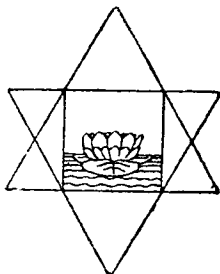


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MOTHER INDIA

DECEMBER 1952

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The Supramental is a truth and its advent is in the very nature of things inevitable . . .

I believe the descent of this Truth opening the way to a development of divine consciousness here to be the final sense of the earth evolution.

SRI AUROBINDO

* * *

*A new Light shall break upon the earth,
a new world shall be born: the things that
were promised shall be fulfilled.*

Sri Aurobindo

*Translated from the Mother's
"Prayers and Meditations."*

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

"Great is Truth and it shall prevail"

Managing Editor
K. R. PODDAR

Editor:
K. D. SETHNA

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THE GNOSTIC BEING

Sri Aurobindo

As there has been established on earth a mental Consciousness and Power which shapes a race of mental beings and takes up into itself all of earthly nature that is ready for the change, so now there will be established on earth a gnostic Consciousness and Power which will shape a race of gnostic spiritual beings and take up into itself all of earth-nature that is ready for this new transformation. It will also receive into itself from above, progressively, from its own domain of perfect light and power and beauty all that is ready to descend from that domain into terrestrial being. For the evolution proceeded in the past by the upsurging, at each critical stage, of a concealed Power from its involution in the Inconscience, but also by a descent from above, from its own plane, of that Power already self-realised in its own higher natural province. In all these previous stages there has been a division between surface self and consciousness and subliminal self and consciousness; the surface was formed mainly under the push of the upsurging force from below, by the Inconscient developing a slowly emergent formulation of a concealed force of the spirit, the subliminal partly in this way but mainly by a simultaneous influx of the largeness of the same force from above: a mental or a vital being descended into the subliminal parts and formed from its secret station there a mental or a vital personality on the surface. But before the supramental change can begin, the veil between the subliminal and the surface parts must have been already broken down; the influx, the descent will be in the entire consciousness as a whole, it will not take place partly behind a veil: the process will be no longer a concealed, obscure and ambiguous procedure but an open outflowing consciously felt and followed by the whole being in its transmutation. In other respects the process will be identical,—a supramental inflow from above, the descent of a gnostic being into the nature, and an emergence of the concealed supramental force from below; the influx and the unveiling between them will remove what is left of the nature of the Ignorance. The rule of the Inconscient will disappear. for the Inconscience will be changed by the outburst of the greater secret Consciousness within it, the hidden Light, into what it always was in reality, a sea of the secret Superconsciousness. A first formation of a gnostic consciousness and nature will be the consequence.

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The creation of a supramental being, nature, life on earth, will not be the sole result of this evolution, it will also carry with it the consummation of the steps that have led up to it: for it will confirm in possession of terrestrial birth the overmind, the intuition and the other gradations of the spiritual nature-force and establish a race of gnostic beings and a hierarchy, a shining ladder of ascending degrees and successive constituent formations of the gnostic light and power in earth-nature. For the description of gnosis applies to all consciousness that is based upon Truth of being and not upon the Ignorance or Nescience. All life and living beings ready to rise beyond the mental ignorance, but not ready yet for the supramental height, would find in a sort of echelon or a scale with overlapping degrees their assured basis, their intermediate steps of self-formation, their expression of realised capacity of spiritual existence on the way to the supreme Reality. But also the presence of the liberated and now sovereign supramental light and force at the head of evolutionary Nature might be expected to have its consequences in the whole evolution. An incidence, a decisive stress would affect the life of the lower evolutionary stages; something of the light, something of the force would penetrate downwards and awaken into a greater action the hidden Truth-Power everywhere in Nature. A dominant principle of harmony would impose itself on the life of the Ignorance; the discord, the blind seeking, the clash of struggle, the abnormal vicissitudes of exaggeration and depression and unsteady balance of the unseeing forces at work in their mixture and conflict, would feel the influence and yield place to a more orderly pace and harmonic steps of the development of being, a more revealing arrangement of progressing life and consciousness, a better life-order. A freer play of intuition and sympathy and understanding would enter into human life, a clearer sense of the truth of self and things and a more enlightened dealing with the opportunities and difficulties of existence. Instead of a constant intermixed and confused struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, the evolution would become a graded progression from lesser light to greater light; in each stage of it the conscious beings belonging to that stage would respond to the inner Consciousness-Force and expand their own law of cosmic Nature towards the possibility of a higher degree of that Nature. This is at least a strong possibility and might be envisaged as the natural consequence of the direct action of supermind on the evolution. . . .

The supramental gnostic being . . . would not only find all his living on an intimate sense and effective realisation of harmonic unity in his own inner and outer life or group life, but would create a harmonic unity also with the still surviving mental world, even if that

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world remained altogether a world of Ignorance. For the gnostic consciousness in him would perceive and bring out the evolving truth and principle of harmony hidden in the formations of the Ignorance, it would be natural to his sense of integrity and it would be within his power to link them in a true order with his own gnostic principle and the evolved truth and harmony of his own greater life-creation. That might be impossible without a considerable change in the life of the world, but such a change would be a natural consequence of the appearance of a new Power in Nature and its universal influence. In the emergence of the gnostic being would be the hope of a more harmonious evolutionary order in terrestrial Nature.

A supramental or gnostic race of beings would not be a race made according to a single type, moulded in a single fixed pattern; for the law of the supermind is unity fulfilled in diversity, and therefore there would be an infinite diversity in the manifestation of the gnostic consciousness although that consciousness would still be one in its basis, in its constitution, in its all-revealing and all-uniting order. It is evident that the triple status of the supermind would reproduce itself as a principle in this new manifestation: there would be below it and yet belonging to it the degrees of the overmind and intuitive gnosis with the souls that had realised these degrees of the ascending consciousness; there would be also at the summit, as the evolution in Knowledge proceeded, individual beings who would ascend beyond a supermind formulation and reach from the highest height of supermind to the summits of unitarian self-realisation in the body which must be the last and supreme state of the epiphany of the Creation. But in the supramental race itself, in the variation of its degrees, the individuals would not be cast according to a single type of individuality; each would be different from the other, a unique formation of the Being, although one with all the rest in foundation of self and sense of oneness and in the principle of his being. It is only this general principle of the supramental existence of which we can attempt to form an idea however diminished by the limitations of mental thought and mental language. A more living picture of the gnostic being supermind only could make; for the mind some abstract outlines of it are alone possible.

The gnosis is the effective principle of the Spirit, a highest dynamis of the spiritual existence. The gnostic individual would be the consummation of the spiritual man; his whole way of being, thinking, living, acting would be governed by the power of a vast universal

spirituality. All the trinities of the Spirit would be real to his self-awareness and realised in his inner life. All his existence would be fused into oneness with the transcendent and universal Self and Spirit, all his action would originate from and obey the supreme Self and Spirit's divine governance of Nature. All life would have to him the sense of the Conscious Being, the Purusha within, finding its self-expression in Nature, his life and all its thoughts, feelings, acts would be filled for him with that significance and built upon that foundation of its reality. He would feel the presence of the Divine in every centre of his consciousness, in every vibration of his life-force, in every cell of his body. In all the workings of his force of Nature he would be aware of the workings of the supreme World-Mother, the Supernature; he would see his natural being as the becoming and manifestation of the power of the World-Mother. In this consciousness he would live and act in an entire transcendent freedom, a complete joy of the spirit, an entire identity with the cosmic self and a spontaneous sympathy with all in the universe. All beings would be to him his own selves. all ways and powers of consciousness would be felt as the ways and powers of his own universality. But in that inclusive universality there would be no bondage to inferior forces, no deflection from his own highest truth: for this truth would envelop all truth of things and keep each in its own place, in a relation of diversified harmony,—it would not admit any confusion, clash, infringing of boundaries, any distortion of the different harmonies that constitute the total harmony. His own life and the world life would be to him like a perfect work of art; it would be as if the creation of a cosmic and spontaneous genius infallible in its working out of a multitudinous order. The gnostic individual would be in the world and of the world, but would also exceed it in his consciousness and live in his self of transcendence above it; he would be universal but free in the universe, individual but not limited by a separative individuality. The true Person is not an isolated entity, his individuality is universal; for he individualises the universe: it is at the same time divinely emergent in a spiritual air of transcendental infinity, like a high cloud-surpassing summit: for he individualises the divine Transcendence. .

The supramental being in his cosmic consciousness seeing and feeling all as himself would act in that sense; he would act in a universal awareness and a harmony of his individual self with the total self, of his individual will with the total will, of his individual action with the total action. For what we most suffer from in our outer life and its reactions upon our inner life is the imperfection of our

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relations with the world, our ignorance of others, our disharmony with the whole of things, our inability to equate our demand on the world with the world's demand on us. There is a conflict—a conflict from which there seems to be no ultimate issue except an escape from both world and self—between our self-affirmation and a world on which we have to impose that affirmation, a world which seems to be too large for us and to pass indifferently over our soul, mind, life, body in the sweep of its course to its goal. The relation of our course and goal to the world's is unapparent to us, and to harmonise ourselves with it we have either to enforce ourselves upon it and make it subservient to us or suppress ourselves and become subservient to it or else to compass a difficult balance between these two necessities of the relation between the individual personal destiny and the cosmic whole and its hidden purpose. But for the supramental being living in a cosmic consciousness the difficulty would not exist, since he has no ego; his cosmic individuality would know the cosmic forces and their movement and their significance as part of himself, and the truth-consciousness in him would see the right relation at each step and find the dynamic right expression of that relation.

For in fact both individual and universe are simultaneous and interrelated expressions of the same transcendent Being; even though in the Ignorance and under its law there is maladjustment and conflict, yet there must be a right relation, an equation to which all arrives but which is missed by our blindness of ego, our attempt to affirm the ego and not the Self one in all. The supramental consciousness has that truth of relation in itself as its natural right and privilege, since it is the supermind that determines the cosmic relations and the relations of the individual with the universe, determines them freely and sovereignly as a power of the Transcendence. . . .

The existence of the supramental being would be the play of a manifoldly and multiply manifesting truth-power of one-existence and one-consciousness for the delight of one-existence. Delight of the manifestation of the Spirit in its truth of being would be the sense of the gnostic life. All its movements would be a formulation of the truth of the spirit, but also of the joy of the spirit,—an affirmation of spiritual existence, an affirmation of spiritual consciousness, an affirmation of spiritual delight of being. . . .

The gnostic being has the will of action but also the knowledge of what is to be willed and the power to effectuate its knowledge; it will not be led from ignorance to do what is not to be done. More-

over, its action is not the seeking for a fruit or result; its joy is in being and doing, in pure state of spirit, in pure act of spirit, in the pure bliss of the spirit. As its static consciousness will contain all in itself and must be, therefore, for ever self-fulfilled, so its dynamis of consciousness will find in each step and in each act a spiritual freedom and a self-fulfilment. . . .

The gnostic being's knowledge self-realised in action will be, not an ideative knowledge, but the Real-Idea of the supermind, the instrumentation of an essential light of Consciousness; it will be the self-light of all the reality of being and becoming pouring itself out continually and filling every particular act and activity with the pure and whole delight of its self-existence. For an infinite consciousness with its knowledge by identity there is in each differentiation the joy and experience of the Identical, in each finite is felt the Infinite.

An evolution of gnostic consciousness brings with it a transformation of our world-consciousness and world-action. for it takes up into the new power of awareness not only the inner existence but our outer being and our world-being; there is a remaking of both, an intergration of them in the sense and power of the spiritual existence. There must come upon us in the change at once a reversal and rejection of our present way of existence and a fulfilment of its inner trend and tendency. For we stand now between these two terms, an outer world of Life and Matter that has made us and a remaking of the world by ourselves in the sense of the evolving Spirit. Our present way of living is at once a subjection to Life-Force and Matter and a struggle with Life and Matter. In its first appearance an outer existence creates by our reactions to it an inner or mental existence: if we shape ourselves at all, it is in most men less by the conscious pressure of a free soul or intelligencę from within than by a response to our environment and the world-Nature acting upon us: but what we move towards in the development of our conscious being is an inner existence creating by its knowledge and power its own outer form of living and self-expressive environment of living. In the gnostic nature this movement will have consummated itself, the nature of living will be an accomplished inner existence whose light and power will take perfect body in the outer life. The gnostic being will take up the world of Life and Matter, but he will turn and adapt it to his own truth and purpose of existence; he will mould life itself into his own spiritual image, and this he will be able to do because he has the secret of a spiritual creation and is in communion and oneness with the Creator within him. This will be first effective in the shaping of his own inner and outer individual existence, but the

THE GNOSTIC BEING

same power and principle will operate in any common gnostic life; the relations of gnostic being with gnostic being will be the expression of their one gnostic self and supernature shaping into a significant power and form of itself the whole common existence.

In all spiritual living the inner life is the thing of first importance; the spiritual man lives always within, and in a world of the Ignorance that refuses to change he has to be in a certain sense separate from it and to guard his inner life against the intrusion and influence of the darker forces of the Ignorance: he is out of the world even when he is within it; if he acts upon it, it is from the fortress of his inner spiritual being where in the inmost sanctuary he is one with the Supreme Existence or the soul and God are alone together. The gnostic life will be an inner life in which the antinomy of the inner and the outer, the self and the world will have been cured and exceeded. The gnostic being will have indeed an inmost existence in which he is alone with God, one with the Eternal, self-plunged into the depths of the Infinite, in communion with its heights and its luminous abysses of secrecy, nothing will be able to disturb or to invade these depths or bring him down from the summits, neither the world's contents nor his action nor all that is around him. This is the transcendence aspect of the spiritual life and it is necessary for the freedom of the spirit; for otherwise the identity in Nature with the world would be a binding limitation and not a free identity. But at the same time God-love and the delight of God will be the heart's expression of that inner communion and oneness, and that delight and love will expand itself to embrace all existence. The peace of God within will be extended in the gnostic experience of the universe into a universal calm of equality not merely passive but dynamic, a calm of freedom in oneness dominating all that meets it, tranquillising all that enters into it, imposing its law of peace on the supramental being's relations with the world in which he is living. Into all his acts the inner oneness, the inner communion will attend him and enter into his relations with others, who will not be to him others but selves of himself in the one existence, his own universal existence. It is this poise and freedom in the spirit that will enable him to take all life into himself while still remaining the spiritual self and to embrace even the world of the Ignorance without himself entering into the Ignorance. . . .

This would be the nature of the being, life and action of the gnostic individual so far as we can follow the evolution with our mental conception up to that point where it will emerge out of overmind and cross the border into supramental gnosis. This nature of the

gnosis would evidently determine all the relations of the life or group-life of gnostic beings, for a gnostic collectivity would be a collective soul-power of the Truth-consciousness, even as the gnostic individual would be an individual soul-power of it: it would have the same integration of life and action in unison, the same realised and conscious unity of being, the same spontaneity, intimate oneness-feeling, one and mutual truth-vision and truth-sense of self and each other, the same truth-action in the relation of each with each and all with all; this collectivity would be and act not as a mechanical but a spiritual integer. A similar inevitability of the union of freedom and order would be the law of the collective life; it would be a freedom of the diverse play of the Infinite in divine souls, an order of the conscious unity of souls which is the law of the supramental Infinite. Our mental rendering of oneness brings into it the rule of sameness; a complete oneness brought about by the mental reason drives towards a thorough-going standardisation as its one effective means,—only minor shades of differentiation would be allowed to operate: but the greatest richness of diversity in the self-expression of oneness would be the law of the gnostic life. In the gnostic consciousness difference would not lead to discord but to a spontaneous natural adaptation, a sense of complementary plenitude, a rich many-sided execution of the thing to be collectively known, done, worked out in life. For the difficulty in mind and life is created by ego, by separation of integers into component parts which figure as contraries, opposites, disparates. all in which they separate from each other is easily felt, affirmed and stressed; that in which they meet, whatever holds their divergence together, is largely missed or found with difficulty, everything has to be done by an overcoming or an adjustment of difference, by a constructed unity. There is, indeed, an underlying principle of oneness and Nature insists on its emergence in a construction of unity, for she is collective and communal as well as individual and egoistic and has her instrumentation of associativeness, sympathies, common needs, interests, attractions, affinities as well as her more brutal means of unification: but her secondary imposed and too prominent basis of ego-life and ego-nature overlays the unity and afflicts all its constructions with imperfection and insecurity. A farther difficulty is created by the absence or rather the imperfection of intuition and direct inner contact making each a separate being forced to learn with difficulty the other's being and nature, to arrive at understanding and mutuality and harmony from outside instead of inwardly through a direct sense and grasp, so that all mental and vital interchange is hampered, rendered ego-tainted or doomed to imperfection and incompleteness by the veil of mutual ignorance. In the collective gnostic life the inte-

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grating truth-sense, the concording unity of gnostic nature would carry all divergences in itself as its own opulence and turn a multitudinous thought, action, feeling into the unity of a luminous lie-whole. This would be the evident principle, the inevitable result of the very character of the Truth-Consciousness and its dynamic realisation of the spiritual unity of all being. This realisation, the key to the perfection of life, difficult to arrive at on the mental plane, difficult even when realised to dynamise or organise, would be naturally dynamic, spontaneously self-organised in all gnostic creation and gnostic life.

This much is easily understandable if we regard the gnostic beings as living their own life without any contact with a life of the Ignorance. But by the very fact of the evolution here the gnostic manifestation would be a circumstance, though a decisive circumstance, in the whole: there would be a continuance of the lower degrees of the consciousness and life, some maintaining the manifestation in the Ignorance, some mediating between it and the manifestation in the the gnosis, these two forms of being and life would either exist side by side or interpenetrate. In either case the gnostic principle might be expected, if not at once, yet finally to dominate the whole. The higher spiritual-mental degrees would be in touch with the supramental principle now overtly supporting them and holding them together and would be delivered from the once enveloping hold of the Ignorance and Inconscience. As manifestations of the truth of being, though in a qualified and modified degree, they would draw all their light and energy from the supramental gnosis and would be in large contact with its instrumental powers; they would themselves be conscious motive-powers of the spirit and, although not yet in the full force of their entirely realised spiritual substance, they would not be subjected to a lesser instrumentation fragmented, diluted, diminished, obscured by the substance of the Nescience. All Ignorance rising or entering into the overmind, into the intuitive, into the illumined or higher-mind being would cease to be ignorant, it would enter into the light, realise in that light the truth which it had covered with its darkness and undergo a liberation, transmutation, new state of consciousness and being which would assimilate it to these higher states and prepare it for the supramental status. At the same time the involved principle of the gnosis, acting now as an overt, arisen and constantly dynamic force and no longer only as a concealed power with a secret origination or a veiled support of things or an occasional intervention as its only function, would be able to lay something of its law of harmony on the still existing Inconscience and Ignorance.

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For the secret gnostic power cocealed in them would act with a greater strength of its support and origination, a freer and more powerful intervention; the beings of the Ignorance, influenced by the light of the gnosis through their association with gnostic beings and through the evolved and effective presence of the supramental Being and Power in earth-nature, would be more conscious and responsive. In the untransformed part of humanity itself there might well arise a new and greater order of mental human beings, for the directly intuitive or partly intuitivised but not yet gnostic mental being, the directly or partly illumined mental being, the mental being in direct or part communion with the higher-thought plane would emerge: these would become more and more numerous, more and more evolved and secure in their type, and might even exist as a formed race of higher humanity leading upwards the less evolved in a true fraternity born of the sense of the manifestation of the One Divine in all beings. In this way, the consummation of the highest might mean also a lesser consummation in its own degree of what must remain still below. At the higher end of the evolution the ascending ranges and summits of supermind would begin to rise towards some supreme manifestation of the pure spiritual existence, consciousness and delight of being of Sachchidananda.

A question might arise whether the gnostic reversal, the passage into a gnostic evolution and beyond it would not mean sooner or later the cessation of the evolution from the Inconscience, since the reason for that obscure beginning of things here would cease. This depends on the farther question whether the movement between the Superconscience and the Inconscience as the two poles of existence is an abiding law of the material manifestation or only a provisional circumstance. The latter supposition is difficult to accept because of the tremendous force of pervasiveness and durability with which the inconscient foundation has been laid for the whole material universe. Any complete reversal or elimination of the first evolutionary principle would mean the simultaneous manifestation of the secret consciousness in every part of this vast universal Inconscience; a change in a particular line of Nature such as the earth-line could not have any such all-pervading effect: the manifestation in earth-nature has its own curve and the completion of that curve is all that we have to consider. Here this much might be hazarded that in the final result of the revelatory creation or reproduction of the upper hemisphere of conscious being in the lower triplicity the evolution here, though remaining the same in its degrees and stages, would be subjected to the law of harmony, the law of unity in diversity and of diversity

working out unity: it would be no longer an evolution through strife, it would become a harmonious development from stage to stage, from lesser to greater light, from type to higher type of the power and beauty of a self-unfolding existence. It would only be otherwise if for some reason the law of struggle and suffering still remained necessary for the working out of that mysterious possibility in the Infinite whose principle underlies the plunge into the Inconscience. But for the earth-nature it would seem as if this necessity might be exhausted once the supramental gnosis had emerged from the Inconscience. A change would begin with its firm appearance; that change would be consummated when the supramental evolution became complete and rose into the greater fullness of a supreme manifestation of the Existence-Consciousness-Delight, Sachchidananda.

(Extracts from "The Life Divine")

A NEW CREATION

Sri Aurobindo

A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous
hour,

A branch of heaven transplant to human soil;
Nature shall overleap her mortal step;
Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.

* * *

A new creation from the old shall rise,
A Knowledge inarticulate find speech,
Beauty suppressed burst into paradise bloom,
Pleasure and pain dive into absolute bliss
A tongueless oracle shall speak at last,
The Superconscious conscious grow on earth,
The Eternal's wonders join the dance of Time.

* * *

There is a being beyond the being of mind,
An Immeasurable cast into many forms,
A miracle of the multitudinous One.
There is a consciousness mind cannot touch,
Its speech cannot utter nor its thought reveal.
It has no home on earth, no centre in man,
Yet is the source of all things thought and done,
The fount of the creation and its works.
It is the origin of all truth here,
The sun-orb of mind's fragmentary rays,
Infinity's heaven that spills the rain of God,
The Immense that calls to man to expand the
Spirit.

The wide Aim that justifies his narrow attempts,
A channel for the little he tastes of bliss.
Some shall be made the glory's receptacles
And vehicles of the Eternal's luminous power.
These are the high forerunners, the heads of
Time,

The great deliverers of earth-bound mind,
The high transfigurers of human clay,
The first-born of a new supernal race.
The incarnate dual Power shall open God's door,

A NEW CREATION

Eternal Supermind touch earthly Time.
The superman shall wake in mortal man
And manifest the hidden demi-god
Or grow into the God-Light and God-Force
Revealing the secret deity in the cave.
Then shall the earth be touched by the Supreme,
His bright unveiled Transcendence shall illumine

The mind and heart, and force the life and act
To interpret his inexpressible mystery
In a heavenly alphabet of Divinity's signs.
His living cosmic spirit shall enring,
Annulling the decree of death and pain,
Erasing the formulas of the Ignorance,
With the deep meaning of beauty and life's hidden sense

The being ready for immortality,
His regard crossing infinity's mystic waves,
Bring back to Nature her early joy to live,
The metred heart-beats of a lost delight,
The cry of a forgotten ecstasy,
The dance of the first world-creating Bliss.
The Immanent shall be the witness God
Watching on his many-petalled lotus-throne,
His actionless being and his silent might
Ruling earth-nature by eternity's law,
A thinker waking the Inconscient's world,
An immobile centre of many infinitudes
In his thousand-pillared temple by Time's sea.
Then shall the embodied being live as one
Who is a thought, a will of the Divine,
A mask or robe of his divinity,
An instrument and partner of his Force,
A pointer line drawn in the infinite,
A manifest of the Imperishable.
The supermind shall be his nature's fount.
The Eternal's truth shall mould his thoughts and acts,

The Eternal's truth shall be his light and guide
All then shall change, a magic order come
Overtopping this mechanical universe
A mightier race shall inhabit the mortal's world.
Then in the process of evolving Time

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All shall be drawn into a single plan,
A divine harmony shall be earth's law.
Beauty and Joy remould her way to live:
Even the body shall remember God,
Nature shall draw back from mortality
And Spirit's fires shall guide the earth's blind
force;
Knowledge shall bring into the aspirant Thought
A high proximity to Truth and God.
The supermind shall claim the world for Light
And thrill with love of God the enamoured heart
And place Light's crown on Nature's lifted head
And found Light's reign on her unshaking base.

* * *

For in the march of all-fulfilling Time
The hour must come of the Transcendent's will.
All turns and winds towards his predestined ends
In Nature's fixed inevitable course
Decreed since the beginning of the worlds
In the deep essence of created things;
Even there shall come as a high crown of all
The end of Death, the death of Ignorance.
But first high Truth must set her feet on earth
And man aspire to the Eternal's light
And all his members feel the spirit's touch
And all his life obey an inner Force.
This too shall be; for a new life shall come,
A body of the Superconscient's truth,
A native field of Supernature's might:

* * *

Thus shall the earth open to divinity
And common natures feel the wide uplift,
Illuminate common acts with the Spirit's ray
And meet the deity in common things.
Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine.

(Selections from "Savitri")

SRI AUROBINDO ON MALLARME

Some questions were put by Nirodbaran on Mallarme and his work. Sri Aurobindo made marginal comments. These are given below within quotation marks. The questions are within brackets.

“Blake is Europe’s greatest mystic poet and Mallarme turned the whole current of French poetry (one might almost say, of all modernist poetry) into a channel of which his poems were an opening.”

(We hear that he used to write with a set determination to make his works unintelligible: is it true? And are his works unintelligible?)

Comment on the first question:

“Certainly not. The French language was too clear and limited to express mystic truth, so he had to wrestle with it and turn it this way and that to arrive at a mystic speech. Also he refused to be satisfied with anything that was a merely intellectual or even at all intellectual rendering of his vision. That is why the surface understanding finds it difficult to follow him. But he is so great that it has laboured to follow him all the same.”

Comment on the second question:

“Then why did they have so much influence on the finest French writers and why is modernist poetry trying to burrow into the subliminal in order to catch something even one quarter as fine as his language, images and mystic suggestions?”

(Please read, Guru, *A Book of French Poetry* by Professor K. In the Introduction he seems to say about Mallarme just what I have said, though he speaks of him as being an acknowledged master and of his great influence on contemporary poetry. Do you agree with the other things he says about Mallarme? He says: “an intellectual artist, never evoking emotion but only thought about thought . . . Obscurity was part of his doctrine. Another cause of his obscurity is that he chose his words and phrases for their evocative value alone, and here again the verbal sonorities suggested by the tortuous trend of his mind make no appeal except to the initiated. His life-long endeavour to achieve an impossible ideal accounts for his sterility—he has left some 60 poems only—and the darkness of his later work, though he did write, before he had fallen a victim to his own theories, a few poems of great beauty and perfectly intelligible.”)

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Comment on the opening sentence of the letter:

“He can’t deny such an obvious fact, I suppose—but he would like to . . .”

Comment on the rest of the letter:

“Certainly not—this man is a mere pedant; his remarks are un-intelligent, commonplace, often perfectly imbecile . . . Rubbish! His [Mallarme’s] doctrines are perfectly tenable and intelligible. It is true that the finest things in art and poetry are appreciated only by the few and he chose therefore not to sacrifice the truth of his mystic (impressionist, symbolist) expression in order to be easily understood by the multitude, including this professor. Not only that—his will to arrive at a true and deep, instead of a superficial and intellectual language. I gave two reasons for Mallarme’s unusual style and not this one of the limitedness of the French language only . . . 60 poems, if they have beauty, are as good as 600. It is not the mass of the poet’s work that determines his greatness. Gray and Catullus wrote little; we have only seven plays of Sophocles and seven of Aeschylus (though they wrote more), but these seven put them still in the front rank of poets.”

(He says also that Mallarme’s verse is acquired while Verlaine’s is inspired. X says M. adopted the path of arduous *tapasya* with language because the French language is too simple, clear and transparent etc. etc. And then he remarks that just as in spirituality simple (*sahaj*) sadhana leads to truth, so also in poetry simplicity leads to beauty. Does it mean that M’s acrobatics with words in poems won’t or don’t lead to beauty?)

“Only X can say what he meant, but to refuse beauty to M’s poetry would be itself an acrobacy of intellect. For what then is beauty? Simplicity and beauty are not convertible terms. There can be a difficult beauty. What about Aeschylus then? or Blake?”

(Mallarme says that the poet’s mission is either to evoke gradually an object in order to suggest a mood, or inversely, to choose an object as a symbol and disengage from it a mood by a series of decipherments. I don’t quite follow what he means but it seems something different from Housman’s idea that the mission or function of poetry is to transfuse emotion, which Mallarme had none of!)

“It is a very good description of the impressionist method in literature. Verlaine and others do the same even if they do not hold the theory . . . Housman is not an impressionist or symbolist in theory.”

Comment on the phrase about Mallarme's lack of emotion:

"Indeed? Because the professor says so? How easily you are impressed by anybody's opinion and take it as final!"

(Please read M's sonnet No. 199. Pardi! Guru, it is indeed a hard nut, a tortuous trend of mind, no doubt! Look at that image 'Le transparent glacier des voils qui n'ont pas fui . . ." etc. The transparent glacier of flights haunting the hard lake under the frost! Frost or snow has become the glacier, and the glacier's compose the lake or what? What do you think of this sonnet?)

"How does hoar-frost or rime become the glacier? 'Givre' is not the same as 'glace'—it is not ice, but a covering of hoar-frost such as you find on the trees etc. the congealed moisture of the air—that is the 'blanche agonie' which has come down from the insulted Space on the swan and on the lake. He can shake off that but the glacier holds him; he can no more rise to the skies, caught in the frozen cold mass of the failures of the soul that refused to fly upward and escape. It is one of the finest sonnets I have ever read. Magnificent line, by the way, 'le transparent glacier des voils qui n'ont pas fui! This idea of the denied flights (imprisoned powers) of the soul that have frozen into a glacier seems to me as powerful as it is violent. Of course in French such expressions were quite new—in some other languages they were already possible. You will find lots of kindred things in the most modern poetry which specialises in violent revelatory (or at least would be revelatory) images. You disapprove. Well one may do so,—classical taste does, but I find myself obliged here to admire.

"I do not know what you mean by emotion. If you mean the surface vital joy and grief of outer life, these poems of Mallarme do not contain it. But if emotion can include also the deeper spiritual or inner feeling which does not weep or shout, then they are here in these two sonnets. The swan is to my understanding not merely the poet who has not sung in the higher spaces of the consciousness, which is already a fine idea, but the soul that has not risen there and found its higher expression, the poet, if Mallarme thought of that specially, being only a signal instance of this spiritual frustration. There can be no more powerful, moving and formidable expression of this spiritual frustration, this chilled and sterile greatness than the image of the frozen lake and the imprisoned swan as developed by Mallarme.

"I do not say that the spiritual or occult cannot be given an easier expression or that if one can arrive at that without minimising the

inner significance, it is not perhaps the greatest achievement. But there is room for more than one kind of spiritual or mystic poetry. One has to avoid mere mistiness or vagueness, one has to be true, vivid, profound in one's images; but, that given, I am free to write either as in *Nirvana* or *Transformation*, giving a clear mental indication or I can suppress the mental indication and give the image only with the content suggested in the language—but not expressed so that even those can superficially understand who are unable to read behind the mental idea—that is what I have done in the *Bird of Fire*. It seems to me that both methods are legitimate."

Comment on Professor K's comparison between Mallarme's verse and Verlaine's:

"If these two magnificent sonnets (the last two) are not inspired then there is no such thing as inspiration. It is rubbish to say of a man who refused to limit himself by intellectual expression, that he was an intellectual artist. Symbolism, impressionism go beyond intellect to the pure sight and Mallarme was the creator of symbolism."

(I sent Professor K's book because of the interesting reference)

"I don't find it interesting,—it is abysmally stupid."

THE FUTURE POETRY

Sri Aurobindo

(13)

THE COURSE OF ENGLISH POETRY

(5)

A power of poetry in a highly evolved language which describes so low a downward curve as to reach this dry and brazen intellectualism, must either perish by a dull slow decay of its creative force and live fixibilities of expression,—that has happened more than once in literary history, —or else be saved by a violent revulsion. But this saving revulsion, if it comes, is likely, if bold enough, to compensate for the past prone descent by an equally steep ascension to an undreamed-of novelty of illumined motive and revealing spirit. This is the economy of Nature's lapses in the things of the mind no less than in the movements of life: these falls are,—when the needed energy is within,—an obscure condition of unprecedented elevations. In the recoil, in the rush or upwinging to the opposite extreme, some discovery is made which would otherwise have been long postponed or not at all have arrived, doors are burst open which would have been passed by unseen or resisted any less vehement or rapidly illumined effort to unlock them. On the other hand it is a constant disadvantage of these revolutions—which are in fact forced rapidities of evolution—that they carry in them a premature light and an element of quick unripeness by which a subsequent reaction and return to lower levels becomes inevitable, because the contemporary mind is not really ready and what is accomplished is itself rather an intuitive anticipation than a firmly based knowledge and execution of the thing seen. All these familiar phenomena are visible in the new turn, a swift and far-reaching upward curve, which carries English poetry from the hard and glittering, well-turned and well-rhymed intellectual superficialities of a thin pseudo-classicism to its second luminous outbreak of sight and inspiration.

Intellect, reason, a clarity of the understanding and arranging intelligence is not the highest power of our being. If it were our summit, many things which have now a great or a supreme importance for human culture, religion, art, poetry, would either be a lure or grace-

ful play of the imagination and emotions, or though admissible and useful for certain human ends, would still be deprived of the truth of their own highest indications. Poetry, even when it is dominated by intellectual tendency and motive, cannot really live and work by intellect alone, it is not created nor wholly shaped by reason and judgment, but is an intuitive seeing and an inspired hearing. But intuition and inspiration are not only spiritual in their essence, they are the characteristic means of all spiritual vision and utterance; they are rays from a greater and intenser Light than the tempered clarity of our intellectual understanding. They may be turned fruitfully to a use which is not their last or most intrinsic purpose,—used, in poetry, to give a deeper and more luminous force and a heightened beauty to the perceptions of outward life or to the inner still surface movements of emotion and passion or the power of thought to perceive certain individual and universal truths which enlighten or which raise to a greater meaning the sensible appearance of the inner and outer life of Nature and man. But every power in the end finds itself drawn towards its own proper home and own highest capacity, and the spiritual faculties of hearing and seeing must climb at least to the expression of things spiritual and eternal and their power and working in temporal things and must find in that interpretation their own richest account, largest and most satisfied action, purest acme of native capacity. An ideal and spiritual poetry revealing the spirit in itself and in things, the unseen in the seen or above and behind it, unveiling ranges of existence which the physical mind ignores, pointing man himself to capacities of godhead in being, truth, beauty, power, joy which are beyond the highest of his common or his yet realised values of existence, is the last potentiality of this creative interpretative power of the human mind. When the eye of the poet has seen life externally or with a more vital inwardness, has risen to the clarities and witnessses of a thought which intimately perceives and understands it, when his word has caught some revealing speech and rhythm of what he has seen, much has been seized, but not the whole possible field of vision, this other and greater realm still remains open for a last transcendence.

In this fourth turn of the evolution of English poetry we get, for the first time in occidental literature, some falling of this higher light upon the poetic mind,—except in so far as the ancient poets had received it through myth and symbol or a religious mystic here and there attempted to give his experience rhythmic and imaginative form. But here there is the first poetic attempt of the intellectual faculty striving at the height of its own development to look beyond

THE FUTURE POETRY

its own level directly into the unseen and the unknown and to unveil the ideal truth of its own highest universal conceptions. This was not an inevitable outcome of the age that preceded Wordsworth, Blake and Shelley. For the intellectual endeavour had been in Milton inadequate in range, subtlety and depth, in those who followed paltry, narrow and elegantly null; a new larger endeavour in the same field might have been expected which would have set before it the aim of a richer, deeper, wider, more curious intellectual humanism, poetic, artistic, many-sided, sounding by the poetic reason the ascertainable truth of God and man and Nature. To that eventually, following the main stream of European thought and culture, English poetry turned for a time in the intellectual fullness of the nineteenth century: that too was more indistinctly the half-conscious drift of the slow transitional movement which intervenes between Pope and Wordsworth. But this movement was obscure, faltering and poor in its achievement, when the greater force came in, the influences that were abroad were those which elsewhere found expression in the revolutionary idealism of the French Revolution and in German transcendentalism and romanticism. Intellectual in their idea and substance, they were in the mind of five or six English poets, each of them a remarkable individuality, carried beyond themselves by the sudden emergence of some half-mystical Celtic turn of the national mind into supra-intellectual sources of inspiration. Insufficiently supported by any adequate spiritual knowledge, unable to find securely the right and native word of their own meaning, these greater tendencies faded away or were lost by the premature end of the poets who might, had they lived, have given them a supreme utterance. But still theirs was the dawn of whose light we shall find the noon in the age now opening before us if it fulfils all its intimations. Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth were first explorers of a new world of poetry other than that of the ancients or of the intermediate poets, which may be the familiar realm of the aesthetic faculty in the future, must be in fact if we are not continually to describe the circle of efflorescence, culmination and decay within the old hardly changing circle.

Certain motives which led up to this new poetry are already visible in the work of the middle eighteenth century. There is, first, a visible attempt to break quite away from the prison of the formal metrical mould, rhetorical style, limited subject-matter, absence of imagination and vision imposed by the high pontiffs of the pseudo-classical cult. Poets like Gray, Collins, Thomson, Chatterton, Cowper seek liberation by a return to Miltonic blank verse and manner, to the Spenserian form,—an influence which prolonged itself in Byron,

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Keats and Shelley,—to lyrical movements, but more prominently the classical ode form, or to freer and richer moulds of verse. Some pale effort is made to recover something of the Shakespearian wealth of language or of the softer, more pregnant colour of the pre-Restoration diction and to modify it to suit the intellectualised treatment of thought and life which was now an indispensable element; for the old rich vital utterance was no longer possible, an intellectualised speech had become a fixed and a well-acquired need of a more developed mentality. Romanticism of the modern type now makes its first appearance in the choice of the subjects of poetic interest and here and there in the treatment, though not yet quite in the grain and the spirit. Especially, there is the beginning of a direct gaze of the poetic intelligence and imagination upon life and Nature and of another and a new power in English speech, the poetry of sentiment as distinguished from the inspired voice of sheer feeling or passion. But all these newer motives are only incipient and unable to get free expression because there is still a heavy weight of the past intellectual tradition. Rhetoric yet loads the style or, when it is avoided, still the purer tensivity of poetic emotion is not altogether found. Verse form tends to be still rather hard and external or else ineffective in its movement; the native lyric note has not yet returned, but only the rhetorical stateliness of the ode, not lyricised as in Keats and Shelley, or else lyrical forms managed with only an outward technique but without any cry in them. Romanticism is still rather of the intellect than in the temperament, sentiment runs thinly and feebly and is weighed with heavy intellectual turns. Nature and life and things are seen accurately as objects and forms, but not with any vision, emotion or peneration into the spirit behind them. Many of the currents which go to make up the great stream of modern poetry are beginning to run in thin tricklings, but still in a hard and narrow bed. There is no sign of the sudden uplifting that after a few decades was to come as if upon the sudden wings of a splendid moment

In Burns these new-born imprisoned spirits break out from their bounds and get into a free air of natural direct and living reality, find a straightforward speech and a varied running or bounding movement of freedom. This is the importance of this solitary voice from the north in the evolution, apart from the intrinsic merits of his poetry. His work has its limitations; the language is often too intellectualised to give the lyrical emotion, though it comes from the frank, unartificial and sturdy intellect of a son of the soil; the view on life is close, almost too close to give the deeper poetic or artistic effect,

but it deals much with outsides and surfaces and the commonnesses and realisms of action, sometimes only does it suggest to us the subtler something which gives lyrical poetry not only its form and lift and its power to stir,—all these he has,—but its moving inmost appeal. Nevertheless, Burns has in him the things which are most native to the poetry of our modern times; he brings in the new naturalness, the nearness of the fuller poetic mind, intellectualised, informed with the power of clear reflective thought, to life and nature, the closely observing eye, the stirring force of great general ideas, the spirit of revolt and self-assertion, the power of personality and the free play of individuality, the poignant sentiment, sometimes even a touch of the psychological subtlety. These things are in him fresh, strong, initial as in a forerunner impelled by the first breath of the coming air, but not in that finished possession of the new motives which is to be the greatness of the future master-singers. That we begin to get first in Wordsworth. His was the privilege of the earliest initiation.

This new poetry has six great voices who fall naturally in spite of their pronounced differences into pairs, Wordsworth and Byron, Blake and Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. Byron sets out with a strangely transformed echo of the past intellectualism, is carried beyond it by the elemental force of his personality, has even one foot across the borders of the spiritual, but never quite enters into that kingdom. Wordsworth breaks away with deliberate purpose from the past, forces his way into this new realm, but finally sinks under the weight of the narrower intellectual tendencies which he carries with him into its amplitudes. Blake and Coleridge open magical gates, pass by flowering side-lanes with hedges laden with supernatural blooms into a middle world whence their voices come to us ringing with an unearthly melody. In Shelley the idealism and spiritual impulse rise to almost giddy heights in a luminous ether and are lost there, unintelligible to contemporary humanity, only now beginning to return to us with their message. Keats, the youngest and in many directions the most gifted of these initiators, enters the secret temple of ideal Beauty, but has not time to find his way into the deepest mystic sanctuary. In him the spiritual seeking stops abruptly short and prepares to fall away down a rich sensuous incline to a subsequent poetry which turns from it to seek poetic Truth of pleasure through the senses and an artistic or curiously observing or finely psychologizing intellectualism. This dawn has no noon, hardly even a morning.

To be continued.

ON TRANSLATING POETRY*

Sri Aurobindo

The choice of metre is the first and most pregnant question that meets a translator. With the growth of Alexandrianism and the diffusion of undigested learning, more and more frequent attempts are being made to reproduce in poetical versions the formal metre of the original. Such attempts rest on a fundamental misconception of the bases of poetry. In poetry as in all other phenomena it is spirit that is at work and form is merely the outward expression and instrument of the spirit. So far is this true that form itself only exists as a manifestation of spirit and has no independent being. But just as the body of a man has in each of its cells a separate portion of spirit, so it is with the mechanical form of a verse.† The importance of metre arises from the fact that different arrangements of syllabic sound have different spiritual and emotional values. When we speak of the Homeric hexameter, we are speaking of a certain spiritual force called Homer working through emotion into the material shape of a fixed mould of rhythmical sound which obeys both in its limiting sameness and in its variations the law of the spirit within. Every poet who has sounded his own consciousness must be aware that management of metre is the gate of his inspiration and the law of his success. There is a double process, his state of mind and spirit suggests its

*From old writings (Editor)

†The mere quantities are but the most mechanical and outward part of metre. A fanciful mind might draw a parallel between the elements of man and the elements of metre. Just as in man there is the outward food-plasm and within it the vital or sensational man conditioned by and conditioning the food-plasm and within that the intellectual man governing the others and again within that the delight of the spirit in its reasoning existence and within that delight like the moon within its halo the Spirit who is Lord of all these, the siter in the chariot and the master of its driving, so in metre there is the quantitative or accentual arrangement which is its body, and within that body conditioning and conditioned by it the arrangement of pauses and sounds, such as assonance, alliteration, composition of related and varying letters, and again within it conditioning and conditioned by the sensational element and through it the mechanical element is the pure emotional movement of the verse and again within these, understanding and guiding all these, bringing the element of restraint, management, subordination to a superior law of harmony is the intellectual element, the driver of the chariot of sound, within this again is the poetic delight in the creation of harmonious sound, the august and disinterested pleasure of the really great poet which has nothing in it of frenzy or rather has the exultation and increased strength of frenzy without the loss of self-control; and within this even is the spirit, that unanalysable thing behind metre, style, diction which makes us feel "This is Homer, this is Shakespeare, this is Dante".

own syllabic measure, and the metre again confirming, prolonging and recreating the original state of mind and spirit. Inspiration itself seems hardly so much a matter of ideas or feeling as of rhythm. Even when the ideas or the feelings are active, they will not usually run into the right form, the words will not take their right places, the syllables will not fall into a natural harmony. But if one has or succeeds in awaking the right metrical mood, if the metrical form instead of being deliberately created creates itself or becomes, a magical felicity of thought, diction and harmony attends it and seems even to be created by it. Ideas and words come rapidly and almost as rapidly take their right places as in a well-ordered assembly where every one knows his seat. When the metre comes right, everything else comes right. When the metre has to be created with effort, everything else has to be done with effort, and the result has to be worked on over again before it satisfies.

This supreme importance of the metrical form might seem at first sight to justify the transplanting of metre. For if it be the aim of good translation to reproduce not merely the mechanical meaning of words, the corresponding verbal counters used in the rough and ready business of interlingual commerce, but to create the same spiritual, emotional and aesthetic effect as the original, the first condition is absolutely to identify our spiritual condition, as far as may be, with that of the poet at the time when he wrote and then to embody that condition in verse; this cannot be done without finding a metre which shall have the same spiritual and emotional value as the metre of the original. Even when one has been found, there will of course be no success unless the mind of the translator has sufficient kinship, sufficient points of spiritual and emotional contact and a sufficient basis of common poetical powers not only to enter into but to render the spiritual temperament and the mood of that temperament of which his text was the expression; hence a good poetical translation is the rarest thing in the world. Conversely even if all these requisites exist, they will not succeed to the full without the discovery of the right metre. Is the right metre then the metre of the original? Must an adequate version of Homer, a real *translation* be couched in Hexameter? At first sight it would seem so. But the issue is here complicated by the hard fact that the same arrangement of quantities or of accents has very seldom the same spiritual and emotional value in two different languages. The hexameter, however skilfully managed in English, has not the same value as the Homeric, the English Alexandrine does not render the French; the terza rima in Latinized Saxon sounds entirely different from the noble movement of the *Divina*

Commedia; the stiff German blank verse of Goethe and Schiller is not the golden Shakespearean harmony. It is not only that there are mechanical differences, a strongly accentuated language hopelessly varying from those which distribute accent evenly, or a language of ultimate accent like French from one of penultimate accent like Italian or initial accent like English, or one which courts elision from one which shuns it, nor that a million grammatical and syllabic details besides lead to fundamental differences of sound-notation, beyond and beneath these outward differences is the essential soul of the language from which they arise and which in its turn depends mainly upon the ethnological type always different in different countries because the mixture of different root races in two types even when they seem nearly related is never the same. The Swedish type, for instance, which is largely the same as the Norwegian is yet largely different, while the Danish generally classed in the same Scandinavian group differs radically from both. This is that curse of Babel, after all quite as much a blessing as a curse, which weighs upon no one so heavily as on the conscientious translator of poetry; for the prose translator being more concerned to render the precise idea than emotional effects and the subtle spiritual aura of poetry treads an immeasurably smoother and more straight-forward path. For some metres at least it seems impossible to find adequate equivalents in other languages. Why has there never been a real rendering of Homer in English? It is not the whole truth to say that no modern can put himself back imaginatively into the half savage Homeric period; a mind with sufficient basis of primitive sympathies and sufficient power of imaginative self-control to subdue for a time the modern in him may conceivably be found. But the main, the insuperable obstacle is that no one has ever found or been able to create an English metre with the same spiritual and emotional equivalent as Homer's marvellous hexameters.

That a transmetrisation is a false method is therefore clear. The translator's only resource is to steep himself in the original, quelling that in him which conflicts with its spirit, and remain on the watch for the proper metrical mood in himself. Sometimes the right metre will come to him, sometimes it will not. In the latter case effort in this direction will not have been entirely wasted, for spirit, when one gives it a chance, is always stronger than matter and he will be able to impose something of the desired spiritual atmosphere even upon an unsuitable metrical form. But if he seizes on the right metre, he has every chance, supposing him poetically empowered, of creating a translation which shall not only be classical, but shall be *the trans-*

lation. Wilful choice of metre is always fatal. William Morris' Homeric translation failed hopelessly partly because of his affected "Anglo-Saxon" diction, but still more because he chose to apply a metre good enough possibly for the Volsunga Saga to the rendering of a far more mighty and complex spirit. On the other hand Fitzgerald might have produced a very beautiful version in English had he chosen for his *Rubaiyat* some ordinary English metre, but his unique success was his reward for discovering the true equivalent of the quatrain in English; his *Rubaiyat* in spite of the serious defect of unfaithfulness will remain the final version of Omar in English, not to be superseded by more faithful renderings, excluding therefore the contingency of a superior poetical genius employing the same metre for a closer translation.*

In Kalidasa another very serious difficulty over and beyond the usual pitfalls meets the unhappy translator. Few great Sanscrit poems employ the same metre throughout. In the dramas where metrical form is only used when the thought, image or emotion rises above the ordinary level, the poet employs whatever metre he thinks suitable to the mood he is in. In English, however, such a method would result in opera rather than in drama. I have therefore thought it best, taking into consideration the poetical feeling and harmonious flow of Kalidasa's prose, to use blank verse throughout varying its pitch according as the original form is metrical or prose and the emotion or imagery more or less exalted. In epic work the license of metrical variation is not quite so great, yet there are several metres considered apt to epic narrative and Kalidasa varies them without scruple in different cantos, sometimes even in the same canto. If blank verse be, as I believe it is, a fair equivalent for the *anustubh*, the ordinary epic metre, how shall one find others which shall correspond as well to the "thunderbolt" (*Indravajra*), of the "lesser Indra's thunderbolt sloka" (*upendravajra*), "the gambolling of the tiger-sloka" (*sardula vikridita*) and all those other wonderful and grandiose rhythmic structures with fascinating names of which Kalidasa is so mighty a master? Nor would such variation be tolerated by English canons of taste. In the epic and drama the translator is driven to a compromise and therefore to that extent a failure; he may infuse good poems or plays reproducing the architecture and idea-sense of Kalidasa with something of his spirit; but it is a version and not a translation. It is only when he comes to the *Cloud Messenger* that he is free of this

*One need only imagine the difference if Fitzgerald had chosen the ordinary English quatrain instead of the rhyme system of the original.

difficulty; for the *Cloud Messenger* is written throughout in a single and consistent stanza. This *Mandakranta* or "gently stepping" stanza is entirely quantitative and too complicated to be rendered into any corresponding accentual form. In casting about for a metre I was only certain of one thing that neither blank verse nor the royal quatrain stanza would serve my purpose, the one has not the necessary basis of recurring harmonies, in the other the recurrence is too rigid, sharply defined and unvarying to represent the eternal swell and surge of Kalidasa's stanza. Fortunately by an inspiration, and without deliberate choice, Kalidasa's lines, as I began turning them, flowed or slipped into the form of triple rhyme and that necessarily suggested the terza rima. This metre, as I have treated it, seems to me to reproduce, with as much accuracy as the difference between the languages allows, the spiritual and emotional atmosphere of the *Cloud Messenger*. The terza rima in English lends itself naturally to the principle of variation in recurrence, which imparts so singular a charm to this poem, recurrence in especial of certain words, images, assonances, harmonies, but recurrence always with a difference so as to keep one note sounding through the whole performance underneath its various harmony. In terza rima the triple rhyme immensely helps this effect, for it allows of the same common rhymes recurring but usually with a difference in one or more of their company.*

*The last paragraph has been included in the Introduction to the new edition of Sri Aurobindo's translation of "Vikramorvasie".

KALIDASA*

THE HISTORICAL METHOD

Sri Aurobindo

Of Kalidasa, the man who represents one of the greatest periods in our civilisation and typifies so many sides and facets of it in his writing, we know if possible even less than of Valmiki and Vyasa. It is probable but not certain that he was a native of Malwa born not in the capital Ujjaini, but in one of those villages of which he speaks in the *Cloud-Messenger* and that he afterwards resorted to the capital and wrote under the patronage of the great Vikramaditya who founded the era of the Malavas in the middle of the first century before Christ. Of his attainments, his creed, his character we may gather something from his poetry, but external facts we have none. There is indeed a mass of apocryphal anecdotes about him couching a number of witticisms and ingenuities mostly ribald, but these may be safely discredited. Valmiki, Vyasa and Kalidasa, our three greatest names are to us, outside their poetical creation, names merely and nothing more.

This is an exceedingly fortunate circumstance. The natural man within us rebels indeed against such a void, who Kalidasa was, what was his personal as distinguished from his poetical individuality, what manner of man was the great king whose patronage he enjoyed, who were his friends, who his rivals and how he dealt with either or both, whether or not he was a lover of wine and women in practice as well as in imagination, under what special surroundings he wrote and who were the minds by whom he was most influenced, all this the natural man clamours to know, and yet all these are things we are very fortunate not to know. The historical method is certainly an attractive one and it leads to some distinct advantages, for it decidedly aids those who are not gifted with fine insight and literary discrimination, to understand certain sides of a poet's work more clearly and intelligently. But while it increases our knowledge of the workings of the human mind, it does not in the end assist or improve our critical appreciation of poetry, it helps to an understanding of the man and of those aspects of his poetry which concern his personal individuality but it obstructs our clear and accurate impression of the work and

*From old writings.

its value. The supporters of the historical method put the cart before the horse and placing themselves between the shafts do a great deal of useless though heroic labour in dragging both. They insist on directing that attention to the poet which should be directed to the poem. After assimilating a man's literary work and realising its value first to ourselves and then in relation to the eternal nature and scope of poetry, we may and indeed must,—for if not consciously aimed at, it must have been insensibly formed in the mind,—attempt to realize to ourselves an idea of his poetic individuality from the data he himself has provided for us, and the idea so formed will be the individuality of the man so far as we can assimilate him, the only part of him therefore that is of real value to us. The individuality of Shakspeare as expressed in his recorded actions and his relations to his contemporaries is a matter of history and has nothing to do with appreciation of his poetry. It may interest me as a study of human character and intellect but I have no concern with it when I am reading *Hamlet* or even when I am reading the *Sonnets*; on the contrary, it may often come between me and the genuine revelation of the poet in his work, for actions seldom reveal more than the outer, bodily and sensational man while his word takes us within to the mind and the reason, the receiving and the selecting part of him which are his truer self. It may matter to the pedant or the gossip within me whether the sonnets were written to William Herbert or to Henry Wriothesley or to William Himself, whether the dark woman whom Shakespeare loved against his better judgment was Mary Fitton or someone else or nobody at all, whether the language is that of hyperbolic compliment to a patron or that of an actual passionate affection; but to the lover of poetry in me these things do not matter at all. It may be a historical fact that Shakespeare when he sat down to write these poems intended to use the affected language of conventional and fulsome flattery; if so, it does not exalt our idea of his character; but after all it was only the bodily and sensational case of that huge spirit which so intended,—the food-sheath and the life-sheath of him, to use Hindu phraseology; but the mind, the soul which was the real Shakespeare felt, as he wrote, every phase of the passion he was expressing to the very utmost, felt precisely those exultations, chills of jealousy and disappointment, noble affections, dark and unholy fires, and because he felt them, he was able so to express them that the world still listens and is moved. The passion was there in the soul of the man,—whether as a potential force or an experience from a past life, matters very little,—and it forms therefore part of his poetic individuality. But if we allow the alleged historical fact to interfere between us and this individuality, the feelings with which we ought to read

the *Sonnets*, admiration, delight, sympathy, rapt interest in a soul struggling through passion towards self-realisation, will be disturbed by other feelings of disgust and nausea or at the best pity for a man who with such a soul within him prostituted its powers to the interests of his mere bodily covering. Both our realisation of the true Shakespeare and our enjoyment of his poetry will thus be cruelly and uselessly marred. This is the essential defect which vitiates the theory of the man and his *milieu*. The man in Dr. Johnson expressed himself in his conversation and therefore his own works are far less important to us than Boswell's record of his daily talk; the man in Byron expresses himself in his letters as well as his poetry and both have therefore to be read. It is only the most sensational and therefore the lowest natures that express themselves mainly by their actions. In the case of great poets with whom expression is an instrument that answers spontaneously and accurately to the touch of the soul, it is in their work that we shall find them, the whole of them and not only that meagre part which struggled out brokenly and imperfectly in the shape of action. It is really this difference that makes the great figures of epic poetry so much less intimately and thoroughly known to us than the great figures of drama. Kalidasa was both an epic poet and a dramatist, yet Shiva and Parvati are merely grand paintings while Dushyanata, Shakuntala, Sharngava, Priyamvada, Anasuya, Pururavas and Urvashi and Chitrlekha, Dharini and Iravati and Agnimitra are living beings who are our friends, whom we know. The difference arises from the importance of speech in self-revelation and the comparative inadequacy of action, except as a check or a corroboration. The only epics which have creations equal to dramatic creation in their nearness to us are the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*; and the art form of these far more closely resemble the methods of the modern novel than those of epic poetry as it is understood in Europe; they combine, that is to say, the dramatic method with the epic and introduce a minuteness of observant detail with which European poets would have shrunk from tempting the patience of the sensational and soon-wearied West. The importance of the *milieu* to criticism has likewise been immensely exaggerated. It is important as literary history; but history is not criticism; a man may have a very wide and curious knowledge of literary history and yet be a very poor critic and the danger of the present times lies in the immense multiplication of literary historians with their ass's load of facts and theories and opinions and tendencies and the comparative rarity of really illuminating critics. This is at least the case with all poets who represent their age in some or most of its phases and with those who do not do this the *milieu* is of very small importance. The *milieu* of

Shakespeare or of Homer or of Kalidasa, so far as it is important to an appreciation of their poetry, can be gathered from their poetry itself, and knowledge of the history of the times would only litter the mind with facts which are of no real value as they mislead and embarrass the judgment instead of assisting it. (I do not say that these things are not in a measure necessary but they are always the scaffolding and not the pile.) The tendency of the historical method beginning with and insisting on the poet rather than the poem is to infer from him as a "man" the meaning and value of his poetry—a vicious process, for it concentrates the energies on the subordinate and adds the essential as an appendix. It has been said that in a rightly constituted mind the knowledge of the man and his *milieu* will help to a just appreciation of his poetry, but this knowledge in its nature rather distorts our judgment than helps it, for instead of giving an honest account to ourselves of the impression naturally made by the poem on us, we are irresistibly led to cut and carve that impression so as to make it square with our knowledge and the theories, more or less erroneous and ephemeral, we deduce from that knowledge. We proceed from the *milieu* to the poem, instead of arguing from the poem to the *milieu*. Yet the latter is the only fair method, for it is not the whole of the *milieu* that affects the man nor every part of it that affects him equally; the extent to which it affects him and the distribution of its various influences can only be judged from the poem itself. We know from literary history that Marlowe and Kyd and other writers exercised no little influence on Shakespeare in his young and callow days, and it may be said in passing that all poets of the first order and even many of the second are profoundly influenced by the inferior and sometimes almost worthless work which was in vogue at the time of their early efforts, but they have the high secret of mental alchemy which can convert not merely inferior metal but even refuse into gold. It is only poets of a one-sided minor genius who can afford to be aggressively original. Now as literary history, as psychology, as part of the knowledge of intellectual origins, this is a highly important and noteworthy fact. But in the task of criticism what do we gain by it? We have simply brought the phantoms of Marlowe and Kyd between ourselves and what we are assimilating, and so disturbed and blurred the true picture of it that was falling on our souls, and if we know our business, the first thing we shall do is to banish those intruding shadows and bring ourselves once more face to face with Shakespeare.

The historical method leads besides to much confusion and is sometimes a veil for a bastard impressionism and sometimes a source

of literary insincerity or at the best anaemic catholicity. As often as not a critic studies, say, the Elizabethan age because he has a previous sympathy with the scattered grandeurs, the hasty and vehement inequalities, the profuse mixture of flawed stones, noble gems and imitation jewellery with which that school overwhelms us. In that case the profession with which he starts is insincere, for he professes to base his appreciation on study, whereas his study begins from, continues with and ends in appreciation. Often on the contrary he studies as a duty and praises in order to elevate his study, because he has perused all and understood all, he must sympathise with all, or where is the proof of his having understood? Perfect intelligence of a man's character and work implies a certain measure of sympathy and liking, antipathy has only half sight and indifference is blind. Hence much false criticism misleading the public intelligence and causing a confusion in critical weights and measures, a depreciation of the literary currency from which in the case of the frank impressionist we are safe. In more truth the historical method is useful only with inferior writers who, not having had full powers of expression, are more interesting than their work, but even here it has led to that excessive and often absurd laudation of numberless small names in literature, many of them "discoveries", which is the curse of latter-day criticism. The historical method is in fact the cloven foot of Science attempting to insinuate itself into the fair garden of Poetry. By this I mean no disrespect to Science. The devil is a gentleman and Shakespeare himself guaranteed his respectability; but he is more than that, he is a highly useful and even indispensable personage. So also is Science not only a respectable branch of intellectual activity,—when it does not indulge its highly civilized propensity for cutting up live animals,—but it is also a useful and indispensable branch. But the devil had no business in Paradise and Science has no business in the sphere of Poetry. The work of Science is to collect facts and generalize from them; the smallest and meanest thing is as important to it as the highest, the weed no less than the flower and the bug that crawls and stinks no less than man who is a little lower than the angels. By introducing this method into criticism, we are overloading ourselves with facts and stifling the literary field with the host of all the mediocrities more or less "historically" important but at any rate deadly dull and uninspiring who at one time or another had the misfortune to take themselves for literary geniuses. And just as scientific history tried to lose the individual genius into movements, so the historical method tries to lose the individual poem in tendencies. The result is that modern poets, instead of holding up before them as their ideal the expression of the great universal feelings and thoughts which

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sway humanity, tend more and more to express tendencies, problems, realisms, romanticisms, mysticisms and all the other local and ephemeral aberrations with which poetry has no business whatever. It is the sign of a decadent and morbid age which is pushing itself by the mass of its own undigested learning into Alexandrianism and scholasticism, cutting itself from the fountainheads of creation and wilfully preparing its own decline and sterility. The age of which Callimachus and Apollonius of Rhodes and Simonides were the Homer and the age of which Tennyson is the Shakespeare and Rudyard Kipling the Milton present ominous resemblance.

THE SYNTHESIS OF YOGA

THE ELEMENTS OF PERFECTION

Sri Aurobindo

When the self is purified of the wrong and confused action of the instrumental Nature and liberated into its self-existent being, consciousness, power and bliss and the Nature itself liberated from the tangle of this lower action of the struggling gunas and the dualities into the high truth of the divine calm and the divine action, then spiritual perfection becomes possible. Purification and freedom are the indispensable antecedents of perfection. A spiritual self-perfection can only mean a growing into oneness with the nature of divine being and therefore according to our conception of divine being will be the aim, effort and method of our seeking after this perfection. To the Mayavadin the highest or rather the only real truth of being is the impassive, impersonal, self-aware Absolute and therefore to grow into an impassive calm, impersonality and pure self-awareness of spirit is his idea of perfection and a rejection of cosmic and individual being and a settling into silent self-knowledge is his way. To the Buddhist for whom the highest truth is a negation of being, a recognition of the impermanence and sorrow of being and the disastrous nullity of desire and a dissolution of egoism, of the upholding associations of the Idea and the successions of Karma are the perfect way. Other ideas of the Highest are less negative; each according to its own idea leads towards some likeness to the Divine, *sadrisya*, and each finds its own way, such as the love and worship of the Bhakta and the growing into the likeness of the Divine by love. But for the integral Yoga perfection will mean a divine spirit and a divine nature which will admit of a divine relation and action in the world; it will mean also in its entirety a divinising of the whole nature, a rejection of all its wrong knots of being and action, but no rejection of any part of our being or of any field of our action. The approach to perfection must be therefore a large and complex movement and its results and working will have an infinite and varied scope. We must fix in order to find a clue and method on certain essential and fundamental elements and requisites of perfection, *siddhi*: for if these are secured, all the rest will be found to be only their natural development or particular working. We may cast these elements into six divisions, interdependent on each other to a great

extent but still in a certain way naturally successive in their order of attainment. The movement will start from a basic equality of the soul and mount to an ideal action of the Divine through our perfected being in the largeness of the Brahmic unity.

The first necessity is some fundamental poise of the soul both in its essential and its natural being regarding and meeting the things, impacts and workings of Nature. This poise we shall arrive at by growing into a perfect equality, *samata*. The self, spirit or Brahman is one in all and therefore one to all; it is, as is said in the Gita which has developed fully this idea of equality and indicated its experience on at least one side of equality, the equal Brahman, *samam Brahma*; the Gita even goes so far in one passage as to identify equality and yoga, *samatwam-yoga uchyate*. That is to say, equality is the sign of unity with the Brahman, of becoming Brahman, of growing into an undisturbed spiritual poise of being in the Infinite. Its importance can hardly be exaggerated; for it is the sign of our having passed beyond the egoistic determinations of our nature, of our having conquered our enslaved response to the dualities, of our having entered into the calm and peace of liberation. Equality is a term of consciousness which brings into the whole of our being and nature the eternal tranquillity of the Infinite. Moreover, it is the condition of a securely and perfectly divine action; the security and largeness of the cosmic action of the Infinite is based upon and never breaks down or forfeits its eternal tranquillity. That too must be the character of the perfect spiritual action; to be equal and one to all things in spirit, understanding, mind, heart and natural consciousness,—even in the most physical consciousness,—and to make all their workings, whatever their outward adaptation to the thing to be done, always and imminuably full of the divine equality and calm must be its inmost principle. That may be said to be the passive or basic, the fundamental and receptive side of equality, but there is also an active and possessive side, an equal bliss which can only come when the peace of equality is founded and which is the beatific flower of its fullness.

The next necessity of perfection is to raise all the active parts of the human nature to that highest condition and working pitch of their power and capacity, *shakti*, at which they become capable of being divinised into true instruments of the free, perfect, spiritual and divine action. For practical purposes we may take the understanding, the heart, the prana and the body as the four members of our nature which have thus to be prepared, and we have to find the

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constituent terms of their perfection. Also there is the dynamical force in us (*virya*) of the temperament, character and soul nature, *swabhava*, which makes the power of our members effective in action and gives them their type and direction, this has to be freed from its limitations, enlarged, rounded so that the whole manhood in us may become the basis of a divine manhood when the Purusha, the real man in us, the divine Soul, shall act fully in this human instrument and shine fully through this human vessel. To divinise the perfected nature we have to call in the divine Power or Shakti to replace our limited human energy so that this may be shaped into the image of and filled with the force of a greater infinite energy, *daivi prakriti*, *bhagawati shakti*. This perfection will grow in the measure in which we can surrender ourselves, first, to the guidance and then to the direct action of that Power and of the Master of our being and our works to whom it belongs, and for this purpose faith is the essential, faith is the great motor-power of our being in our aspirations to perfection,—here, a faith in God and the Shakti which shall begin in the heart and understanding, but shall take possession of all our nature, all its consciousness, all its dynamic motive-force. These four things are the essentials of this second element of perfection, the full powers of the members of the instrumental nature, the perfected dynamis of the soul nature, the assumption of them into the action of the divine Power, and a perfect faith in all our members to call and support that assumption, *shakti*, *virya*, *daivi prakriti*, *sraddha*.

But so long as this development takes place only on the highest level of our normal nature, we may have a reflected and limited image of perfection translated into the lower terms of the soul in mind, life and body, but not the possession of the divine perfection in the highest terms possible to us of the divine Idea and its Power. That is to be found beyond these lower principles in the supramental gnosis; therefore the next step of perfection will be the evolution of the mental into the gnostic being. This evolution is effected by a breaking beyond the mental limitation, a stride upward into the next higher plane or region of our being hidden from us at present by the shining lid of the mental reflections and a conversion of all that we are into the terms of this greater consciousness. In the gnosis itself, *vijnana*, there are several gradations which open at their highest into the full and infinite Ananda. The gnosis once effectively called into action will progressively take up all the terms of intelligence, will, sense-mind, heart, the vital and sensational being and translate them by a luminous and harmonising conversion into a unity of the truth, power and delight of a divine existence. It will lift into

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that light and force and convert into their own highest sense our whole intellectual, volitional, dynamic, ethical, aesthetic, sensational, vital and physical being. It has the power also of overcoming physical limitations and developing a more perfect and divinely instrumental body. Its light opens up the fields of the superconscient and darts its rays and pours its luminous flood into the subconscious and enlightens its obscure hints and withheld secrets. It admits us to a greater light of the Infinite than is reflected in the paler luminosity even of the highest mentality. While it perfects the individual soul and nature in the sense of a diviner existence and makes a full harmony of the diversities of our being, it founds all its action upon the Unity from which it proceeds and takes up everything into that Unity. Personality and impersonality, the two eternal aspects of existence, are made one by its action in the spiritual being and Nature body of the Purushottama.

The gnostic perfection, spiritual in its nature, is to be accomplished here in the body and takes life in the physical world as one of its fields, even though the gnosis opens to us possession of planes and worlds beyond the material universe. The physical body is therefore a basis of action, *pratistha*, which cannot be despised, neglected or excluded from the spiritual evolution: a perfection of the body as the outer instrument of a complete divine living on earth will be necessarily a part of the gnostic conversion. The change will be effected by bringing in the law of the gnostic Purusha, *vijnanamya purusha*, and of that into which it opens, the Anandamaya, into the physical consciousness and its members. Pushed to its highest conclusion this movement brings in a spiritualising and illumination of the whole physical consciousness and a divinising of the law of the body. For behind the gross physical sheath of this materially visible and sensible frame there is subliminally supporting it and discoverable by a finer subtle consciousness a subtle body of the mental being and a spiritual or causal body of the gnostic and bliss soul in which all the perfection of a spiritual embodiment is to be found, a yet unmanifested divine law of the body. Most of the physical siddhis acquired by certain Yogins are brought about by some opening up of the law of the subtle or a calling down of something of the law of the spiritual body. The ordinary method is the opening up of the *chakras* by the physical processes of Hathayoga (of which something is also included in the Rajayoga) or by the methods of the Tantric discipline. But while these may be optionally used at certain stages by the integral Yoga, they are not indispensable; for here the reliance is on the power of the higher being to change the

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lower existence, a working is chosen mainly from above downward and not the opposite way, and therefore the development of the superior power of the gnosis will be awaited as the instrumentative change in this part of the Yoga.

There will remain, because it will then only be entirely possible, the perfect action and enjoyment of being on the gnostic basis. The Purusha enters into cosmic manifestation for the variations of his infinite existence, for knowledge, action and enjoyment; the gnosis brings the fullness of spiritual knowledge and it will found on that the divine action and cast the enjoyment of world and being into the law of the truth, the freedom and the perfection of the spirit. But neither action nor enjoyment will be the lower action of the gunas and consequent egoistic enjoyment mostly of the satisfaction of rajasic desire which is our present way of living. Whatever desire will remain, if that name be given, will be the divine desire, the will to delight of the Purusha enjoying in his freedom and perfection the action of the perfected Prakriti and all her members. The Prakriti will take up the whole nature into the law of her higher divine truth and act in that law offering up the universal enjoyment of her action and being to the Anandamaya Ishwara, the Lord of existence and works and Spirit of bliss, who presides over and governs her workings. The individual soul will be the channel of this action and offering, and it will enjoy at once its oneness with the Ishwara and its oneness with the Prakriti and will enjoy all relations with Infinite and finite, with God and the universe and beings in the universe in the highest terms of the union of the universal Purusha and Prakriti.

All the gnostic evolution opens up into the divine principle of Ananda, which is the foundation of the fullness of spiritual being, consciousness and bliss of Sachchidananda or eternal Brahman. Possessed at first by reflection in the mental experience, it will be possessed afterwards with a greater fullness and directness in the massed and luminous consciousness, *chidghana*, which comes by the gnosis. The Siddha or perfected soul will live in union with the Purushottama in this Brahmic consciousness, he will be conscious in the Brahman that is the All, *anantam brahma*, in the Brahman infinite in being and infinite in quality, *anantam brahma*, in Brahman as self-existent consciousness and universal knowledge, *jnanam brahma*, in Brahman as the self-existent bliss and its universal delight of being, *anandam brahma*. He will experience all the universe as the manifestation of the One, all quality and action as the play of his universal and infi-

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nite energy, all knowledge and conscious experience as the outflowing of that consciousness, and all in the terms of that one Ananda. His physical being will be one with all material Nature, his vital being with the life of the universe, his mind with the cosmic mind, his spiritual knowledge and will with the divine knowledge and will both in itself and as it pours itself through these channels, his spirit with the one spirit in all beings. All the variety of cosmic existence will be changed to him in that unity and revealed in the secret of its spiritual significance. For in this spiritual bliss and being he will be one with That which is the origin and continent and inhabitant and spirit and constituting power of all existence. This will be the highest reach of self-perfection.

(From "The Synthesis of "Yoga" · Chapter LVIII)

SRI AUROBINDO ON THE VEDAS

SELECTED HYMNS*

I

THE COLLOQUY OF INDRA AND AGASTYA

Rig Veda 1, 170

INDRA.

1. It is not now, nor is It tomorrow; who knoweth that which is Supreme and Wonderful? It has motion and action in the consciousness of another, but when it is approached by the thought, It vanishes.

AGASTYA.

2. Why dost thou seek to smite us, O Indra? The Maruts are thy brothers. By them accomplish perfection; slay us not in our struggle.

INDRA.

3. Why, O my brother Agastya, art thou my friend, yet settest thy thought beyond me? For well do I know how to us thou wilt not to give thy mind.

4. Let them make ready the altar, let them set Agni in blaze in front. It is there, the awakening of the consciousness to Immortality. Let us two extend for thee thy effective sacrifice.

AGASTYA.

5. O Lord of substance over all substances of being, thou art the master in force! O Lord of Love over the powers of love, thou art the strongest to hold in status! Do thou, O Indra, agree with the Maruts, then enjoy the offerings in the ordered method of the Truth.

COMMENTARY.

The governing idea of the hymn belongs to a stage of spiritual progress when the human soul wishes by the sheer force of Thought

*These translations are offered here only in their results for the interest of the general reader and as an illustration of the theory advanced. Their philological and critical justification would demand a space not available in this Review and would be interesting only to a limited circle.

to hasten forward beyond in order to reach prematurely the source of all things without full development of the being in all its progressive stages of conscious activity. The effort is opposed by the Gods who preside over the universe of man and of the world and a violent struggle takes place in the human consciousness between the individual soul in its egoistic eagerness and the universal Powers which seek to fulfil the divine purpose of the Cosmos.

The seer Agastya at such a moment confronts in his inner experience Indra, Lord of Swar, the realm of pure intelligence, through which the ascending soul passes into the divine Truth.

Indra speaks first of that unknowable Source of things towards which Agastya is too impatiently striving. That is not to be found in Time. It does not exist in the actualities of the present, nor in the eventualities of the future. It neither is now nor becomes here after. Its being is beyond Space and Time and therefore in Itself cannot be known by that which is in Space and Time. It manifests Itself by Its forms and activities in the consciousness of that which is not Itself and through those activities it is meant that It should be realised. But if one tries to approach It and study It in Itself, It disappears from the thought that would seize It and is as if It were not.

Agastya still does not understand why he is so violently opposed in a pursuit which is the eventual aim of all being and which all his thoughts and feelings demand. The Maruts are the powers of Thought which by the strong and apparently destructive motion of their progress break down that which is established and help to the attainment of new formations. Indra, the Power of pure Intelligence, is their brother, kin to them in his nature although elder in being. He should by their means effect the perfection towards which Agastya is striving and not turn enemy nor slay his friend in this terrible struggle towards the goal.

Indra replies that Agastya is his friend and brother,—brother in the soul as children of one Supreme Being, friend as comrades in a common effort and one in the divine love that unites God and man, —and by this friendship and alliance has attained to the present stage in his progressive perfection; but now he treats Indra as an inferior Power and wishes to go beyond without fulfilling himself in the domain of the God. He seeks to divert his increased thought-powers towards his own object instead of delivering them up to the universal Intelligence so that it may enrich its realisations in humanity through Agastya and lead him forward by the way of the Truth. Let the egoistic endeavour cease, the great sacrifice be resumed, the flame

of the divine Force, Agni, be kindled in front as head of the sacrifice and leader of the march. Indra and Agastya together, the universal Power and the human soul, will extend in harmony the effective inner action on the plane of the pure Intelligence so that it may enrich itself there and attain beyond. For it is precisely by the progressive surrender of the lower being to the divine activities that the limited and egoistic consciousness of the mortal awakens to the infinite and immortal state which is its goal.

Agastya accepts the will of the God and submits. He agrees to perceive and fulfil the Supreme in the activities of Indra. From his own realm Indra is supreme lord over the substances of being as manifested through the triple world of mind, life and body and has therefore power to dispose of its formations towards the fulfilment, in the movement of Nature, of the divine Truth that expresses itself in the universe,—supreme lord over love and delight manifested in the same triple world and has therefore power to fix those formations harmoniously in the status of Nature. Agastya gives up all that is realised in him into the hands of Indra, as offerings of the sacrifice, to be held by him in the fixed parts of Agastya's consciousness and directed in the motion towards fresh formations. Indra is once more to enter into friendly parley with the upward aspiring powers of Agastya's being and to establish agreement between the seer's thoughts and the illumination that comes to us through the pure Intelligence. That power will then enjoy in Agastya the offerings of the sacrifice according to the right order of things as formulated and governed by the Truth which is beyond.

II

INDRA, GIVER OF LIGHT

Rig Veda 1. 4.

1. The fashioner of perfect forms, like a good yielder for the milker of the Herds, we call for increase from day to day.
2. Come to our Soma-offerings. O Soma-drinker, drink of the Soma-wine; the intoxication of thy rapture gives indeed the Light.
3. Then may we know somewhat of thy uttermost right thinkings. Show not beyond us, come.
4. Come over, question Indra of the clear-seeing mind, the vigorous, the unoverthrown, who to thy comrades has brought the highest good.

5. And may the Restrainers* say to us, "Nay, forth and strive on even in other fields, reposing on Indra your activity".

6. And may the fighters, doers of the work,† declare us entirely blessed, O achiever; may we abide in Indra's peace.

7. Intense for the intense bring thou this glory of the sacrifice that intoxicates the Man, carrying forward on the way Indra who gives joy to his friend.

8. When thou hast drunk of this, O thou of the hundred activities, thou becamest a slayer of the Coverers and protectedst the rich mind in its riches.

9. Thee thus rich in thy riches we enrich again, O Indra, O thou of the hundred activities, for the safe enjoyment of our havings.

10. He who in his vastness is a continent of bliss,—the friend of the Soma-giver and he carries him safely through,—to that Indra raise the chant.

(SAYANA'S INTERPRETATION)

1. "The doer of (works that have) a good shape, Indra, we call daily for protection as (one calls) for the cow-milker a good milch-cow.

2. "Come to our (three) libations, drink of the Soma, O soma-drinker; the intoxication of thee, the wealthy one, is indeed cow-giving.

3. "Then (standing) among the intelligent people who are nearest to thee, may we know thee. Do not (go) beyond us (and) manifest (thyself to others, but) come to us.

4. "Come to him and question about me, the intelligent one, (whether I have praised him rightly or not),—to the intelligent and unhurt Indra who gives to thy friends (the priests) the best wealth.

5. "Let of us (i.e. our priests) speak (i.e. praise Indra),—and also O you who censure, go out (from here) and from elsewhere too, —(our priests) doing service all about Indra.

6. "O destroyer (of foes), may even our enemies speak of us as

*Or Censurers, Nidah. The root nid bears, I think, in the Veda the sense of bondage, confinement, limitation, which can be assigned to it with entire certainty by philological deduction. It is the base of nidita, bound, and nidana, tether. But the root also means to blame. After the peculiar method of the esoteric diction one or other sense predominates in different passages without entirely excluding the other.

†Arih Prishtayah may also be translated, "the Aryan people," or "the warlike nations." The words Krishti and Charshani, interpreted by Sayana as "man" have as their base the roots Krish and Charsh which originally imply labour, effort or laborious action. They mean sometimes the doer of Vedic Karma, sometimes, the Karma itself,—the worker or the works.

having good wealth,—men (i.e. our friends will say it of course); may we be in the peace (bestowed) by Indra.

7. "Bring this Soma, that wealth of the sacrifice, the cause of exhilaration to men, (the Soma) that pervades (the three oblations) for Indra who pervades (the Soma-offering), that attains the rites and is friendly to (Indra) who gives joy (to the sacrificer).

8. "Drinking of this, O thou of many actions, thou becomest a slayer of Vritras (i.e. enemies led by Vritra) and didst protect entirely the fighter in the fights.

9. "O Indra of many actions, for enjoyment of riches we make thee abundant in food who art strong in the battles.*

10. "Sing to that Indra who is a protector of wealth, great, a good fulfiller (of works) and a friend of the sacrificer."

COMMENTARY

Madhuchchhandas, son of Visvamitra, invokes in the Soma-offering Indra, the Master of luminous Mind, for increase in the Light. The symbols of the hymn are those of a collective sacrifice. Its subject is the growth of power and delight in Indra by the drinking of the Soma, the wine of immortality, and the consequent illumination of the human being so that the obstructions of his inner knowledge are removed and he attains to the utmost splendours of the liberated mind.

But what is this Soma, called sometimes amrita, the Greek ambrosia, as if it were itself the substance of immortality? It is a figure for the divine Ananda, the principle of Bliss, from which, in the Vedic conception, the existence of Man, this mental being, is drawn. A secret Delight is the base of existence, its sustaining atmosphere and almost its substance. This Ananda is spoken of in the Taittiriya Upanishad as the ethereal atmosphere of bliss without which nothing could remain in being. In the Aitareya Upanishad Soma, as the lunar deity, is born from the sense-mind in the universal Purusha and, when man is produced, expresses himself again as sense-

*Note that Sayana explains Vajnam in V.8 as "fighter in the fights" and the same expression in the very next verse as "strong in the fights" and that in the phrase vajeshu vajnam vajayamah he takes the base word vaja in three different significances, "battle", "strength" and "food". This is a typical example of the deliberate inconsistency of Sayana's method.

I have given the two renderings together so that the reader may make an easy comparison between both methods and results. I enclose within brackets the commentator's explanations wherever they are necessary to complete the sense or to make it intelligible. Even the reader unacquainted with Sanskrit will be able, I think, to appreciate from this single example the reasons which justify the modern critical mind in refusing to accept Sayana as a reliable authority for the interpretation of the Vedic text.

mentality in the human being. For delight is the *raison d'être* of sensation, or we may say, sensation is an attempt to translate the secret delight of existence into the terms of physical consciousness. But in that consciousness—often figured as *adri*, the hill, stone, or dense substance—divine light and divine delight are both of them concealed and confined, and have to be released or extracted. Ananda is retained as *rasa*, the sap, the essence, in sense-objects and sense experiences, in the plants and growths of the earth-nature, and among these grows the mystic Soma-plant symbolises that element behind all sense activities and their enjoyments which yields the divine essence. It has to be distilled and, once distilled, purified and intensified until it has grown luminous, full of radiance, full of swiftness, full of energy, *gomat, ashu, yuvaku*. It becomes the chief food of the gods who, called to the Soma-oblation, take their share of the enjoyment and in the strength of that ecstasy increase in man, exalt him to his highest possibilities, make him capable of the supreme experiences. Those who do not give the delight in them as an offering to the divine Powers, preferring to reserve themselves for the sense and the lower life, are adorers not of the gods, but of the Panis, lords of the sense-consciousness, traffickers in its limited activities, they who press not the mystic wine, give not the purified offering, raise not the sacred chant. It is the Panis who steal from us the Rays of the illumined consciousness, those brilliant herds of the sun, and pen them up in the cavern of the sub-conscient, in the dense hill of matter, corrupting even Sarama, the hound of heaven, the luminous intuition, when she comes on their track to the cave of the Panis

But the conception of this hymn belongs to a stage in our inner progress when the Panis have been exceeded and even the Vritras or Coverers who seclude from us our full powers and activities and Vala who holds back the Light, are already overpassed. But there are even then powers that stand in the way of our perfection. They are the powers of limitation, the Confiners or Censurers, who, without altogether obscuring the rays or damming up the energies, yet seek by constantly affirming the deficiencies of our self-expression to limit its field and set up the progress realised as an obstacle to the progress to come. Madhuchchandas calls upon Indra to remove the defect and affirm in its place an increasing illumination.

The principle which Indra represents is Mind-Power released from the limits and obscurations of the nervous consciousness. It is this enlightened Intelligence which fashions right or perfect forms of

thought or of action not deformed by the nervous impulses, not hampered by the falsehoods of sense. The image presented is that of a cow giving abundantly its yield to the milker of the herds. The word *go* means in Sanskrit both a cow and a ray of light. This double sense is used by the Vedic symbolists to suggest a double figure which was to them more than a figure; for light, in their view, is not merely an apt poetic image of thought, but is actually its physical form. Thus, the herds that are milked are the Herds of the Sun,—Surya, God of the revelatory and intuitive mind, or else of Dawn, the goddess who manifests the solar glory. The Rishi desires from Indra a daily increase of this light of Truth by his fuller activity pouring rays in a rich yield upon the receptive mind.

The activity of the pure illuminated Intelligence is sustained and increased by the conscious expression in us of the delight in divine existence and divine activity typified by the Soma wine. As the Intelligence feeds upon it, its action becomes an intoxicated ecstasy of inspiration by which the rays come pouring abundantly and joyously in. "Light-giving indeed is the intoxication of thee in thy rapture".

For then it is possible, breaking beyond the limitations still insisted upon by the Confiners, to arrive at something of the finalities of knowledge possible to the illuminated intelligence. Right thoughts, right sensibilities,—this is the full sense of the word *sumati*; for the Vedic *mati* includes not only the thinking, but also the emotional parts of mentality. *Sumati* is a light in the thoughts; it is also a bright gladness and kindness in the soul. But in this passage the stress of the sense is upon right thought and not on the emotions. It is necessary, however, that the progress in right thinking should commence in the field of consciousness already attained; there must not be flashes and dazzling manifestations which by going beyond our powers elude expression in right form and confuse the receptive mind. Indra must be not only illuminer, but a fashioner of right thought-formations, *surupakritnu*.

The Rishi, next, turning to a comrade in the collective Yoga, or, perhaps, addressing his own mind, encourages him or it to pass beyond the obstruction of the adverse suggestions opposed to him and by questioning the divine Intelligence progress to the highest good which it has already given to others. For it is that Intelligence which clearly discerns and can solve or remove all still-existing confusion and obstruction. Swift of movement, intense, energetic, it does not by its energy stumble in its paths like the impulses of the nervous consciousness. Or perhaps it is rather meant that owing to its

invincible energy it does not succumb to the attacks whether of the Coverers or of the powers that limit.

Next are described the results towards which the seer aspires. With this fuller light opening on to the finalities of mental knowledge the powers of Limitation will be satisfied and of themselves will withdraw, consenting to the farther advance and to the new luminous activities. They will say, in effect, "Yes, now you have the right which we were hitherto justified in denying. Not only in the fields won already, but in other and untrod provinces pursue then your conquering march. Repose this action wholly on the divine Intelligence, not upon your lower capacities. For it is the greater surrender which gives you the greater right."

The word *arata*, move or strive, like its congeners *ari*, *arya*, *arya*, *arata*, *arani*, expresses the central idea of the Veda. The root *ar* indicates always a movement of effort or of struggle or a state of surpassing height or excellence; it is applied to rowing, ploughing, fighting, lifting, climbing. The Aryan then is the man who seeks to fulfil himself by the Vedic action, the internal and external *Krama* or *apas*, which is of the nature of a sacrifice to the gods. But it is also imaged as a journey, a march, a battle, a climbing upwards. The Aryan man labours towards heights, fights his way on in a march which is at once a progress forward and an ascent. That is his Aryahood, his *arete*, virtue, to use a Greek word derived from the same root. *Arata*, with the rest of the phrase, might be translated, "Out and push forward in other fields".

The idea is taken up again, in the subtle Vedic fashion of thought-connections by word-echoes, with the *arih kristayah* of the next verse. These are, I think, not the Aryan nations on earth, although that sense too is possible when the idea is that of a collective or national Yoga, but the powers that help man in his ascent, his spiritual kindred bound to him as comrades, allies, brothers, yoke-fellows (*sakhayah*, *yujah*, *jamayah*), for his aspiration is their aspiration and by his completeness they are fulfilled. As the Restrainers are satisfied and give way, so they too, satisfied, must affirm finally their task accomplished by the fullness of human bliss, when the soul shall rest in the peace of Indra that comes with the Light, the peace of a perfected mentality standing as upon heights of consummated consciousness and Beatitude.

Therefore is the divine Ananda poured out to be made swift and intense in the system and offered to Indra for the support of his intensities. For it is this profound joy manifest in the inner sensations that gives the ecstasy by which the man or the God grows

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strong The divine Intelligence will be able to move forward in the journey yet uncompleted and will return the gift by fresh powers of the Beatitude descending upon the friend of God.

For it was in this strength that the Divine Mind in man destroyed all that opposed, as Coverers or besiegers, its hundredfold activities of will and of thought; in this strength it protected afterwards the rich and various possessions already won in past battles from the *Atris* and *Dasyus*, devourers and plunderers of our gains.

Although, continues Madhuchchandas, that Intelligence is already thus rich and variously stored we seek to increase yet more its force of abundance, removing the Restrainers as well as the Vrtras, so that we may have the full and assured possession of our riches.

For this Light is, in its entire greatness free from limitation, a continent of felicity; this Power is that which befriends the human soul and carries it safe through the battle, to the end of its march, to the summit of its aspiration.

SRI AUROBINDO ON THE UPANISHADS

The Upanishads are the supreme work of the Indian mind, and that it should be so, that the highest self-expression of its genius, its greatest creation of the thought and word should be not a literary or poetical masterpiece of the ordinary kind, but a large flood of spiritual revelation of this direct and profound character, is a significant fact, evidence of a unique mentality and unusual turn of spirit. The Upanishads are at once profound religious scriptures,—for they are a record of the deepest spiritual experiences,—documents of revelatory and intuitive philosophy of an inexhaustible light, power and largeness and, whether written in verse or cadenced prose, spiritual poems of an absolute and unfailing inspiration inevitable in phrase, wonderful in rhythm and expression. It is the expression of a mind in which philosophy and religion and poetry are made one, because this religion does not end with a cult nor is limited to a religio-ethical aspiration, but rises to an infinite discovery of God, of self, of our highest and whole reality of spirit and being and speaks out of an ecstasy of luminous knowledge and an ecstasy of moved and fulfilled experience, this philosophy is not an abstract intellectual speculation about Truth or a structure of the logical intelligence, but Truth seen, felt, lived, held by the inmost mind and soul in the joy of utterance of an assured discovery and possession, and this poetry is the work of the aesthetic mind lifted up beyond its ordinary field to express the wonder and beauty of the rarest spiritual self-vision and the profoundest illumined truth of self and God and universe. Here the intuitive mind and intimate psychological experience of the Vedic seers passes into a supreme culmination in which the Spirit, as is said in a phrase of the Katha Upanishad, discloses its own very body, reveals the very word of its self-expression and discovers to the mind the vibration of rhythms which repeating themselves within in the spiritual hearing seem to build up the soul and set it satisfied and complete on the heights of self-knowledge.

This character of the Upanishads needs to be insisted upon with a strong emphasis, because it is ignored by foreign translators who seek to bring out the intellectual sense without feeling the life of thought vision and the ecstasy of spiritual experience which made the ancient verses appear then and still make them to those who can enter into the element in which these utterances move, a revelation not to the intellect alone, but to the soul and the whole being, make

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of them in the old expressive word not intellectual thought and phrase, but *Sruti*, spiritual audience, an inspired Scripture. The philosophical substance of the Upanishads demands at this day no farther stress of appreciation of its value; for even if the amplest acknowledgement by the greatest minds were wanting, the whole history of philosophy would be there to offer its evidence. The Upanishads have been the acknowledged source of numerous profound philosophies and religions that flowed from it in India like her great rivers from their Himalayan cradle fertilising the mind and life of the people and kept its soul alive through the long procession of the centuries, constantly returned to for light, never failing to give fresh illumination, a fountain of inexhaustible life-giving waters. Buddhism with all its developments was only a restatement, although from a new standpoint and with fresh terms of intellectual definition and reasoning, of one side of its experience and it carried it thus changed in form but hardly in substance over all Asia and westward towards Europe. The ideas of the Upanishads can be rediscovered in much of the thought of Pythagoras and Plato and form the profoundest part of Neo-platonism and Gnosticism with all their considerable consequences to the philosophical thinking of the west, and Sufism only repeats them in another religious language. The larger part of German metaphysics is little more in substance than an intellectual development of great realities more spiritually seen in this ancient teaching, and modern thought is rapidly absorbing them with a closer, more living and intense receptiveness which promises a revolution both in philosophical and in religious thinking; here they are filtering in through many indirect influences, there slowly pouring through direct and open channels. There is hardly a main philosophical idea which cannot find an authority or a seed or indication in these antique writings—the speculations, according to a certain view, of thinkers who had no better past or background to their thought than a crude, barbaric, naturalistic and animistic ignorance. And even the larger generalisations of Science are constantly found to apply to the truth of physical Nature formulas already discovered by the Indian sages in their original, their largest meaning in the deeper truth of the spirit.

And yet these works are not philosophical speculations of the intellectual kind, a metaphysical analysis which labours to define notions, to select ideas and discriminate those that are true, to logicise truth or else to support the mind in its intellectual preferences by dialectical reasoning and is content to put forward an exclusive solution of existence in the light of this or that idea of the reason and

see all things from that view-point, in that focus and determining perspective. The Upanishads could not have had so undying a vitality, exercised so unflinching an influence, produced such results or seen now their affirmations independently justified in other spheres of inquiry and by quite opposite methods, if they had been of that character. It is because these seers saw Truth rather than merely thought it, clothed it indeed with a strong body of intuitive idea and disclosing image, but a body of ideal transparency through which we look into the illimitable, because they fathomed things in the light of self-existence and saw them with the eye of the Infinite that their words remain always alive and immortal, of an inexhaustible significance, an inevitable authenticity, a satisfying finality that is at the same time an infinite commencement of truth, to which all our lines of investigation when they go through to their end arrive again and to which humanity constantly returns in its minds and its ages of greatest vision. The Upanishads are Vedanta, a book of knowledge in a higher degree even than the Vedas, but knowledge in the profounder Indian sense of the word, *Jnana*. Not a mere thinking and considering by the intelligence, the pursuit and grasping of a mental form of truth by the intellectual mind, but a seeing of it with the soul and a total living in it with the power of the inner being, a spiritual seizing by a kind of identification with the object of knowledge is *Jnana*. And because it is only by an integral knowing of the self that this kind of direct knowledge can be made complete, it was the self that the Vedantic sages sought to know, to live in and to be one with it by identity. And through this endeavour they came easily to see that the self in us is one with the universal self of all things and that this self again is the same as God and Brahman, a transcendent Being or Existence, and they beheld, felt, lived in the inmost truth of all things in the universe and the inmost truth of man's inner and outer existence by the light of this one and unifying vision. The Upanishads are epic hymns of self-knowledge and world-knowledge and God-knowledge. The great formulations of philosophic truth with which they abound are not abstract intellectual generalisations, things that may shine and enlighten the mind, but do not live and move the soul to ascension, but are ardours as well as lights of an intuitive and revelatory illumination, reachings as well as seeings of the one Existence, the transcendent Godhead, the divine and universal Self and discoveries of his relation with things and creatures in this great cosmic manifestation. Chants of inspired knowledge, they breathe like all hymns a tone of religious aspiration and ecstasy, not of the narrowly intense kind, proper to a lesser religious feeling but raised beyond cult and special forms of devotion to the universal

Ananda of the Divine which comes to us by approach to and oneness with the self-existent and universal spirit. And though mainly concerned with an inner vision and not directly with outward human action, all the highest ethics of Buddhism and later Hinduism are still emergences of the very life and significance of the truths to which they give expressive form and force,—and there is something greater than any ethical precept and mental rule of virtue, the supreme ideal of a spiritual action founded on oneness with God and all living beings. Therefore even when the life of the forms of the Vedic cult had passed away, the Upanishads still remained alive and creative and could generate the great devotional religions and motive the persistent Indian idea of the Dharma.

The Upanishads are the creation of a revelatory and intuitive mind and its illumined experience, and all their substance, structure, phrase, imagery, movement are determined by and stamped with this original character. These supreme and all-embracing truths, these visions of oneness and self and a universal divine being are cast into brief and monumental phrases which bring them at once before the soul's eye and make them real and imperative to its aspiration and experience or are couched in poetic sentences full of revealing power and suggestive thought-colour that discover a whole infinite through a finite image. The One is there revealed, but also disclosed the many aspects, and each is given its whole significance by the amplitude of the expression and finds as if in a spontaneous self-discovery its place and its connection by the illumining justness of each word and all the phrase. The passage, the sentence, the couplet, the line, even the half line follows the one that precedes with a certain interval full of an unexpressed thought, an echoing silence between them, a thought which is carried in the total suggestion and implied in the step itself, but which the mind is left to work out for its own profit and these intervals of pregnant silence are large, the steps of this thought are like the paces of a Titan striding from rock to distant rock across infinite waters. There is a perfect totality, a comprehensive connection of harmonious parts in the structure of each Upanishad; but it is done in the way of a mind that sees masses of truth at a time and stops to bring only the needed word out of a filled silence. The rhythm in verse or cadenced prose corresponds to the sculpture of the thought and the phrase. The metrical forms of the Upanishads are made up of four half lines each clearly cut, the lines mostly complete in themselves and integral in sense, the half lines presenting two thoughts or distinct parts of a thought that are wedded to and complete each other, and the sound movement follows a corresponding principle, each step brief and marked off by the distinctness of its

pause, full of echoing cadences that remain long vibrating in the inner hearing; each is as if a wave of the infinite that carries in it the whole voice and rumour of the ocean. It is a kind of poetry—word of vision, rhythm of the spirit—that has not been written before or after.

The imagery of the Upanishads is in large part developed from the type of imagery of the Veda and though very ordinarily it prefers an unveiled clarity of directly illuminative image, not unoften also it uses the same symbols in a way that is closely akin to the spirit and to the less technical part of the method of the older symbolism. It is to a great extent this element no longer seizable by our way of thinking that has baffled certain western scholars and made them cry out that these scriptures are a mixture of the sublimest philosophical speculations with the first awkward stammerings of the child mind of humanity. The Upanishads are not a revolutionary departure from the Vedic mind and its temperament and fundamental ideas, but a continuation and development and to a certain extent an enlarging transformation in the sense of bringing out into open expression all that was held covered in the symbolic Vedic speech as a mystery and a secret. It begins by taking up the imagery and the ritual symbols of the Veda and the Brahmanas and turning them in such a way as to bring out an inner and a mystic sense which will serve as a sort of physical starting-point for its own more highly evolved and more purely spiritual philosophy. There are a number of passages especially in the prose Upanishads which are entirely of this kind and deal, in a manner recondite, obscure and even unintelligible to the modern understanding, with the psychic sense of ideas then current in the Vedic religious mind, the distinction between the three kinds of Veda, the three worlds and other similar subjects; but, leading as they do in the thought of the Upanishads to deepest spiritual truths, these passages cannot be dismissed as childish aberrations of the intelligence void of sense or of any discoverable bearing on the higher thought in which they culminate. On the contrary we find that they have a deep enough significance once we can get inside their symbolic meaning. That appears in a psycho-physical passing upward into a psycho-spiritual knowledge for which we would now use more intellectual, less concrete and imaged terms, but which is still valid for those who practise Yoga and rediscover the secrets of our psycho-physical and psycho-spiritual being. Typical passages of this kind of peculiar expression of psychic truths are Ajatashatru's explanation of sleep and dream or the passages of the Prasna Upanishad on the vital principle and

its motions, or those in which the Vedic idea of the struggle between the Gods and the demons is taken up and given its spiritual significance and the Vedic godheads more openly than in Rik and Saman characterised and invoked in their inner function and spiritual power.

I may cite as an example of this development of Vedic idea and image a passage of the Taittiriya in which Indra plainly appears as the power and godhead of the divine mind or supermind:

‘He who is the Bull of the Vedas of the universal form, he who was born in the sacred rhythms from the Immortal,—may Indra satisfy me through the intelligence. O God, may I become a vessel of the Immortal. May my body be full of vision and my tongue of sweetness, may I hear the much and vast with my ears. For thou art the sheath of Brahman covered over and hidden by the intelligence.’

And a kindred passage may also be cited from the Isha in which Surya the Sun-God is invoked as the godhead of knowledge whose supreme form of effulgence is the oneness of the Spirit and his rays dispersed here on the mental level are the shining diffusion of the thought mind and conceal his own infinite supramental truth, the body and self of this Sun, the truth of the spirit and the Eternal:

‘The face of the Truth is covered with a golden lid: O fostering Sun, that uncover for the law of the truth, for sight. O fosterer, O sole Rishi, O controlling Yama. O Surya, O son of the Father of creatures, marshal and mass thy rays. The lustre that is thy most blessed form of all, that I see, He who is this, this Purusha, He am I.’

The kinship in difference of these passages with the imagery and style of the Veda is evident and the last indeed paraphrases or translates into a later and more open style a Vedic verse of the Atris:

‘Hidden by your truth is the Truth that is constant for ever where they unyoke the horses of the Sun. There the ten thousands stand together, That is the One: I have seen the supreme Godhead of the embodied gods.’

This Vedic and Vedantic imagery is foreign to our present mentality which does not believe in the living truth of the symbol, because the revealing imagination intimidated by the intellect has no longer the courage to accept, identify itself with and boldly embody a psy-

chic and spiritual vision; but it is certainly very far from being a childish or a primitive and barbarous mysticism; this vivid, living luminously poetic intuitive language is rather the natural expression of a highly evolved spiritual culture.

The intuitive thought of the Upanishads starts from this concrete imagery and these symbols, first to the Vedic rishis secret seer words wholly expressive to the mind of the seer but veils of their deepest sense to the ordinary intelligence, links them to a less covertly expressive language and passes beyond them to another magnificently open and sublime imagery and diction which at once reveals the spiritual truth in all its splendour. The prose Upanishads show us this process of the early mind of India at its work using the symbol and then passing beyond it to the overt expression of the spiritual significance. A passage of the Prasna Upanishad on the power and significance of the mystic syllable AUM illustrates the earlier stage of the process:

'This syllable OM, O Satyakama, it is the supreme and it is the lower Brahman. Therefore the man of knowledge passeth by this house of the Brahman to the one or the other. And if one meditate on the single letter, he getteth by it knowledge and soon he attaineth on the earth. And him the Riks lead to the world of men and there perfected in Tapas and Brahmacharya and faith he experienceth the greatness of the spirit. Now if by the double letter he is accomplished in the mind, then is he led up by the Yajus to the middle world, to the moon-world of Soma. He in the world of Soma experienceth the majesty of the spirit and returneth again. And he who by the triple letter again, even this syllable Om, shall meditate on the highest Purusha, is perfected in the light that is the Sun. As a snake putteth off its skin, even so is he released from sin and evil and is led by the Samans to the world of Brahman. He from this dense of living souls seeth the higher than the highest Purusha who lieth in this mansion. Three letters are afflicted by death, but now they are used undivided and united to each other, then are the inner and the outer and the middle action of the spirit made whole in their perfect using and the spirit knows and is not shaken. This world by the Riks, the middle world by the Yajus and by the Samans that which the seers make known to us. The man of knowledge passeth to Him by OM, his house, even to the supreme spirit that is calm and ageless and fearless and immortal'

The symbols here are still obscure to our intelligence, but indications are given which show beyond doubt that they are representations of a psychical experience leading to different states of spiritual realisa-

tion and we can see that these three outward, mental and supra-mental, and as the result of the last a supreme perfection, a complete and integral action of the whole being in the tranquil eternity of the immortal Spirit. And later in the Mandukya Upanishad the other symbols are cast aside and we are admitted to the unveiled significance. Then there emerges a knowledge to which modern thought is turning through its own very different intellectual, rational and scientific method, the knowledge that behind the operations of our outward physical consciousness are working the operations of another, subliminal,—another and yet the same,—of which our waking mind is a surface action, and above—perhaps, we still say—is a spiritual superconscience in which can be found, it may well be, the highest state and the whole secret of our being. We shall see, when we look closely at the passage of the Prasna Upanishad, that this knowledge is already there, and I think we can very rationally conclude that these and similar utterances of the ancient sages, however perplexing their form to the rational mind, cannot be dismissed as a childish mysticism, but are the imaged expression, natural to the mentality of the time, of what the reason itself by its own processes is now showing us to be true and a very profound truth and real reality of knowledge.

The metrical Upanishads continue this highly charged symbolism but carry it more lightly and in the bulk of their verses pass beyond this kind of image to the overt expression. The self, the Spirit, the Godhead in man and creatures and Nature and all this world and in other worlds and beyond all cosmos, the Immortal, the One, the Infinite is hymned without veils in the splendour of his eternal transcendence and his manifold self-revelation. A few passages from the teaching of Yama, lord of the Law and of Death, to Nachiketas, will be enough to illustrate something of their character

‘Om is this syllable This syllable is the Brahman, this syllable is the Supreme. He who knoweth the imperishable Om, whatso he willeth, it is his. This support is the best, this support is the highest; and when a man knoweth it, he is greatened in the world of Brahman. The omniscient is not born, nor dies, nor has he come into being from anywhere, nor is he anyone. He is unborn, he is constant and eternal, he is the Ancient of days who is not slain in the slaying of the body. . .

‘He is seated and journeys far, and lying still he goes to every side. Who other than I should know this ecstatic Godhead? The wise man cometh to know the great Lord and Self established and

bodiless in these bodies that pass and has grief no longer. This self is not to be won by teaching nor by brain-power nor by much learning, he whom the Spirit chooses, by him alone it can be won, and to him it discloses its own very body. One who has not ceased from ill-doing, one who is not concentrated and calm, one whose mind is not tranquil, shall not get him by the brain's wisdom. He is whom warriors and sages are the food and death, is the spice of his banquet, who knoweth where is He'

'The Self-born has cloven his doors outward, therefore man sees outward and not in the inner self; only a wise man here and there turns his eyes inward, desiring immortality, and looks on the self face to face. The child minds follow after surface desires and fall into the net of death who is spread wide for us, but the wise know of immortality, and ask not from things inconstant that which is constant. One knoweth by this self form and taste and odour and touch and its pleasures and what then is here left over? The wise man cometh to know the great Lord and Self by whom one seeth all that is in the soul that wakes and all that is in the soul that dreams and hath grief no longer. He who knoweth the Self, the eater of sweetness close to the living being, the lord of what was and what will be shrinks thereafter from nothing that is. He knoweth him who is that which was born of old from Tapas and who was born of old from the waters and hath entered in and standeth in the secret cavern of being with all these creatures. He knoweth her who is born by the life force, the infinite Mother with all the gods in her, her who hath entered in and standeth in the secret cavern of being with all these creatures. This is the Fire that hath the knowledge and it is hidden in the two tinders as the embryo is borne in pregnant women; this is the Fire that must be adored by men watching sleeplessly and bringing to him the offering. He is that from which the Sun rises and that in which it sets, and in him all the gods are founded and none can pass beyond him. What is here, even that is in other worlds, and what is there, even according to that is all that is here. He goes from death to death who sees here only difference. A Purusha no bigger than a thumb stands in man's heart and he is like a light without smoke; he is the Lord of what was and what shall be. It is he that is today and it is he that shall be tomorrow.'

The Upanishads abound with passages which are at once poetry and spiritual philosophy, of an absolute clarity and beauty, but no translation empty of the suggestions and the grave and subtle and luminous sense echoes of the original words and rhythms can

give any idea of their power and perfection. There are others in which the subtlest psychological and philosophical truths are expressed with an entire sufficiency without falling short of a perfect beauty of poetical expression and always so as to live to the mind and not merely be presented to the understanding intelligence. There is in some of the prose Upanishads another element of vivid narrative and tradition which restores for us though only in brief glimpses the picture of that extraordinary stir and movement of spiritual enquiry and passion for the highest knowledge which made the Upanishads possible. The scenes of the old world live before us in a few pages, the sages sitting in their groves ready to test and teach the comer, princes and learned Brahmans and great landed nobles going about in search of knowledge, the King's son in his chariot and the illegitimate son of the servant-girl, seeking any man who might carry in himself the thought of light and the word of revelation, the typical figures and personalities, Janaka and the subtle mind of Ajatashatru, Raikwa of the cart, Yajnavalkya militant for truth, calm and ironic, taking to himself with both hands without attachment worldly possessions and spiritual riches and casting at last all his wealth behind to wander forth as a houseless ascetic, Krishna, son of Devaki, who heard a single word of the Rishi Ghora and knew at once the Eternal, the āsramas, the courts of kings who were also spiritual discoverers and thinkers, the great sacrificial assemblies where the sages met and compared their knowledge. And we see how the soul of India was born and how arose this great birth-song in which it soared from its earth into the supreme empyrean of the spirit. The Vedas and the Upanishads are not only the sufficient fountain-head of Indian philosophy and religion, but of all Indian art, poetry and literature. It was the soul, the temperament, the ideal mind formed and expressed in them which later carved out the great philosophies, built the structures of the Dharma, recorded its heroic youth in the Mahabharata and Ramayana, intellectualised indefatigably in the classical times of the ripeness of its manhood, threw out so many original intuitions in science, created so rich a glow of aesthetic and vital and sensuous experience, renewed its spiritual and psychic experience in Tantra and Purana, flung itself into grandeur and beauty of line and colour, hewed and cast its thought and vision in stone and bronze, poured itself in new channels of self-expression in the later tongues and now after eclipse re-emerges always the same in difference and ready for a new life and a new creation.

(From "A Defence of Indian Culture"· XVII)

SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS
CORRESPONDENCE WITH NIRODBARAN

SRI AUROBINDO'S FORCE

(Continued from previous issue)

The following are the marginal comments made by Sri Aurobindo on my letters to him, regarding the action of his spiritual Force. They are arranged here in relevance to the questions asked.

9-2-35.

Myself: "We are a little puzzled when you give your own example to prove your arguments and defend your views, because that really proves nothing. I need not explain why—what Avatars can achieve is not possible for ordinary mortals like us to achieve. So when you say that you had a sudden 'opening' in the appreciation and understanding of painting, or that you freed your mind from all thoughts in seven days; or transformed your nature, it is very poor consolation for us. Then again, when you state that you developed something that was not originally there in your nature, can it not be said that it was already there in your *divya amsha*?"

Sri Aurobindo: "I don't know what you mean. My sadhana is not a freak or a monstrosity or a miracle done outside the laws of Nature and the conditions of life and consciousness on earth. If I could do these things or if they could happen in my Yoga, it means that they can be done and that therefore these developments and transformations are possible in the terrestrial consciousness."

Myself (continuing): "There are many who admit that faculties which are latent can be developed, but they maintain that things which are not there in latency cannot be made manifest. My belief is that even that can be done. The Divine is everywhere, and wherever He is, there everything exists. Still,—I don't think that I could be turned into, say, an artist or a musician!"

Sri Aurobindo's comment: "How do you know that you can't?"

Myself (continuing): "As for your statement: 'All is possible, but all is not licit—except by a recognisable process It is possible that an ass may be changed into an elephant, but it is not done, at

SRI AUROBINDO'S LETTERS

least physically, because of the lack of a process', people say that there is no point in saying this, because it is no use knowing that a thing can be done but is not licit and therefore is not done."

Sri Aurobindo made the following brief marginal comment on this remark but gave a longer answer to it at the end of the letter: "You had said it can't be done or somebody had said it".

Myself (continuing): "About your changing 'cowards into heroes', they put forward the same 'latency theory'."

Sri Aurobindo's comment: "How do they prove their theory—when they don't know what is or is not latent? In such conditions the theory can neither be proved nor refuted. To say 'O, it was latent' when a thing apparently impossible is done, is a mere *post factum* explanation which amounts to an evasion of the difficulty."

Myself: "They state very strongly that a servant of the Ashram like Muthu, for example, cannot be changed into a Ramakrishna, or a Yogi for that matter, even by the Divine."

Sri Aurobindo: "If he were, they would say, 'O, it was latent in him.'"

Myself: "Another point, one can't say categorically and absolutely that the Divine is omnipotent, because there are different planes from which He works. It is when He acts from the Supramental level that His Power is omnipotent. The fact that X was not changed by the mental-spiritual force put on him proves that."

In answer to the first part of the question Sri Aurobindo wrote: "If the Divine were not in essence omnipotent, he could not be omnipotent anywhere—whether in the Supramental or anywhere else. Because He chooses to limit or determine his action by conditions, it does not make him less omnipotent. His self-limitation is itself an act of omnipotence."

To the second part of the question he replied: "It does not prove it for a minute. It simply means that the omnipotent unconditioned Supramental force was not put out there—any more than it was when Christ was put on the cross or when after healing thousands he failed to heal in a certain district (I forget the name) because people had no faith (faith being one of the conditions imposed for his working) or when Krishna after fighting eighteen battles with Jarasanda failed to prevail against him and had to run away from Mathura. Why should the Divine be tied down to succeed in all His operations? What if failure suits him better and serves better the ultimate pur-

pose? What if the gentleman in question had to be given his chance as Duryodhan was given his chance when Krishna went to him as ambassador in a last effort to avoid the massacre of Kurukshetra? What rigid primitive notions are these about the Divine! And what about my explanation of how the Divine acts through the Avatar? It seems all to have gone into water.

“By the way about the ass becoming an elephant—what I meant to say was that the only reason why it can’t be done is because there is no recognisable process for it. But if a process can be discovered whether by a scientist (let us say transformation or redistribution of the said ass’s atoms or molecules or what not) or by an occultist or by a Yogi, then there is no reason why it should not be done. In other words certain conditions have been established for the game and as long as those conditions remain unchanged certain things are not done—so we say that they are impossible, can’t be done. If the conditions are changed then the same things are done or at least become licit—allowable, legal according to the so-called laws of Nature and then we say they can be done. The Divine also acts according to the conditions of the game. He may change them, but he has to change them first, not proceed, while maintaining the conditions, to act by a series of miracles.”

Myself: “You say that since ‘these things’ have been possible in you, they are possible in the earth-consciousness. Quite true; but have they been done? Has any sweeper or street-begger been changed into a Buddha or a Chaitanya by the Divine? We see in the whole history of spirituality only one Christ, one Buddha, one Krishna, one Sri Aurobindo and one Mother. Has there been any breaking of this rule? Since it has not been done, it can’t be done.”

Sri Aurobindo: “What a wonderful argument! Since it has not been done, it can’t be done! At that rate the whole history of the earth must have stopped long before the protoplasm. When it was a mass of gases, no life had been born. *et go*, life could not be born—when only life was there, mind was not born, so mind could not be born. Since mind is there but nothing beyond, as there is no supermind manifested in anybody, so supermind can never be born. *Sobhanallah!* Glory, Glory, Glory to the human reason! Luckily the Divine or the cosmic Spirit or Nature or whatever is there cares a damn for the human reason. He or She or It does what He or She or It has to do, whether it can or can’t be done.

“The question was not whether it had been done but whether it could be done. The street-beggar is a side-issue. The question

was whether new faculties not at all manifested in the personality up to now in this life could appear, even suddenly appear, by force of Yoga. I say they can and I gave my own case as proof. I could have given others also. The question involved is also this—is a man bound to the characters and qualities he has come with into this life—can he not become a new man by Yoga? That also I have proved in my sadhana that it can be done. When you say that I could do this only in my case because I am an Avatar (!) and it is improbable in any other case, you reduce my sadhana to an absurdity—and Avatarhood also to an absurdity. For my Yoga is done not for myself who need nothing and do not need salvation or anything else, but precisely for the earth-consciousness, to open a way for the earth-consciousness to change. Has the Divine need to come down to prove that he can do this or that or has he any personal need of doing it? Your argument proves that I am not an Avatar but only a big human person. It may well be so as a matter of fact, but you start your argument from the other basis. Besides, if I am only a big human person, what I achieve shows that that achievement is possible for humanity. Whether any street-beggar can do it or has done it, is a side issue, it is sufficient if others who have not the economic misfortune of being street-beggars can do it.”

Myself. “Kindly excuse the impudence of the next question; it has been hovering at the back of my mind for some time. Can a Muthu or a sadhak be ever a Sri Aurobindo, even if he is supramentalised! I say that it is absolutely impossible—a thousand times impossible.”

Sri Aurobindo. “What need has he to be a Sri Aurobindo? He can be a supramentalised Muthu! This part of your argument is perfectly correct—but it is also perfectly irrelevant.”

Myself: “And how can it be otherwise? You are looked upon by us here, and even by many outside, as a full Incarnation of the Divine. The sadhaks here at best are misty sparks of the Divine. I cannot by any empyrean flights of imagination conceive of this possibility even for a second.”

Sri Aurobindo: “The psychic being is more than a spark at this stage of its evolution. It is a flame. Even if the flame is covered by mist or smoke, the mist or smoke can be dissipated. To do that and to open to the higher consciousness is what is wanted, not to become a Sri Aurobindo or equal to the Mother. But if we are the Divine, what is the harm of evolving into a portion of the Divine, living in the divine Consciousness even if in a lesser degree?”

Myself: "Can anybody become Sri Aurobindo or Mother?"

Sri Aurobindo: "Certainly not, it is not intended and I never said that he could as a practical matter."

Myself: "All this is really too much for me. Please give a more direct answer—is it possible or not? 'Can a Muthu be changed into a being as great as an Avatar? If he can be, I have nothing to say; if not, then there is a limit to the Omnipotence of the Divine. It is for this reason that I said that your own example doesn't prove much."

Sri Aurobindo: "Not at all; you are always making the same elementary baby stumble. It is not because the Divine cannot manifest his greatness anywhere, but because it is not in the conditions of the game, because he has chosen to manifest his centrality in a particular line that it is practically impossible."

Myself: "Next point, it is hoped that the sadhaks will be supra-mentalised. Since it is a state surpassing the Overmind, am I to deduce that the sadhaks would be greater than Krishna, who was the Avatar of the Overmind level. Logically it follows; but looking at others and at myself, I wonder if such a theory will be practically realised. Past history does not seem to prove it. In Krishna's time we don't see any spiritual figure greater than the preceding Avatar Rama, though Krishna was an Avatar of a higher plane."

Sri Aurobindo: "What is all this obsession of greater or less? In the Yoga we do not strive after greatness. It is not a question of Sri Krishna's disciples but of the earth-consciousness. Rama was a mental man, there is no touch of the Overmind consciousness (direct) in anything he said or did, but what he did was done with the greatness of the Avatar. But there have since been men who did live in touch with the planes above mind—higher mind, illumined mind, intuition. There is no question of asking whether they were 'greater' than Rama; they might have been less 'great', but they were able to live from a new plane of consciousness. And Krishna's opening the Overmind certainly made it possible for the attempt at bringing Supermind to the earth to be made."

Myself: "I would not mind your fury in revenge if only you will crush me with a convincing assault. I hope to close the chapter on 'Divine Omnipotence' with this last letter, but you keep me hoping with that promise of yours to write at length some day. . . ."

This remark brought forth a magnificent reply, written in the half-humorous half-serious style he often adopted with me:

"'Peace, peace, O fiery furious spirit—Calm thyself and be at rest'. Your fury or furiousness is wasted because your point is perfectly

irrelevant to the central question on which all this breath (or rather ink) is being spent. Muthu and the sadhaks who want to equal or distance or replace the Mother and myself—there have been several—have appeared only as meaningless foam and froth on the excited crest of the dispute. I fear you have not grasped the internalities and modalities and causalities of my high and subtle reasoning. It is not surprising as you are down down in the troughs of the rigidly logically illogical human reason while I am floating in the heights and infinite plasticities of the Overmind and the lightning-like subtleties and swiftnesses of the intuition. There! What do you think of that? However!!

“More seriously, I have not stated that any Muthu has equalled Ramakrishna and I quite admit that Muthu here *in ipsa persona* has no chance of performing that feat. I have not said that anyone here can be Sri Aurobindo or the Mother—I have pointed out what I meant when I objected to your explaining away my sadhana as a perfectly useless piece of Avatarian fireworks. So in my comment on the Muthu logic I simply pointed out that it was bad logic—that someone quite ignorant and low in the social scale can manifest a great spirituality and a great spiritual knowledge. I hope you are not bourgeois enough to deny that or to contend that the Divine or the spiritual can only manifest in somebody who has some money in his pocket and some university education in his pate! For the rest I have myself been pointing out all the time there is a difference between essential truth and conditional truth, *paramartha* and *vivekaharika*, the latter being relative and conditional and mutable. In Mathematics one works out problems in infinite and in unreal numbers which exist nowhere on earth and yet these are very important and can help scientific reasoning and scientific discovery and achievement. The question of a Muthu becoming a Ramakrishna or a great spiritual man may look to you like being an exercise in unreal numbers or magnitudes because it exceeds the actual observable facts in the case of this Muthu who very evidently is not going to be a great spiritual man—but we are arguing the matter of essential principle. I was pointing out that in the essentiality all things are possible—so you ought not to say the Divine cannot do this or that. But at the same time I was pointing out too that the Divine is not bound to show his omnipotence without rhyme or reason when he is working by his own will under conditions. For by arguing that the Divine cannot, that he is impotent, that he cannot do what has never yet been done etc., you deny the possibility of changing things and thus of evolution, of the realisation of the unrealised, of the action of the Divine Power, of Divine Grace

MOTHER INDIA

and reduce all to a matter of rigid and unalterable *status quo*, which is an insolent defiance to both fact and reason (!) and suprareason. See now?

“About myself and the Mother—there are people who say, ‘If the Supramental is to come down, it can come down in everyone, why then in them first? Why should we not get it before they do? Why through them, not direct?’ It sounds very rational, logical, very arguable. The difficulty is that this reasoning ignores the conditions, foolishly assumes that one can get the Supramental down into oneself without having the least knowledge of what the Supramental is and so supposes an upside-down miracle—everybody who tries it is bound to land himself in a most horrible cropper—as all have done hitherto who tried it. It is like thinking one need not follow the Guide, but can reach up to the top of the mountain from the narrow path one is following on the edge of a precipice by simply leaping into the air. The result is inevitable.

“About greater and less, one point. Is Captain John Higgins of S.S. Mauretania a greater man than Christopher Columbus because he can reach America without trouble in a few days? Is a University graduate in philosophy greater than Plato because he can reason about problems and systems which had never even occurred to Plato? No, only humanity has acquired greater scientific power which any good navigator can use or a wider intellectual knowledge which anyone with a philosophic training can use. You will say greater scientific power and wider knowledge is not a change of consciousness. Very well, but there are Rama and Ramakrishna, Rama spoke always from the thinking intelligence, the common property of developed men, Ramakrishna constantly from a swift and luminous spiritual intuition. Can you tell me which is the greater? The Avatar recognised by all India? Or the saint and Yogi recognised as an Avatar only by his disciples and some others who follow them?”

11-2-35.

To be continued

PAGES FROM A JOURNAL
THE EARLY CONVERSATIONS OF SRI AUROBINDO
Compiled from the Notes of Anilbaran Roy

COMPILER'S NOTE

Before Sri Aurobindo went into seclusion in order to carry on a yogic-spiritual action by which he could prepare conditions in earth-life suitable for establishing the Supermind, he used to have long conversations with his disciples. Exact verbatim reports of these were not taken down, but some of the disciples used to keep notes. Anilbaran Roy was in the habit of writing down after the conversations were over most of the things that had been discussed.

It is true that Sri Aurobindo later changed his views on some matters to a certain extent, not so much in their fundamental truth as in their application to life amidst the fast-changing conditions of the world, also, as his mastery over the world forces increased he was led to alter some of his views with regard to the working of the Higher Power in the earth-consciousness. Nevertheless, the fundamental truths he had previously expressed he did not reject but incorporated them in a larger and more complex unity.

At some places the notes taken down may not capture the correct tone of Sri Aurobindo's exposition and bring out the precise shade of meaning, or again they may fail to catch the right turn of phrase and the immaculateness of the expression, making the philosophical formulation suffer stylistically to some extent, but on the whole the journal does justice to the informal discourses Sri Aurobindo used to give to his disciples before he went into seclusion, and definitely succeeds in recreating the atmosphere of that period—an atmosphere of erudition and spiritual enlightenment, of friendship and good humour, of love and goodwill, an atmosphere that can only be possible among men who live together in brotherhood for the pursuit of a high spiritual ideal and look up to their God-realised leader to give them light and realisation.

"Synergist"

Prior to 1926, when for yogic reasons he went into seclusion, Sri Aurobindo had not written much about the Supermind, except in *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga* in the *Arya*. Some of his disciples, who could not thoroughly understand these works, used to constantly question him about the Supermind. Today, after reading hundreds of letters written by him on spiritual and philosophical matters, these questions may seem a little callow, but in those days, they were necessary for mental clarification, especially of those who

could not properly understand the exposition given in these two works.

A discussion once took place about the manifestation of the Supermind in the outer field of life, when Sri Aurobindo cleared some of the intellectual difficulties of the disciples. This discussion is given here, as taken down by Anilbaran soon after it was over.

A disciple asked, "When the Supermind is established here, I suppose it will have an expression in external life. If so, what will be the form such an activity will take? I mean, what will be the form and nature of the external activities of a superman?"

"What do you mean by external life?" Sri Aurobindo asked

"Well, we have our sadhana—that is inner activity", replied the disciple.

"Take cooking, for example—is it an external activity?"

"Yes, cooking is an external activity."

"Then you have taken a wrong attitude towards it. The cooking you do ought to be a part of your 'sadhana' . . . Certainly when the Supermind is realised in yourself, you will have external activities, a superman is not going to pass his time sitting in an arm-chair meditating on philosophy. But yours is a state of preparation—you will have to make your mind plastic and your whole being a proper instrument, so that the Higher Power may work through you. This is sufficient work for you—the preparation of your mind and whole being by 'sadhana'. During this time you retain certain external activities as a field of experiment, you do any kind of work so as to do it in the proper way. In ordinary life, the manner in which you do the work is blind and haphazard—there is not the right attitude. When a Yogi works, he works with a deeper consciousness—his hands and fingers move automatically not as a dead mechanical instrument, but with a full consciousness behind the automatic activity.

"A Yogi is not to be a jack-of-all-trades; everyone has a role to play and that role is known by the descent of the higher knowledge. In the meantime you must prepare yourselves in such a manner as to be able to do any kind of work. . . . When the Supermind descends and sets you to work, what form that work will take is not possible to say beforehand. There are infinite possibilities and the truth-force will determine the work for each according to his 'swadharma', and according to the development of circumstances. The mind can catch glimpses of the nature of the work to be accomplished, but these can always be falsified. I have certain ideas about the future work, but I do not accept them as final. If I communicate them to you, you will misunderstand and misapply them and hastily try to execute them, and make various mental formations and constructions which

will become an impediment to the coming down of the higher truth. Some years ago, I had certain ideas about social and economic organisation, and I gave them to Motilal to be worked out, but his activities have taken such a turn that I cannot approve of them now. . . .

"The creations of truth are very complex—they cannot be stated in any cut and dried formula. Of course, there will be some forms but these will be progressive forms and will vary with varying conditions. Now some people advocate Communism as the only solution, others vote for democracy, Gandhi speaks of soul-force, and Rabindranath of love—but truth is not limited to any of these conceptions. All these men have grasped some part of the truth, and in their attempts to express it build up organisations which are but imperfect expressions of it and which therefore collapse after a short time, giving place to newer forms, newer organisations, for expressing the truth force

"Of course, Truth has infinite possibilities, but the earth and mankind are not yet ready for all kinds of manifestation; there are stages in the manifestation of the Truth. The very gods will come down on the earth, but if the attempt is made now, the physical earth and the whole structure of humanity will break down. Yet, a beginning is going to be made, and we must keep ourselves free and plastic so that we may become proper instruments for working it out. We must reject the constructions of the mind. The constructions of the mind,—the plans and forms evolved by it—are an obstacle, an impediment to the working of the Truth. Observe the forces that are at work, study the mistakes committed in life and find out the truth behind them, but do not form plans. Leave it to the Higher Power to organise and effectuate the work that has to be done. All political bodies, all workers in the active field ought to have an open and plastic mind, and not have plans and programmes fixed for all time. Of course, the purpose must be fixed—there should be an unalterable purpose before you. But as to the means and methods of achieving that purpose, you must be always ready to change and modify them according to new developments

"Your question betrays impatience—it arises from the vital being. I myself am not sure as to the exact form my work should take, though I have some ideas about it . . . I have not yet got the whole plan; otherwise I would myself have given it to you. I am perfecting my ideas within, but people misunderstand me, and say that I am doing nothing. I do not mind at all what the outside world says of me—I have my own work to do, and I am doing it."

To be continued

GUIDANCE FOR THE YOUNG ASPIRANT

Compiled from Sri Aurobindo's Unpublished Letters

COMPILER'S INTRODUCTION

More and more people are daily drawn towards the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo. Attracted by the ideal of the divine life which is being given a concrete shape there by the Mother as regards both individual perfection and collective living, men and women come and settle down at Pondicherry with their families.

The International University Centre that is being created round the parent body has given an added impetus to these people to keep their children under the Mother's care to get educated into a new way of life. This has led to the formation of quite a large group of boys and girls.

As those in the higher grade have already begun to study the smaller books of Sri Aurobindo, and aspire to participate in the New Creation, a special Series of questions and answers has been prepared from the unpublished letters of Sri Aurobindo with a view to give them help in understanding his teachings. As most of the letters published here were originally addressed to a young boy, they were written in a manner which would enable him to understand things easily. Nevertheless, their value for the elders is equally great, for they succeed in elucidating matters on yoga which are sometimes a little difficult to understand from the letters addressed to the more advanced sadhaks

"Synergist"

THE DIVINE

Q. God is everywhere. But I don't understand how He can be in the Ignorance also?

A. This whole world in which we live is a world of Ignorance; according to your reasoning then, the Divine does not exist here at all. (2-7-33)

* * *

Q. I still don't understand how the Divine through His Shakti is behind *all action*. How can the Divine be in the falsehood and ignorance?

A. How can anything exist without the Divine? The Divine is omnipresent; if It were not, the world would not exist. The falsehood and ignorance exist in you because you have separated yourself from the Divine in you.

* * *

Q. What is Ananda?

A. It is the Divine Bliss which comes from above. It is not joy or pleasure, but something self-existent, pure and fully beyond what any joy or pleasure can be. (27-7-33)

* * *

GUIDANCE FOR THE YOUNG ASPIRANT

Q Today, during "Prosperity" time, I saw light around Mother's face. Was it my imagination or something real?

A. There is always light around the Mother. (1-6-33)

* * *

Q What is the colour of the light around Mother? I saw it blue today.

A. The Mother's special colour is white, but all the other colours are hers also. (8-6-33)

ON YOGA

Q. What is meant by the spiritual call?

A The call in the inner being to seek after the Divine. (28-8-33)

* * *

Q. I would like to know what is meant by Agni?

A. Agni is the fire of aspiration or the fire of Tapasya. (19-8-33)

* * *

Q. May I know the meaning of Tapasya?

A When the will and energy are concentrated and used to control the mind, vital and physical and change them or to bring down the higher consciousness or for any other Yogic purpose or high purpose, that is called Tapasya. (1-9-33)

* * *

Q. What are mental bhakti and vital bhakti?

A The vital bhakti is egoistic, usually full of claims and demands on the Divine and revolting when they are not satisfied. The mental is simply a worship in the thought and idea without love in the heart. (6-8-33)

* * *

Q. What is real bhakti?

A. The psychic bhakti which gives itself, asks nothing but the Divine, is always turned to the Divine alone. (7-8-33)

* * *

Q. What is psychic love?

A. It is the love that comes direct from the soul, not mixed with vital desire or ego. (24-8-33)

MISCELLANEOUS

Q. Last night I did not get sleep at all. What prevented me from getting sleep?

A. It is a restlessness in you which prevents you from keeping still inwardly or outwardly. To sleep well the vital and physical and mind also must learn how to relax themselves and be quiet.

* * *

Q. What is spiritual happiness?

A. Happiness not depending on outer things or material things or the satisfactions of the mind or the vital desires, but self-existent or caused by contact with the Divine within or the Divine in things.

(18-9-33)

* * *

Q. Is it true that only spiritual knowledge is useful?

A. It does not help for spiritual knowledge to be ignorant of the things of this world.

(22-8-33)

* * *

Q. When Krishna gave advice to Arjuna, is it not that he put some power in him, therefore the hostile forces became weak or were destroyed and Arjuna got the sense of what Sri Krishna was speaking?

A. He gave Arjuna light and knowledge and consciousness and removed his ignorance.

(30-3-33)

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM, PONDICHERRY

NOTICE

The Mother of the Ashram has decided to offer all her jewellery to the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre and in order that this gift may realise its full value, the jewellery will be sold by public auction and the proceeds paid into the University Fund

The auction will take place at the Ashram in Pondicherry in the last week of December 1952; the exact dates will be announced later in the papers.

The Government of India has been approached with a request that as a special consideration to the Sri Aurobindo International University, the articles purchased at the auction may be permitted entry into the Indian Union free of Import Duty.

1-12-52