am born again and again." So says the Bhagavad Gita—and never was any prophecy more conclusively vindicated than this, by the appearance of Sankaracharya, early in the ninth century after Christ.

This wonderful boy—for he died at the age of thirty-two—was born at the end of the eighth century, and had already completed a great mission when most men are still dreaming of the future. The characteristic product of Oriental culture is always a commentary. By this form of literature the future is knit firmly to the past, and though the dynamic power of the connecting idea may be obscure to the foreigner, it is clearly and accurately conveyed to the Eastern mind itself. The whole of Confucianism is contained in a commentary on the Eking, or Book of Change, and European Protestantism might almost be described as a special kind of commentary on the Christian sacred literature. The Sanskrit *sutras* lend themselves to critical writing, and even demand it, in a special degree: for the word *sutra* means *thread*, and is applied to works which are only the main line of a given argument, and require expansion at the end of every sentence. This literary convention obtains in all Oriental countries, and must date from the period when the main function of writing was to assist memorising. Obviously, by writing a new commentary on a given *sutra*, the man of genius has it in his power to re-adjust the relationship between a given question and the whole of current opinion. Hence it is not surprising to find that the masterpiece of Sankaracharya's life was a commentary on the *Vedanta-Sutra*.

The problems which faced the Indian mind during his lifetime, with the single exception that the

country was then rich and prosperous, must have been curiously like ~~that~~ of the present day, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that in his eyes they assumed national dimensions. Religious practices had lost their primitive simplicity, and also perhaps their compelling power. Ideas as to national and unnational (for the word "orthodox" was but the Asiatic word for "national") were conflicting and confused. Men lived much in the thought of the recent sectarian developments of the faith, and tended to lose sight of its austere imperative, pointing to the highest realisation, of its antiquity, and its close-knit continuity. Lukshmi, Goddess of Fortune, was one of the chief objects of worship. Sects and kingdoms alike had lost their sense of mutual solidarity. Never perhaps was an Asiatic people nearer precipitating itself on a purely secular development.

At this moment the whole of the national genius awoke once more in Sankaracharya. Amidst all the brilliance and luxury of the age, in spite of the rich and florid taste of the Puranic period, his soul caught the mystic whisper of the ancient rhythm of the Vedic chants, and the dynamic power of the faith to lead the soul to super-consciousness, became for him the secret of every phase of Hinduism. He was on fire with the love of the Vedas. His own poems have something of their classical beauty and vigour, and his books may almost be described as chains of quotations from the most piercing and comprehensive sentences of the Upanishads, to which he has contributed links and rivets.

Sankaracharya wandered, during his short life, from his birthplace in the South as far as the Himalayas, and everything that he came across in his travels related itself to the one focus and centre, in his mind. He accepted each worship, even that from which he was at first adverse, but always

because he found that the great mood of One-without-a-second was not only the Vedic, but also the Puranic goal. This is the doctrine that he expresses in his twelve epoch-making commentaries, especially in his crowning work, the commentary on the Vedānta Sūtra. And this idea, known as the Advaita Philosophy, constitutes, for the rest of the Hindu period, the actual unity of India.

Western people can hardly imagine a personality such as that of Sankarachārya. In the course of so few years to have nominated the founders of no less than ten great religious orders, of which four have fully retained their prestige to the present day; to have acquired such a mass of Sanskrit learning as to create a distinct philosophy, and impress himself on the scholarly imagination of India in a pre-eminence that twelve hundred years have not sufficed to shake; to have written poems whose grandeur makes them unmistakable, even to the foreign and unlearned ear; and at the same time to have lived with his disciples in all the radiant joy and simple pathos of the saints—this is greatness that we may appreciate, but cannot understand. We contemplate with wonder and delight the devotion of Francis of Assisi, the intellect of Abelard, the force and freedom of Martin Luther, and the political efficiency of Ignatius Loyola; but who could imagine all these united in one person?

Subsequent critics have painted Sankarachārya as the persecutor of Buddhists. Inasmuch as he asserted a co-ordination of mythologies and doctrines, instead of preaching a single exclusive method of salvation; inasmuch as to him the goal was a positive, and not a negative affirmation, and in so far also as he insisted upon the worthlessness of ritual apart from philosophy, of worship without illumination, he may be taken as the enemy of one school or another. It is almost unnecessary to add that this

enmity was purely controversial in its character, and to Buddhists of the Northern School, a clearer historic knowledge will reveal him as the very opposite of a persecutor, as, rather, another example of the race of inspired religious teachers to which their own apostle, Nagarjuna, belonged.*

Buddhism as a whole, with the succeeding Puranism, had been the creation of the lay mind, the creation of the people. The work of Sankaracharya was the relinking of popular practice to the theory of Brahman, the stern infusion of mythological fancies with the doctrine of the Upanishads. He took up and defined the current catchwords—maya, karma, reincarnation, and others—and left the terminology of Hinduism what it is to-day. At the same time, we must not neglect to remind ourselves that in all this, if he had been other than the expression of that which it was the actual tendency of the race to formulate, he would not have found the scope he did. The recognition of a great man is as essential a factor in his history as his own power and character. His complete appropriation by his nation only shows that he is in perfect unison with its thought and aspiration.

The two or three centuries immediately succeeding Sankaracharya are commonly known as the dark ages of Indian history. The application of the term is obscure. In what sense were these ages dark? They were centuries of chivalric dominance, and in many a Rajput line the bardic annals are still preserved that will one day enable a generation of Indian historians to read their record. Even the wars of such a period were never destructive; for, apart from their specially chivalrous character, Oriental

* Nagarjuna.—An Indian monk, whose name is well known in China and Japan. He followed in the wake of previous teachers, in the second century of the Christian era. He gave ultimate theological form to the first school of Buddhism.

military usage has always secured the safety of non-combatants. The lives of water-carriers and commissariat servants were scrupulously respected in Asiatic warfare. It is said, indeed, that the European gipsy is an example of this. These poor people were originally a tribe of petty merchants who used to accompany the march of armies. Wherever the camp was pitched, they could run up a bazaar in half an hour, and their caste-honour lay in telling neither side the secrets of the other. When Genghis Khan invaded Hungary, these particular clans were carried there, never to return.

But it was not only camp-followers who were protected by a law such as that which now defends the Red Cross Sisterhoods of Europe. A like consideration prevailed, with regard to the peasant working in the fields, and the craftsman toiling at his anvil. The young crops were honoured in ancient combat, as would be Cologne Cathedral or Notre Dame de Paris in modern. Under these circumstances a battle became only a deadly form of tournament, involving in its peril none but fighting men.

But if such contests could not become destructive, neither could they succeed in educating the masses *of the people to the common duty of military defence*. This result could only be achieved when a religious idea should become the war-cry of whole regions, conferring on all men the right of struggle without distinction of caste. This right, so necessary to the completion of nationality, the Mohammedan invasion gave, and it is difficult to imagine any other way in which the lesson could have been widely learnt.

The great tide of vigour that emanated from Sankaracharya swept round India by south, west, and north, in a spiral curve. Ramanuja, Mad-

havacharya,* Ram Das and Tukaram,† the Sikh Gurus‡ and Gauranga,§ were all in turn its products. Wherever it touched the Mussulman consciousness, it created, chiefly by means of contest, a well-centred nation. Where it did not come in contact with Mohammedanism, as in the extreme south, this spiritual energy* did not succeed in evoking a nationality. And where it did not lead to definite fighting, as in Bengal under Chaitanya, the sense of national existence remained more or less potential. Thus the advent of Islam into India during the post-Sankaracharyan period cannot be regarded as a revolutionary invasion, inasmuch as under the new power there was no loss of Asiatic modes. New arts of luxury were introduced, but the general economic system remained undisturbed. India received a more centralised government than had been possible since the Asokan Empire, but no new forces came into operation, tending to reduce her own children to the position of agricultural serfs or tenants. And we have seen that even the wars which arose between contiguous populations of Hindus and Mohammedans must be regarded rather as those athletic* contests between brothers and cousins which confer individuality, than as conquests on the one side or the other. The victor after victory attempts neither to exclude his rival's creed from

* Ramanuja and Madhavacharya.—Flourished in the South of India in the twelfth and fourteenth centuries.

† Ram Das and Tukaram.—Two Mahratta saints to whose inspiration Sivaji's passionate defence of his own people was due. Tukaram was born about 1605.

‡ The Sikh Gurus.—These were ten in number, Guru Nanak born 1469, was the first, and Guru Govind Singh, who died 1708, was the last. By the lives and teachings of these ten leaders was formed the Hindu nation of the Panjab, the Sikhs. Amritsar is still the sacred city of this sect of Hinduism.

§ Gauranga.—Another name for Chaitanya, born 1486, the saint in whom Bengal first begins to realise herself as a united consciousness.

office, nor to create invidious distinctions. "The great bankers and nobles of Bengal remained Hindu under the rule of the Nawabs, as naturally as the Mussulman maintained his face in the shadow of a Hindu throne."*

Nor have the clearness and self-consciousness that its definition has added to Hinduism in any way tended to impair its inclusiveness. For the personality that the nineteenth century has revealed as the turning-point of the national development is that of Ramakrishna Paramahansa,† whose name stands as another word for the synthesis of all possible ideals and all possible shades of thought. In this great life, Hinduism finds the philosophy of Sankaracharya clothed upon with flesh, and is made finally aware of the entire sufficiency of any single creed or conception to lead the soul to God as its true goal. Henceforth, it is not true that each form of life or worship is tolerated or understood by the Hindu mind: each form is justified, welcomed, set up for its passionate 'loving, for evermore. Henceforth, the supreme crime for the follower of any Indian sect, whether orthodox or modern, philosophic or popular, shall be the criticism of any other, as if it were without the bounds of "the Eternal Faith." "Man proceeds from truth to truth, and not from error to truth," becomes in future the formula that constitutes belief.

At this point we could almost have prophesied, had it not already happened, that some great disciple of this master would declare, on behalf of the whole nation, that the final differentia of Hinduism lay in the acceptance of the doctrine of the *Istha Devata*, i.e., the right of every man to choose his own

* Torrens' "Empire in Asia."

† Ramakrishna Paramahansa lived in a temple-garden outside Calcutta from 1853 to 1886. His teachings have already become a great intellectual force.

creed, and of none to force the same choice on any other.*

At last, then, Indian thought stands revealed in its entirety—no sect, but a synthesis; no church, but a university of spiritual culture—as an idea of individual freedom, amongst the most complete that the world knows. Certain conceptions, such as *maya*, *karma*, and reincarnation, popularised by Buddhism, and *mukhti* or the beatific vision, sown broadcast alike by Sankaracharya and the Sufis, are characteristic of large areas. But they are nowhere and in no sense regarded as essential. For it is as foreign to the genius of Hinduism to require an oath of conformity to any given religious tenet whatever, as it would be to the habits of an Oxford don to require adherence to the doctrines of Plato as against those of Aristotle. It would thus appear that the reforming sects of the Mohammedan period and of the nineteenth century itself, have to the full as good a right to call themselves Hindu as the most orthodox priest of Siva, or the most learned Sanskrit pundit.

We have seen then, that it is certainly a mistake to read the history of India at any time as the account of a struggle between Hindu and Mohammedan thought, though it is a mistake which is perhaps inseparable from the European conception of the influence of faith on politics. But it cannot, on the other hand, be too clearly understood that the problem which the Indian idea has had to face, during the period between Sankaracharya and the

I desire to say that in thus referring to my own gurus, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the Swami Vivekananda, I do not intend to imply that every one will or ought to be willing to assign them the same place in the evolution of Hinduism that seems to myself to belong to them. Whether their names be accepted or not, however, I believe that all Hindus will agree regarding the *ideas* which are here stated as constituting Hinduism.

nineteenth century, was the inclusion of the Mohammedan element in a completed nationality. From the nineteenth century onwards, it becomes the *realisation* of that single united nationality, amidst the vast complexity which has been the growth of ages.

It is said that nations and systems of culture fulfil special functions, as organs of humanity just as individuals fulfil special uses in the community. If this be so, it would almost appear that within the bounds of India lies one of the focal or polar points of the race. The great task of the reconciliation of opposites would seem to devolve on the peoples within this pale. It is not enough that the Mussulman should inhabit the pastoral belt, the Mongolian rest secure behind the Thian Shan, and the Aryan and Dravidian dwell peacefully side by side in the Southern peninsula. It was decreed from the beginning, it lay unavoidably in the very nature of things, that sooner or later all these should meet in the land of the Indus, and learn their mutual significance and responsibilities. Buddhism may be regarded in one aspect as simply the synthesis of Eastern Asia. Neo-Hinduism (to borrow a term which has been coined in no friendly spirit) is equally indicative of a place found in Aryan thought for Semitic formulæ, and who shall say what is yet to be born of that conjunction between all these, in which Asia shall find herself to be—not, as she has so long been told, “merely a congeries of geographical fragments,” still less a concert of rival political units, held in mechanical combination by a due admixture of mutual hopes and recriminations, but a single immense organism, filled with the tide of one strong pulsating life from end to end, firm-rooted in the soil of common origins and common modes? The value which we may attach to the prospect of this future will depend on the idea that

we have already been able to form, of the place of Asia in the evolution of humanity, but to those who foresee a future moralisation of international relations it may well appear that this question is among the most important in the world.

CHAPTER X

THE ORIENTAL EXPERIENCE

THE spiritual intellect refuses to believe in any good tidings of dogmas and happenings. It is St. Thomas Aquinas himself who points out that prayer cannot avail to change the will of God, but may, in any given case, be the appointed means of its accomplishment. Truth is not something that is told of in books or stated in words. It is the self-evident, the ultimate. It is that of which all our modes of seeing and saying are but so many refractions through a falsifying medium. All the teachings of Christianity put together are but as a vase or form, within which is conveyed to us the central actuality, the beautiful myth of the Christian soul.

And rightly so. For what is the real stuff of the human tragedy, the hunger for bread, or the longing for salvation? The answer is not doubtful. And this, although it may be, more than half of us are without any conception of that which we seek to save, or what it is from which we seek to fly. The fact remains, the human race is dominated by an inexpressible desire for the well-being of a metaphysical something which it cannot conceive of, but calls the soul. And any scheme, even the wildest, that makes profession of accomplishing this object, will meet with some measure of welcome and approval, provided only that he who offers is

sufficiently convinced of the efficacy of his own method.

Most beautiful, perhaps, of all those known to us, is the series of pictures in which Catholicism paints her promise of deliverance. The little bark of life, in which the soul puts out to sea, to be guided in its tossings and wanderings by a science that the Church names saving knowledge; the mysterious transition of death, by which it lands on the shores of purification; and, finally, the pain of sanctification exhausted, its being received up into heaven, and attainment of the Beatific Vision.

But, after all, are not the symbols somewhat crude? Heaven and hell, reward and punishment! Is it not possible for even a child to go beyond these? Can we attempt to describe what is meant by the moral sense, without implying that we would choose good, though we suffered countless ages for it, and refrain from evil, though it brought us Heaven? Besides, are there not amongst us parents who refuse to act out a melodrama of judgment every time a baby steals a sugar-plum? Is the whole universe, multiplied by eternity, only one vast kindergarten? Or are we somewhere to learn that in self-control itself is beatitude? How are we to believe in salvation that is expressed as an *event*? in unchangeable happiness conferred upon us from without? in a *process* of knowledge and praise?

Do we not feel within us an ungovernable protest against these artificialities, an irrepressible claim for something that is the Nature-of-things, and requires no stage-management; a desire to be done with vicissitudes, alike of heaven and hell, salvation and perdition, and find some fixed mean, some centre of enduring poise, which shall confer freedom from all perception of antitheses; and knowledge at last of That which is the thing in itself? Or are we so in love with the limitations of the

personal existence, with the fact that our good is another's ill, that present joy is future pain, that we would, if we could, prolong the experience?

Some such protest, at least, is apt to be roused in the Oriental by Western dreams of a future life. It is all physical, all sense-impression, he says, and as such is necessarily subject to that law of change and decay which must sooner or later apply to all compounds. In the sublime imagination of the Beatific Vision, he catches a hint of a deeper reality, but why, he asks, this distinction between time and eternity? Can the apprehension of the Infinite Good be conditioned by the clock? Oh, for a knowledge undimensioned, untimed, effect of no cause, cause of no effect! Reaching That, and That alone, we could be sure of unchanging bliss, of existence ultimate. But if accessible at all, it must be now in the earth-life or never. It must transcend and still the life of the senses, when the senses are most active; it must absorb and transmute the personal, when personality is capable of every eager claim, or remain for ever incredible, save as one swing of a pendulum, some day to be reversed.

This is the illumination that India calls the knowledge of unity, and the gradual appropriation of it by the whole nature, so that it ceases to be mere words and becomes a living actuality, she names realisation. Thus every step, every movement in life is either dull and dead, or on fire with the growing knowledge that we know as spirituality. The highest genius becomes only an incident on the road to supreme blessedness. And the passionless desire of Pheidias that wrought Olympian Zeus, the love of Dante for Beatrice, the "glorious nothingness" of S. Teresa, and the light on the face of Faraday the physicist, are all alike and all equally beads on that rosary whereon the soul's experience is told. For the

whole story in all its forms is summed up, to Indian thinking, in the struggle to pass from the perceiving of manifoldness to the perceiving of One, and every heightening of common knowledge is to be regarded as a step towards this. The kitten at play will pursue first one object and then another with all the bewilderment and disconnectedness of the animal mind, while even the youngest baby will show the superiority of human faculty by its greater persistence of purpose and pertinacity of desire. The man of low type is led hither and thither by every impulse of sensation, while Archimedes is so absorbed in thought that he never perceives the Roman enter his presence, nor dreams of begging more than time to finish his speculation.

It must be remembered that to the Eastern intellect man himself is the universe, for all differentiation is within the mind. India may accept as a working hypothesis the theory that sociology is the synthesis of all the sciences, but her own fundamental conviction is that psychology occupies this place. Hence to her, power is always lodged in personality. Mind is the lord of body, undoubtedly; but mind, like body, is only the tool of the great Self of Things that stands behind and uses both for its own purpose. Like a strangely complex telescope, one part of the instrument stands pointed to give reports of many kinds—of light, sound, weight, smell, taste, and touch; and by another we are led to conceive of vast ranges of these, outside the possibilities of our immediately perceiving, by which we can build up the conception that we call the Cosmos. But, according to Indian thinking again, perfect control over the apparatus has only been attained when every part of it can be directed at will to a common point—the whole power of investigation brought to bear on any object. When this is done, when the intensest vibration of the whole

being is reached and every faculty is convergent on the point of attention, then declares India, we, being one, perceive oneness, the mind sees truth face to face.

How we shall interpret and express the vision is determined wholly by our own past language and discipline. The mother comes out of it to love and serve; Joan of Arc commands armies with unfaltering insight; Sir Isaac Newton gives us the law of gravitation; Mozart produces his *Requiem Mass*, and the Messiah comes down from the mountain side whispering, "I and My Father are One." That is to say, the self-limited joys of sense have given way to the pursuit of the good of others as an end in itself. The man is overpowered by a beauty and a truth that he must needs share with the whole world. Or the finite personality is completed, transcended, in union with the absolute and universal.

There are thus, as the East counts, two modes of existence—one the personal, or egoistic, and the other the impersonal, or supra-personal, where egoism and altruism are alike forgotten. The realisation of this illimitable existence is itself salvation, and is to be reached in life, not death. Concentration is its single secret, and real power is always power over oneself.

What, then, are the common hindrances to this centring of thought and feeling that we are not all constantly immersed in the Divine intoxication? And what are the paths by which we are ordinarily led to overcome such hindrances? For it is to be supposed that, if the experience be authentic, men first stumbled upon it by accident, and formulation of theory came afterwards.

The mind of man sweeps an infinite circle, and from every point upon the immeasurable circumference runs a life-path to the division of Unity as the common centre. Each man is, as it were, a

new window through which all others may look upon the Infinite, each life a new name for That which we call God. The paths, therefore, are countless. No two methods can be exactly the same. Yet there are certain broad characteristics which are more or less general.

The soul that thirsts for service, gradually expunging from the area of motive even the subtler shades of selfishness—such as the preference for special forms of activity, exactingness on behalf of work, and desire for sympathy and affection—as the result—this soul will more readily than another lose itself in the supreme intuition of the good of others. “The People” with Mazzini, “the fair realm of France” with Joan of Arc, the fulfilment of duty to his country with the great sovereign or statesman, are amongst the forms which this realisation takes. In such a mood of uttermost blessedness, some have even suffered death by fire.

The temporary experience, in which the subject becomes unconscious of bodily sensation, is called *samadhi*. The process by which he comes out of samadhi time after time, to work its volume of force, so to speak, into his daily life, is known as realisation. And the path of service in purity of motive, is spoken of as *karma-yoga*, or divine union by work.

Again, we can in some measure understand the development of a nature to whom everything appears in degrees of loveliness. This was undoubtedly the method of S. Francis, and after him of S. Teresa. It is called in India *bhakti*, or devotion. Gradually, in such souls—guided by the thought of reaching the Infinite in abnegation of self—the power of love becomes a fire scorching, burning, consuming the barriers of individuality. “One cannot understand,” says S. Teresa, “what is meant by talking of the

impermanence of worldly joys. For one would renounce them so much the more gladly, could they but be eternal." Then there is a fusing of all things in the one conception of the Beloved. Lastly, distinction ceases, self is forgotten, there is left nothing, save the Infinite Love. First the prayer of quiet, then the prayer of Union, last the irresistible rapture, says the great Carmelite. Such is *bhakti-yoga*, the road by which the vast majority of the saints have gone.

Highest of all, however, is Union by knowledge, or *jnana-yoga*. A life whose whole struggle is the passion for truth; a soul to which falsehood or superstition is the worst of sins; a mind clear as the black depths of a mountain-pool; an atmosphere of joy, all stillness, all calm, all radiance without emotion; to these comes the growing intensity of recognition, the increasing power of direct vision, and finally that last illumination, in which there is neither knower, knowing nor known, but all is one in Oneness. It is much to be regretted that we have in English no word corresponding to *jnana*. *Insight* has a certain affinity, but is not sufficiently intense. The fact is, the habit of thought that leads up to the conception is foreign to us: a true parallelism is, therefore, out of the question.

The greatest *jnani* that has appeared in human history was undoubtedly Buddha, for the calmness of intellect predominates in Him, living through a ministry of more than forty years, though it was the immense outburst of His love and pity (explained as the fruit of five hundred sacrifices of Himself) that drove Him forth on His passionate quest to serve mankind. Then He is also in a high degree a combination of the three types of realisation—by intellect, heart and work. Some measure of this amalgamation there must be in all who use their knowledge for the good of others, of whom the

Incarnations are the culminating type. For in *jñāna* by itself, the personal existence is seen to be a dream, a mere illusion, and it is impossible for him, who has once received its overwhelming revelation, to believe that there exist outside himself other centres of illusion for whose emancipation he might work.

For *karma*, or service, again, there could be no sufficient motive, without the impulse of *bhakti*. And the madness of divine love, unlighted by knowledge, unawaking to compassion, is almost unthinkable.

Such are the three ways—truth, devotion, and good works—by which it is said that souls may reach their goal. He who has attained, and remains in life, is called a Paramahansa, or swan amongst men. And of all such, Sukē—he to whom it was given while in mortal form to drink a handful of the waters of the ocean of super-consciousness—is ideal and head. For most men die, it has been said, having heard only the thunder of its waves upon the shore; a few come within sight: fewer still taste; to Sukē alone was it given to drink. Many Mohammedan saints have become Paramahansas, and are equally loved and revered by all religions alike.

So far of the apprehension of unity when consciousness and self-direction have made it vital spirituality. The hindrance to our reaching it is always, it is declared, one, namely, under whatever guise, want of the power to give up self. "When desire is gone, and all the cords of the hearts are broken, *then*," says the Upanishad, "a man attains to immortality." And by "immortality," it should be understood, is here meant the quality of deathlessness. For this reason, all religions are a call to renunciation; all ethics negate selfishness of personality; all disciplines are a repression of individual impulse. In the Indian doctrine of One

immanent in the many, all these receive interpretation. The scholar's austerity of study; the artist's striving to become the witness; the lover's desire to sacrifice himself; all speak, however unconsciously, of our longing not to be, that the infinite, the universal consciousness, may abide within us.

The fact that the final achievement is variously known as Freedom, Mukti, or Nirvana, the annihilation of the limited, requires, at this point, little explanation. The idea that the perception of manifoldness is *Maya* or illusion, that the One is the real, and the many unreal, underlies the whole theory. "They that behold the One in all the changing manifoldness of this universe, unto *them* belongs eternal peace—unto none else, unto none else."

Obviously, the final truth of the doctrine is capable of no other proof or disproof than that of experience. But the attitude to it of the common Indian mind is strictly scientific. We cannot prove, save by making the experiment, but we can point to the fact that the accumulated observation of life goes to establish the tenableness of the proposition, says India in effect. And when we are shown one morality that does not demand the holding of unity of principle against manifoldness of impulse; one science that does not grow by the correlating of apparent discrepancies in continually stricter unities; or one character that does not find perfection in surrendering the personal to the impersonal, the theory of *Maya*—real unity amidst apparent diversity—will fall to the ground, and must be acknowledged a misconception. Hitherto, it may be claimed, the whole history of the world has not sufficed to furnish the required exception.

Thus the beatific vision of Hinduism is not unlike that of Dante's Empyrean, only it is to be relegated to no distant future, but triumphantly vindicated within mortality itself. The name of God and the

conventions of piety are as unreal as anything else in Maya, but they have the power of enabling us to break its bondage, whereas the delights of the senses only fasten it the tighter.

One point remains. The doctrine with which we have been dealing represents a national culture. Very few in the West can be said to have grasped the whole secret of that for which their country stands. Very few will be found to understand deeply any given idea or subject. The very reverse is the case in the East. Men who have no emancipation into the scheme of modern knowledge are emancipated into the sequence of renunciation and freedom. Though India is daily losing her grip on her own character, she is still the motherland of hundreds of the saints. And amongst that people of ancient aristocracies the realm of the ideal is so completely democratised that the poorest peasant, the meanest workman, comprehends what is meant by the great daily prayer of Hinduism:—

From the Unreal, lead us to the Real!
 From darkness, lead us unto light!
 From death, lead us to immortality!
 Reach us through and through ourself,
 And evermore protect us—O Thou Terrible!—
 From ignorance by Thy sweet compassionate Face.

CHAPTER XI

THE WHEEL OF BIRTH AND DEATH

Reflection has taught me that there is nothing mightier than Destiny. . . . Zeus bows to her power. She surpasses iron in hardness.—EURIPIDES' *Alceſtis*.

Heredity is a condition, not a destiny.—BJÖRNSON.

As a man casts off worn-out clothes, and puts on others which are new, so the embodied casts off worn-out bodies, and puts on others which are new.—*Bhagavad Gītā*.

THE crucial feature of the Greek conception of life was the dramatic distinction which it made between will and the conditions with which will had to cope. Just as surely as our birth on the planet Earth gives us a place, definite, however infinitesimal, in the solar system, relating us in our degree to all that occurs within the orbit of the farthest satellite, so it is clear that our position, geographically, ethnologically, historically, upon that planet, places us from the beginning at definite points on lines of cause and effect, to which, as human beings, we can but exercise the function of acceptance. This Not-to-be-refused, which modern science calls natural law, was simply to the Greek an unexplained and unexplored Necessity or Fate.

To the ancients, a curse, for example, was no exercise of the volition of the speaker. It was in no sense a threat. Our own more frivolous use of the word is a case of degradation by the death of a conception. To the old Greek, as indeed to the

THE WHEEL OF BIRTH AND DEATH 179

Hindu and the Norseman, a curse was entirely a prophecy. It was pronounced by way of warning or revelation that upon a certain act certain results would be found to follow. Apollo perceives that if Laios begets a son, disaster will result. He does not determine that it shall be so. Evidently, will is regarded as free up to a certain point, or we should not have the alternative imagined, of begetting no son. But to Ædipus and his children there is no alternative; he and they have been born in that circle of destiny where they can only fulfil the lot marked out.

This fact the Greek mind appears to accept without further inquiry. For it, overwhelming interest attaches, not to an analysis of the nature and conditions of fate, but to the spectacle of the human will in spiritual conflict with it. This spectacle is the theme of the whole of Hellenic tragedy. The Christian doctrine of grace introduces something confused and miraculous into the European idea of life, and for centuries the pursuit of the knowledge of things as they are is thwarted by a supernatural metaphysic of things as they ought to be, and are not. With the Renaissance, however, the intellect of Europe springs back sharply to the Greek position. *Macbeth* and *Othello* are in some ways as completely Hellenic as anything of Æschylus. Temptation is once more placed outside a man; true and false incentives are inextricably blended; and the will is shown as the mere plaything of its own blindness. On these points, and in the feeling of vastness with which he covers his subject, Shakespeare's delineation is all Greek.

In *Macbeth*, it is true, a sense of ethical suffering somewhat blurs the outline. But nothing dims the perfect beauty of *Othello*. Untortured by misgiving its heroic figures move from the dawn of their love to the noon of supreme vindication of its purity

in death. The particular problem is not antique. Its delicacy of tint is somewhat modern, but in simplicity and grandeur, in the conviction that life is a mere straw swept along on the current of necessity *Othello* is an ancient drama.

One great difference between the Hellenisms of antiquity and of the Renaissance lay in the fact that organisation was at the disposal of the modern. Isolated genius writes dramas, elaborates philosophies, or carves statues: organised genius produces scientific inquiry. In some sense modern science is nothing but the efficient development of the Aristotelian and Alexandrian elements of classical thought. The human will itself, however, is the one thing eternally baffling to human research. There is no crucible in which it can be melted. All science, therefore, resolves itself into the old problem of the Greek dramatist—the problem of due observation of the conditions which confront the will; and it is by a strictly logical development of the thought of the ancients—a thought which scarcely dreamt of any distinction between a man and his body—that we arrive at the modern conception of body-and-brain as the last and crucially important element of destiny.

Its *naïveté* is at once the strength and weakness of European thought. The springs of modern fiction are still brackish with the salt of our enthusiasm about heredity. Recent talk of degeneration is little more than the bitterness left within a cup. Like every single truth mistaken for the whole, heredity would impose as great a bondage on the human spirit as any system of fatalism. Of what use the fight against the weakness or ignorance of one's ancestors? What hope of victory over the taint that is in the blood? And yet, high over all law and all instruments rose, rises, and shall for ever rise, the human will, its brow bright with the sun-

shine of freedom, its foot on the foe that our subtle criticism had pronounced invincible, serene in the knowledge of its own power to defy alike heredity and the nature-of-things, and make for itself out of the web of failure the mantle of a supreme victory.

But this will so often seems asleep! Unaroused, or ignorant as a child, it has turned aside perhaps for every wayside flower, for any shining pebble, and in the hour of the crisis is simply missing. Or it may be that it suffers from some base intoxication of falsehood or desire, and has fallen down to kiss the feet of evil as though it were good, courting slavery and defeat as maidens to be caressed. Surely here, and here alone, is the crux of things, in the difference between the enlightened and the unenlightened will. Necessity is but the sum of the conditions. Heredity is but one, though the most critical, of those conditions. In the setting of the will itself towards bondage or towards freedom lies the secret of the unity of life.

There are thus three factors in the interpretation of human life, and it has been the distinction of Asiatic thought to have recognised all three. A profound certitude that cause must sooner or later be followed by effect, while effect has as surely been preceded by cause, gives to the Indian temperament an air of quiet resignation which is far from being the inactive fatalism so commonly supposed. For there is surely the difference of extremes between a dignified acceptance of things because they are unaccountable and not to be interfered with, and a similar dignified acceptance because they are so entirely accountable that events require no acceleration!

That India understands the doctrine of heredity is demonstrated by caste. There alone, amongst all the countries of the world, it has been held for ages

an unpardonable social dishonour to allow the diseased or deformed or mentally alienated to marry. For such, the quietly enforced decree of caste has been always—no posterity. But more than this, the very meaning of the institution is, amongst other things, the attempt to develop still further the brain of the Brahmin, the hand of the toolbearer, and every form of expert faculty. It is true that it rejects the *crossing* of blood as a means to this end, but it looks to the cumulative influence of careful selection from generation to generation, to that of the occupational environment, and to the inheritance of the effects of clean-feeding. The last is held specially important to the user of the brain: hence the Brahmin represents more than any other the fibre produced by countless generations of care in this respect, and the lower we go in society the less do we find of such transmission.

But the Indian comprehension of the nature of things and of heredity as complementary elements in the scheme presented to the will has never meant blindness to the last and most important consideration of all—the efficiency of the will itself. If this were not the determining factor, India would say, it would not be possible, as it is, to watch two brothers, with the same inheritance, the same material opportunities, and the same moral environment, journey, one to glory and the other to shame, by a common road. And if it were not also the ultimate standard of success or failure, the Greek story of Aristides, for instance, would lose all its pathos. For we all know how, when an ignorant man asked his help in casting his vote for the condemnation of Aristides, the great man first complied with his request, and then, on mildly inquiring its reason, was answered, "I am tired of hearing him called 'the just.'"

Is it here, or in the story of Dives and Lazarus, that we catch a glimpse of inequality? Which is

the crueller perplexing of our sense of justice—that one man receives wealth and another poverty, or that one cannot wish well, nor another ill?

The answer of India is not doubtful. There is one tool and only one, she says, that is finer than the most perfect human brain, and that is the tool of a noble intention. No more than other delicate instruments is this, she claims, immediately producible wherever we may wish to see it. Just as faculty grows from feeble and unrationalised to its perfection, just as organisms progress from minute and simple to large and complex, so must we suppose that will passes through all the stages of egotism till it reaches that illumination which we know as perfect charity. At each stage the possibilities of aspiration are limited, though they become less and less so as the goal is approached. The whole Hindu outlook is thus critical and scientific. There is no longer a vague horrible something called sin: this has given place to a clearly defined state of ignorance, or blindness of the will. Nor is this ignorance conceived of as a stationary or fixed quantity. So surely as trees grow and rivers seek the sea will it sooner or later give place to knowledge, in every human soul; and then a man's mere forgetfulness of his limited personality and its aims may look to others like nobility: to himself it will not even be apparent, lost in the larger yearning of more universal life. Thus a great and generous thought is like a position near the river-mouth to the water springing at the source, not by any means to be reached without traversing the complete distance. The supreme good fortune possible to man would consist of a noble intention, joined to a great brain, joined to an external position of mastery and freedom an advantageous point, that is to say, on some line of cause and effect. Such, we may take it, to Gautama the Buddha, was the opportunity of his

birth. Most lives, however, represent every possible degree, and combination of degrees, of the three conditions. We see the great position made the background of stupidity and meanness. We see the kind wish rendered futile by feebleness of intellect. Very occasionally there is no discord between person and circumstance; but now and again the discrepancy takes the acute form of the lion caught in the net, or the common criminal wearing an emperor's crown. Whence have these anomalies arisen? In what firm order do they stand rooted?

The Hindu mind seems always to have been possessed of the quiet confidence that all phenomena will yield themselves to a rational explanation. Since "that which exists is one," it is absurd to suppose an ultimate contradiction between the human reason and the universe. The mind that is normal and right amongst its fellows is normal and right in its relation to things. If we see and hear and taste, it is because in primal vibration there is something correspondent to sight and sound and the rest, of which our human sense has been the necessary outcome. Our faculty, that is to say, may be feeble, but we must assume it to be true. If thirty years of life can impress us with a sense of terrible duration, utterly disproportionate to their relative importance, it is because in the Absolute there is no passage of time, all the infinite eternities of consciousness lying in the Now. If human love can oppress us with a vastness undreamed of, suddenly opened before us, it is because in it we have approximated to a state which transcends all limit and all change. Whatever be the nature of the Real it must include, not exclude, consciousness. This being so, we must take it that the order of things as we see them—time, space, and causation—applies to life itself as naturally as to all that

THE WHEEL OF BIRTH AND DEATH 185

within the limits of life we perceive. Our appearance here from birth to death is a simple case of the sequences that every moment of our stay brings to our notice. It is the effect of some cause which could no more have failed to find its fulfilment in time and space than the self-striking of a bird's wing could fail to be accompanied by flight. Everything, again, within the general effect, is a subordinate effect conditioned by its own subordinate cause. Physical, mental, and moral, are only terms denoting so many dimensions, as it were, within which the seed has germinated and come to its fruition. So much for the effect. Do things, as we see them, give us any hint as to the nature of the cause? Yes, there is one force—the force of desire—that we see at work daily, making, cherishing, gathering, action and its fruits. Without this as creative antecedent it will be found on examination that nothing that we know of comes to pass. Hence if life as a whole be regarded as but a phenomenon similar in kind to those which it encloses, we are impelled to the conclusion that of it also the efficient cause has been the human will. We dreamed of ourselves as bodies. Falling into some strange error, we longed for the sweets of sense. And we awoke and, without knowing it, found ourselves in prison, there but to continue adding to the energy of those desires, each of which was already a fetter binding us the faster. Such is the Hindu interpretation of our presence here. Of what led to our self-deceit he attempts no account, conceiving that his right to a rational theory applies only to the phenomenal, meaning those things that are perceived within the play of reason.

Thus, life is a harvest reaped at birth. It is also the sowing of fresh harvests for the painful reaping of the future. Every act is as a seed, effect of past cause, cause of effect to come—*Karma*. The unend-

ing wheel of birth and change and death. For the Hindu does not consider that a single life alone is to be accounted for. The very constitution of our minds forces on us the idea that phenomena are cyclic; that appearances recur; that the starry Universe itself blooms and will wither like another flower. Clearly then the causes that have placed us here to-day must bring us again; must, in the circling of infinite ages, have brought us infinite times before. This is the doctrine of Reincarnation. Our ignorance now tells of a deeper ignorance in the past. The desires that burn within us are but our subjective apprehension of what is yet to be. For that which we long for must come to our hand. The *Karma* of each birth is only the harvest of our ancient wishes.

What the victim of desire so constantly forgets, however, is the twofold nature of things, and their constant state of flux. Good brings evil; wealth is succeeded by poverty: Jove is but a messenger sent before the feet of sorrow. In fact, the seeming benefits of material things are in reality scourges, sooner or later to lash the very back of him who drew them to himself. None, for instance, could be so puerile as to declare palaces, jewels, and horses as good in themselves, so that their chance possession now and again should be any compensation for the suffering of requiring them. It is little more exalted, says the Hindu, to claim love, intellect, and salvation, as necessities. The world of *Maya* consists of the perpetual alternation of opposites. Every desire carries its fulfilment, its decay, and its retribution hidden within itself. That what we would have we must first give, is the lesson of austerity.

The *Karma* of an individual, then, consists of a given condition of taste or knowledge, a given physical equipment, and a given share of material fortune or misfortune. Taste sometimes rises to

genius, or sinks to brutish appetite. The physical equipment may include a mathematician's brain, a violinist's hand, or a body tortured by perverse temptations. In any case, according to the theory, the will that has come to administer, earned exactly that endowment, and in this respect life is justly distributed. It is thought not unnatural that the soul of a Bach should seek incarnation in a family of musicians, since here it could best find the conditions it demanded. With regard to such matters, a vast lore has been accumulated, into which it is interesting to dip. There is a popular belief amongst Hindus that marriage is always contracted between the same two persons, and that the merit of either is divided equally with the other. However this may be, love at first sight—an occasional experience the world over!—is held a sure proof of past friendship and acquaintance. Very perfect relationships, by which is meant, amongst other things, those that are complex in their quality, would be considered in the same way, to be long-rooted. The religious life is one of the most fascinating subjects of speculation. It will sometimes happen that the stern ascetic in the midst of his austerities yields to, or at least harbours, some vain desire. This is enough to precipitate him once more into the world, where his position and power will be exactly equal to the severity of his past renunciations. He may thus very easily become a monarch, and it is believed that a faint memory of the religious habit often haunts the throne. The great Akbar of Delhi told of such a reminiscence in his own case. He had been a monastic novice, and had fallen in love! When sovereignty was exhausted, however, he would return to his prayers and gain freedom, without another fall. An impression of this kind about Queen Victoria was the real secret of the influence of her name in India—an influence, be it added, which

would have been much deepened had she succeeded in abdicating some few years before her death, in order to devote the rest of her life to God.

We must remember, however, that the Oriental, born to the idea of re-incarnation, rarely becomes so infatuated with it as to make it his sole dependence in interpreting life. He does not lose his head over it, as may one who hears of it for the first time. He is well aware that, on his own hypothesis, "we are engaged in the sowing of seed, as well as the reaping of grain. He will not therefore attempt to explain every new introduction from an imaginary past. This life is to him but one measure in a long passage of music. The great majority of its tones gain all their beauty and meaning from the fact that they were prepared beforehand and will be resolved after, but some nevertheless are new. That we do not, as a rule, remember our pasts is, he argues, no disproof of their existence, since neither do we remember our birth and infancy.

It is this clearness of logical speculation that lends its terror to the Indian notion of existence. To the wise man, frankly, life is a bondage, and the only question how to be freed from it. Suicide cannot solve the problem. The reasons for this act may be frivolous or weighty. It is an instrument as much within a man's own power as the tools of his calling or the weapons of self-defence. Only, it offers no escape from the misery of existence. Can the schoolboy make progress in arithmetic by wiping from his slate the sum he could not work? Will not that particular difficulty recur whenever he would take an onward step, confusing, taunting, blinding him, till it is conquered? Even so is the lot of the suicide, thinks the Hindu. He desired to escape the rope of justice? Then in some future incursion into life it will become his *Karma* to stand on the scaffold and undergo the extreme penalty, for a crime he has

not committed. He would flee from a dishonour he had not strength to endure? No coward's self-banishment shall suffice to save him. Sooner or later the ordeal must be met and faced. Or *was* it the abstract hatred of life that used his own hand to slay the man? Fool! saw he not that the act was part and parcel of an extreme self-indulgence, and must bring its terrible consequence of exile from all that could make existence beautiful and blessed?

Desire, in short, is the ego-centripetal, the self-assertive, self-regarding force. The current must be turned out deliberately, not drawn inward. The passion for self must be destroyed in the thirst for service. Desire must be burnt to ashes in the fires of renunciation. Then, and then only, will there be escape from the incessant turning of the wheel. Then alone can the victim become the conqueror, and the slave master of the world.

This is the "cosmic suicide" of Schopenhauer, the much talked-of "pessimism" of the East. It is indeed a familiar conception to all Hindus, so familiar as to be an integral part of language. But it is hardly "pessimism." Does the prophecy of victory carry with it sadness? the certain promise of his freedom embitter the slave? There is a sense in which, if Hindu philosophy be not optimistic, it is difficult to know what the world means by optimism. Taking the doctrine of reincarnation as a whole, we find it so necessary to the theory of *Maya* that even the Buddhist formulation could not exist without some version of it. At the same time, a clear understanding of it is a valuable corrective of slipshod misconceptions as to the philosophy of illusion. That this involves no lazy intellectual uncertainty regarding phenomena we have seen; since the whole doctrine of *Karma* is based on the Hindu's implicit conviction of the entire calculableness of law. It

cannot be too clearly understood that the argument of *Maya* is compatible with, and tenacious of, the severest scientific research, and that to Oriental thinking, only that man who has in his own person, by some method of self-discipline, achieved a realisation, compared to which all that we know through the senses is unreal, has a right to speak of the phenomenal universe as, to him, fundamentally an illusion. The effort to reach this vision remains, nevertheless, to the Oriental mind the one end and justification of existence, the one escape from the wheel of life, and mankind is for ever divisible into those who see and struggle towards such a goal, and those who are engaged in sowing the wind, and reaping the whirlwind, of Desire.

The battlefield of Kurukshetra lies silent these many centuries, yet still to the ear of the wise man it echoes the doom of Humanity in the terrible words "of that which is born, death is certain of that which is dead, birth is certain."

CHAPTER XII

THE STORY OF THE GREAT GOD: SIVA OR MAHADEV

Thou that art knowledge itself,
Pure, free, ever the witness,
Beyond all thought and beyond all qualities,
To Thee, the only true Guru, my salutation,
Siva Guru! Siva Guru! Siva Guru!

Salutation to Siva, as the Teacher of the Soul.

IN India's great moments, the Himalayas have always been her highway, not her boundary. Those strings of pack-mules, with their sorry-looking rice-bags, that we meet on every hill-path, as we wander through the mountains, are the remains of a great continental traffic that once carried the religion into China. For beliefs, like diseases, do not travel alone. The pilgrim is accompanied by the pedlar: the begging-friar dogs the footsteps of the merchant; the faith follows the line of trade. It may be that if Chinese silk and turquoise had not found their way to India many centuries before the birth of Buddha, the news of the Great Nirvana could never have reached the remoter East.

To this day, we find ancient capitals and their ruins, old fortresses, royal temples, scattered up and down the heights from Beluchistan to Nepal, in regions long depopulated. And Himalayan shrines and cities have an art and architecture of their own, which is more severely beautiful, because more

directly related to the common early Asiatic, than the later styles, to be found further south. For the first culture-area of humanity had these mountains as its rim. Long before a local prepossession had named the Mediterranean, Asia was. And of that Asia, Egypt, Greece, Etruria, were outlying provinces. The Saracen and Moor, with all that they brought of art and chivalry, with all the intellectual vividness they conferred on Europe, were but the relic-mongers of its past. In the West, even now, we admit a people to be civilised only if we can trace its intellectual descent from this ancient Asia.

Above all, it is the broken voices of its primitive consciousness that are hailed to-day in every civilised country as divine revelations. India herself is no exception to this rule. For all the migrations of Asokan and other periods pale beside the memory of the still more significant era when for the first time there came to settle on the Northern Plain these little communities of people, already agricultural and industrial in their habits, who carried with them the culture of Central Asia. It was not a regimented immigration. The Lall Kaffir, or pale folk, dwelling to this day in the Hindu Kuch, were not deserters, turning aside from the line of march. We must rather suppose a gradual overflow, through many centuries, of the Himalayan region. And yet, at some time or place, it must have been sufficiently consolidated and self-organised to become conscious of its great heritage of thought, to commit its knowledge to writing, and to give form and definition to the Aryan civilisation.

Wherever and whenever it may have happened, this was the moment at which long ages of accumulating reflection and observation precipitated themselves into form as the Vedas. Even so are all Scriptures born. The Tartar herdsman, facing his

THE STORY OF THE GREAT GOD. 193

unknown future as a peasant, records at once his ideals and his memories, and we have the Eki, or Book of Change, of the Chinese people. The austere self-isolation of a few tribes of Syrian shepherds fronts with terror the degradation of Babylonian cities, and the prophets pour out their sublime woes. The Latin Church carries to the Norse peasant with one hand the waters of baptism, with the other the script, by means of which he is to write down his magnificent sagas. The old order blossoms into complete self-consciousness at that very instant when every petal trembles to the fall.

So passed the Vedic age, for the Aryans settled down in India, and became Hindus. The process by which this was accomplished must have been complex and gradual. In some directions towards a greater luxury, it must have been fundamentally a simplification of life. The builders of the Himalayas had used wood and stone. The builders of the plains used bamboos, mud, and bricks; and their architectural designs began to approximate to those of pottery. The weavers of Central Asia had worked in wool, doubtless of marvellous dyes. The craftsmen of the South were driven to cotton and silk. That system of ritual purification which was common to the whole of the Asiatic culture, and which is still retained by Europe in the form of sacraments and rubrics, must have been deepened and extended to meet the new climatic conditions. Natural metaphor underwent transformation. Coolness was exchanged for warmth as the qualification of friendship. Himalayan scenery was no longer present to give constant birth to grand myths and colossal imaginary. That gradual absorption of regional thought and worship began, which was to produce what in its latest phase would be known as Hinduism. But it was always to be absorption. It was always to be the play of the Aryan intellect

upon the indigenous symbol ; never the acceptance of a superstition that could not be rationalised. This wonderful continuity of thinking marks the solidarity of Hinduism as nothing else could. Every creed within its frontiers—and they are wide enough to include all types of religious thought—can prove the Vedas to be its authority. Even the image of the Goddess Kali is held to be foreshadowed in the sublime Anthem to Creation of the Rig-Veda :

The Self sustained as Cause below,
Projected as Effect above.

We find in India, then, a classical nation like Egypt or Greece, which has been allowed to develop freely on the mental plane, and has held the thread of its thought unbroken to the present day. It may be said broadly that great culture and subjective philosophies are almost always continental in their origin, while the sense of nationality and insistence on the beautiful are insular. If this be true, it would explain the greater sympathy between Hellenic and Japanese developments than between Greek and Indian.

For the Hindu imagination long ago detached itself from the cycle of physical beauty, to seek its fullest satisfaction in subtler realms. This fact is extraordinarily evident in Kalidas' poem of "The birth of the War-Lord," where he depicts the wooing of Mahadev by Uma, the Himalayan princess. Here the poet places his heroine at the very acme of maidenly charm, kneeling in worship to lay flowers at the feet of the Great God, and having as her background the forest of plum and cherry, and almond, all suddenly burst into blossom, because to them comes Spring, as the comrade of Love. And then, with a single sweep of the brush, the picture is blotted out : the Great God has vanished from beneath his cedar ; Eros is burnt to ashes ; and the

royal maiden kneels alone, while the bitter wailing of Desire, the beautiful wife of Love, fills the whole woodland. Uma's triumph is reached, and the Divine Spouse drawn to her side, only when, in the midst of unheard-of austerities, she gives supreme proof of courage and devotion as nun and worshipper instead of woman and lover. This touch lies far beyond the range of the Greek.

A similar tendency to use physical symbolism as a system of notation merely, instead of seeking in it the direct and adequate expression of spiritual conceptions, as did the classical genius of Europe, is to be found throughout the whole conception of Siva or Mahadev, the Great God Himself. The tiger-skin in which he is clad, and some of the names of this deity, induce Tod in his "Annals of Rajasthan" to regard him as simply a new version of the Greek Bacchus. It is a great deal more likely that behind the two, in the dim North, and in the distant past—in some Lake Manasarovar of thought, to quote Max Müller—there may loom up a common ancestor. But this probability only makes more significant the divergences between the two conceptions.

Any one who visits Northern India must desire to know the meaning of the little black stones under every conspicuous tree, which are so evidently set up for worship. They are said by Europeans to be of phallic origin; but if so, Hindus are no more conscious of the fact than we of the similar origin of the maypole. Wherever one goes, one finds them, by the roadsides in cities and villages, on the river-banks, or inside the entrance to a garden, if there is a tree that stands alone. For in such places one is glad to think that the Great God, begging His handful of rice from door to door, may have seated Himself to bless us with His meditation.

The small stone pillar, called the *lingam*—the

wora *lingam* is literally *symbol*—may have been taken from the bed of a stream, and in that case is likely to be of a long egg-shape. But if it has been cut by the hand of man, it is short and slightly tapering, with a thimble-like top. Sometimes, in all good faith, the features of a human face have been more or less crudely marked on it, with white paint. In any case, it is only a question of time till some woman, passing by on her way from bathing, stops to pour a little water, or sprinkle a few grains of rice tenderly over the head of the stone, perhaps also to add bel-leaves, trifoliate like our clover; or a garland of white flowers; or, prompted by a heart more devoted and loving than usual, to touch it with a spot of sandal-paste, so cool and refreshing in this hot climate! Then the earth is touched with the head, and the worshipper passes on.

The simple act is not without its perplexities, and we seek for interpretation. At first in vain. Or the explanations given are more bewildering than helpful. Hindus are too conscious of the symbolistic nature of every faith, and too sensitive also to the scornful irreverence of most foreign inquirers, to speak out, or argue out, the heart of their heart with the passing stranger. Rather they will turn on one, with a strange pity. "Do you not understand," they will say, "that this is the Great God who is emblemed here? He can have neither visitor, nor history, nor worshipper. Such things are vain dreams of men. Only for our own hearts' ease, and to carry ourselves nearer to the inner vision, do we set up a stone whereon we may offer rice and water and lay a leaf or two!" It will be difficult in all India to find a woman so simple, or a peasant so ignorant, that to them worship is not, as some one has said, "a conscious symbolism, instead of a fragment of primitive personification." Yet by degrees

the great myth leaks out. Little by little we learn the associations of the name.

The lingam, after all, is but a fragment of stone. Far better images of Mahadev are those who come and go yonder, amidst the passing crowd—the monks and beggars, some clad only in ashes with matted hair, others with shaven head, and clothed from throat to foot in the sacred yellow, but most of them bearing one form or another of staff or trident, and carrying a begging bowl. And finer still will these be, when, retiring into the forest, or climbing to the verge of eternal snows, they sit, even like this stone lingam, bolt upright in the shelter of tree or rock, lost to the world without, in solitary meditation.

About the whole conception there is a striking reminiscence of the Himalayas. Whether we will or not we are carried back, as we listen, to the great age of the Vedas, when the Aryan immigration was still taking place. It is a day of sacrifice, and at the forest-clearing people and priests are met, to heap the offerings on the mighty fire, chanting appropriate texts. Hour after hour, sometimes day after day, the mound of pure flame lasts, and long after it has ceased the hot white ashes lie in their immense bed, thrilling now and then to a faint trickling spark, sighing themselves out into the coldness of death. Who was it that first came and rubbed himself with those soft white ashes, in order to be clothed upon with the worship of God and separation from the world? Who was it that first retired into cave or jungle, and meditated, until his hair became a tangled mass, and his nails grew long, and his body emaciated, and he still pursued the sublime bliss of the soul? However the idea of such an exterior grew, the whole genius of India has spoken for many a century in just such a picture—the hermit clad in wood-ashes, with masses of neglected hair,

piled on the top of his head, indifferent to the whole world, bent only on thought.

As the Aryans wandered in sight of the snow-mountains, with the fire-sacrifice for their central rite, an indissoluble connection arose in their minds between the two ideas. Were not the flames of the offerings white like the Himalayas, always mounting upward like the aspiring peaks, leaving behind them ashes for eternal frost? Those snowy heights, we must suppose, became the central objects of their love. Lifted above the world in silence, terrible in their cold and their distance, yet beautiful beyond all words, what are they like? Why, they are like—a great monk, clothed in ashes, lost in his meditation, silent and alone! They are like—like—the Great God Himself, Siva, Mahadev!

Having arrived at this thought, the Hindu mind began to work out all sorts of accessories and symbols, in which sometimes the idea of flame, sometimes of mountain, sometimes of hermit is uppermost—all contributing to the completed picture of Siva, the Great God.

The wood was borne to the sacrifice on a bull: Siva possesses an old bull, on which he rides.

As the moon shines above the mountains, so He bears on His forehead the new moon.

Like the true ascetic, begging food at the householder's door, He is pleased with very simple gifts. The cold water of the bath, a few grains of rice, and two or three green bel-leaves, are His whole offering in the daily worship. But the rice and water must be of the purest, for they are presented to a most honoured guest. Evidently the bel-leaf, like the shamrock, refers to the Trinity. For, as we all know, this doctrine is Hindu as well as Christian and Egyptian.

To show how easily Siva can be pleased, the people tell a pretty story. A poor huntsman—that is to

THE STORY OF THE GREAT GOD 199

say, one of the lowest of the low—once came to the end of a day's hunting without having snared or killed a single creature. Night came on, and he was far from home, in the jungle, alone. Near by stood a bel-tree, with branches near the ground, and he was glad to climb into it, to pass the night in shelter from wild beasts. But as he lay crouching in its branches, the thought of his wife and children starving at home would come to him, and for pity of their need great tears rolled down his cheeks, and falling on the bel-leaves broke them by their weight, and carried them to the ground. Under the sacred tree, however, stood a Siva-lingam, image of Siva, and the tears fell, with the leaves, on its head. That night a black snake crept up the tree, and stung the man. And bright spirits came, and carried his soul to Heaven, and laid it down at the feet of Siva.

Then, in that holy place, rose the clamour of many voices questioning: "Why is this savage here? Has he not eaten impure foods? Has he offered right sacrifices? Has he known the law?" But the Great God turned on them all in gentle surprise: "Did he not worship Me with bel-leaves and with tears?" He said.

Looking closer at the *flame*, however, one thing was very clear. It was white, but it had a blue throat—we see it even when we light a match!—and in order to bestow a blue throat upon Siva, the following story arose:

Once upon a time, all the splendour and glory of the gods seemed to be vanishing from them. (Are such tales, we wonder, a reminiscence of the period when the old gods, Indra, Agni, and the lords of the universe, found themselves growing unfashionable, because the Trinity, Brahma—Vishnu—Siva, was coming into favour?) What to do, the gods did not know, but they determined to pray to Vishnu, the