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THE FUTURE POETRY

AND LETTERS ON POETRY, LITERATURE AND ART

SRI AUROBINDO



THE FUTURE POETRY

AND

LETTERS ON POETRY, LITERATURE AND ART

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I

THE FUTURE POETRY

II

LETTERS ON POETRY, LITERATURE AND ART

THE FUTURE POETRY

CHAPTER I

Introductory

IT IS not often that we see published in India literary criticism which is of the first order, at once discerning and suggestive, criticism which forces us both to see and think. A book which recently I have read and more than once reperused with a yet unexhausted pleasure and fruitfulness, Mr. James Cousins' *New Ways in English Literature*, is eminently of this kind. It raises thought which goes beyond the strict limits of the author's subject and suggests the whole question of the future of poetry in the age which is coming upon us, the higher functions open to it, — as yet very imperfectly fulfilled, — and the part which English literature on the one side and the Indian mind and temperament on the other are likely to take in determining the new trend. The author is himself a poet, a writer of considerable force in the Irish movement which has given contemporary English literature its two greatest poets, and the book on every page attracts and satisfies by its living force of style, its almost perfect measure, its delicacy of touch, its fineness and depth of observation and insight, its just sympathy and appreciation.

For the purpose for which these essays have been, not indeed written, but put together, the criticism, fine and helpful as it is, suffers from one great fault, — there is too little of it. Mr. Cousins is satisfied with giving us the essential, just what is necessary for a trained mind to seize intimately the spirit and manner and poetic quality of the writers whose work he brings before us. This is done sometimes in such a masterly manner that even one touch more might well have been a touch in excess. The essay on Emerson is a masterpiece in this kind; it gives perfectly in a few pages all that should be said about Emerson's poetry and nothing that need not be said. But some of the essays, admirable in themselves, are too slight for our need. The book

is not indeed intended to be exhaustive in its range. Mr. Cousins wisely takes for the most part, — there is one notable exception — writers with whom he is in close poetical sympathy or for whom he has a strong appreciation; certain names which have come over to our ears with some flourish of the trumpets of renown, Thompson, Masefield, Hardy, do not occur at all or only in a passing allusion. But still the book deals among contemporary poets with Tagore, A.E. and Yeats, among recent poets with Stephen Phillips, Meredith, Carpenter, great names all of them, not to speak of lesser writers. This little book with its 135 short pages is almost too small a pedestal for the figures it has to support, not, be it understood, for the purposes of the English reader interested in poetry, but for ours in India who have on this subject a great ignorance and, most of us, a very poorly trained critical intelligence. We need something a little more ample to enchain our attention and fix in us a permanent interest; a finger-post by the way is not enough for the Indian reader, you will have to carry him some miles on the road if you would have him follow it.

But Mr. Cousins has done a great service to the Indian mind by giving it at all a chance to follow this direction with such a guide to point out the way. The English language and literature is practically the only window the Indian mind, with the narrow and meagre and yet burdensome education given to it, possesses into the world of European thought and culture; but, at least as possessed at present, it is a painfully small and insufficient opening. English poetry for all but a few of us stops short with Tennyson and Browning, when it does not stop with Byron and Shelley. A few have heard of some of the recent, fewer of some of the contemporary poets; their readers are hardly enough to make a number. In this matter of culture this huge peninsula, once one of the greatest centres of civilisation, has been for long the most provincial of provinces; it has been a patch of tilled fields round a lawyer's office and a Government cutcherry, a cross between a little district town and the most rural of villages, at its largest a dried-up bank far away from the great stream of the world's living thought and action, visited with no great force by occasional and belated waves, but for the rest a bare field for

sluggish activities, the falsest possible education, a knowledge always twenty-five or fifty years behind the time. The awakening brought by the opening years of the twentieth century has chiefly taken the form of a revival of cultural patriotism, highly necessary for a nation which has a distinctive contribution to make to the human spirit in its future development, some new and great thing which it must evolve out of a magnificent past for the opening splendours of the future; but in order that this may evolve rapidly and surely, it needs a wide and sound information, a richer stuff to work upon, a more vital touch with the life and master tendencies of the world around it. Such books as this will be of invaluable help in creating what is now deficient.

The helpfulness of this suggestive work comes more home to me personally because I have shared to the full the state of mere blank which is the ordinary condition of the Indian mind with regard to its subject. Such touch as in the intellectual remoteness of India I have been able to keep up with the times, had been with contemporary continental rather than contemporary English literature. With the latter all vital connection came to a dead stop with my departure from England quarter of a century ago; it had for its last events the discovery of Meredith as a poet, in his *Modern Love*, and the perusal of *Christ in Hades*, — some years before its publication, — the latter an unforgettable date. I had long heard, standing aloof in giant ignorance, the great name of Yeats, but with no more than a fragmentary and mostly indirect acquaintance with some of his work; A.E. only lives for me in Mr. Cousins' pages; other poets of the day are still represented in my mind by scattered citations. In the things of culture such a state of ignorance is certainly an unholy state of sin; but in this immoral and imperfect world even sin has sometimes its rewards, and I get that now in the joy and light of a new world opening to me all in one view while I stand, Cortes-like, on the peak of the large impression created for me by Mr. Cousins' book. For the light we get from a vital and illuminative criticism from within by another mind can sometimes almost take the place of a direct knowledge.

There disengages itself from these essays not so much a special point of view as a distinctive critical and literary tempera-

ment, which may be perhaps not so much the whole mind of the critic as the response to his subject in a mind naturally in sympathy with it. Mr. Cousins is a little nervous about this in his preface; he is apprehensive of being labelled as an idealist. The cut and dried distinction between idealism and realism in literature has always seemed to me to be a little arbitrary and unreal, and whatever its value in drama and fiction, it has no legitimate place in poetry. What we find here is a self-identification with what is best and most characteristic of a new spirit in the age, a new developing aesthetic temper and outlook, — or should we rather say, inlook? Its mark is a greater (not exclusive) tendency to the spiritual rather than the merely earthly, to the inward and subjective than the outward and objective, to the life within and behind than to the life in front, and in its purest, which seems to be its Irish form, a preference of the lyrical to the dramatic and of the inwardly suggestive to the concrete method of poetical presentation. Every distinctive temperament has naturally the defect of an insufficient sympathy, often a pronounced and intolerant antipathy towards all that departs from its own motives. Moreover, contemporary criticism is beset with many dangers; there is the charm of new thought and feeling and expression of tendency which blinds us to the defects and misplaces or misproportions to our view the real merits of the expression itself; there are powerful cross-currents of immediate attraction and repulsion which carry us from the true track; especially, there is the inevitable want of perspective which prevents us from getting a right vision of things too near us in time. And if, in addition, one is oneself part of a creative movement with powerful tendencies and a pronounced ideal, it becomes difficult to get away from the standpoint it creates to a larger critical outlook. From these reefs and shallows Mr. Cousins' sense of measure and justice of appreciation largely, generally indeed, preserve him, though not, I think, quite invariably. But still it is not a passionless, quite disinterested criticism which we get or want from this book, but a much more helpful thing, an interpretation of work which embodies the creative tendencies of the time by one who has himself lived in them and helped both to direct and to form.

Mr. Cousins' positive criticism is almost always fine, just and inspired by a warm glow of sympathy and understanding tempered by discernment, restraint and measure; whatever the future critic, using his scales and balance, may have to take away from it, will be, one would imagine, only by way of a slight alteration of stress here and there. His depreciations, though generally sound enough, are not, I think, invariably as just as his appreciations. Thus his essay on the work of J. M. Synge, "The Realist on the Stage", is, in sharp distinction from the rest of the book, an almost entirely negative and destructive criticism, strong and interesting, but written from the point of view of the ideals and aims of the Irish literary movement against a principle of work which seemed entirely to depart from them; yet we are allowed to get some glimpse of a positive side of dramatic power which the critic does not show us, but leaves us rather to guess at. Mr. Cousins seems to me to take the dramatist's theory of his own art more seriously than it should be taken; for the creator can seldom be accepted — there may of course be exceptions, rare instances of clairvoyant self-sight — as a sound exponent of his own creative impulse. He is in his central inspiration the instrument of a light and power not his own, and his account of it is usually vitiated, out of focus, an attempt to explain the workings of this impersonal power by motives which were the contribution of his own personal effort, but which are often quite subordinate or even accidental side-lights of the lower brain-mind, not the central moving force.

Mr. Cousins has pointed out clearly enough that art can never be a copy of life. But it is also true, I think, that that is not the secret object of most realism, whatever it may say about itself; realism is in fact a sort of nether idealism, or, perhaps more correctly, sometimes an inverse, sometimes a perverse romanticism which tries to get a revelation of creative truth by an effective force of presentation, by an intensity, often an exaggeration at the opposite side of the complex phenomenon of life. All art starts from the sensuous and sensible, or takes it as a continual point of reference or, at the lowest, uses it as a symbol and a fount of images; even when it soars into invisible worlds, it is from the earth that it soars; but equally all art worth the name must go

beyond the visible, must reveal, must show us something that is hidden, and in its total effect not reproduce but create. We may say that the artist creates an ideal world of his own, not necessarily in the sense of ideal perfection, but a world that exists in the idea, the imagination and vision of the creator. More truly, he throws into significant form a truth he has seen, which may be truth of hell or truth of heaven or an immediate truth behind things terrestrial or any other, but is never merely the external truth of earth. By that ideative truth and the power, the perfection and the beauty of his presentation and utterance of it, his work must be judged.

Some occasional utterances in this book seem to spring from very pronounced idiosyncrasies of its distinctive literary temperament or standpoint and cannot always be accepted without reservation. I do not myself share its rather disparaging attitude towards the dramatic form and motive or its comparative coldness towards the architectural faculty and impulse in poetry. When Mr. Cousins tells us that "its poetry and not its drama will be the thing of life" in Shakespeare's work, I feel that the distinction is not sound all through, that there is a truth behind it, but it is overstated. Or when still more vivaciously he dismisses Shakespeare the dramatist "to a dusty and reverent immortality in the libraries" or speaks of the "monstrous net of his life's work" which but for certain buoys of line and speech "might sink in the ocean of forgetfulness", I cannot help feeling that this can only be at most the mood of the hour born of the effort to get rid of the burden of its past and move more freely towards its future, and not the definitive verdict of the poetic and aesthetic mind on what has been so long the object of its sincere admiration and a powerful presence and influence. Perhaps I am wrong, I may be too much influenced by my own settled idiosyncrasies of an aesthetic temperament and being impregnated with an early cult for the work of the great builders in Sanskrit and Greek, Italian and English poetry. At any rate, this is true that whatever relation we may keep with the great masters of the past, our present business is to go beyond and not to repeat them, and it must always be the lyrical motive and spirit which find a new secret and begin a new creation; for the lyrical is the primary

poetical motive and spirit and the dramatic and epic must wait for it to open for them their new heaven and new earth.

I have referred to these points which are only side issues or occasional touches in Mr. Cousins' book, because they are germane to the question which it most strongly raises, the future of English poetry and of the world's poetry. It is still uncertain how that future will deal with the old quarrel between idealism and realism, for the two tendencies these names roughly represent are still present in the tendencies of recent work. More generally, poetry always sways between two opposite trends, towards predominance of subjective vision and towards an emphasis on objective presentation, and it can rise too beyond these to a spiritual plane where the distinction is exceeded, the divergence reconciled. Again, it is not likely that the poetic imagination will ever give up the narrative and dramatic form of its creative impulse; a new spirit in poetry, even though primarily lyrical, is moved always to seize upon and do what it can with them, — as we see in the impulsion which has driven Maeterlinck, Yeats, Rabindranath to take hold of the dramatic form for self-expression as well as the lyrical in spite of their dominant subjectivity. We may perhaps think that this was not the proper form for their spirit, that they cannot get there a full or a flawless success; but who shall lay down rules for creative genius or say what it shall or shall not attempt? It follows its own course and makes its own shaping experiments. And it is interesting to speculate whether the new spirit in poetry will take and use with modifications the old dramatic and narrative forms, as did Rabindranath in his earlier dramatic attempts, or quite transform them to its own ends, as he has attempted in his later work. But after all these are subordinate issues.

It will be more fruitful to take the main substance of the matter for which the body of Mr. Cousins' criticism gives a good material. Taking the impression it creates for a starting-point and the trend of English poetry for our main text, but casting our view farther back into the past, we may try to sound what the future has to give us through the medium of the poetic mind and its power for creation and interpretation. The issues of recent activity are still doubtful and it would be rash to make any

confident prediction; but there is one possibility which this book strongly suggests and which it is at least interesting and may be fruitful to search and consider. That possibility is the discovery of a closer approximation to what we might call the *mantra* in poetry, that rhythmic speech which, as the Veda puts it, rises at once from the heart of the seer and from the distant home of the Truth, — the discovery of the word, the divine movement, the form of thought proper to the reality which, as Mr. Cousins excellently says, "lies in the apprehension of a something stable behind the instability of word and deed, something that is a reflection of the fundamental passion of humanity for something beyond itself, something that is a dim foreshadowing of the divine urge which is prompting all creation to unfold itself and to rise out of its limitations towards its Godlike possibilities". Poetry in the past has done that in moments of supreme elevation; in the future there seems to be some chance of its making it a more conscious aim and steadfast endeavour.

CHAPTER II

The Essence of Poetry

IN ORDER to get a firm clue which we can follow fruitfully in the retrospect and prospect we have proposed to ourselves, it will not be amiss to enquire what is the highest power we demand from poetry; or, — let us put it more largely and get nearer the root of the matter, — what may be the nature of poetry, its essential law, and how out of that arises the possibility of its use as the *mantra* of the Real. Not that we need spend a vain effort in labouring to define anything so profound, elusive and indefinable as the breath of poetic creation; to take the myriad-stringed harp of Saraswati to pieces for the purpose of scientific analysis must always be a narrow and rather barren amusement. But we do stand in need of some guiding intuitions, some helpful descriptions which will serve to enlighten our search; and to fix in that way, not by definition, but by description, the essential things in poetry is neither an impossible, nor an unprofitable endeavour.

We meet here two common enough errors, to one of which the ordinary uninstructed mind is most liable, to the other the too instructed critic or the too intellectually conscientious artist or craftsman. To the ordinary mind, judging poetry without really entering into it, it looks as if it were nothing more than an aesthetic pleasure of the imagination, the intellect and the ear, a sort of elevated pastime. If that were all, we need not have wasted time in seeking for its spirit, its inner aim, its deeper law. Anything pretty, pleasant and melodious with a beautiful idea in it would serve our turn; a song of Anacreon or a plaint of Mimnermus would be as good as the Oedipus, Agamemnon or Odyssey, for from this point of view they might well strike us as equally and even, one might contend, more perfect in their light, but exquisite unity and brevity. Pleasure, certainly, we expect from poetry as from all art; but the external sensible and even

the inner imaginative pleasure are only first elements; refined in order to meet the highest requirements of the intelligence, the imagination and the ear, they have to be still farther heightened and in their nature raised beyond even their own noblest levels.

For neither the intelligence, the imagination nor the ear are the true recipients of the poetic delight, even as they are not its true creators; they are only its channels and instruments: the true creator, the true hearer is the soul. The more rapidly and transparently the rest do their work of transmission, the less they make of their separate claim to satisfaction, the more directly the word reaches and sinks deep into the soul, the greater the poetry. Therefore poetry has not really done its work, at least its highest work, until it has raised the pleasure of the instrument and transmuted it into the deeper delight of the soul. A divine Ananda, a delight interpretative, creative, revealing, formative, — one might almost say, an inverse reflection of the joy which the universal Soul has felt in its great release of energy when it rang out into the rhythmic forms of the universe the spiritual truth, the large interpretative idea, the life, the power, the emotion of things packed into its original creative vision — such spiritual joy is that which the soul of the poet feels and which, when he can conquer the human difficulties of his task, he succeeds in pouring also into all those who are prepared to receive it. And this delight is not merely a godlike pastime; it is a great formative and illuminative power.

The critic — of a certain type — or the intellectually conscientious artist will, on the other hand, often talk as if poetry were mainly a matter of a faultlessly correct or at most an exquisite technique. Certainly, in all art good technique is the first step towards perfection; but there are so many other steps, there is a whole world beyond before you can get near to what you seek; so much so that even a deficient correctness of execution will not prevent an intense and gifted soul from creating great poetry which keeps its hold on the centuries. Moreover, technique, however indispensable, occupies a smaller field perhaps in poetry than in any other art, — first, because its instrument, the rhythmic word, is fuller of subtle and immaterial elements; then because, the most complex, flexible, variously suggestive of all

the instruments of the artistic creator, it has more infinite possibilities in many directions than any other. The rhythmic word has a subtly sensible element, its sound value, a quite immaterial element, its significance or thought value, and both of these again, its sound and its sense, have separately and together a soul value, a direct spiritual power, which is infinitely the most important thing about them. And though this comes to birth with a small element subject to the laws of technique, yet almost immediately, almost at the beginning of its flight, its power soars up beyond the province of any laws of mechanical construction.

Rather it determines itself its own form. The poet least of all artists needs to create with his eye fixed anxiously on the technique of his art. He has to possess it, no doubt; but in the heat of creation the intellectual sense of it becomes a subordinate action or even a mere undertone in his mind, and in his best moments he is permitted, in a way, to forget it altogether. For then the perfection of his sound-movement and style come entirely as the spontaneous form of his soul: that utters itself in an inspired rhythm and an innate, a revealed word, even as the universal Soul created the harmonies of the universe out of the power of the word secret and eternal within him, leaving the mechanical work to be done in a surge of hidden spiritual excitement by the subconscient part of his Nature. It is this highest speech which is the supreme poetic utterance, the immortal element in his poetry, and a little of it is enough to save the rest of his work from oblivion. *Svalpam apyasya dharmasya!*

This power makes the rhythmic word of the poet the highest form of speech available to man for the expression whether of his self-vision or of his world-vision. It is noticeable that even the highest experience, the pure spiritual which enters into things that can never be wholly expressed, still, when it does try to express them and not merely to explain them intellectually, tends instinctively to use, often the rhythmic forms, almost always the manner of speech characteristic of poetry. But poetry attempts to extend this manner of vision and utterance to all experience, even the most objective, and therefore it has a natural urge towards the expression of something in the object beyond its mere

appearances, even when these seem outwardly to be all that it is enjoying.

We may usefully cast a glance, not at the last inexpressible secret, but at the first elements of this heightening and intensity peculiar to poetic utterance. Ordinary speech uses language mostly for a limited practical utility of communication; it uses it for life and for the expression of ideas and feelings necessary or useful to life. In doing so, we treat words as conventional signs for ideas with nothing but a perfunctory attention to their natural force, much as we use any kind of common machine or simple implement; we treat them as if, though useful for life, they were themselves without life. When we wish to put a more vital power into them, we have to lend it to them out of ourselves, by marked intonations of the voice, by the emotional force or vital energy we throw into the sound so as to infuse into the conventional word-sign something which is not inherent in itself. But if we go back earlier in the history of language and still more if we look into its origins, we shall, I think, find that it was not always so with human speech. Words had not only a real and vivid life of their own, but the speaker was more conscious of it than we can possibly be with our mechanised and sophisticated intellects. This arose from the primitive nature of language which, probably, in its first movement was not intended, — or shall we say, did not intend, — so much to stand for distinct ideas of the intelligence as for feelings, sensations, broad indefinite mental impressions with minute shades of quality in them which we do not now care to pursue. The intellectual sense in its precision must have been a secondary element which grew more dominant as language evolved.

For the reason why sound came to express fixed ideas, lies not in any natural and inherent equivalence between the sound and its intellectual sense, for there is none, — intellectually any sound might express any sense, if men were agreed on a conventional equivalence between them; it started from an indefinable quality or property in the sound to raise certain vibrations in the life-soul of the human creature, in his sensational, his emotional, his crude mental being. An example may indicate more clearly what I mean. The word wolf, the origin of which is no longer

present to our minds, denotes to our intelligence a certain living object and that is all, the rest we have to do for ourselves: the Sanskrit word *vṛka*, "tearer", came in the end to do the same thing, but originally it expressed the sensational relation between the wolf and man which most affected the man's life, and it did so by a certain quality in the sound which readily associated it with the sensation of tearing. This must have given early language a powerful life, a concrete vigour, in one direction a natural poetic force which it has lost, however greatly it has gained in precision, clarity, utility.

Now, poetry goes back in a way and recovers, though in another fashion, as much as it can of this original element. It does this partly by a stress on the image replacing the old sensational concreteness, partly by a greater attention to the suggestive force of the sound, its life, its power, the mental impression it carries. It associates this with the definitive thought value contributed by the intelligence and increases both by each other. In that way it succeeds at the same time in carrying up the power of speech to the direct expression of a higher reach of experience than the intellectual or vital. For it brings out not only the definitive intellectual value of the word, not only its power of emotion and sensation, its vital suggestion, but through and beyond these its soul-suggestion, its spirit. So poetry arrives at the indication of infinite meanings beyond the finite intellectual meaning the word carries. It expresses not only the life-soul of man as did the primitive word, not only the ideas of his intelligence for which speech now usually serves, but the experience, the vision, the ideas, as we may say, of the higher and wider soul in him. Making them real to our life-soul as well as present to our intellect, it opens to us by the word the doors of the Spirit.

Prose style carries speech to a much higher power than its ordinary use, but it differs from poetry in not making this yet greater attempt. For it takes its stand firmly on the intellectual value of the word. It uses rhythms which ordinary speech neglects, and aims at a general fluid harmony of movement. It seeks to associate words agreeably and luminously so as at once to please and to clarify the intelligence. It strives after a more accurate, subtle, flexible and satisfying expression than the rough

methods of ordinary speech care to compass. A higher adequacy of speech is its first object. Beyond this adequacy it may aim at a greater forcefulness and effectiveness by various devices of speech which are so many rhetorical means for heightening its force of intellectual appeal. Passing beyond this first limit, this just or strong, but always restraining measure, it may admit a more emphatic rhythm, more directly and powerfully stimulate the emotion, appeal to a more vivid aesthetic sense. It may even make such a free or rich use of images as to suggest an outward approximation to the manner of poetry; but it employs them decoratively, as ornaments, *alaṁkāra*, or for their effective value in giving a stronger intellectual vision of the thing or the thought it describes or defines; it does not use the image for that profounder and more living vision for which the poet is always seeking. And always it has its eye on its chief hearer and judge, the intelligence, and calls in other powers only as important aids to capture his suffrage. Reason and taste, two powers of the intelligence, are rightly the supreme gods of the prose stylist, while to the poet they are only minor deities.

If it goes beyond these limits, approaches in its measures a more striking rhythmic balance, uses images for sheer vision, opens itself to a mightier breath of speech, prose style passes beyond its province and approaches or even enters the confines of poetry. It becomes poetical prose or even poetry itself using the apparent forms of prose as a disguise or a loose apparel. A high or a fine adequacy, effectivity, intellectual illuminativeness and a carefully tempered aesthetic satisfaction are the natural and normal powers of its speech. But the privilege of the poet is to go beyond and discover that more intense illumination of speech, that inspired word and supreme inevitable utterance, in which there meets the unity of a divine rhythmic movement with a depth of sense and a power of infinite suggestion welling up directly from the fountatin-heads of the spirit within us. He may not always or often find it, but to seek for it is the law of his utterance, and when he can not only find it, but cast into it some deeply revealed truth of the spirit itself, he utters the *mantra.*

But always, whether in the search or the finding, the whole style and rhythm of poetry are the expression and movement

which come from us out of a certain spiritual excitement caused by a vision in the soul of which it is eager to deliver itself. The vision may be of anything in Nature or God or man or the life of creatures or the life of things; it may be a vision of force and action, or of sensible beauty, or of truth of thought, or of emotion and pleasure and pain, of this life or the life beyond. It is sufficient that it is the soul which sees and the eye, sense, heart and thought-mind become the passive instruments of the soul. Then we get the real, the high poetry. But if it is too much an excitement of the intellect, the imagination, the emotions, the vital activities seeking rhythmical and forceful expression which acts, without enough of the greater spiritual excitement embracing them, if all these are not sufficiently sunk into the soul, steeped in it, fused in it and the expression does not come out purified and uplifted by a sort of spiritual transmutation, then we fall to lower levels of poetry, and get work of a much more doubtful immortality. And when the appeal is altogether to the lower things in us, to the mere mind, we arrive outside the true domain of poetry; we approach the confines of prose or get prose itself masking in the apparent forms of poetry, and the work is distinguished from prose style only or mainly by its mechanical elements, a good verse form and perhaps a more compact, catching or energetic expression than the prose writer will ordinarily permit to the easier and looser balance of his speech. That is to say, it will not have at all or not sufficiently the true essence of poetry.

For in all things that speech can express there are two elements, the outward or instrumental and the real or spiritual. In thought, for instance, there is the intellectual idea, that which the intelligence makes precise and definite to us, and the soul-idea, that which exceeds the intellectual and brings us into nearness or identity with the whole reality of the thing expressed. Equally in emotion, it is not the mere emotion itself the poet seeks, but the soul of the emotion, that in it for the delight of which the soul in us and the world desires or accepts emotional experience. So too with the poetical sense of objects, the poet's attempt to embody in his speech truth of life or truth of Nature. It is this greater truth and its delight and beauty for which he is seeking, beauty which is truth and truth beauty and therefore a joy for ever,

because it brings us the delight of the soul in the discovery of its own deeper realities. This greater element the more timid and temperate speech of prose can sometimes shadow out to us, but the heightened and fearless style of poetry makes it close and living and the higher cadences of poetry carry in on their wings what the style by itself could not bring. This is the source of that intensity which is the stamp of poetical speech and of the poetical movement. It comes from the stress of the soul-vision behind the word; it is the spiritual excitement of a rhythmic voyage of self-discovery among the magic islands of form and name in these inner and outer worlds.

CHAPTER III

Rhythm and Movement

THE Mantra, poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality, is only possible when three highest intensities of poetic speech meet and become indissolubly one, a highest intensity of rhythmic movement, a highest intensity of verbal form and thought-substance, of style, and a highest intensity of the soul's vision of truth. All great poetry comes about by a unison of these three elements; it is the insufficiency of one or another which makes the inequalities in the work of even the greatest poets; and it is the failure of some one element which is the cause of their lapses, of the scoriae in their work, the spots in the sun. But it is only at a certain highest level of the fused intensities that the Mantra becomes possible.

From a certain point of view it is the rhythm, the poetic movement which is of primary importance; for that is the first fundamental, indispensable element without which all the rest, whatever its other value, remains inacceptable to the Muse of poetry. A perfect rhythm will often even give immortality to work which is slight in vision and very far from the higher intensities of style. But it is not merely metrical rhythm, even in a perfect technical excellence, which we mean when we speak of poetic movement; that perfection is only the first step, the physical basis. There must be a deeper and more subtle music, a rhythmical soul-movement entering into the metrical form and often overflooding it, before the real poetic achievement begins. A mere metrical excellence, however subtle, rich or varied, however perfectly it satisfies the outer ear, does not meet the deeper aims of the creative spirit; for there is an inner hearing which makes its greater claim, and to reach and satisfy it is the true aim of the creator of melody and harmony.

Nevertheless metre, by which we mean a fixed and balanced system of the measures of sound, *mātrā*, is not only the tradi-

tional, but also surely the right physical basis for the poetic movement. A recent modern tendency, — that which has given us the poetry of Whitman and Carpenter and the experimentalists in *vers libre* in France and Italy, — denies this tradition and sets aside metre as a limiting bondage, perhaps even a frivolous artificiality or a falsification of true, free and natural poetic rhythm. That is, it seems to me, a point of view which cannot eventually prevail, because it does not deserve to prevail. It certainly cannot triumph, unless it justifies itself by supreme rhythmical achievements beside which the highest work of the great masters of poetic harmony in the past shall sink into a clear inferiority. That has not yet been done. On the contrary, *vers libre* has done its best when it has either limited its aim in rhythm to a kind of chanting poetical prose or else based itself on a sort of irregular and complex metrical movement which in its inner law, though not in its form, recalls the idea of Greek choric poetry.

Milton disparaging rhyme, which he had himself used with so much skill in his earlier, less sublime, but more beautiful poetry, forgot or ignored the spiritual value of rhyme, its power to enforce and clinch the appeal of melodic or harmonic recurrence which is a principal element in the measured movement of poetry, its habit of opening sealed doors to the inspiration, its capacity to suggest and reveal beauty to that supra-intellectual something in us which music is powerful to awake. The Whitmanic technique falls into a similar, but wider error. When mankind found out the power of thought and feeling thrown into fixed and recurring measures of sound to move and take possession of the mind and soul, they were not discovering a mere artistic device, but a subtle truth of psychology, of which the conscious theory is preserved in the Vedic tradition. And when the ancient Indians chose more often than not to throw whatever they wished to endure, even philosophy, science and law, into metrical form, it was not merely to aid the memory, — they were able to memorise huge prose Brahmanas quite as accurately as the Vedic hymnal or the metrical Upanishads, — but because they perceived that metrical speech has in itself not only an easier durability, but a greater natural power than unmetrical, not only an intenser value of sound, but a force to compel language and

sense to heighten themselves in order to fall fitly into this stricter mould. There is perhaps a truth in the Vedic idea that the Spirit of creation framed all the movements of the world by *chandas*, in certain fixed rhythms of the formative word, and it is because they are faithful to the cosmic metres that the basic world-movements unchangingly endure. A balanced harmony maintained by a system of subtle recurrences is the foundation of immortality in created things, and metrical movement is simply creative sound grown conscious of this secret of its own powers.

Still there are all sorts of heights and gradations in the use of this power. General consent seems indeed to have sanctioned the name of poetry for any kind of effective language set in a vigorous or catching metrical form, and although the wideness of this definition is such that it has enabled even the Macaulays and Kiplings to mount their queer poetic thrones, I will not object: catholicity is always a virtue. Nevertheless, mere force of language tacked on to the trick of the metrical beat does not answer the higher description of poetry; it may have the form or its shadow, it has not the essence. There is a whole mass of poetry, — the French metrical romances and most of the mediaeval Ballad poetry may be taken as examples, — which relies simply on the metrical beat for its rhythm and on an even level of just tolerable expression for its style; there is hardly a line whose rhythm floats home or where the expression strikes deep. Even in later European poetry, though the art of verse and language has been better learned, essentially the same method persists, and poets who use it have earned not only the popular suffrage, but the praise of the critical mind. Still the definitive verdict on their verse is that it is nothing more than an effective jog-trot of Pegasus, a pleasing canter or a showy gallop. It has great staying-power, — indeed there seems no reason why, once begun, it should not go on for ever, — it carries the poet easily over his ground, but it does nothing more. Certainly no real soul-movement can get easily into this mould. It has its merits and its powers; it is good for metrical romances of a sort, for war poetry and popular patriotic poetry, or perhaps any poetry which wants to be an "echo of life"; it may stir, not the soul, but the vital being in us like a trumpet or excite it like a drum. But after all the drum and

the trumpet do not carry us far in the way of music.

But even high above this level we still do not get at once the greater sound-movement of which we are speaking. Poets of considerable power, sometimes the greatest, are satisfied ordinarily with a set harmony or a set melody, which is very satisfying to the outward ear and carries the aesthetic sense along with it in a sort of even, indistinctive pleasure, and into this mould of easy melody or harmony they throw their teeming or flowing imagination without difficulty or check, without any need of an intenser heightening, a deeper appeal. It is beautiful poetry; it satisfies the aesthetic sense, the imagination and the ear; but there the charm ends. Once we have heard its rhythm, we have nothing new to expect, no surprise for the inner ear, no danger of the soul being suddenly seized and carried away into unknown depths. It is sure of being floated along evenly as if upon a flowing stream. Or sometimes it is not so much a flowing stream as a steady march or other even movement: this comes oftenest in poets who appeal more to the thought than to the ear; they are concerned chiefly with the thing they have to say and satisfied to have found an adequate rhythmic mould into which they can throw it without any farther preoccupation.

But even a great attention and skill in the use of metrical possibilities, in the invention of rhythmical turns, devices, modulations, variations, strong to satisfy the intelligence, to seize the ear, to maintain its vigilant interest, will not bring us yet to the higher point we have in view. There are periods of literature in which this kind of skill is carried very far. The rhythms of Victorian poetry seem to me to be of this kind; they show sometimes the skill of the artist, sometimes of the classical or romantic technician, of the prestigious melodist or harmonist, sometimes the power of the vigorous craftsman or even the performer of robust metrical feats. All kinds of instrumental faculties have been active; but the one thing that is lacking, except in moments or brief periods of inspiration, is the soul behind creating and listening to its own greater movements.

Poetic rhythm begins to reach its highest levels, the greater poetic movements become possible when rising from and beyond any of these powers the soul begins to make its direct demand and

yearn for a profounder satisfaction: they awake when the inner ear begins to listen. Technically, we may say that this comes in when the poet becomes, in Keats' phrase, a miser of sound and syllable, economical of his means, not in the sense of a niggardly sparing, but of making the most of all its possibilities of sound. It is then that poetry gets farthest away from the method of prose-rhythm. Prose-rhythm aims characteristically at a general harmony in which the parts are subdued to get the tone of a total effect; even the sounds which give the support or the relief, yet to a great extent seem to be trying to efface themselves in order not to disturb by a too striking particular effect the general harmony which is the whole aim. Poetry, on the contrary, makes much of its beats and measures; it seeks for a very definite and insistent rhythm. But still, where the greater rhythmical intensities are not pursued, it is only some total effect that predominates and the rest is subdued to it. But in these highest, intensest rhythms every sound is made the most of, whether in its suppression or in its swelling expansion, its narrowness or its openness, in order to get in the combined effect something which the ordinary flow of poetry cannot give us.

But this is only the technical side, the physical means by which the effect is produced. It is not the artistic intelligence or the listening physical ear which is most at work, but something within trying to bring out an echo of hidden harmonies, a secret of rhythmical infinities within us. It is not a labour of the devising intellect or the aesthetic sense which the poet has achieved, but a labour of the spirit within itself to cast something out of the surge of the eternal depths. The other faculties are there in their place, but the conductor of the orchestral movement is the soul coming forward to get its own work done by its own higher and unanalysable methods. The result is something as near to wordless music as word-music can get, and with the same power of soul-life, of soul-emotion, of profound supra-intellectual significance. In these higher harmonies and melodies the metrical rhythm is taken up by the spiritual; it is filled with or sometimes it seems rolled away and lost in a music that has really another and spiritual secret of movement.

This is the intensity of poetic movement out of which the

greatest possibility of poetic expression arises. It is where the metrical movement remains as a base, but either enshrines and contains or is itself contained and floats in an element of greater music which exceeds it and yet brings out all its possibilities, that the music fit for the Mantra makes itself audible. It is the triumph of the spirit over the difficulties and limitations of its physical instrument. Its listener seems to be that eternal spirit whom the Upanishad speaks of as the ear of the ear, he who listens to all hearings; and "behind the instabilities of word and speech" it is the inevitable harmonies of his own thought and vision for which he is listening.

CHAPTER IV

Style and Substance

RHYTHM is the premier necessity of poetical expression because it is the sound-movement which carries on its wave the thought-movement in the word; and it is the musical sound-image which most helps to fill in, to extend, subtilise and deepen the thought impression or the emotional or vital impression and to carry the sense beyond itself into an expression of the intellectually inexpressible, — always the peculiar power of music. This truth was better understood on the whole or at least more consistently felt by the ancients than by the modern mind and ear, perhaps because they were more in the habit of singing, chanting or intoning their poetry while we are content to read ours, a habit which brings out the intellectual and emotional element, but unduly depresses the rhythmic value. On the other hand modern poetry has achieved a far greater subtlety, fineness and depth of suggestion in style and thought than the ancients, — with perhaps some loss in power, height and simple largeness. The ancients would not so easily as the moderns have admitted into the rank of great poets writers of poor rhythmic faculty or condoned, ignored or praised in really great poets rhythmic lapses, roughnesses and crudities for the sake of their power of style and substance.

In regard to poetic style we have to make, for the purpose of the idea we have in view, the starting-point of the Mantra, precisely the same distinctions as in regard to poetic rhythm, — since here too we find actually everything admitted as poetry which has some power of style and is cast into some kind of rhythmical form. But the question is what kind of power and in that kind what intensity of achievement? There is plenty of poetry signed by poets of present reputation or lasting fame which one is obliged to consign to a border region of half-poetry, because its principle of expression has not got far enough away

from the principle of prose expression. It seems to forget that while the first aim of prose style is to define and fix an object, fact, feeling, thought before the appreciating intelligence with whatever clearness, power, richness or other beauty of presentation may be added to that essential aim, the first aim of poetic style is to make the thing presented living to the imaginative vision, the spiritual sense, the soul-feeling and soul-sight. Where the failure is to express at all with any sufficient power, to get home in any way, the distinction becomes palpable enough and we readily say of such writings that this is verse but not poetry. But where there is some thought-power or other worth of substance attended with some power of expression, false values more easily become current and even a whole literary age may dwell on this borderland or be misled into an undue exaltation and cult for this half-poetry.

Poetry, like the kindred arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, appeals to the spirit of man through significant images, and it makes no essential difference that in this case the image is mental and verbal and not material. The essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make us think or feel; thought and feeling must arise out of or rather be included in the sight, but sight is the primary consequence and power of poetic speech. For the poet has to make us live in the soul and in the inner mind what is ordinarily lived in the outer mind and the senses, and for that he must first make us see by the soul, in its light and with its deeper vision what we ordinarily see in a more limited and halting fashion by the senses and the intelligence. He is, as the ancients knew, a seer and not merely a maker of rhymes, not merely a jongleur, rhapsodist or troubadour, and not merely a thinker in lines and stanzas. He sees beyond the sight of the surface mind and finds the revealing word, not merely the adequate and effective, but the illumined and illuminating, the inspired and inevitable word, which compels us to see also. To arrive at that word is the whole endeavour of poetic style.

The modern distinction is that the poet appeals to the imagination and not to the intellect. But there are many kinds of imagination; the objective imagination which visualises strongly the outward aspects of life and things; the subjective imagination

which visualises strongly the mental and emotional impressions they have the power to start in the mind; the imagination which deals in the play of mental fictions and to which we give the name of poetic fancy; the aesthetic imagination which delights in the beauty of words and images for their own sake and sees no farther. All these have their place in poetry, but they only give the poet his materials, they are only the first instruments in the creation of poetic style. The essential poetic imagination does not stop short with even the most subtle reproductions of things external or internal, with the richest or delicatest play of fancy or with the most beautiful colouring of word or image. It is creative, not of either the actual or the fictitious, but of the more and the most real; it sees the spiritual truth of things, — of this truth too there are many gradations, — which may take either the actual or the ideal for its starting-point. The aim of poetry, as of all true art, is neither a photographic or otherwise realistic imitation of Nature, nor a romantic furbishing and painting or idealistic improvement of her image, but an interpretation by the images she herself affords us not on one, but on many planes of her creation, of that which she conceals from us, but is ready, when rightly approached, to reveal.

This is the true, because the highest and essential aim of poetry, but the human mind arrives at it only by a succession of steps, the first of which seems far enough away from its object. It begins by stringing its most obvious and external ideas, feelings and sensations of things on a thread of verse in a sufficient language of no very high quality. But even when it gets to a greater adequacy and effectiveness, it is often no more than a vital, an emotional or an intellectual adequacy and effectiveness. There is a strong vital poetry which powerfully appeals to our sensations and our sense of life, like much of Byron or the less inspired mass of the Elizabethan drama; a strong emotional poetry which stirs our feelings and gives us the sense and active image of the passions; a strong intellectual poetry which satisfies our curiosity about life and its mechanism, or deals with its psychological and other "problems", or shapes for us our thoughts in an effective, striking and often quite resistlessly quotable fashion. All this has its pleasures for the mind and the surface

soul in us, and it is certainly quite legitimate to enjoy them and to enjoy them strongly and vividly on our way upward; but if we rest content with these only, we shall never get very high up the hill of the Muses.

The style of such poetry corresponds usually to its substance; for between the word and the vision there tends to be, though there is not by any means perfectly or invariably, a certain equation. There is a force of vital style, a force of emotional style, a force of intellectual style which we meet constantly in poetry and which it is essential to distinguish from the language of the higher spiritual imagination. The forceful expression of thought and sentiment is not enough for this higher language. To take some examples, it is not enough for it to express its sense of world-sorrow in a line of cheap sentimental force like Byron's

There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,

or to voice an opposite truth in the sprightly-forcible manner of Browning's

God's in his heaven,
All's right with the world,

or to strike the balance in a sense of equality with the pointed and ever quotable intellectuality of Pope's

God sees with equal eyes as lord of all,
A hero perish or a sparrow fall.

This may be the poetical or half-poetical language of thought and sentiment; it is not the language of real poetic vision. Note that all three brush the skirts of ideas whose deeper expression from the vision of a great poet might touch the very heights of poetic revelation. Byron's line is the starting-point in the emotional sensations for that high world-pessimism and its spiritual release which finds expression in the Gita's

Anityam asukham lokam imam prāpya bhajasva mām[1]

[1] "Thou who hast come to this transient and unhappy world, love and turn to Me."

and one has only to compare the manner of the two in style and rhythm, even leaving the substance aside, to see the difference between the lesser and the greater poetry. Browning's language rises from a robust cheerfulness of temperament, it does not touch the deeper fountain-heads of truth in us; an opposite temperament may well smile at it as vigorous optimistic fustian. Pope's actually falsifies by its poetical inadequacy that great truth of the Gita's teaching, the truth of the divine equality, because he has not seen and therefore cannot make us see; his significant images of the truth are, like his perception of it, intellectual and rhetorical, not poetic images.

There is a higher style of poetry than this which yet falls below the level to which we have to climb. It is no longer poetical language of a merely intellectual, vital or emotional force, but instead or in addition a genuinely imaginative style, with a certain, often a great beauty of vision in it whether objective or subjective, or with a certain, often a great but indefinite soul-power bearing up its movement of word and rhythm. It varies in intensity; for the lower intensity we can get plenty of examples from Chaucer, when he is indulging his imagination rather than his observation, and at a higher pitch from Spenser; for the loftier intensity we can cite at will for one kind from Milton's early poetry, for another from poets who have a real spiritual vision like Keats and Shelley. English poetry runs, indeed, ordinarily in this mould. But this too is not that highest intensity of the revelatory poetic word from which the Mantra starts. It has a certain power of revelation in it, but still the deeper vision is coated up in something more external and sometimes the poetic intention of decorative beauty, sometimes some other deliberate intention of the poetic mind overlays with the more outward beauty, beauty of image, beauty of thought, beauty of emotion, the deeper intention of the spirit within, so that we have still to look for that beyond the image rather than are seized by it through the image. A high pleasure is there, not unspiritual in its nature, but still it is not that point where pleasure passes into or is rather drowned in the pure spiritual Ananda, the ecstasy of the creative, poetic revelation.

That intensity comes where everything else may be present,

but all is powerfully carried on the surge of a spiritual vision which has found its inspired and inevitable speech. All or any of the other elements may be there, but they are at once subordinated and transfigured to their highest capacity for poetic light and rapture. This intensity belongs to no particular style, depends on no conceivable formula of diction. It may be the height of the decorative imaged style as often we find it in Kalidasa or Shakespeare; it may be that height of bare and direct expression where language seems to be used as a scarcely felt vaulting-board for a leap into the infinite; it may be the packed intensity of language which uses either the bare or the imaged form at will, but fills every word with its utmost possible rhythmic and thought suggestion. But in itself it depends on none of these things; it is not a style, but poetic style itself, the Word; it creates and carries with it its elements rather than is created by them. Whatever its outward forms, it is always the one fit style for the Mantra.

CHAPTER V

Poetic Vision and the Mantra

THIS highest intensity of style and movement which is the crest of the poetical impulse in its self-expression, the point at which the aesthetic, the vital, the intellectual element of poetic speech pass into the spiritual, justifies itself perfectly when it is the body of a deep, high or wide spiritual vision into which the life-sense, the thought, the emotion of the beauty in the thing discovered and its expression, — for all great poetic utterance is discovery, — rise on the wave of the culminating poetic inspiration into an ecstasy of sight. In the lesser poets these moments are rare and come like brilliant accidents, angel's visits, in the greater they are more frequent outbursts, but in the greatest they abound because they arise from a constant faculty of poetic vision and poetic speech which has its lesser and its greater moments, but never entirely fails them.

Vision is the characteristic power of the poet, as is discriminative thought the essential gift of the philosopher and analytic observation the natural genius of the scientist. The Kavi[1] was in the idea of the ancients the seer and revealer of truth, and though we have wandered far enough from that ideal to demand from him only the pleasure of the ear and the amusement of the aesthetic faculty, still all great poetry preserves something of that higher truth of its own aim and significance. Poetry, in fact, being Art, must attempt to make us see, and since it is to the inner senses that it has to address itself, — for the ear is its only physical gate of entry and even there its real appeal is to an inner hearing, — and since its object is to make us live within ourselves what the poet has embodied in his verse, it is an inner sight which he opens in us, and this inner sight must have been intense in him

[1] The Sanskrit word for poet. In classical Sanskrit it is applied to any maker of verse or even of prose, but in the Vedic it meant the poet-seer who saw and found the inspired word of his vision.

before he can awaken it in us.

Therefore the greatest poets have been always those who have had a large and powerful interpretative and intuitive vision of Nature and life and man and whose poetry has arisen out of that in a supreme revelatory utterance of it. Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Valmiki, Kalidasa, however much they may differ in everything else, are at one in having this as the fundamental character of their greatness. Their supremacy does not lie essentially in a greater thought-power or a more lavish imagery or a more penetrating force of passion and emotion; these things they may have had, one being more gifted in one direction, another in others, but these other powers were aids to their poetic expression rather than the essence or the source of it. There is often more thought in a short essay of Bacon's than in a whole play of Shakespeare's, but not even a hundred cryptograms can make him the author of the dramas; for, as he showed when he tried to write poetry, the very nature of his thought-power and the characteristic way of expression of the born philosophical thinker hampered him in poetic expression. It was the constant outstreaming of form and thought and image from an abundant vision of life which made Shakespeare, whatever his other deficiencies, the sovereign dramatic poet. Sight is the essential poetic gift. The archetypal poet in a world of original ideas is, we may say, a Soul that sees in itself intimately this world and all the others and God and Nature and the life of beings and sets flowing from its centre a surge of creative rhythm and word-images which become the expressive body of the vision; and the great poets are those who repeat in some measure this ideal creation, *kavayaḥ satyaśrutaḥ*, seers and hearers of the poetic truth and poetic word.

The tendency of the modern mind at the present day seems to be towards laying a predominant value on the thought in poetry. We live still in an age which is in a great intellectual trouble and ferment about life and the world and is developing enormously the human intelligence, — often at the expense of other powers which are no less necessary to self-knowledge, — in order to grapple with life and master it. We are seeking always and in many directions to decipher the enigma of things, the cryptogram of the worlds which we are set to read, and to deci-

pher it by the aid of the intellect; and for the most part we are much too busy living and thinking to have leisure to be silent and see. We expect the poet to use his great mastery of language to help us in this endeavour; we ask of him not so much perfect beauty of song or largeness of creative vision as a message to our perplexed and seeking intellects. Therefore we hear constantly today of the "philosophy" of a poet, even the most inveterate beautifier of commonplaces being forcibly gifted by his admirers with a philosophy, or of his message, — the message of Tagore, the message of Whitman. We are asking then of the poet to be, not a supreme singer or an inspired seer of the worlds, but a philosopher, a prophet, a teacher, even something perhaps of a religious or ethical preacher. It is necessary therefore to say that when I claim for the poet the role of a seer of Truth and find the source of great poetry in a great and revealing vision of life or God or the gods or man or Nature, I do not mean that it is necessary for him to have an intellectual philosophy of life or a message for humanity, which he chooses to express in verse because he has the metrical gift and the gift of imagery, or a solution of the problems of the age or a mission to improve mankind, or, as it is said, "to leave the world better than he found it". As a man, he may have these things, but the less he allows them to get the better of his poetical gift, the happier it will be for his poetry. Material for his poetry they may give, an influence in it they may be, provided they are transmuted into vision and life by the poetical spirit, but they can be neither its soul nor its aim, nor give the law to its creative activity and its expression.

The poet-seer sees differently, thinks in another way, voices himself in quite another manner than the philosopher or the prophet. The prophet announces the Truth as the word of God or his command, he is the giver of the message; the poet shows us Truth in its power of beauty, in its symbol or image, or reveals it to us in the workings of Nature or in the workings of life, and when he has done that, his whole work is done; he need not be its explicit spokesman. The philosopher's business is to discriminate Truth and put its parts and aspects into intellectual relation with each other; the poet's is to seize and embody aspects of Truth in their living relations, or rather, — for that is too philo-

sophical a language, — to see her features and excited by the vision create in the beauty of her image.

No doubt, the prophet may have in him a poet who breaks out often into speech and surrounds with the vivid atmosphere of life the directness of his message; he may follow up his injunction "Take no thought for the morrow", by a revealing image of the beauty of the truth he enounces, in the life of Nature, in the figure of the lily, or link it to human life by the apologue and the parable; the philosopher may bring in the aid of colour and image to give some relief and hue to his dry light of reason and water his arid path of abstractions with some healing dew of poetry. But these are ornaments and not the substance of his work; and if the philosopher makes his thought substance of poetry, he ceases to be a philosophical thinker and becomes a poet-seer of Truth. Thus the more rigid metaphysicians are perhaps right in denying to Nietzsche the name of philosopher; for Nietzsche does not think, but always sees, turbidly or clearly, rightly or distortedly, but with the eye of the seer rather than with the brain of the thinker. On the other hand, we may get great poetry which is full of a prophetic enthusiasm of utterance or is largely or even wholly philosophic in its matter; but this prophetic poetry gives us no direct message, only a mass of sublime inspirations of thought and image, and this philosophic poetry is poetry and lives as poetry only in so far as it departs from the method, the expression, the way of seeing proper to the philosophic mind. It must be vision pouring itself into thought-images and not thought trying to observe truth and distinguish.

In earlier days this distinction was not at all clearly understood and therefore we find even poets of great power attempting to set philosophic systems to music or even much more prosaic matter than a philosophic system, Hesiod and Virgil setting about even a manual of agriculture in verse! In Rome, always a little blunt of perception in the aesthetic mind, her two greatest poets fell a victim to this unhappy conception, with results which are a lesson and a warning to all posterity. Lucretius' work lives only, in spite of the majestic energy behind it, by its splendid digressions into pure poetry, Virgil's Georgics by fine passages and pictures of Nature and beauties of word and image, but its subs-

tance is lifeless matter which has floated to us on the stream of Time saved for the beauty of its setting. India, and perhaps India alone, had managed once or twice to turn this kind of philosophic attempt into a poetic success, in the Gita, in the Upanishads and some minor works modelled upon them. But the difference is great. The Gita owes its poetical success to its starting from a great and critical situation in life, having that in view and always returning upon it, and to its method which is to seize on a spiritual experience or moment or stage of the inner life and throw it into the form of thought; and this, though a delicate operation, can keep well within the limits of the poetic manner of speech. Only where it overburdens itself with metaphysical matter and deviates into sheer philosophic definition and discrimination, which happens especially in two or three of its closing chapters, does the poetic voice sink under the weight, even occasionally into flattest versified prose. The Upanishads too, and much more, are not at all philosophic thinking, but spiritual seeing, a rush of spiritual intuitions throwing themselves inevitably into the language of poetry, shaped out of fire and life, because that is their natural speech and a more intellectual utterance would have falsified their vision.

Nowadays we have clarified our aesthetic perceptions sufficiently to avoid the mistake of the Roman poets; but in a subtler form the intellectual tendency still shows a dangerous spirit of encroachment. For the impulse to teach is upon us, the inclination to be an observer and critic of life, — there could be no more perilous definition than Arnold's poetic "criticism of life", in spite of the saving epithet, — to clothe, merely, in the forms of poetry a critical or philosophic idea of life to the detriment of our vision. Allegory with its intellectual ingenuities, its facile wedding of the abstract idea and the concrete image, shows a tendency to invade again the domain of poetry. And there are other signs of the intellectual malady of which we are almost all of us the victims. Therefore it is well to insist that the native power of poetry is in its sight, not in its intellectual thought-matter, and its safety is in adhering to this native principle of vision and allowing its conception, its thought, its emotion, its presentation, its structure to rise out of that, or compelling it to rise into that

before it takes its finished form. The poetic vision of life is not a critical or intellectual or philosophic view of it, but a soul-view, a seizing by the inner sense; and the Mantra is not in its substance or form poetic enunciation of a philosophic truth, but the rhythmic revelation or intuition arising out of the soul's sight of God and Nature and the world and the inner truth — occult to the outward eye — of all that peoples it, the secrets of their life and being.

With regard to the view of life which Art must take, distinctions are constantly laid down, such as the necessity of a subjective or an objective treatment or of a realistic or an idealistic view, which mislead more than they enlighten. Certainly, one poet may seem to excel in the concrete presentation of things and falter or be less sure in his grasp of the purely subjective, while another may move freely in the more subjective worlds and be less at home in the concrete; and both may be poets of a high order. But when we look closer, we see that just as a certain objectivity is necessary to make poetry live and the thing seen stand out before our eyes, so on the other hand even the most objective presentation starts from an inner view and subjective process of creation, for the poet really creates out of himself and not out of what he sees outwardly: that outward seeing only serves to excite the inner vision to its work. Otherwise his work would be a mechanical construction and putting together, not a living creation.

Sheer objectivity brings us down from art to photography; and the attempt to diminish the subjective view to the vanishing-point so as to get an accurate presentation is proper to science, not to poetry. We are not thereby likely to get a greater truth or reality, but very much the reverse; for the scientific presentation of things, however valid in its own domain, that of the senses and the observing reason, is not true to the soul, not certainly the integral truth or the whole vision of things, because it gives only process and machinery and the mechanic law of things, but not their inner life and spirit. That is the error in the theory of realism. Realistic art does not and cannot give us a scientifically accurate presentation of life, because Art is not and cannot be Science. What it does do, is to make an arbitrary selection of

motives, forms and hues, sometimes of dull blacks and greys and browns and dingy whites and sordid yellows, sometimes of violent blacks and reds, and the result is sometimes a thing of power and sometimes a nightmare. Idealistic art makes a different selection and produces either a work of power or beauty or else a false and distorted day-dream. In these distinctions there is no safety; nor can any rule be laid down for the poet, since he must necessarily go by what he is and what he sees, except that he should work from the living poetic centre within him and not exile himself into artificial standpoints.

From our present point of view we may say that the poet may do as he pleases in all that is not the essential matter. Thought-matter may be prominent in his work or life-substance predominate. He may proceed by sheer force of presentation or by direct power of interpretation. He may make this world his text, or wander into regions beyond, or soar straight into the pure empyrean of the infinite. To arrive at the Mantra he may start from the colour of a rose, or the power or beauty of a character, or the splendour of an action, or go away from all these into his own secret soul and its most hidden movements. The one thing needful is that he should be able to go beyond the word or image he uses or the form of the thing he sees, not be limited by them, but get into the light of that which they have the power to reveal and flood them with it until they overflow with its suggestions or seem even to lose themselves and disappear into the revelation. At the highest he himself disappears into sight; the personality of the seer is lost in the eternity of the vision, and the Spirit of all seems alone to be there speaking out sovereignly its own secrets.

But the poetic vision, like everything else, follows necessarily the evolution of the human mind and according to the age and environment, it has its levels, its ascents and descents and its returns. The eye of early man is turned upon the physical world about him, the interest of the story of life and its primary ideas and emotions; he sees man and his world only, or sees the other worlds and their gods and beings in that image also, but magnified and heightened. He asks little of poetry except a more forceful vision of these which will help him to see them more largely and feel them more strongly and give him a certain inspiration to

live them more powerfully. Afterwards he begins to intellectualise, but still on the same subject-matter, and he asks now from the poet a view of them enlightened by the inspired reason and beautifully shaped by the first strong and clear joy in his developing aesthetic sense. A vital poetry appealing to the imagination through the sense-mind and the emotions and a poetry interpretative of life to the intelligence are the fruit of these ages. Later poetry tends always to return on these forms with a more subtilised intellect and a richer life-experience.

Great things may be done by poetry on this basis, but it is evident that the poet will have a certain difficulty in getting to a deeper vision, because he has to lean entirely on the external thought and form, be subservient to it and get at what truth he can that may be beyond them with their veil still thickly interposing. A higher level comes when the mind of man begins to see more intimately the forces behind life, the powers concealed by our subjective existence, and the poet can attempt to reveal them more directly or at least to use the outward physical and vital and thought symbol only as a suggestion of greater things. Yet a higher level is attained, more depth possible when the soul in things comes nearer to man or other worlds than the physical open themselves to him. And the entire liberation of the poetic vision to see most profoundly and the poetic power to do its highest work must arrive when the spiritual itself is the possession of the greatest minds and the age stands on the verge of its revelation.

Therefore it is not sufficient for poetry to attain high intensities of word and rhythm; it must have, to fill them, an answering intensity of vision. And this does not depend only on the individual power of vision of the poet, but on the mind of his age and country, its level of thought and experience, the adequacy of its symbols, the depth of its spiritual attainment. A lesser poet in a greater age may give us occasionally things which exceed in this kind the work of less favoured immortals. The religious poetry of the later Indian tongues has for us fervours of poetic revelation which in the great classics are absent, even though no mediaeval poet can rank in power with Valmiki and Kalidasa. The modern literatures of Europe commonly fall short of the

Greek perfection of harmony and form, but they give us what the greatest Greek poets had not and could not have. And in our own days a poet of secondary power in his moments of inspiration can get to a vision far more satisfying to us than Shakespeare or Dante. Greatest of all is the promise of the age that is coming, if it fulfils its possibilities; for it is an age in which all the worlds are beginning to open to man's gaze and invite his experience, and in all he is near to the revelation of the Spirit of which they are, as we choose, the veils, the significant forms and symbols or else the transparent raiment.

CHAPTER VI

The National Evolution of Poetry

THE work of the poet depends not only on himself and his age, but on the mentality of the nation to which he belongs and the spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic tradition and environment which it creates for him. It is not to be understood by this that he is or need be entirely limited by this condition or that he is to consider himself as only a voice of the national mind or bound by the past national tradition and debarred from striking out a road of his own. In nations which are returning under difficulties to a strong self-consciousness, like the Irish or the Indians at the present moment, this nationalism may be a living idea and a powerful motive. And in others which have had a vivid collective life exercising a common and intimate influence on all its individuals or in those which have cherished an acute sense of a great national culture and tradition, the more stable elements of that tradition may exert a very conscious influence on the mind of the poets, at once helping and limiting the weaker spirits, but giving to genius an exceptional power for sustained beauty of form and a satisfying perfection. But this is no essential condition for the birth of great poetry. The poet, we must always remember, creates out of himself and has the indefeasible right to follow freely the breath of the spirit within him, provided he satisfies in his work the law of poetic beauty. The external forms of his age and his nation only give him his starting-point and some of his materials and determine to some extent the room he finds for the free play of his poetic spirit.

Nor do I mean to subscribe to the theory of the man and his milieu or the dogma of the historical school of criticism which asks of us to study all the precedents, circumstances, influences, surroundings, all that created the man and his work, — as if there were not something in him apart from all these which made all the difference, — and supposes that out of this the right estimate

of his poetry will arise. But not even the right historical or psychological understanding of him need arise out of this method, since we may very easily read into him and his work things which may perhaps have been there before and around him, but never really got into him. But the right poetical estimate we certainly shall not form if we bring in so much that is accidental and unessential to cloud our free and direct impression. Rather the very opposite is the true method of appreciation, to come straight to the poet and his poem for all we need essentially to know about them, — we shall get there all that we really want for any true aesthetic or poetic purpose, — and afterwards go elsewhere for any minor elucidation or else to satisfy our scientific and historical curiosity: things accidental are then much more likely to fall into their right place and the freshness of poetic appreciation to remain unobscured. But quite apart from its external and therefore unreal method, there is a truth in the historical theory of criticism which is of real help towards grasping something that is important and even essential, if not for our poetic appreciation, yet for our intellectual judgment of a poet and his work.

In poetry, as in everything else that aims at perfection, there are always two elements, the eternal and the time element. The first is what really and always matters, it is that which must determine our definitive appreciation, our absolute verdict, or rather our essential response to poetry. A soul expressing the eternal spirit of Truth and Beauty through some of the infinite variations of beauty, with the word for its instrument, that is, after all, what the poet is, and it is to a similar soul in us seeking the same spirit and responding to it that he makes his appeal. It is when we can get this response at its purest and in its most direct and heightened awakening that our faculty of poetic appreciation becomes at once surest and most intense. It is, we may say, the impersonal enjoyer of creative beauty in us responding to the impersonal creator and interpreter of beauty in the poet; for it is the impersonal spirit of Truth and Beauty that is seeking to express itself through his personality, and it is that which finds its own word and seems itself to create in his highest moments of inspiration. And this Impersonal is concerned with the creative idea and the motive of beauty which is seeking expression and with the attempt

to find the perfect expression, the inevitable word and the rhythm that reveals. All else is subordinate, accidental, the crude material and the conditioning medium of this essential endeavour.

Still there is also the personality of the poet and the personality of the hearer, the one giving the pitch and the form of the success arrived at, while the other determines the characteristic intellectual and aesthetic judgment to which its appeal arrives. The correspondence or the dissonance between the two decides the relation between the poet and his reader, and out of that arises what is personal in our appreciation and judgment of his poetry. In this personal or time element there is always much that is merely accidental and often rather limits and deflects our judgment than helps usefully to form it. How much that interferes can be seen when we try to value contemporary poetry. It is a matter of continual experience that even critics of considerable insight and sureness of taste are yet capable of the most extraordinarily wrong judgments, whether on the side of appreciation or of depreciation, when they have to pass a verdict on their contemporaries. And this is because a crowd of accidental influences belonging to the effect of the time and the mental environment upon our mentality exercise an exaggerated domination and distort or colour the view of our mental eye upon its object. But apart from this there is always something essential to our present personality which has a right to be heard. For we are all of us souls developing in a constant endeavour to get into unity with the spirit in life through its many forms of manifestation and on many different lines. And as there is in Indian Yoga a principle of *adhikāra*, something in the immediate power of a man's nature that determines by its characteristics his right to this or that way of Yoga, of union, which, whatever its merits or its limitations, is his right way because it is most helpful to him personally, so in all our activities of life and mind there is this principle of *adhikāra*. That which we can appreciate in poetry and still more the way in which we appreciate it, is that in it and us which is most helpful to us and therefore, for the time being at least, right for us in our attempt to get into union with the universal or the transcendent beauty through the revealing ideas and motives and revealing forms of poetic creation.

This is the individual aspect of the personal or time element. But there is also a larger movement to which we belong, both ourselves and the poet and his poetry; or rather it is the same movement of the general soul of mankind in the same endeavour towards the same objective. In poetry this shows itself in a sort of evolution from the objective to the inward, from the inward to the spiritual, an evolution which has many curves and turns and cycles, many returns upon past motives and imperfect anticipations of future motives, a general labour of self-enlargement and self-finding. It is a clear idea of this evolution which may most helpfully inform the historical or evolutionary element in our judgment and appreciation of poetry. And this general movement we see working itself out in different forms and on different lines through the souls of the nations and peoples who have arrived at a strong self-expression by the things of the mind, art and thought and poetry. These things do not indeed form the whole of the movement even as they do not make up the whole of the life of the people; they rather represent its highest points, — or the highest with the exception of the spiritual, in the few nations that have powerfully developed the spiritual force within, — and in them we best see the inner character and aim of that line of the movement.

This general evolution has its own natural periods or ages; but as with the stone, bronze and other ages discovered by the archaeologists, their time periods do not correspond in all the peoples which have evolved them. Moreover, they do not always follow each other in quite the same order; for in things psychological the Spirit in the world varies his movements more freely than in things physical. There, besides, he can anticipate the motives of a higher stratum of psychological development while yet he lives the general life of a lower stratum; so too when he has got on to a higher level of development, he may go strongly back to a past and inferior motive and see how it works out when altered by the motives and powers of the superior medium. There is too here a greater complexity of unseen or half-seen subconscient and superconscient tendencies and influences at work upon the comparatively small part of us which is conscious of what it is doing. And very often a nation in its self-ex-

pression is both helped and limited by what has been left behind from the evolution of a past self which, being dead, yet liveth.

Thus, the Indian spirit could seize powerfully the spiritual motive in an age which lived a strenuous objective life and was strongly objective in its normal outward mentality, and could express it at first in the concrete forms proper to that life and mentality converted into physical symbols of the supraphysical and then, by a rapid liberation, in its own proper voice, so producing the sacred poetry of the Veda and Upanishads. An Italy with the Graeco-Roman past in its blood could seize intellectually on the motives of Catholic Christianity and give them a clear and supreme expression in Dante, while all Germanised Europe had only been stammering in the faltering infantile accents of romance verse or shadowing them out in Gothic stone, successful only in the most material form of the spiritual. In another direction, when it seized upon the romantic life-motive, the meeting-place of the Teuton and the Celt, we see it losing entirely the mystically sentimental Celtic element, Italianising it into the sensuousness of Tasso, and Italianising the rest into an intellectualised, a half imaginative, half satiric play with the superficial motives of romance, — the inevitable turn of the Italianised Roman spirit. On the other hand, the English spirit, having got rid of the Latin culture and holding the Celtic mind for a long time at bay, exiled into the Welsh mountains or parked beyond the pale in Ireland, followed with remarkable fidelity the natural curve and stages of the psychological evolution of poetry, taking several centuries to arrive at the intellectual motive and more to get at something like the spiritual.

Generally, every nation or people has or develops a spirit in its being a special soul-form of the human all-soul and a law of its nature which determines the lines and turns of its evolution. All that it takes from its environment it naturally attempts to assimilate to this spirit, transmute into stuff of this soul-form, make apt to and governable by this law of its nature. All its self-expression is in conformity with them. And its poetry, art and thought are the expression of this self and of the greater possibilities of its self to which it moves. The individual poet and

his poetry are part of its movement. Not that they are limited by the present temperament and outward forms of the national mind; they may exceed them. The soul of the poet may be like a star and dwell apart; even, his work may seem not merely a variation from but a revolt against the limitations of the national mind. But still the roots of his personality are there in its spirit and even his variation and revolt are an attempt to bring out something that is latent and suppressed or at least something which is trying to surge up from the secret all-soul into the soul-form of the nation. Therefore to appreciate this national evolution of poetry and the relations of the poet and his work with it cannot but be fruitful if we observe them from the point of view not so much of things external to poetry, but of its own spirit and characteristic forms and motives.

CHAPTER VII

The Character of English Poetry - 1

OF ALL the modern European tongues the English language, I think it may be said without serious doubt, has produced the most rich and naturally powerful poetry, the most lavish of energy and innate genius. The unfettered play of poetic energy and power has been here the most abundant and brought forth the most constantly brilliant fruits. And yet it is curious to note that English poetry and literature have been a far less effective force in the shaping of European culture than those of other tongues inferior actually in natural poetic and creative energy. At least they have had to wait till quite a recent date before they produced any potent effect and even then their direct influence was limited.

A glance will show how considerable has been this limitation. The poetic mind of Greece and Rome has pervaded and largely shaped the whole artistic production of Europe, Italian poetry of the great age has thrown on some part of it at least a stamp only less profound, French prose and poetry, — but the latter in a much less degree, — have helped more than any other literary influence to form the modern turn of the European mind and its mode of expression, the short-lived outbursts of creative power in the Spain of Calderon and the Germany of Goethe exercised an immediate, a strong, though not an enduring influence, and the newly created Russian literature has been, though more subtly, among the most intense of recent cultural forces. But if we leave aside Richardson and Scott in fiction and in poetry the very considerable effects of the belated continental discovery of Shakespeare and the vehement and sudden wave of the Byronic influence, which did much to enforce the note of revolt and of a half sentimental, half sensual pessimism which is even now one of the strongest shades in the literary tone of modern Europe, — to the present day Shakespeare and Byron

are the only two great names of English poetry which are generally familiar on the continent and have had a real vogue, — we find the literature of the English tongue and especially its poetry flowing in a large side-stream, always receiving much from the central body of European culture but returning upon it very little. This insularity, not of reception but of reaction, is a marked phenomenon and calls for explanation.

If we look for the causes, — for such a paucity of influence cannot, certainly, be put down to any perversity or obtuseness in the general mind of Europe, but must be due to some insufficiency or serious defect in the literature itself, — we shall find, I think, if we look with other than English-trained eyes, that there is even in this rich and vigorous poetry abundant cause for the failure. English poetry is powerful but it is imperfect, strong in spirit, but uncertain and tentative in form; it is extraordinarily stimulating, but not often quite satisfying. It aims high, but its success is not as great as its effort. Especially its imaginative force exceeds its thought-power; it has indeed been hardly at all a really great instrument of poetic thought-vision; it has not dealt fruitfully with life. Its history has been more that of individual poetic achievements than of a constant national tradition; in the mass it has been a series of poetical revolutions without any strong inner continuity. That is to say that it has had no great self-recognising idea or view of life expressing the spiritual attitude of the nation and finding successfully from an early time its own sufficient artistic forms. But it is precisely the possession of such a self-recognising spiritual attitude and the attainment of a satisfying artistic form for it which make the poetry of a nation a power in the world's general culture. For that which recognises its self, will most readily be recognised by others; that which attains the perfect form of its own innate character, will most effectively leave its stamp in the formation of the mind of humanity.

We have only to take one or two examples to see the whole difference. No poetry has had so powerful an influence as Greek poetry; no poetry is, I think, within its own limits so perfect and satisfying. The limits indeed are marked and even, judged by the undulating many-sidedness and wideness of the modern mind,

narrow; but on its own lines this poetry works with a flawless power and sufficiency. From beginning to end it dealt with life from one large viewpoint, that of the inspired reason and the enlightened and chastened aesthetic sense; whatever changes overtook it, it never departed from this motive which is of the very essence of the Greek spirit. And of this motive it was very conscious and by its clear recognition of it and fidelity to it, it was able to achieve an artistic beauty and sufficiency of expressive form which affect us like an easily accomplished miracle and which have been the admiration of after-ages. Even the poetry of the Greek decadence preserved enough of this power to act as a shaping influence on Latin poetry.

French poetry is much more limited than the Greek, much less powerful in inspiration. For it deals with life from the standpoint not of the inspired reason, but of the clear-thinking intellect, not of the enlightened aesthetic sense, but of emotional sentiment. These are its two constant powers; the one gives it its brain-stuff, the other its poetical fervour and appeal. Throughout all the changes of the last century, in spite of apparent cultural revolutions, the French spirit has remained in its poetry faithful to these two motives which are of its very essence, and therefore too it has always or almost always found its satisfying and characteristic form. To that combination of a clear and strong motive and a satisfying form it owes the influence it has exercised from time to time on other European literatures. The cultural power of the poetry of other tongues may be traced to similar causes. But what has been the spirit and form of English poetry? Certainly, there is an English spirit which could not fail to be reflected in its poetry; but, not being clearly self-conscious, it is reflected obscurely and confusedly, and it has been at war within itself, followed a fluctuation of different motives and never succeeded in bringing about between them a conciliation and fusion. Therefore its form has suffered; it has had indeed no native and characteristic principle of form which would be, through all changes, the outward reflection of a clear self-recognising spirit.

The poetry of a nation is only one side of its self-expression and its characteristics may be best understood if we look at it in relation to the whole mental and dynamic effort of the people.

If we so look at the general contribution of the English nation to human life and culture, the eye is arrested by some remarkable lacunae. These are especially profound in the arts: English music is a zero, English sculpture an unfilled void, English architecture hardly better; English painting, illustrated by a few great names, has been neither a great artistic tradition nor a powerful cultural force and merits only a casual mention by the side of the rich achievement of Italy, Spain, France, Holland, Belgium. When we come to the field of thought we get a mixed impression like that of great mountain eminences towering out of a very low and flat plain. We find great individual philosophers, but no great philosophical tradition, two or three remarkable thinkers, but no high fame for thinking, many of the most famous names in science, but no national scientific culture. Still in these fields there has been remarkable accomplishment and the influence on European thought has been occasionally considerable and sometimes capital. But when finally we turn to the business of practical life, there is an unqualified pre-eminence: in mechanical science and invention, in politics, in commerce and industry, in colonisation, travel, exploration, in the domination of earth and the exploitation of its riches England has been till late largely, sometimes entirely the world's leader, the shaper of its motives and the creator of its forms.

This peculiar distribution of the national capacities finds its root in certain racial characteristics. We have first the dominant Anglo-Saxon strain quickened, lightened and given force, power and initiative by the Scandinavian and Celtic elements. This mixture has made a national mind remarkably dynamic and practical, with all the Teutonic strength, patience, industry, but liberated from the Teutonic heaviness and crudity, yet retaining enough not to be too light of balance or too sensitive to the shocks of life; therefore, a nation easily first in practical intelligence and practical dealing with the facts and difficulties of life. Not, be it noted, by any power of clear intellectual thought or by force of imagination or intellectual intuition, but rather by a strong vital instinct, a sort of tentative dynamic intuition. No spirituality, but a robust ethical turn; no innate power of the word, but a strong turn for action; no fine play of emotion or

quickness of sympathy, but an abundant energy and force of will. This is one element of the national mind; the other is the submerged, half-insistent Celtic, gifted with precisely the opposite qualities, inherent spirituality, the gift of the word, the rapid and brilliant imagination, the quick and luminous intelligence, the strong emotional force and sympathy, the natural love of the things of the mind and still more of those beyond the mind, left to it from an old forgotten culture in its blood which contained an ancient mystical tradition. In life a subordinate element, modifying the cruder Anglo-Saxon characteristics, breaking across them or correcting their excess, we may perhaps see it emerging in English poetry, coming repeatedly to the surface and then working with a certain force and vehement but embarrassed power like an imprisoned spirit let out for a holiday, but within not quite congenial bounds and with an unadaptable companion. From the ferment of these two elements arise both the greatness and the limitations of English poetry.

CHAPTER VIII

The Character of English Poetry - 2

WHAT kind or quality of poetry should we naturally expect from a national mind so constituted? The Anglo-Saxon strain is dominant and in that circumstance there lay just a hazardous possibility that there might have been no poetical literature at all. The Teutonic nations have in this field been conspicuous by their silence or the rarity of their speech. After the old rude epics, saga or Nibelungenlied, we have to wait till quite recent times for poetic utterance, nor, when it came, was it rich or abundant. In Germany a brief period of strong productive culture in which the great names of Goethe and Heine rise out of a mass of more or less vigorous verse talent rather than poetical genius, and after them again silence; in the North the solitary genius of Ibsen. Holland, another Teutonic country which developed an art of a considerable but a wholly objective power, is mute in poetry. It would almost seem that there is still something too thick and heavy in the strength and depth of the Teutonic composition for the ethereal light and fire of the poetic word to make its way freely through the intellectual and vital envelope. What has saved the English mind from a like taciturnity? Certainly, it must have been the mixture of racial elements, sublimating the material temperament, with the submerged Celtic genius coming in as a decisive force to liberate and uplift the poetic spirit. And as a necessary aid we have the unique historical accident of the reshaping of a Teutonic tongue by French and Latinistic influences which gave it clearer and more flowing forms and turned it into a fine though difficult linguistic material sufficiently malleable, sufficiently plastic for Poetry to produce her larger and finer effects, sufficiently difficult to compel her to put forth her greatest energies. A stuff of speech which, without being harsh and inapt, does not tempt by too great a facility, but offers a certain resistance in the material, in-

creases the strength of the artist by the measure of the difficulty conquered and can be thrown into shapes at once of beauty and of concentrated power. That is eminently the character of the English language.

At any rate we have this long continuity of poetic production. And once supposing a predominantly Anglo-Saxon national mind to express itself in poetry, we should, ignoring for a moment the Celtic emergence, expect the groundwork to be a strong objective poetry, a powerful presentation of the forms of external life, action and character in action, the pleasant or the melancholy outsides of Nature, the robust play of the will and the passions, a vigorous vital and physical verse. Even we might look for a good deal of deviation into subjects and motives for which prose will always be the more adequate and characteristic instrument, nor should we be surprised at a self-styled Augustan age which would make them the greater part of its realm and indulge with a self-satisfied contentment in a "criticism" of external life, the poetry of political and ecclesiastical controversy, didactic verse, satire. There would be considerable power of narrative and a great energy in the drama of character and incident, but a profounder use of the narrative and dramatic forms would not be looked for; at most we might have in the end the dramatic analysis of character. The romantic element would be of the external Teutonic kind sensational and outward, appealing to the life and the senses, not the delicate and beautiful, the imaginative and spiritual Celtic romanticism. We should have perhaps much poetical thinking or even poetical philosophy of a rather obvious kind, sedate, or vigorous, prompt and direct, or robustly powerful, but not the finer and subtler poetical thought which comes easily to the clear Latin intellect. Form too of a kind we might hope for, though we could not be quite sure of it, at best bright and plain or strongly balanced, not either those greater forms in which a high and deep creative thought presides or the more exquisite forms which a delicate sense of beauty or a subtle poetic intuition creates. Both the greater and more profound and the subtler intensities of style and rhythm would be absent; but there would be a boldly forcible or a well-beaten energy of speech and much of the more metallic vigours of verse.

This side of the national mind would prepare us for English poetry as it was until Chaucer and beyond, the ground-type of the Elizabethan drama, the work of Dryden and Pope, the whole mass of eighteenth-century verse, Cowper, Scott, Wordsworth in his more outward moments, Byron without his Titanism and unrest, the poetry of Browning. For these we need not go outside the Anglo-Saxon temperament.

That also would give, but subject to a potent alchemy of transformation the basic form and substance of most English poetry. That alchemy we can fairly attribute to the submerged Celtic element which emerges, as time goes on, in bright upstreamings and sometimes in exceptional outbursts of power. It comes up in a blaze of colour, light, emotion and imaginative magic; in a hungering for beauty in its more subtle and delicately sensuous forms, for the ideal which escapes definition and yet has to be seized in forms; in a subtler romance; in a lyrical intoxication. It casts into the mould a higher urge of thought, not the fine, calm and measured poetical thinking of the Greeks and the Latin races which deals sovereignly with life within the limits of the intellect and the inspired reason, but an excitement of thought seeking for something beyond itself and behind life through the intensities of poetical sight. It brings in a look upon Nature which pierces beyond her outsides and her external spirit and lays its touch on the mysteries of her inner life and sometimes on that in her which is most intimately spiritual. It awakens rare outbreaks of mysticism, a vein of subtler sentiment, a more poignant pathos; it refines passion from a violence of the vital being into an intensity of the soul, modifies vital sensuousness into a thing of imaginative beauty by a warmer aesthetic perception. It carries with it a seeking for exquisite lyrical form, touches narrative poetry to finer issues, throws its romantic beauty and force and fire and its greater depth of passion across the drama and makes it something more than a tumultuous external action and heavily powerful character-drawing. At one period it strives to rise beyond the English mould, seems about to disengage itself and reveal through poetry the Spirit in things. In language and music it is always a quickening and refining force; where it can do nothing more, it breathes a more intimate energy

and, where it gets its freer movement, creates that intensity of style and rhythm, that force of imaginative vision and that peculiar beauty of turn which are the highest qualities of English poetry.

The various commingling or separating of these two elements marks the whole later course of the literature and they present as their effect a side of failure and defect and a side of achievement. There are evidently two opposite powers at work in the same field, often compelled to labour in the same mind at a common production, and when two such opposites can coalesce, seize each other's motives and become one, the very greatest achievement becomes possible. For they fill in each other's deficiencies, light each other up with a new light and bring in a fresh revelation which neither by itself could have accomplished. The greatest things in English poetry have come where this fusion was effected in the creative mind and soul of the poet. But that could not always be done and there arises an uncertainty of motive, an unsureness of touch, an oscillation. It does not prevent great triumphs of poetic power, but does prevent a high equality and sustained perfection of self-expression and certainty of form. We must expect inequality in all human work, but not necessarily on this scale or with so frequent and extensive a falling below what should be the normal level.

To the same uncertainty may be attributed the abrupt starts and turns of the course of English poetry, its want of conscious continuity, — for there is a secret and inevitable continuity which we shall have to disengage. It takes a very different course from the external life of the nation which has always been faithful to its inner motive and spirit and escaped from the shattering and suddenly creative changes that have at once afflicted and quickened the life of other peoples. The revolutions of the spirit of English poetry are of an astonishing decisiveness and abruptness. We can mark off first the early English poetry which found its solitary greater expression in Chaucer; indeed it marks itself off by an absolute exhaustion and cessation. The magnificent Elizabethan outburst has another motive, spirit, manner of expression, which seems to have nothing to do with the past; it is self-born under the impulse of a new age and environment. As this dies

away, we have the lonely figure of Milton with his strenuous effort at an intellectual poetry cast in the type of the ancients. The age which succeeds is that of a trivial intellectuality which does not follow the lead of Milton and is the exact contrary of the Elizabethan form and spirit, the thin and arid reign of Pope and Dryden. Another violent breaking away, a new outburst of wonderful freshness gives us the poetry of Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Blake with another spirit and another language of the spirit. The Victorian period did not deny their influences; it felt them in the form of its work, and we might have expected it to have gone forward with what had been only a great beginning that did not arrive at its full fruition. But it did nothing of the kind; it deviated into a new way which has nothing to do with the finer spirit of the preceding poets and fell off into an intellectual, artistic, carefully wrought, but largely external poetry. And now we have this age which is still trying to find itself, but in its most characteristic tendencies seems to be a rejection of the Victorian forms and motives. These reversals and revolutions of the spirit are not in themselves a defect or a disability; they simply mean that English poetical literature has been a series of bold experiments less shackled by the past than in countries which have a stronger sense of cultural tradition. Revolutions are distracting things, but they are often good for the human soul; for they bring a rapid opening of new horizons.

Here comes in the side of success and achievement. By the natural law of compensation it is gained by a force which answers to the defects and limitations; it has those for its price. For nowhere else has individual genius found so free a field, been able to work so directly out of itself and follow so boldly its own line of poetic adventure. Form is a great power, but sureness of form is not everything. A strong tradition of form gives a sure ground upon which genius can work in safety and be protected from its own wanderings; but it limits and stands in the way of daring individual adventure. The spirit of adventure, if its path is strewn with accidents, stumblings or fatal casualties, brings, when it does succeed, new revelations which are worth all the price paid for them. English poetry is full of such new revelations. Its richness, its constant freshness, its lavish expenditure

of genius exulting in freedom, delivered from all meticulous caution, its fire and force of imagination, its lambent energy of poetic speech, its constant self-liberation into intensest beauty of self-expression are the rewards of its courage and its liberty. These things are of the greatest value in poetry. They lead besides to possibilities which are of the highest importance to the poetry of the future.

We may briefly anticipate and indicate in what manner. We have to accept one constant tendency of the spirit of English poetry, which loves to dwell with all its weight upon the presentation of life and action, of feeling and passion, to give that its full force and to make it the basis and the source and, not only the point of reference, but the utility of all else. A strong hold upon this life, the earth-life, is the characteristic of the English mind, and it is natural that it should take possession of its poetry. The pure Celtic genius leans towards the opposite extreme, seems to care little for the earth-life for its own sake, has little hold on it or only a light and ethereal hold, accepts it as a starting-point for the expression of other-life, is attracted by all that is hidden and secret. The Latin mind insists on the presentation of life, but for the purposes of thought; its eye is on the universal truths and realities of which it is the visible expression, — not the remoter, the spiritual or soul truths, but those which present themselves to the clarities of the intelligence. But the English mind looks at life and loves it for its own sake, in all its externalities, its play of outer individualities, its immediate subjective idiosyncrasies. Even when it is strongly attracted by other motives, the intellectual, the aesthetic or the spiritual, it seldom follows these with a completely disinterested fidelity, but comes back with them on the external life and tries to subject them to its mould. This turn is not universal, — Blake escapes from it, — nor the single dominant power, — Keats and Shelley and Wordsworth have their hearts elsewhere; but it is a constant power; it attracts even the poets who have not a real genius for it and vitiates their work by the immixture of an alien motive.

This objective and external turn might be strong enough in some other arts, — fiction, for instance, or sculpture, — to create a clear national tradition and principle of form, but not easily

in poetry. For here the mere representation of life cannot be enough, however vivid or subjected to the law of poetic beauty it may be. Poetry must drive at least at a presentation from within and not at simple artistic reproduction, and the principle of presentation must be something more than that of the eye on the visible object. It is by a process from within, a passing of it through some kind of intimately subjective vision that life is turned into poetry. If this subjective medium is the inspired reason or the intuitive mind, the external presentation of life gives place inevitably to an interpretation, a presentation in which its actual lines are either neglected or subordinated in order that some inner truth of it may emerge. But in English poetry the attempt is to be or at least to appear true to the actual lines of life, to hold up a mirror to Nature. It is the mirror then which has to do the poetising of life; the vital, the imaginative, the emotional temperament of the poet is the reflecting medium and it has to supply unaided the creative and poetical element. We have then a faithfully unfaithful reflection which always amounts to a transformation, because the temperament of the poet lends to life and Nature its own hues, its own lines, its own magnitudes. But the illusion of external reality, of an "imitation" of Nature is created, — the illusion which has been for so long a first canon of Western artistic conceptions, — and the English mind which carries this tendency to an extreme, feels then that it is building upon the safe foundation of the external and the real; it is satisfied of the earth even when it is singing in the heavens.

But this sole reliance on the temperament of the poet has certain strong results. It gives an immense importance to individuality, much greater than that which it must always have in poetical creation: the transformation of life and Nature in the individuality becomes almost the whole secret of this poetry. Therefore English poetry is much more powerfully and consciously personal and individual than that of any other language, aims much less directly at the impersonal and universal. This individual subjective element creates enormous differences between the work of poets of the same age; they cannot escape from the common tendencies, but give to them a quite independent turn and expression, subordinate them to the assertion

of the individuality; in other literatures, until recently, the reverse has oftener happened. Besides, the higher value given to the intensity of the imaginative, vital or emotional response, favours and is perhaps a first cause of that greater intensity of speech and immediate vision which is the strength of English poetry. For since the heightening cannot come mainly from the power and elevation of the medium through which life is seen, as in Greek and ancient Indian poetry, it has to come almost entirely from the individual response in the poet, his force of personal utterance, his intensity of personal vision.

Three general characteristics emerge. The first is a constant reference and return of the higher poetical motives to the forms of external life, as if the enriching of that life were its principal artistic aim. The second is a great force of subjective individuality and personal temperament as a leading power of the poetic creation. The third is a great intensity of speech and ordinarily of a certain kind of direct vision. But in the world's literature generally these are the tendencies that have been on the increase and two of them at least are likely to be persistent. There is everywhere a considerable stressing of the individual subjective element, a drift towards making the most of the poet's personality, an aim at a more vivid response and the lending of new powers of colour and line from within to the vision of life and Nature, a search for new intensities of word and rhythm which will translate into speech a deeper insight. In following out the possible lines of the future the defect of the English mind is its inability to follow the higher motives disinterestedly to their deepest and largest creative results, but this is being remedied by new influences. The entrance of the pure Celtic temperament into English poetry through the Irish revival is likely to do much; the contribution of the Indian mind in work like Tagore's may act in the same direction.

If this change is effected, the natural powers of the English spirit will be of the highest value to the future poetry. For that poetry is likely to move to the impersonal and universal, not through the toning down of personality and individuality, but by their heightening to a point where they are liberated into the impersonal and universal expression. Subjectivity is likely to be

its greater power, the growth to the universal subjective enriched by all the forces of the personal soul-experience. The high intensity of speech which English poetry has brought to bear upon all its material, its power of giving the fullest and richest value to the word and the image, is needed for the expression of the values of the spiritual, which will be one of the aims of a higher intuitive utterance. If the pursuit of the higher godheads into their own sphere will be one of its endeavours, their return upon the earth-life to transform our vision of it will be its other side. If certain initial movements we can even now see in English poetry outline themselves, this long stream of strong creation and utterance may arrive at a point where it will discover a supreme utility for all its past powers in another more comprehensive motive into which their strands can be successfully interwoven: it may achieve clear and powerful forms of a new intuitive utterance in which the Anglo-Celtic spirit will find its highest self-expression. The Elizabethan poet wrote in the spacious days of its first birth into greatness,

> *Or who can tell for what great work in hand*
> *The greatness of our style is now ordained?*
> *What powers it shall bring in, what spirits command?*

It has since brought in many powers, commanded many spirits; but it may be that the richest powers, the highest and greatest spirit yet remain to be found and commanded.

CHAPTER IX

The Course of English Poetry - 1

THESE are the general characteristics of English poetry, the powers which have been at work in it. For we have to see first what are the spirit and temper that have stood behind and come to the front in a literature in order to understand the course that it has taken and the forms that it has assumed. The field which poetry covers is common ground, but each nation has its own characteristic spirit and creative quality which determine the province in which it will best succeed, the turn or angle of its vision and the shape of its work. The English poetical genius was evidently predestined by the complexity of its spirit and its union of opposite powers to an adventurous consecutive seeking over the whole field; but in first potentiality its limitations point to a more facile success in the concrete or imaginative presentation of life, a more difficult success in the intellectual or spiritual interpretation of life, while most difficult of all for it would be a direct presentation of the things beyond, of mystic realities or of the higher truths of the spirit. Yet, on the other hand, if this difficulty could once be overcome, then because of the profounder intensity of the power of poetical speech which this literature has developed, the very highest expression of these things would be possible, a nearer expression than would be possible without much fashioning to the poetry of the Latin tongues whose speech has been cast in the mould of a clear or high intellectuality rather than into the native utterance of imaginative vision. We see in modern French creation a constant struggle with this limitation and, even, a poet like Mallarmé breaking the mould of the French speech in his desperate effort to force it to utter what is to its natural clear lucidity almost unutterable. No such difficulty presents itself in English poetry; the depths, the vistas of suggestion, the power to open the doors of the infinite are already there for the mind rightly

gifted to evoke and use for the highest purposes. Much less naturally fitted for fine prose utterance, the language has all the close lights and shades, the heights and depths, the recesses of fathomless sense needed by the poet.

We have to see how this has come about; for it has not been accomplished at all easily, but only by much effort and seeking. We observe first that English poetry has covered the field that lies before the genius of poetry by successive steps which follow the natural ascending order of our developing perceptions. It began by a quite external, a clear and superficial substance and utterance. It proceeded to a deeper vital poetry, a poetry of the power and beauty and wonder and spontaneous thought, the joy and passion and pain, the colour and music of Life, in which the external presentation of life and things was taken up, but exceeded and given its full dynamic and imaginative content. From that it turned to an attempt at mastering the secret of the Latins, the secret of a clear, measured and intellectual dealing with life, things and ideas. Then came an attempt, a brilliant and beautiful attempt to get through Nature and thought and the mentality in life and Nature and their profounder aesthetic suggestion to certain spiritual truths behind them. This attempt could not come to perfect fruition, partly because there had not been the right intellectual preparation or a sufficient basis of spiritual knowledge and experience and only so much could be given as the solitary individual intuition of the poet could by a sovereign effort attain, partly because after the lapse into an age of reason the spontaneous or the intenser language of spiritual poetry could not always be found or, if found, could not be securely kept. So we get a deviation into another age of intellectual, artistic or reflective poetry with a much wider range, but less profound in its roots, less high in its growth; and partly out of this, partly by a recoil from it has come the turn of recent and contemporary poetry which seems at last to be approaching the secret of the utterance of profounder truth with its right magic of speech and rhythm.

We get the first definite starting-point of this movement in the poetry of Chaucer when the rough poverty of the Anglo-Saxon mind first succeeded in assimilating the French influence

and refining and clarifying by that its speech and its aesthetic sense. It is characteristic of the difficulty of the movement that as in its beginning, so at each important turn, or at least on the three first occasions of a new orientation, it has had thus to go to school, to make almost a fresh start under the influences of a foreign culture and poetry, needing in spite of so much poetic originality and energy and genius a strong light of suggestion from outside to set it upon its way. All modern literatures have at one time or another needed this kind of external help, but once formed and in possession of themselves they adopt impresses more or less lightly and only as a secondary assistance. But here we have a remodelling of the whole plan under foreign teaching. Chaucer gives English poetry a first shape by the help of French romance models and the work of Italian masters; the Elizabethans start anew in dependence on Renaissance influences from France and Italy and a side wind from Spain; Milton goes direct to classical models; the Restoration and the eighteenth century take pliantly the pseudo-classical form from the contemporary French poets and critics. Still this dependence is only in externals; in the essential things of poetry some native character prevails, a new turn is rapidly given, an original power and method emerges; the dynamic vitality of the race was too great not to arrive almost at once at a transmutation.

The first early motive and style of this poetry as it emerges in Chaucer strikes at once an English note. The motive is the poetic observation of ordinary human life and character — without any preoccupying idea, without any ulterior design, simply as it reflects itself in the individual mind and temperament of the poet. Chaucer has his eye fixed on the object, and that object is the external action of life as it passes before him throwing its figures on his mind and stirring it to a kindly satisfaction in the movement and its interest, to a blithe sense of humour or a light and easy pathos. He does not seek to add anything to it or to see anything below it or behind its outsides, nor does he look at all into the souls or deeply into the minds of the men and women whose appearance, action and easily apparent traits of character he describes with so apt and observant a fidelity. He does not ask himself what is the meaning of all this

movement of life or the power in it or draw any large poetic idea from it; he is not moved to interpret life, a clear and happy presentation is his business. It is there simply in the sunlight with its familiar lines and normal colours, sufficiently interesting in itself, by its external action, and he has to record it, to give it a shape in lucid poetic speech and rhythm; for to turn it into stuff of poetry that and the sunlight of his own happy poetic temperament in which he bathes it is all he needs. And the form he gives it is within its limits and for its work admirably apt, sufficient and satisfying, — provided we ask from it nothing more than it has to offer us. Chaucer had learnt ease, grace and lucidity from the French romance poetry and from the great Italians a sufficient force and compactness of expression which French verse had not yet attained. But neither his poetic speech nor his rhythm has anything of the plastic greatness and high beauty of the Italians. It is an easy, limpid and flowing movement, a stream rather than a well, — for it has no depths in it, — of pure English utterance just fitted for the clear and pleasing poetic presentation of external life as if in an unsullied mirror, at times rising into an apt and pointed expression, but for the most part satisfied with a first primitive power of poetic speech, a subdued and well-tempered even adequacy. Only once or twice does he by accident strike out a really memorable line of poetry; yet Dante and Petrarch were among his masters.

No other great poetical literature has had quite such a beginning. Others also started with a poetry of external life, Greek with the poetry of Homer, Latin with the historical epic of Ennius, French with the feudal romances of the Charlemagne cycle and the Arthurian cycle. But in none of these was the artistic aim simply the observant presentation of Greek or Roman or feudal life. Homer gives us the life of man always at a high intensity of impulse and action and without subjecting it to any other change he casts it in lines of beauty and in divine proportions; he deals with it as Phidias dealt with the human form when he wished to create a god in marble. When we read the Iliad and the Odyssey, we are not really upon this earth, but on the earth lifted into some plane of a greater dynamis of life, and so long as we remain there we have a greater vision in a more lustrous air

and we feel ourselves raised to a semi-divine stature. Ennius' object was like Virgil's to cast into poetical utterance the spirit of Rome. So the spirit of Catholic and feudal Europe transmutes life and gives in its own way an ideal presentation of it which only misses greatness by the inadequacy of its speech and rhythmic movement and the diffuse prolixity of its form. Chaucer's poetic method has no such great idea or uplifting motive or spirit. Whether the colour he gives happens to be realistic or romantic, it falls within the same formula. It is the reflecting of an external life, with sometimes just a tinge of romantic illumination, in an observing mind that makes itself a shining poetic mirror.

The spirit of English poetry having thus struck its first strong note, a characteristic English note, having got as far as the Anglo-Saxon mind refined by French and Italian influence could go in its own proper way and unchanged nature, came suddenly to a pause. Many outward reasons might be given for that, but none sufficient; for the real cause was that to have developed upon this line would have been to wander up and down in a cul-de-sac; it would have been to anticipate in a way in poetry the self-imprisonment of Dutch art in a strong externalism, of a fairer kind indeed, but still too physical and outward in its motive. English poetry had greater things to do and it waited for some new light and more powerful impulse to come. Still this external motive and method are native to the English mind and with many modifications have put their strong impress upon the literature. It is the method of English fiction from Richardson to Dickens; it got into the Elizabethan drama and prevented it, except in Shakespeare, from equalling the nobler work of other great periods of dramatic poetry. It throws its limiting shade over English narrative poetry, which after its fresh start in the symbolism of the *Faery Queen* and the vital intensity of Marlowe ought either to have got clear away from it or at least to have transmuted it by the infusion of much higher artistic motives. To give only one instance in many, it got sadly in the way of Tennyson, who yet had no real turn for the reproduction of life, and prevented him from working out the fine subjective and mystic vein which his first natural intuitions had discovered in such work as the *Lady of Shalott* and the *Morte d'Arthur*; we

have to be satisfied instead with the *Princess* and *Enoch Arden* and the picturesque triviality of the *Idylls of the King* which give us the impression of gentlemen and ladies of Victorian drawing-rooms masquerading as Celtic-mediaeval knights and dames, with a meaning of some kind in it all that does not come home to us because it is lost in a falsetto mimicking of the external strains of life. Certainly, it is useless to quarrel with national tendencies and characteristics which must show themselves in poetry as elsewhere; but English poetry had opened the gates of other powers and if it could always have lifted up the forms of external life by these powers, the substance of its work might then have meant much more to the world and the strength of its vision of things might constantly have equalled the power and beauty of its utterance. As it is, even poets of great power are being constantly led away by this tendency from the fulfilment of their more characteristic potentialities.

The new light and impulse that set free the silence of the poetic spirit in England for its first abundant and sovereign utterance, came from the Renaissance in France and Italy. The Renaissance meant many things and it meant too different things in different countries, but one thing above all everywhere, the discovery of beauty and joy in every energy of life. The Middle Ages had lived strongly and with a sort of deep and sombre force, but, as it were, always under the shadow of death and under the burden of an obligation to aspire through suffering to a beyond; their life is bordered on one side by the cross and on the other by the sword. The Renaissance brings in the sense of a liberation from the burden and the obligation; it looks at life and loves it in excess; it is carried away by the beauty of the body and the senses and the intellect, the beauty of sensation and action and speech and thought, — of thought hardly at all for its own sake, but thought as a power of life. It is Hellenism returning with its strong sense of humanity and things human, *nihil humani alienum*,[1] but at first a barbarised Hellenism, unbridled and extravagant, riotous in its vitalistic energy, too much overjoyed for restraint and measure.

Elizabethan poetry is an expression of this energy, passion

[1] Nothing human is alien to me,

and wonder of life, and it is much more powerful, disorderly and unrestrained than the corresponding poetry in other countries, having neither a past traditional culture nor an innate taste to restrain its extravagances. It springs up in a chaos of power and of beauty in which forms emerge and shape themselves by a stress within it for which there is no clear guiding knowledge except such as the instinctive genius of the age and the individual can give. It is constantly shot through with brilliant threads of intellectual energy, but is not at all intellectual in its innate spirit and dominant character. It is too vital for that, too much moved and excited; for its mood is passionate, sensuous, loose of rein; its speech sometimes liquid with sweetness, sometimes vehement and inordinate in pitch, enamoured of the variety of its notes, revelling in image and phrase, a tissue of sweet or violent colours, of many-hued fire, of threads of golden and silver light.

It bestowed on the nation a new English speech, rich in capacity, gifted with an extraordinary poetic intensity and wealth and copiousness, but full also of the disorder and excess of new formation. A drama exultant in action and character, passion and incident and movement, a lyric and romantic poetry of marvellous sweetness, richness and force are its strong fruits. Here the two sides of the national mind throw themselves out for the first time with a full energy, but within the limits of a vital, sensuous and imaginative mould, the one dominant in its pure poetry, the other ordinarily in its drama, but both in Shakespeare welded into a supreme phenomenon of poetic and dramatic genius. It is on the whole the greatest age of utterance, — though not of highest spirit and aim, — of the genius of English poetry.

CHAPTER X

The Course of English Poetry - 2

BEAUTIFUL as are many of its productions, powerful as it is in the mass, if we look at it not in detail, not merely revelling in beauty of line and phrase and image, in snatches of song and outbursts of poetic richness and power, but as a whole, as definite artistic creation, this wealthiest age of English poetry bears a certain stamp of defect and failure. It cannot be placed for a moment as a supreme force of excellence in literary culture by the side of the great ages of Greek and Roman poetry, but, besides that, it falls short too in aesthetic effect and virtue in comparison with other poetic periods less essentially vigorous than itself; it has an inferior burden of meaning and, if a coursing of richer life-blood, no settled fullness of spirit and a less adequate body of forms. The great magician, Shakespeare, by his marvellous poetic rendering of life and the spell his poetry casts upon us, conceals this general inadequacy; the whole age which he embodies is magnified by his presence and the adjacent paler figures catch something of the light and kinship of his glory and appear in it more splendid than they are. Shakespeare is an exception, a miracle of poetic force; he survives untouched all adverse criticism, not because there are not plenty of fairly large spots in this sun, but because in any complete view of him they disappear in the greatness of his light. Spenser and Marlowe are poets of a high order, great in spite of an eventual failure. But the rest owe their stature to an uplifting power in the age and not chiefly to their own intrinsic height of genius; and that power had many vices, flaws and serious limitations which their work exaggerates wilfully rather than avoids. The gold of this golden age of English poetry is often very beautifully and richly wrought, but it is seldom worked into a perfect artistic whole; it disappears continually in masses of alloy, and there is on the whole more of a surface gold-dust than

of the deeper yield of the human spirit.

The defect of this Elizabethan work is most characteristic and prominent in that part of it which has been vaunted as its chief title to greatness, its drama. Shakespeare and Marlowe may be considered separately; but the rest of Elizabethan dramatic work is powerful in effort rather than sound and noble in performance. All its vigorous presentation of life has not been able to keep it alive; it is dead or keeps only, to use Mr. Cousins' phrase, the dusty immortality of the libraries, and this in spite of the attention drawn to it in quite recent times by scholars and critics and the hyperbolic eulogies two or three eminent writers have bestowed on it. This is not to say that it has not merits and, in a way, very striking merits. The Elizabethan playwrights were men of a confident robust talent, some of them of real genius; they had the use of the language of an age in which the power of literary speech was a common possession and men were using language as a quite new and rich instrument, lavishly, curiously, exulting in its novel capacities of expression; the first elements of the dramatic form, the temper and some of the primary faculties which go to make dramatic creation possible were there in the literary spirit of the age, and all of them in more or less degree possessed these things and could use them. They have a certain force of vital creation, the faculty of producing very freely a mass of incident and movement, much power of exuberant dialogue, a knack of expression both in verse and prose and of putting the language of the passions into the mouth of cleverly constructed human figures which walk actively about the stage, if not in quite a natural manner, yet with enough of it to give for the time the illusion of living creatures; and they had eminently a vigorous turn for the half romantic, half realistic reproduction of life and manners. Especially, it was a time in which there was a fresh and vivid interest in life and man and action, in the adventure and wonder and appeal of the mere vital phenomenon of living and feeling and thinking, and their work is full of this freshness and interest. All this, it might be thought, is quite enough to create a great dramatic poetry; and certainly if we require no more than this we shall give a prominent place to the Elizabethan drama, higher perhaps than to

the Greek or any other. But these things are enough only to produce plays which will live their time on the stage and in the library; they are not, by themselves, sufficient for great dramatic creation. Something else is needed for that, which we get in Shakespeare, in Racine, Corneille and Molière, in Calderon, in the great Greeks, in the Sanskrit dramatists; but these other Elizabethans are rather powerful writers and playwrights than inspired dramatic poets and creators.

Dramatic poetry cannot live by the mere presentation of life and action and the passions, however truly they may be portrayed or however vigorously and abundantly. Its object is something greater and its conditions of success much more onerous. It must have, to begin with, as the fount of its creation or in its heart an interpretative vision and in that vision an explicit or implicit idea of life and the human being; and the vital presentation which is its outward instrument, must arise out of that harmoniously, whether by a spontaneous creation, as in Shakespeare, or by the compulsion of an intuitive artistic will, as with the Greeks. This interpretative vision and idea have in the presentation to seem to arise out of the inner life of vital types of the human soul or individual representatives of it through an evolution of speech leading to an evolution of action, — speech being the first important instrument, because through it the poet reveals the action of the soul, and outward action and event only the second, important, but less essential, reducible even to a minimum, because by that he makes visible and concrete to us the result of the inner action. In all very great drama the true movement and result is really psychological and the outward action, even when it is considerable, and the consummating event, even though loud and violent, are only either its symbol or else its condition of culmination. Finally, all this has to be cast into a close dramatic form, a successful weaving of interdependent relations, relations of soul to soul, of speech to speech, of action to action, the more close and inevitable the better, because so the truth of the whole evolution comes home to us. And if it is asked what in a word is the essential purpose of all this creation, I think we might possibly say that drama is the poet's vision of some part of the world-act in the life of the human soul, it is in a way his vision of

Karma, in an extended and very flexible sense of the word; and at its highest point it becomes a poetic rendering or illustration of the Aeschylean *drasanti pathein*, "the doer shall feel the effect of his act", in an inner as well as an outer, a happy no less than an austere significance, whether that effect be represented as psychological or vital, whether it comes to its own through sorrow and calamity, ends in a judgment by laughter or finds an escape into beauty and joy, whether the presentation be tragic or comic or tragi-comic or idyllic. To satisfy these conditions is extremely difficult and for that reason the great dramatists are so few in their number, — the entire literature of the world has hardly given us more than a dozen. The difficult evolution of dramatic poetry is always more hard to lead than the lyric which is poetry's native expression, or than the narrative which is its simpler expansion.

The greatness of a period of dramatic poetry can be measured by the extent to which these complex conditions were understood in it or were intuitively practised. But in the mass of the Elizabethan drama the understanding is quite absent and the practice comes, if at all, only rarely, imperfectly and by a sort of accident. Shakespeare himself seems to have divined these conditions or contained them in the shaping flame of his genius rather than perceived them by the artistic intelligence. The rest have ordinarily no light of interpretative vision, no dramatic idea. Their tragedy and comedy are both oppressively external; this drama presents, but does not at all interpret; it is an outward presentation of manners and passions and lives by vigour of action and a quite outward-going speech; it means absolutely nothing. The tragedy is irrational, the comedy has neither largeness nor subtlety of idea; they are mixed together too without any artistic connection such as Shakespeare manages to give to them so as to justify thoroughly their coexistence. The characters are not living beings working out their mutual Karma, but external figures of humanity jostling each other on a crowded stage, mere tossing drift of the waves of life. The form of the drama too is little more than a succession of speech and incident,[1]

[1] Ben Jonson is an exception. He has the idea of construction, but his execution is heavy and uninspired, the work of a robustly conscientious craftsman rather than a creative artist.

as in a story, with a culminating violent or happy ending, which comes not because psychologically it must, but because a story has to have a release of ending, or, if tragic, its point of loud detonation. To make up for their essential defects these poets have to heap up incident and situation and assail us with vehement and often grossly exaggerated speech and passion, frequently tearing the passion into glaringly coloured tatters, almost always overstraining or in some way making too much of it. They wish to pile on us the interest of life in whose presentation their strength lies, to accumulate in a mass, so as to carry us away, things attracting, things amusing, things striking, things horrible; they will get at us through the nerves and the lower emotional being, — and in this they succeed eminently, — since they cannot get at us through a higher intellectual and imaginative appeal. The evolution of the action is rather theatrically effective than poetic, the spirit and the psychology melodramatic rather than dramatic. Nor are these radical dramatic defects atoned for by any great wealth of poetry, for their verse has more often some formal merit and a great air of poetry than its essence, — though there are exceptions as in lines and passages of Peele and Webster. The presentation of life with some poetic touch but without any transforming vision or strongly suffusing power in the poetic temperament is the general character of their work. It is necessary to emphasise these defects because indiscriminate praise of these poets helps to falsify or quite exclude the just artistic view of the aim of sound dramatic creation, and imitation of the catching falsities of this model has been the real root of the inefficacy of subsequent attempts in the dramatic form even by poets of great gifts. It explains the failure of even a mind which had the true dramatic turn, a creator like Browning, to achieve drama of the first excellence.

Marlowe alone of the lesser Elizabethan dramatists stands apart from his fellows, not solely by his strong and magnificent vein of poetry, but because he knows what he is about; he alone has some clearly grasped dramatic idea. And not only is he conscious of his artistic aim, but it is a sound aim on the higher levels of the dramatic art. He knows that the human soul in action is his subject and Karma the power of the theme, and he

attempts to create a drama of the human will throwing itself on life, the will egoistic and Asuric, conquering only to succumb to the great adversary Death or breaking itself against the forces its violence has brought into hostile play. This is certainly a high and fit subject for tragic creation and his highly coloured and strongly cut style and rhythm are well-suited for its expression. Unhappily, Marlowe had the conception, but not any real power of dramatic execution. He is unable to give the last awakening breath of life to his figures; in the external manner so common in English poetry and fiction he rather constructs than evolves, portrays than throws out into life, paints up or sculptures from outside than creates from within, which is yet the sole true method of poetic or at least of dramatic creation. He has not, either, the indispensable art of construction; only in one of his tragedies does he vitally relate together his characters and their action throughout, and even that, though a strong work, falls far short of the greatness of a masterpiece. He had too, writing for the Elizabethan stage, to adopt a model which was too complex for the strong simplicity of his theme and the narrow intensity of his genius, and he had, working for that semi-barbarous public, to minister to tastes which were quite incongruous with his purpose and which he had not flexibility enough to bring within its scope or to elevate towards its level. In fact, Marlowe was not a born dramatist; his true genius was lyrical, narrative and epic. Limited by his inborn characteristics, he succeeds in bringing out his poetic motive only in strong detached scenes and passages or in great culminating moments in which the lyrical cry and the epic touch break out through the form of drama.

Shakespeare stands out alone, both in his own age when so many were drawn to the form and circumstances were favourable to this kind of genius, and in all English literature, as the one great and genuine dramatic poet, but this one is indeed equal to a host. He stands out too as quite unique in his spirit, method and quality. For his contemporaries resemble him only in externals; they have the same outward form and crude materials, but not the inner dramatic method by which he transformed and gave them a quite other meaning and value; and later romantic drama, though it has tried hard to imitate the Shakespea-

rian motive and touch, has been governed by another kind of poetic mind and its intrinsic as distinguished from its external method has been really different. It takes hold of life, strings together its unusual effects and labours to make it out of the way, brilliant, coloured, conspicuous. Shakespeare does not do that, except rarely, in early imitative work or when he is uninspired. He does not need to lay violent hands on life and turn it into romantic pyrotechnics; for life itself has taken hold of him in order to recreate itself in his image, and he sits within himself at its heart and pours out from its impulse a throng of beings, as real in the world he creates as men are in this other world from which he takes his hints, a multitude, a riot of living images carried on a many-coloured sea of revealing speech and a never failing surge of movement. His dramatic method seems indeed to have usually no other intellectual purpose, aesthetic motive or spiritual secret: ordinarily it labours simply for the joy of a multiple poetic vision of life and vital creation with no centre except the life-power itself, no coordination except that thrown out spontaneously by the unseizable workings of its energy, no unity but the one unity of man and the life-spirit in Nature working in him and before his eyes. It is this sheer creative Ananda of the life-spirit which is Shakespeare; abroad everywhere in that age it incarnates itself in him for the pleasure of poetic self-vision.

All Shakespeare's powers and limitations, — for it is now permissible to speak of his limitations, — arise from this character of the force that moved him to poetic utterance. He is not primarily an artist, a poetical thinker or anything else of the kind, but a great vital creator and intensely, though within marked limits, a seer of life. His art itself is life arranging its forms in its own surge and excitement, not in any kind of symmetry, — for symmetry here there is none, — nor in fine harmonies, but still in its own way supremely and with a certain intimately metric arrangement of its many loose movements, in mobile perspectives, a succession of crowded but successful and satisfying vistas. While he has given a wonderful language to poetic thought, he yet does not think for the sake of thought, but for the sake of life; his way indeed is not so much the poet himself thinking about life, as life thinking itself out in him through many mouths,

in many moods and moments, with a rich throng of fine thought-effects, but not for any clear sum of intellectual vision or to any high power of either ideal or spiritual result. His development of human character has a sovereign force within its bounds, but it is the soul of the human being as seen through outward character, passion, action, the life-soul, and not either the thought-soul or the deeper psychic being or the profounder truth of the human spirit. Something of these things we may get, but only in shadow or as a partial reflection in a coloured glass, not in their own action. In his vision and therefore in his poetic motive Shakespeare never really either rises up above life or gets behind it; he neither sees what it reaches out to nor the great unseen powers that are active within it. At one time, in two or three of his tragedies, he seems to have been striving to do this, but all that he does see then is the action of certain tremendous life-forces which he either sets in a living symbol or indicates behind the human action, as in *Macbeth*, or embodies, as in *King Lear*, in a tragically uncontrollable possession of his human characters. Nevertheless, his is not a drama of mere externalised action, for it lives from within and more deeply than our external life. This is not Virat, the seer and creator of gross forms, but Hiranya-garbha, the luminous mind of dreams, looking through those forms to see his own images behind them. More than any other poet Shakespeare has accomplished mentally the legendary feat of the impetuous sage Viswamitra; his power of vision has created a Shakespearean world of his own, and it is, in spite of its realistic elements, a romantic world in a very true sense of the word, a world of the wonder and free power of life and not of its mere external realities, where what is here dulled and hampered finds a greater enlarged and intense breath of living, an ultra-natural play of beauty, curiosity and amplitude.

It is needful in any view of the evolution of poetry to note the limits within which Shakespeare did his work, so that we may fix the point reached; but still within the work itself his limitations do not matter. And even his positive defects and lapses cannot lower him, because there is an unfailing divinity of power in his touch which makes them negligible. He has, however much toned down, his share of the Elizabethan crudities,

violences, extravagances, but they are upborne on a stream of power and end by falling in into the general greatness of his scheme. He has deviations into stretches of half prosaic verse and vagaries of tortured and bad poetic expression, sometimes atrociously bad; but they are yet always very evidently not failures of power, but the wilful errors of a great poet, more careful of dramatic truth and carried on by his force of expression than bound to verbal perfection. We feel obliged to accept his defects, which in another poet our critical sense would be swift to condemn or reject, because they are part of his force, just as we accept the vigorous errors of a great personality. His limitations are very largely the condition of his powers. Certainly, he is no universal revealer, as his idolaters would have him be, — for even in the life-soul of man there are things beyond him, — but to have given a form so wonderful, so varied, so immortally alive, in so great a surge of the intensest poetical expression, to a life-vision of this kind and this power, is a unique achievement of poetical genius. The future may find for us a higher and profounder, even a more deeply and finely vital aim for the dramatic form than any Shakespeare ever conceived, but until that has been done with an equal power, grasp and fullness of vision and an equal intensity of revealing speech, he keeps his sovereign station. The claim made for him that he is the greatest of poets may very well be challenged, — he is not quite that, — but that he is first among dramatic poets cannot well be questioned.

So far then the English poetic spirit had got in the drama, and it has never got any farther. And this is principally because it has allowed itself to be obsessed by the Elizabethan formula; for it has clung not merely to the Shakespearian form, — which might after due modification still be used for certain purposes, especially for a deeper life-thought expressing itself through the strong colours of a romantic interpretation, — but to the whole crude inartistic error of that age. Great poets, poets of noble subjective power, delicate artists, fine thinkers and singers, all directly they turn to the dramatic form, begin to externalise fatally; they become violent, they gesticulate, they press to the action and forget to have an informing thought, hold them-

selves bound to the idea of drama as a robust presentation of life and incident and passion. And because this is not a true idea and, in any case, it is quite inconsistent with the turn of their own genius, they fail inevitably. Dryden stumbling heavily through his rhymed plays, Wordsworth of all people, the least Elizabethan of poets, penning with a conscientious dullness his *Borderers*, Byron diffusing his elemental energy in bad blank verse and worse dramatic construction, Keats turning from his unfinished *Hyperion* to wild school-boy imitations of the worst Elizabethan type, Shelley even, forgetting his discovery of a new and fine literary form for dramatic poetry to give us the Elizabethan violences of the *Cenci*, Tennyson, Swinburne, even after *Atalanta*, following the same ignis fatuus, a very flame of fatuity and futility, are all victims of the same hypnotism. Recently a new turn is visible; but as yet it is doubtful whether the right conditions for a renovation of the dramatic form and a true use of the dramatic motive have all come into being. At any rate the predestined creator, if he is to come, is not yet among us.

CHAPTER XI

The Course of English Poetry - 3

THE Elizabethan drama is an expression of the stir of the life-spirit; at its best it is a great or strong, buoyant or rich or beautiful, passionately excessive or gloomily tenebrous force of vital poetry. The rest of the utterance of the time is full of the lyric joy, sweetness or emotion or moved and coloured self-description of the same spirit. There is much in it of curious and delighted thinking, but little of a high and firm intellectual value. Culture is still in its imaginative childhood and the thinking mind rather works for the curiosity and beauty of thought and even more for the curiosity and beauty of the mere expression of thought than for its light and its vision. The poetry which comes out of this mood is likely to have great charm and imaginative, emotional or descriptive appeal, but may very well miss that depth of profounder substance and that self-possessing plenitude of form which are the other characteristics of a rounded artistic creation. Beauty of poetical expression abounds in an unstinted measure, but for the music of a deeper spirit or higher significance we have to wait; the attempt at it we get, but not often all the success of its presence.

Spenser, the poet of second magnitude of the time, gives us in his work this beauty in its fullest abundance but also the limited measure of this deeper but not quite successful endeavour. The *Faerie Queene* is indeed a poem of unfailing imaginative charm and its two opening cantos are exquisite in execution; a stream of liquid harmony, of curiously opulent, yet finely tempered description, of fluid poetical phrase and minutely seen image, — for these are Spenser's constant gifts, the native form of his genius which displays more of descriptive vision than of the larger creative power or narrative force, — they work out an inspired idea, a little too much lost in detail and in the diffusion of a wealthy prolixity but still holding well together its rather

difficult and entangling burden of symbols and forms and achieving in the end some accomplished totality of fine poetic effect. But if we look at the poem as a whole, the effect intended fails, not because it happened to be left unfinished, nor even because the power in it is not equally sustained and is too evidently running thinner and thinner as it proceeds, but because it could not have come to a successful completion. Kalidasa's *Birth of the War-God* was left unfinished, or finished by a very inferior hand, yet even in the fragment there is already a masterly totality of effect; there is the sense of a great and admirable design. Virgil's *Aeneid*, though in a way finished, did not receive those last touches which sometimes make all the difference between perfection and the approach to it, and we feel too, not a failure of art, — for that is a defect which could never be alleged against Virgil, — but a relative thinning of the supporting power and inspiration. Still the consummate artistic intelligence of the poet has been so steadily at work, so complete from the very inception, it has so thought out and harmonised its idea from the beginning that a fine and firm total effect is still given. But here there is a defect of the artistic intellect, a vice or insufficiency in its original power of harmonising construction, characteristic of the Elizabethan, almost of the English mind.

Spenser's intention seems to have been to combine in his own way the success of Ariosto with the success of Dante. His work was to have been a rich and beautiful romance and at the same time a great interpretation by image and symbol, not here of the spiritual but of the ethical meaning of human life. A faery-tale and an ethical symbol in one is his conception of his artistic task. That is a kind of combination difficult enough to execute, but capable of a great and beautiful effect in a master hand; it had been achieved with supreme success by Homer and Valmiki. But the Elizabethan intellectual direction runs always towards conceit and curious complication and it is unable to follow an idea for the sake of what is essential in it, but tangles it up in all sorts of turns and accessories; seizing on all manner of disparates it tends to throw them together without any real fusion. Spenser in his idea and its execution fell a victim to all these defects of the intelligence. He has taken his intellectual

scheme from his Hellenism, the virtues to be figured in typical human beings, but dressed it up with the obvious mediaeval ingenuity of the allegory. Nor is he satisfied with a simple combination; the turn of the allegory must be at once ethical, ecclesiastical and political in one fell complexity, his witch of Faeryland represents Falsehood, the Roman Catholic Church and Mary Queen of Scots in an irritating jumble. The subject of a poem of this kind has to be the struggle of the powers of good and evil, but the human figures through whom it works out to its issues, cannot be merely the good or the evil, this or that virtue or vice, but must stand for them as their expressive opportunity of life, not as their allegorical body. That is how Homer and Valmiki work out their idea. Spenser, a great poet, is not blind to this elementary condition, but his tangled skein of allegory continually hampers the sounder conception and the interpretative narration works itself through the maze of its distractions which we are obliged to accept, not for their own interest or living force and appeal, but for the beauty of the poetic expression and description to which they give occasion.

Besides this fault of the initial conception, there are defects in the execution. After a time at least the virtues and vices altogether lose their way in faery-land or they become mistily vague and negligible which is, but considering the idea of the poem ought not to be, a great relief to the reader. We are content to read the poem or, still better, each canto apart as a romance and leave the meaning to take care of itself, — what was intended as a great ethical interpretative poem of the human soul, as a series of romantic descriptions and incidents. We see where the defect is when we make a comparison with the two other greater poems which had a similar intention. The Odyssey is a battle of human will and character supported by divine power against evil men and wrathful gods and adverse circumstance and the deaf opposition of the elements, whose scenes move with an easy inevitability between the lands of romance and the romance of actual human life, losing nowhere in the wealth of incident and description either the harmonising aesthetic colour or the simple central idea. The Ramayana too is made up of first materials which belong to the world of faery romance, but, transformed into an

epic greatness, they support easily a grandiose picture of the struggle of incarnate God and Titan, of a human culture expressing the highest order and range of ethical values with a reign of embattled anarchic force, egoistic violence and domination and lawless self-assertion. The whole is of a piece and even in its enormous length and protracted detail there is a victorious simplicity, largeness and unity. The English poet loses himself in the outward, in romantic incident and description pursued by his imagination for their own sake. His idea is often too much and too visibly expressed, yet in the end finds no successful expression. Instead of relying upon the force of his deeper poetic idea to sustain him, he depends on intellectual device and parades his machinery. The thread of connection is wandering and confused. He achieves a diffuse and richly confused perplexity, not a unity.

These are the natural limitations of the Elizabethan age, and we have to note them with what may seem at first a disproportionate emphasis, because they are the key to the immediately following reaction of English poetry with its turn in Milton towards a severe and serious intellectual effort and discipline and its fall in Dryden and Pope to a manner which got away from the most prominent defects of the Elizabethan mind at the price of a loss of all its great powers. English poetry before Milton had not passed through any training of the poetic and artistic intelligence; it had abounding energy and power, but no self-discipline of the idea. Except in Shakespeare it fails to construct; it at once loses and finds itself in a luxurious indulgence of its power, follows with a loose sweetness or a vehement buoyancy all its impulses good, bad or indifferent. Still what it does achieve, is unique and often superlative in its kind. It achieves an unsurpassed splendour of imaginative vitality, vision of the life spirit, and also an unsurpassed intensity of poetical expression, life venting itself in speech, pouring its lyric emotion, its intimate and intuitive description of itself in passionate detail, thinking aloud in a native utterance of poetry packed with expressive image or felicitous in directness. There is no other poetry which has in at all the same degree this achievement.

This poetry is then great in achievement within the limits of its method and substance; but that substance and method

belong to the second step of the psychological gradations by which poetry becomes a more and more profound and subtle instrument of the self-expression of the spirit in man. English poetry, I have remarked, follows the grades of this ascension with a singular fidelity of sequence. At first it was satisfied with only a primary superficial response to the most external appearances of life, its visible figures, incidents, primary feelings and characteristics; to mirror these things clearly, justly, with a certain harmony of selection and a just sufficient transmutation in the personality and aesthetic temperament is enough for this earlier type of poetry, all the more easily satisfied because everything is fresh, interesting, stimulating, and the liveliness of the poetic impression replaces the necessity of subtlety or depth. Great poetry can be written in early times with this as its substantial method, but not afterwards when the race mind has begun to make an intenser and more inward response to life. It then becomes the resort of a secondary inspiration which is unable to rise to the full heights of poetic possibility; or else, this external method still persists as part of the outward manner of a more subjective creation, but with a demand for more heightened effects and a more penetrating expression.

This is what has happened in the Elizabethan age. The external tendency still persists, but it is no longer sufficient. Where it is most preserved, it still demands a more vehement response, strong colours, violent passions, exaggerated figures, out-of-the-way or crowding events. Life is still the Muse of its poetry, but it is a Life which demands to feel itself more and is knocking at the gates of the deeper subjective being. And in all the best work of the time it has already got there, not very deep, but still enough to be initially subjective. Whatever Shakespeare may suggest, — a poet's critical theories are not always a just clue to his inspiration, — it is not the holding up of a mirror to life and Nature, but a moved and excited reception and evocation. Life throws its impressions, but what seizes upon them is a greater and deeper life-power in the poet which is not satisfied with mirroring or just beautifully responding, but begins to throw up at once around them its own rich matter of being and so creates something new, more personal, intimate, fuller of an inner vision,

emotion, passion of self-expression. This is the source of the new intensity; it is this impulse towards an utterance of the creative life-power within which drives towards the dramatic form and acts with such unexampled power in Shakespeare; at another extremity of the Elizabethan mind, in Spenser, it gets farther away from the actuality of life and takes its impressions as hints only for a purely imaginative creation which has an aim at things symbolic, otherwise revelatory, deeper down in the soul itself, and shadows them out through the magic of romance if it cannot yet intimately seize and express them. Still even there the method of the utterance, if not altogether its aim, is the voice of Life lifting itself out into waves of word and colour and image and sheer beauty of sound. Imagination, thought, vision work with the emotional life-mind as their instrument or rather in it as a medium, accepted as the form and force of their being.

Great poetry is the result, but there are other powers of the human mind which have not yet been mastered, and to get at these is the next immediate step of English poetry. The way it follows is to bring forward the intellect as its chief instrument, the thought-mind no longer carried along in the wave of life, but detaching itself from it to observe and reflect upon it. We have at first an intermediate manner, that of Milton's early work and of the Carolean poets, in which the Elizabethan impulse prolongs itself but is fading away under the stress of an increasing intellectuality. This rises on one side into the ripened classical perfection of Milton, falls away on the other through Waller into the reaction in Dryden and Pope.

CHAPTER XII

The Course of English Poetry - 4

IN THE work of the intellectual and classical age of English poetry, one is again struck by the same phenomenon that we meet throughout, of a great power of achievement limited by a characteristic defect which turns to failure, wastes the power spent and makes the total result much inferior to what it should have been with so much nerve of energy to speed it or so broad a wing of genius to raise it into the highest heights of the empyrean. The mind of this age went for its sustaining influence and its suggestive models to Greece, Rome and France. That was inevitable; for these have been the three intellectual nations, their literatures have achieved, each following its own different way and spirit, the best in form and substance that that kind of inspiration can produce, and not having the root of the matter in itself, the inborn intellectual depth and subtlety, the fine classical lucidity and aesthetic taste, if the attempt was to be made at all, it was here that the English mind must turn. Steeping itself in these sources, it might have blended with the classical clarity and form its own masculine force and strenuousness, its strong imagination, its deeper colour and profounder intuitive suggestiveness and arrived at something new and great to which the world could have turned as another supreme element of its aesthetic culture. But the effect did not answer to the possibility. To have arrived at it, it was essential to keep, transmuted, all that was best in the Elizabethan spirit and to colour, enrich and sweeten with its touch the classical form and the intellectual motive. There was instead a breaking away, a decisive rejection, an entirely new attempt with no roots in the past. In the end not only was the preceding structure of poetry abolished, but all its Muses were expelled; a stucco imitation classical temple, very elegant, very cold and very empty, was erected and the gods of satire and didactic commonplace set up in a shrine which was

built more like a coffee-house than a sanctuary. A sterile brilliance, a set polished rhetoric was the poor final outcome.

The age set out with a promise of better things; for a time it seemed almost on the right path. Milton's early poetry is the fruit of a strong classical intellectuality still touched with the glow and beauty of a receding romantic colour, emotion and vital intuition. Many softer influences have woven themselves together into his high language and rhythm and been fused in his personality into something wonderfully strong and rich and beautiful. Suggestions and secrets have been caught from Chaucer, Peele, Spenser, Shakespeare, and their hints have given a strange grace to a style whose austerity of power has been nourished by great classical influences; Virgilian beauty and majesty, Lucretian grandeur and Aeschylean sublimity coloured or mellowed by the romantic elements and toned into each other under the stress of an original personality make the early Miltonic manner which maintains a peculiar blending of greatness and beauty not elsewhere found in English verse. The substance is often slight, for it is as yet Milton's imagination rather than his soul or his whole mind that is using the poetic form, though the form itself is of a faultless beauty. But still here we already have the coming change, the turning of the intelligence upon life to view it from its own intellectual centre of vision. Some of the Elizabethans had attempted it, but with no great poetical success; when they wrote their best, then even though they tried to think closely and strongly, life took possession of the thought or rather itself quivered out into thought-expression. Here, on the contrary, even in the two poems that are avowedly expressions of vital moods, it is yet the intellect and its imaginations that are making the mood a material for reflective brooding, not the life-mood itself chanting its own sight and emotion. In the minor Carolean poets too we have some lingering of the colours of the Elizabethan sunset, something of the life-sense and emotional value, but, much thinned and diluted, finally they die away into trivialities of the intelligence playing insincerely with the objects of the emotional being. For here too the idea already predominates, is already rather looking at the thing felt than taken up in the feeling. Some of this work is even mystical, but that too

suffers from the same characteristic; the opening of an age of intellect was not the time when a great mystical poetry could be created.

In the end we find the change complete; colour has gone, sweetness has vanished, song has fallen into a dead hush: for a whole long century the lyrical faculty disappears from the English tongue, to reawaken again first in the Celtic north. Only the grandiose epic chant of Milton breaks the complete silence of genuine poetry; but it is a Milton who has turned away from the richer beauty and promise of his youth, lost the Virgilian accent, put away from him all delicacies of colour and grace and sweetness to express only in fit greatness of speech and form the conception of Heaven and Hell and man and the universe which his imagination had constructed out of his intellectual beliefs and reviewed in the vision of his soul. One might speculate on what we might have had if, instead of writing after the long silence during which he was absorbed in political controversy until public and private calamities compelled him to go back into himself, he had written his master work in a continuity of ripening from his earlier style and vision. Nothing quite so great perhaps, but surely something more opulent and otherwise perfect. As it is, it is by *Paradise Lost* that he occupies his high rank among the poets; that is the one supreme fruit of the attempt of English poetry to seize the classical manner, to achieve a poetical expression disciplined by a high intellectual severity and to forge a complete balance and measured perfection of form.

Paradise Lost is assuredly a great poem, one of the five great epical poems of European literature, and in certain qualities it reaches heights which no other of them had attained, even though as a whole it comes a long way behind them. Rhythm and speech have never attained to a mightier amplitude of epic expression and movement, seldom to an equal sublimity. And to a great extent Milton has done in this respect what he had set out to do; he has given English poetic speech a language of intellectual thought which is of itself highly poetic without depending in the least on any of the formal aids of poetic expression except those which are always essential and indispensable, a speech which is in its very grain poetry and in its very grain intellectual

thought-utterance. This is always the aim of the classical poet in his style and movement, and Milton has fulfilled it, adding at the same time that peculiar grandeur in both the soul and manner of the utterance and in both the soul and the gait of the rhythm which belongs to him alone of poets. These qualities are, besides, easily sustained throughout, because with him they are less an art, great artist though he is, than the natural language of his spirit and the natural sound of its motion. His aim too is high, his subject loftier than that of any one of his predecessors except Dante; there is nowhere any more magnificently successful opening than the conception and execution of his Satan and Hell, the living spirit of egoistic revolt fallen to its natural element of darkness and pain, yet preserving still the greatness of the divine principle from which he was born. If the rest had been equal to the opening, there would have been no greater poem, few as great in literature.

Here, too, the performance failed the promise. *Paradise Lost* commands admiration, but as a whole, apart from its opening, it has failed either to go home to the heart of the world and lodge itself in its imagination or to enrich sovereignly what we may describe as the acquired stock of its more intimate poetical thought and experience. But the poem that does neither of these things, however fine its powers of language and rhythm, has missed its best aim. The reason is not to be found in the disparity between Milton's professed aim, which was to justify the ways of God to man, and his intellectual means for fulfilling it. The theology of the Puritan religion was a poor enough aid for so ambitious a purpose, but the Scriptural legend treated was still quite sufficient poetically if only it had received throughout a deeper interpretation. Dante's theology, though it has the advantage of the greater richness of import and spiritual experience of mediaeval Catholicism, is still intellectually insufficient, but through his primitive symbols Dante has seen and has revealed things which make his work poetically great and sufficient. It is here that Milton has failed. Nor is the failure mainly intellectual. It is true that he had not an original intellectuality, his mind was rather scholastic and traditional, but he had an original soul and personality and the vision of a poet. To justify the ways of God

to man intellectually is not the province of poetry; what it can do, is to reveal them. Yet just here is the point of failure. Milton has seen Satan and Death and Sin and Hell and Chaos; there is a Scriptural greatness in his account of these things: he has not so seen God and heaven and man or the soul of humanity at once divine and fallen, subject to evil and striving for redemption; here there is no inner greatness in the poetic interpretation of his materials. In other words, he has ended by stumbling over the rock of offence that always awaits poetry in which the intellectual element becomes too predominant, the fatal danger of a failure of vision.

This failure extends itself to all the elements of his later poetry; it is definitive and he never, except in passages, recovered from it. His language and rhythm remain unfalteringly great to the end, but they are only a splendid robe and the body they clothe is a nobly carved but lifeless image. His architectural structure is always greatly and classically proportioned; but structure has two elements or, perhaps we should say, two methods, that which is thought out and that which grows from an inward artistic and poetic vision. Milton's structures are thought out; they have not been seen, much less been lived out into their inevitable measures and free inspired lines of perfection. The difference becomes evident by a simple comparison with Homer and Dante or even with the structural power, much less inspired and vital than theirs, but always finely aesthetic and artistic, of Virgil. Poetry may be intellectual, but only in the sense of having a strong intellectual strain in it and of putting forward as its aim the play of imaginative thought in the service of the poetical intelligence; but that must be supported very strongly by the emotion or sentiment or by the imaginative vision to which the idea opens. Milton's earlier work is suffused by his power of imaginative vision, the opening books of *Paradise Lost* are upborne by the greatness of the soul that finds expression in its harmonies of speech and sound and the greatness of its sight. But in the later books and still more in the *Samson Agonistes* and the *Paradise Regained* this flame sinks; the sight, the thought become intellectually externalised. Milton writing poetry could never fail in a certain greatness and power, nor could he descend, as

did Wordsworth and others, below his well-attained poetical level, but the supreme vitalising fire has sunk; the method and idea retain sublimity, the deeper spirit has departed.

Much greater, initial and essential was the defect in the poetry that followed. Here all is unredeemed intellectuality and even the very first elements of the genuine poetic inspiration are for the most part, one might almost say, entirely absent. Pope and Dryden and their school, except now and then, — Dryden especially has lines sometimes in which he suddenly rises above his method, — are busy only with one aim, with thinking in verse, thinking with a clear force, energy and point or with a certain rhetorical pomp and effectiveness, in a well-turned and well-polished metrical system. That seems to have been their sole idea of "numbers", of poetry, and it is an idea of unexampled falsity. No doubt this was a necessary phase, and perhaps, the English mind being what it then was, being always so much addicted in its poetry to quite the reverse method, it had to go to an extreme, to sacrifice even for a time many of its native powers in order to learn as best it could how to arrive at the clear and straightforward expression of thought with a just, harmonious and lucid turn; an inborn gift in all the Latin tongues, in a half-Teutonic speech attacked by the Celtic richness of imagination it had to be acquired. But the sacrifice made was great and cost much effort of recovery to the later development of the language. These writers got rid of the Elizabethan confusions, the involved expression, the lapses into trailing and awkward syntax, the perplexed turn in which ideas and images jostle and stumble together, fall into each other's arms and strain and burden the expression in a way which is sometimes stimulating and exhilarating, but sometimes merely awkward and embarrassing; they got rid too of the crudeness and extravagance; but also of all the rich imagination and vision, the sweetness, lyrism, grace and colour. They replaced it with mere point and false glitter. They got rid too of Milton's Latinisms and poetic inversions, — though they replaced them by some merely rhetorical artifices of their own, — dismissed his great and packed turns of speech and replaced his grandeurs by what they thought to be a noble style, though it was no more than a spurious rhetorical pomp.

Still the work they had to do they did effectively, with talent, energy, even a certain kind of genius.

Therefore, if the substance of this poetry had been of real worth, it would have been less open to depreciation and need not have excited so vehement a reaction or fallen so low from its exaggerated pride of place. But the substance was on a par with, often below the method. It took for its models the Augustan poets of Rome, but it substituted for the strength and weight of the Latin manner an exceeding superficiality and triviality. It followed more really contemporary French models, but missed their best ordinary qualities, their culture, taste, tact of expression, and missed too the greater gifts of the classical French poetry, which though it may suffer by its excessive cult of reason and taste or its rhetorical tendency, may run often in too thin a stream, has yet ideas, power, a strong nobility of character in Corneille, a fine grace of poetic sentiment in Racine. But this poetry cares nothing for such gifts: it is occupied with expressing thought, but its thought is of little or no value; for the most part it is brilliant commonplace, and even ideas which have depths behind them become shallow and external by the way of their expression. The thought of these writers has no real eye on life, except when it turns to satire. Therefore that is the part of their work which is still most alive; for here the Anglo-Saxon spirit gets back to itself, leaves the attempt at a Gallicised refinement, finds its own robust vigour and arrives at a brutal, but still genuine and sometime really poetic vigour and truth of expression. Energy, driving force is, however, a general merit of the verse of Pope and Dryden and in this one respect they excel their nearest French exemplars. Their expression is striking in its precision, each couplet rings out with a remarkable force of finality and much coin of their minting has passed into common speech and citation: it is not gold of poetry for all that, but it is well-gilt copper coin of a good currency. But all turns to a monotonous brilliance of language, a monotonous decisiveness and point of rhythm. It has to be read by couplets and passages, for each poem is only a long string of these and except in one instance the true classical gift, the power of structure is quite wanting. The larger thought-power which is necessary for structure, was ab-

sent. This intellectual age of English poetry did its work, but, as must happen when there is in art a departure from what is best in the national mind, ended in a failure and for a time even a death of the true poetic faculty.

CHAPTER XIII

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 flexibilities 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 graceful 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 but 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 appearances 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 last 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 widenesses 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 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, 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 tensity 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 weighted with heavy intellectual turns. Nature and life and things are seen accurately as objects and forms, but not with any vision, emotion or penetration 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 lilt and its power to stir, — all these he has, — but its more 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 Words-

worth. 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 or pleasure through the senses and an artistic or curiously observing or finely psychologising intellectualism. This dawn has no noon, hardly even a morning.

CHAPTER XIV

The Movement of Modern Literature - 1

POETRY as the fullness of imaginative self-expression of the entirely modernised mind begins with the writers of the later eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. They are the free, impetuous but often narrow sources of these wider flowings. We see the initial tendencies which undergo a rapid growth of meaning and changes of form in the subsequent decades, until now all their sense and seeking have reached in the early twentieth a subtle intensity, refinement and variety of motives, a tense straining on many lines to find some last truth and utterance which must end either in a lingering decadence or in a luminous and satisfied self-exceeding. From the beginning this modern movement, in literature as in thought, takes the form of an ever widening and deepening intellectual and imaginative curiosity, a passion for knowledge, a passion for finding, an eye of intelligence awakened to all the multiform possibilities of new truth and discovery. The Renascence was an awakening of the life spirit to wonder and curiosity and reflection and the stirred discovery of the things of the life and the mind; but the fullness of the modern age has been a much larger comprehensive awakening of the informed and clarified intellect to a wider curiosity, a much more extensive adventure of discovery and an insistent need to know and possess the truth of Nature and man and the universe and whatever may lie hidden behind their first appearances and suggestions. A long intellectual search for truth that goes probing always deeper into the physical, the vital and subjective, the action of body and life, mind and emotion and sensation and thought is now beginning to reach beyond these things or rather through their subtlest and strongest intensities of sight and feeling towards the truth of the Spirit. The soul of the Renascence was a lover of life and an amateur of knowledge; the modern spirit is drawn by the cult of a clear, broad and

minute intellectual and practical Truth; knowledge and a power of life founded on the power of knowledge are the dominating necessities of its being. Poetry in this age has followed intellectually and imaginatively the curve of this great impulse.

Continental literature displays the mass of this movement with a much more central completeness and in a stronger and more consistent body and outline than English poetry. In the Teutonic countries the intellectual and romantic literature of the Germans at the beginning with its background of transcendental philosophy, at the end the work of the Scandinavian and Belgian writers with their only apparently opposite sides of an intellectual or a sensuous realism and a sentimental or a psychological mysticism, the two strands sometimes separate, sometimes mingled, among the Latins the like commencement in the work of Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Chénier, Hugo, the intermediate artistic development of most of the main influences by the Parnassians, the like later turn towards the poetry of Mallarmé, Verlaine, D'Annunzio, stigmatised by some as the beginning of a decadence, give us a distinct view of the curve. In English poetry the threads are more confused, the work has on the whole a less clear and definite inspiration and there is in spite of the greatness of individual poets an inferior total effectivity; but at the beginning and the end it has one higher note, a lifting of sight beyond the stress of the intellect and the senses, which is reached either not at all or much less directly realised with a less pure vision in the more artistically sound and sufficient poetry of the Continent. Still the principal identical elements are distinguishable, sometimes very strongly pronounced and helped to some fullest expression by the great individual energy of imagination and force of character which are the most distinct powers of the English poetic mind. Often they thus stand out all the more remarkable by the magnificent narrowness of their self-concentrated isolation.

Earliest among these many new forces to emerge with distinctness is an awakening of the eye to a changed vision of Nature, of the imagination to a more perfect and intimate visualisation, of the soul to a closer spiritual communion. An imaginative, scrutinising, artistic or sympathetic dwelling on the details

of Nature, her sights, sounds, objects, sensible impressions is a persistent characteristic of modern art and poetry; it is the poetic side of the same tendency which upon the intellectual has led to the immeasurable development of the observing and analysing eye of Science. The older poetry directed an occasional objective eye on Nature, turning a side glance from life or thought to get some colouring or decorative effect or a natural border or background for life or something that illustrated, ministered to or enriched the human thought or mood of the moment, at most for a casual indulgence of the imagination and senses in natural beauty. But the intimate subjective treatment of Nature, the penetrated human response to her is mostly absent or comes only in rare and brief touches. On the larger scale her subjective life is realised not with an immediate communion, but through myth and the image of divine personalities that govern her powers. In all these directions modern poetry represents a great change of our mentality and a swift and vast extension of our imaginative experience. Nature now lives for the poet as an independent presence, a greater or equal power dwelling side by side with him or embracing and dominating his existence. Even the objective vision and interpretation of her has developed, where it continues at all the older poetic method, a much more minute and delicate eye and touch in place of the large, strong and simply beautiful or telling effects which satisfied an earlier imagination. But where it goes beyond that fine outwardness, it has brought us a whole world of new vision; working sometimes by a vividly suggestive presentation, sometimes by a separation of effects and an imaginative reconstruction which reveals aspects the first outward view had hidden in, sometimes by a penetrating impressionism which in its finest subtleties seems to be coming back by a detour to a sensuously mystical treatment, it goes within through the outward and now not so much presents as recreates physical Nature for us through the imaginative vision.[1] By that new creation it penetrates through the form nearer to the inner truth of her being.

But the direct subjective approach to Nature is the most

[1] I am speaking here of Western literature. Oriental art and poetry at any rate in the far East had already in a different way anticipated this more intimate and imaginative seeing.

distinctly striking characteristic turn of the modern mentality. The approach proceeds from two sides which constantly meet each other and create between them a nexus of experience between man and Nature which is the modern way of responding to the universal Spirit. On one side there is the subjective sense of Nature herself as a great life, a being, a Presence, with impressions, moods, emotions of her own expressed in her many symbols of life and stressing her objective manifestations. In the poets in whom this turn first disengages itself, that is a living conscious view of her to which they are constantly striving to give expression whether in a large sense of her presence or in a rendering of its particular impressions. On the other side there is a sensitive human response, moved in emotion or thrilling in sensation or stirred by sheer beauty or responsive in mood, a response of satisfaction and possession or of dissatisfied yearning and seeking, in the whole an attempt to relate or harmonise the soul and mind and sensational and vital being of the human individual with the soul and mind and life and body of the visible and sensible universe. Ordinarily it is through the imagination and the intellect and the soul of sensibility that this approach is made; but there is also a certain endeavour to get through these instruments to a closer spiritual relation and, if not yet to embrace Nature by the Spirit in man, to harmonise and unite the spiritual soul of man with the spiritual Presence in Nature.

Another widening of experience which modern poetry renders much more universally and with a constant power and insistence is a greater awakening of man to himself, to man in this warp and weft of Space and Time and in the stress of the universe, to all that is meant by his present, his past and his future. Here too we have a parallel imaginative movement in poetry to the intellectual movement of thought and science with its large and its minute enquiry into the origins and antiquity and history of the race, into the sources of its present development, into all its physical, psychological, sociological being and the many ideal speculations and practical aspirations of its future which have arisen from this new knowledge of the human being and his possibilities. Formerly, the human mind in its generality

did not go very far in these directions. Its philosophy was speculative and metaphysical, but with little actuality except for the intellectual and spiritual life of the individual, its science explorative of superficial phenomenon rather than opulent both in detail and fruitful generalisation; its view of the past was mythological, traditional and national, not universal and embracing, its view of the present limited in objective scope and, with certain exceptions, of no very great subjective profundity; an outlook on the future was remarkable by its absence. The constant self-expansion of the modern mind has broken down many limiting barriers; a vast objective knowledge, an increasingly subtle subjectivity, a vivid living in the past, present and future, a universal view of man as of Nature are its strong innovations. This change has found inevitably its vivid reflections in the wider many-sided interests, the delicate refinements, fine searchings, large and varied outlook and profound inlook of modern poetry.

The first widening breadth of this universal interest in man, not solely the man of today and our own country and type or of the past tradition of our own culture, but man in himself in all his ever-changing history and variety, came in the form of an eager poetic and romantic valuing of all that had been ignored and put aside as uncouth and barbarous by the older classical or otherwise limited type of mentality. It sought out rather all that was unfamiliar and attractive by its unlikeness to the present, the primitive, the savage, mediaeval man and his vivid life and brilliant setting, the Orient very artificially seen through a heavily coloured glamour, the ruins of the past, the life of the peasant or the solitary, the outlaw, man near to Nature undisguised by conventions and uncorrupted by an artificial culture or man in revolt against conventions, a willed preference for these strange and interesting aspects of humanity, as in Nature for her wild and grand, savage and lonely scenes or her rich and tropical haunts or her retired spots of self-communion. On one side a sentimental or a philosophic naturalism, on the other a flamboyant or many-hued romanticism, superficial mediaevalism, romanticised Hellenism, an interest in the fantastic and the supernatural, tendencies of an intellectual or an ideal transcendentalism, are the salient constituting characters. They make up that

brilliant and confusedly complex, but often crude and unfinished literature, stretching from Rousseau and Chateaubriand to Hugo and taking on its way Goethe, Schiller and Heine, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats and Shelley, which forms a hasty transition from the Renascence and its after-fruits to the modernism of today which is already becoming the modernism of yesterday. Much of it we can now see to have been ill-grasped, superficial and tentative; much, as in Chateaubriand and in Byron, was artificial, a pose and affectation; much, as in the French Romanticists, merely bizarre, overstrained and overcoloured; a later criticism condemned in it a tendency to inartistic excitement, looseness of form, an unintellectual shallowness or emptiness, an ill-balanced imagination. It laid itself open certainly in some of its more exaggerated turns to the reproach, — not justly to be alleged against the true romantic element in poetry, — that the stumbling-block of romanticism is falsity. Nevertheless, behind this often defective frontage was the activity of a considerable force of new truth and power, much exceedingly great work was done, the view of the imagination was immensely widened and an extraordinary number of new motives brought in which the later nineteenth century developed with a greater care and finish and conscientious accuracy, but with crudities of its own and perhaps with a less fine gust of self-confident genius and large inspiration.

The recoil from these primary tendencies took at first the aspect of a stress upon artistic execution, on form, on balance and design, on meticulous beauty of language and a minute care and finished invention in rhythm. An unimpassioned or only artistically impassioned portraiture and sculpture of scene and object and idea and feeling, man and Nature was the idea that governed this artistic and intellectual effort. A wide, calm and impartial interest in all subjects for the sake of art and a poetically intellectual satisfaction, — this poise had already been anticipated by Goethe, — is the atmosphere which it attempts to create around it. There is here a certain imaginative reflection of the contemporary scientific, historic and critical interest in man, in his past and present, his creations and surroundings, a cognate effort to be unimpassioned, impersonal, scrupulous, sceptically interested and reflective, though in poetry it loses the cold accuracy of

the critical intellect and assumes the artistic colour, emphasis, warmth of the constructive imagination. There is amidst a wide atmosphere of sceptical or positive thinking an attempt to enter into the psychology of barbaric and civilised, antique, mediaeval and modern, occidental and oriental humanity, to reproduce in artistic form the spirit of the inner truth and outer form of its religions, philosophic notions, societies, arts, monuments, constructions, to reflect its past inner and outer history and present frames and mentalities. This movement too was brief in duration and soon passed away into other forms which arose out of it, though they seemed a revolt against its principles. This apparent paradox of a development draped in the colours of revolt is a constant psychological feature of all human evolution.

In this turn we are struck by its most glaring feature, the vehement waving of the revolutionary red flag of realism. Realism is in its essence an attempt to see man and his world as they really are without veils and pretences; it is imagination turning upon itself and trying to get rid of its native tendency to give a personal turn or an enhanced colouring to the object, art trying to figure as a selective process of scientific observation and synthetised analysis. Necessarily, whenever it is art at all, it betrays itself in the process. Its natural movement is away from the vistas of the past to a pre-occupation with the immediate present, although it began with a double effort, to represent the past with a certain vividness of hard and often brutal truth, not in the colours in which the ideally constructive imagination sees it through the haze of distance, and to represent the present too with the same harsh and violent actuality. But success in this kind of representation of the past is impossible; it carries in it always a sense of artificiality and willed construction. Realism tends naturally to take the present as its field; for that alone can be brought under an accurate because an immediate observation. Scientific in its inspiration, it subjects man's life and psychology to the scalpel and the microscope, exaggerates all that strikes the first outward view of him, his littlenesses, imperfections, uglinesses, morbidities, and comes easily to regard these things as the whole or the greater part of him and to treat life as if it were a psychological and physiological disease, a fungoid growth upon

material Nature: it ends, indeed almost begins, by an exaggeration and overstressing which betrays its true character, the posthumous child of romanticism perverted by a pseudo-scientific preoccupation. Romanticism also laid a constant stress on the grotesque, diseased, abnormal, but for the sake of artistic effect, to add another tone to its other glaring colours. Realism professes to render the same facts in the proportions of truth and science, but being art and not science, it inevitably seeks for pronounced effects by an evocative stress which falsifies the dispositions and shades of natural truth in order to arrive at a conspicuous vividness. In the same movement it falsifies the true measure of the ideal, which is a part of the totality of human life and nature, by bringing the idealism in man down to the level of his normal daily littlenesses; in attempting to show it as one strand in his average humanity, it reduces it to a pretension and figment, ignoring the justification of the idealistic element in art which is that the truth of the ideal consists essentially in its aspiration beyond the limitations of immediate actuality, in what our strain towards self-exceeding figures and not in the moment's failure to accomplish. Realism on both those sides, in what it ignores and what it attempts, lies open to the reproach aimed at romanticism; its stumbling-block is a falsity which pursues both its idea and its method. Nevertheless this movement too behind its crudities has brought in new elements and motives. It has done very considerable work in fiction and prose drama; in poetry, even, it has brought in some new strains amid the greater powers, but here it could not dominate, — for that would have meant the death of the very spirit of poetry whose breath of life is the exceeding of outward reality. Realism is still with us, but has already evolved out of itself another creative power whose advent announces its own passing.

CHAPTER XV

The Movement of Modern Literature - 2

OUT of the period of dominant objective realism what emerges with the strongest force is a movement to quite an opposite principle of creation, a literature of pronounced and conscious subjectivity. There is throughout the nineteenth century an apparent contradiction between its professed literary aim and theory and the fundamental unavoidable character of much of its inspiration. In aim throughout, — though there are notable exceptions, — it professes a strong objectivity. The temper of the age has been an earnest critical and scientific curiosity, a desire to see, know and understand the world as it is: that requires a strong and clear eye turned on the object and it would seem to require also as far as possible an elimination of one's own personality; a strongly personal view of things would appear to be the very contrary of an accurate observation, for the first constructs and colours the object from within, the second would allow it to impress its own colour and shape on the mind, — we have to suppose, of course, that, as the modern intellect has generally held, objects exist in themselves and not in our own consciousness of them. Goethe definitely framed this theory of literary creation when he laid it down that the ideal of art and poetry was to be beautifully objective. With the exception of some of the first initiators and until yesterday, modern creation has followed more or less this line: it has tried to give either a striking, moving and exciting or an aesthetically sound or a realistically powerful presentation, — all three methods often intermingling or coalescing, — rather than a subjective interpretation; thought, feeling, aesthetic treatment of the object are supposed to intervene upon and arise from a clear or strong objective observation.

But, on the other hand, an equally strong characteristic of the modern mind is its growing subjectivity, an intense conscious-

ness of the I, the soul or the self, not in any mystic withdrawal within or inward meditation, or not in that pre-eminently, but in relation to the whole of life and Nature. This characteristic distinguishes modern subjectivism from the natural subjectivity of former times, which either tended towards an intense solitary inwardness or was superficial and confined to a few common though often strongly emphasised notes. Ancient or mediaeval individuality might return more self-assertive or violent responses to life, but the modern kind is more subtly and pervasively self-conscious and the stronger in thought and feeling to throw its own image on things, because it is more precluded from throwing itself out freely in action and living. This turn was in fact an inevitable result of an increasing force of intellectualism; for great intensity of thought, when it does not isolate itself from emotion, reactive sensation and aesthetic response, as in science and in certain kinds of philosophy, must be attended by a quickening and intensity of these other parts of our mentality. In science and critical thought, where this isolation is possible, the objective turn prevailed, — though much that we call critical thought is after all a personal construction, a use of the reason and the observation of things for a view of what is around us which, far from being really disinterested and impersonal, is a creation of our own temperament and a satisfaction of our intellectualised individuality. But in artistic creation where the isolation is not possible, we find quite an opposite phenomenon, the subjective personality of the poet asserting itself to a far greater extent than in former ages of humanity.

Goethe himself, in spite of his theory, could not escape from this tendency; his work, as he himself recognised, is always an act of reflection of the subjective changes of his personality, a history of the development of his own soul in the guise of objective creation. From the work of a poet like Leconte de Lisle who attempted with the most deliberate conscientiousness a perfect fidelity to the ideal of an impersonal artistic objectiveness, there disengages itself in the mass an almost poignant impression of the strong subjective personality shaping everything into a mask-reflection of its own characteristic moods; the attempt to live in the thoughts and feelings of other men, other civilisations

betrays itself as only the multiple imaginative and sympathetic extension of the poet's own psychology. This peculiarity of the age is noticeable even in many creators whose aim is deliberately realistic or their method founded upon a minute psychological observation, Ibsen or Tolstoi and the Russian novelists. The self of the creator very visibly overshadows the work, is seen everywhere like the conscious self of Vedanta both containing and inhabiting all his creations. Shakespeare succeeds, as far as a poet can, in veiling himself behind his creatures; he gives us at least the illusion of mirroring the world around him, a world universally represented rather than personally and individually thought and imaged, and at any rate the Life-spirit sees and creates in him through a faithful reflecting instrument, quite sufficiently universal and impersonal for its dramatic purpose even in his personality. Browning, the English poet who best represented the spirit of the age in its temperament of curious observation and its aim at a certain force of large and yet minute reality, who was eminently a poet of life observed and understood and of thought playing around the observation, as Shakespeare was the poet of life seen through an identity of feeling with it and of thought arising up out of the surge of life, — Browning, though he seems to have considered this self-concealment especially admirable and the essence of the Shakespearian method of creation, fails himself to achieve it in anything like the same measure. The self-conscious thinking of the modern mind which brings into prominent relief the rest of the mental personality and stamps the whole work with it, gets into his way; everywhere we feel the presence of the creator bringing forward his living puppets, analysing, commenting, thinking about them or else about life through a variation of many voices so that they become as much his masks as his creations.

Thus both the subjective personality of the man and the artistic personality of the creator tend to count for much more in modern work than at any previous time; the poet is a much greater part of his work. It is doubtful whether we have not altogether lost the old faculty of impersonal self-effacement in the creation which was so common in the ancient and mediaeval ages when many men working in one spirit could build great uni-

versal works of combined architecture, painting and sculpture or in literature the epic or romantic cycles or lyric cycles like the Vedic Mandalas or the mass of Vaishnava poetry. Even when there are definite schools marked by a common method, we do not find, as in the old French romance writers or the Elizabethan dramatists or the poets of the eighteenth century, a spiritual resemblance which overshadows individual differences; in the moderns the technical method may have in all similar motives, but difference of subjective treatment so stresses its values as to prevent all spiritual unity. There is here a gain which more than compensates any loss; but we have to note the cause, a growth of subjectivism, an enhanced force, enrichment and insistence of the inner personality.

This trend, though for some time held back from its full development by the aim at the objective method, betrays itself in that love of close and minute psychological observation which pervades the work of the time. There, too, the modern mind has left far behind all the preceding ages. Although most prominent in fiction and drama, the characteristic has laid some hold too on poetry. Compared with its work all previous creation seems psychologically poor both in richness of material and in subtlety and the depth of its vision; half the work of Shakespeare in spite of its larger and greater treatment hardly contains as much on this side as a single volume of Browning. Realism has carried this new trend to the farthest limit possible to a professedly objective method, stressing minute distinctions, forcing the emphasis of extreme notes, but in so doing it has opened to the creative mind of the age a door of escape from realism. For, in the first place, while in the representation of outward objects, of action, of character and temperament thrown out in self-expressive movement we may with success affect the method of a purely objective observation, from the moment we begin to psychologise deeply, we are at once preparing to go back into ourselves. For it is only through our own psychology, through its power of response to and of identification with the mind and soul in others that we can know their inner psychology; for the most part our psychological account of others is only an account of the psychological impressions of them they produce in our

own mentality. This we see even in the realistic writers in the strongly personal and limited way in which they render the psychology of their creatures in one or two always recurring main notes upon which they ring minute variations. In the end the creative mind could not fail to become conscious of this self within which was really doing the whole work and to turn to it for a theme or for the mould of its psychological creations, to a conscious intimate subjectivism. Again, the emphasising of extreme notes brings us to a point where to go farther we have to go within and to make ourselves a sort of laboratory of new psychological experiment and discovery.

This is the turn we get in the poetry of Verlaine which is throughout a straining after an intimate and subtle experience of the senses, vital sensations, emotions pushed beyond ordinary limits into a certain vivid and revealing abnormality, in the earlier work of Maeterlinck which is not so much an action of personalities as the drama of a childlike desire-soul uttering half inarticulate cries of love and longing, terror and distress and emotion, in the work of Mallarmé where there is a constant seeking for subjective symbols which will reveal to our own soul the soul of the things that we see. The rediscovery of the soul is the last stage of the round described by this age of the intellect and reason. It is at first mainly the perceptions of a desire-soul, a soul of sense and sensation and emotion, and an arriving through them at a sort of psychological mysticism, a psychism which is not yet true mysticism, much less spirituality, but is still a movement of the lower self in that direction. The movement could not stop here: the emergence of the higher perceptions of a larger and purer psychical and intuitive entity in direct contact with the Spirit could not but come, and this greater impulse is represented by the work of the Irish poets. It is the sign of the end, now in sight, of a purely intellectual modernism and the coming of a new age of creation, intellectualism fulfilled ceasing by a self-exceeding in a greater motive of intuitive art and poetry.

Thus this wide movement of interests, so many-sided and universal, in man past and present after embracing all that attracts the observing eye in his life and history and apparent

nature comes back to a profounder interest in the movements of his deeper self which reveals itself to an extended psychological experience and an intuitive sense. But an insistent interest in future man has been the most novel, the most fruitfully distinguishing characteristic of the modern mind. Once limited to the far-off dream of religions or the distant speculation of isolated thinkers, the attempt to cast a seeing eye as well as a shaping will on the future is now an essential side of the human outlook. Formerly the human mentality of the present lived in the great shadow thrown on it by its past, nowadays, on the contrary, it turns more to some image of coming possibility. The colour of this futurism has changed with the changes of modern intellectualism. At first it came in on the wave of a partly naturalistic, partly transcendentalist idealism, a reverie of the perfected individual and the perfected society, and was commonly associated with the passion for civic or the idea of a spiritual and personal liberty. A more sober colouring intervened, the intellectual constructions of positivism, liberalism, utilitarian thought which were soon in their turn followed by broader democratic and socialistic utopias. Touched sometimes with an aesthetic and idealistic colouring, they have grown for a time more scientific, economic, practical with the advance of realism and rationalism. But the new force of subjectivism will have probably the effect of rehabilitating the religious and spiritually idealistic element in our vision of the future of the race. Poetry which has been less able to follow this stream of thought than prose literature, will find its account in the change; for it will be the natural interpreter of this more inner and intuitive vision. The futurist outlook has never been more pronounced than at the present day; on all sides, in thought, in life, in the motives and forms of literary and artistic creation, we are swinging violently away from the past into an unprecedented adventure of new teeming possibilities. Never has the past counted so little for its own sake, — its tradition is still effectual only when it can be made a power or an inspiration for the future, never has the present looked so persistently and creatively forward.

But Nature and man in his active, intellectual and emotional life and physical environment are not the whole subject of man's

thought or of his creative presentment of his mind's seeings and imaginings. He has been even more passionately occupied by the idea of things beyond, other worlds and an after life, symbols and powers of that which exceeds him or of his own self-exceeding, the cult of gods of nature and supernature, the belief in or the seeking after God. On this side of the human mind modern literature, though not a blank, has been during the greater part of the nineteenth century inferior in its matter and in its power, because it has been an age of scepticism and of denial or else of a doubtful and tormented, a merely intellectual or a conventional clinging to the residuum of past beliefs. They have not formed a real and vital part of its inner life and what is not real or vital to thought, imagination and feeling cannot be powerfully creative. At first this ebb of positive faith was to some extent compensated for by the ideal element of a philosophic transcendentalism, vague and indefinite but with its own large light and force of inspiration. As scepticism became more positive, this light fades, the most poetic notes of the age which deal with the foundations of life are either the poignant expression of a regretful scepticism, or a defiant atheism exulting in the revolt of the great denial, the hymn of the Void, an eternal Nihil which has taken the place of God, or else the large idea of Nature as a universal entity, the Mother of our being. To Science this is only an inconscient Force; the poetic mind with its natural turn for finding a reality even behind what are to the intellect abstract conceptions, has passed through this conception to a new living sense of the universal, the infinite. It has even evolved from it now and then, a vivid pantheism. The difficult self-defence or reaction of the old faiths against the prevalent scepticism and intellectualism has given too some minor notes; but these are the greater voices of negation and affirmation in this sphere of poetic thought and creation which have added some novel and powerful strains to poetry. With the return to subjective intuition and a fresh adventuring of knowledge and imagination into the beyond modern poetry, freed from the sceptical attitude, is beginning in this field too to turn the balance in its favour as against the old classical and mediaeval literature. The vision of the worlds beyond which it is gaining is nearer, less grossly human, more

supernatural to physical Nature; the symbols it is beginning to create and its reinterpretation of the old symbols are more adequate and more revealing; rid of the old insufficient forms and limiting creeds, it is admitting a near, direct and fearless seeing and experience of God in Nature, God in man, God in the universal and the eternal. From faith it has advanced through the valley of doubt to the heights of a more luminous knowledge. These are the main movements of the modern mind constituting the turns of a psychological evolution of the most rapid and remarkable kind which have dominated the literature of Europe, now more than ever before growing into a single though varied whole. We have to see how they have worked themselves out in English poetry during this period. We shall then be able to form a clearer idea of the dominant possibilities of the future: for though it has been a side stream and not the central current, yet in the end the highest and most significant, though not yet the strongest forces of the future poetry have converged here and given their first clearest and most distinct sounds. The continent is still overshadowed by the crepuscule of the intellectual age sick unto death but unable to die. Here there are some clear morning voices, English precursors, the revived light of Celtic spirituality, not least significant the one or two accents of a more self-assured message which have broken across the mental barrier between East and West from resurgent India.

CHAPTER XVI

The Poets of the Dawn - 1

THE superiority of the English poets who lead the way into the modern age is that sudden almost unaccountable spiritual impulse, insistent but vague in some, strong but limited in one or two, splendid and supreme in its rare moments of vision and clarity, which breaks out from their normal poetic mentality and strives constantly to lift their thought and imagination to its own heights, a spirit or Daemon who does not seem to trouble at all with his voice or his oestrus the contemporary poets of continental Europe. But they have no clearly seen or no firmly based constant idea of the greater work which this spirit demands from them; they get at its best only in an inspiration over which they have not artistic control, and they have only an occasional or uncertain glimpse of its self motives. Thus they give to it often a form of speech and movement which is borrowed from their intellect, normal temperament or culture rather than wells up as the native voice and rhythm of the spirit within, and they fall away easily to a lower kind of work. They have a greater thing to reveal than the Elizabethan poets, but they do not express it with that constant fullness of native utterance or that more perfect correspondence between substance and form which is the greatness of Shakespeare and Spenser.

This failure to grasp the conditions of a perfect intuitive and spiritual poetry has not yet been noted, because the attempt itself has not been understood by the critical mind of the nineteenth century. That mind was heavily intellectualised, sometimes lucid, reasonable and acute, sometimes cloudily or fierily romantic, sometimes scientific, minutely delving, analytic, psychological, but in none of these moods and from none of these outlooks capable of understanding the tones of this light which for a moment flushed the dawning skies of its own age or tracing it to the deep and luminous fountains from which it welled.

Taine's grotesquely misproportioned appreciation in which Byron figures as the colossus and Titan of the age while the greater and more significant work of Wordsworth and Shelley is dismissed as an ineffective attempt to poetise a Germanic transcendentalism, Carlyle's ill-tempered and dyspeptic depreciation of Keats, Arnold's inability to see in Shelley anything but an unsubstantially beautiful poet of cloud and dawn and sunset, a born musician who had made a mistake in taking hold of the word as his instrument, are extreme, but still characteristic misunderstandings. In our own day we see the singers who lead the van of the future entering with a nearer intimacy into the domains of which these earlier poets only just crossed the threshold, but the right art and technique of this poetry have been rather found by the intuitive sense of their creators than yet intellectually understood so as to disengage their form from the obstruction of old-world ideas and standards of appreciation.

Each essential motive of poetry must find its own characteristic speech, its own law of rhythms, — even though metrically the mould may appear to be the same, — its own structure and development in the lyric, dramatic, narrative and, if that can still be used, the epic form and medium. The objective poetry of external life, the vital poetry of the life-spirit, the poetry of the intellect or the inspired reason, each has its own spirit and, since the form and word are the measure, rhythm, body of the spirit, must each develop its own body. There may be a hundred variations within the type which spring from national difference, the past of the civilisation, the cultural atmosphere, the individual idiosyncrasy, but some fundamental likeness of spirit will emerge. Elizabethan poetry was the work of the life-spirit in a new, raw and vigorous people not yet tamed by a restraining and formative culture, a people with the crude tendencies of the occidental mind rioting almost in the exuberance of a state of nature. The poetry of the classical Sanskrit writers was the work of Asiatic minds, scholars, court-poets in an age of immense intellectual development and an excessive, almost over-cultivated refinement, but still that too was a poetry of the life-spirit. In spite of a broad gulf of difference we yet find an extraordinary basic kin-

ship between these too very widely separated great ages of poetry, though there was never any possibility of contact between that earlier oriental and this later occidental work, — the dramas of Kalidasa and some of the dramatic romances of Shakespeare, plays like the Sanskrit *Seal of Rakshasa* and *Toy-Cart* and Elizabethan historic and melodramatic pieces, the poetry of the *Cloud-Messenger* and erotic Elizabethan poetry, the romantically vivid and descriptive narrative method of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and the more intellectually romantic vividness and descriptive elaborateness of the *Line of Raghu* and the *Birth of the War-God*. This kinship arises from the likeness of essential motive and psychological basic type and emerges and asserts itself in spite of the enormous cultural division. A poetry of spiritual vision and the sense of things behind life and above the intellect must similarly develop from its essence a characteristic voice, cry, mould of speech, natural way of development, habits of structure.

The great poets of this earlier endeavour had all to deal with the same central problem of creation and were embarrassed by the same difficulty of a time which was not ready for work of this kind, not prepared for it by any past development, not fitted for it by anything in the common atmosphere of the age. They breathed the rarity of heights lifted far beyond the level of the contemporary surrounding temperament, intellect and life. But each besides had an immense development of that force of separate personality which is in art at least the characteristic of our later humanity. Each followed his own way, was very little influenced by the others, was impelled by a quite distinct spiritual idea, worked it out in a quite individual method and, when he fell away from it or short of it, failed in his own way and by shortcomings peculiar to his own nature. There is nothing of that common aim and manner which brings into one category the Elizabethan dramatists or the contemporaries of Pope and Dryden. We have to cast an eye upon them successively at their separate work and see how far they carried their achievement and where they stopped short or else deviated from the path indicated by their own highest genius.

CHAPTER XVII

The Poets of the Dawn - 2

A POETRY whose task is to render truth of the Spirit by passing behind the appearances of the sense and the intellect to their spiritual reality, is in fact attempting a work for which no characteristic power of language has been discovered, — except the symbolic, but the old once established symbols will no longer entirely serve, and the method itself is not now sufficient for the need, — no traditional form of presentation native to the substance, no recognised method of treatment or approach, or none at once sufficiently wide and subtle, personal and universal for the modern mind. In the past indeed there have been hieratic and religious ways of approaching the truths of spirit which have produced some remarkable forms in art and literature. Sufi poetry, Vaishnava poetry are of this order, in more ancient times the symbolic and mystic way of the Vedic singers, while the unique revelatory utterance of the Upanishads stands by itself as a form of inspired thought which penetrates either direct or through strong unveiling images to the highest truths of self and soul and the largest seeing of the Eternal. One or two modern poets have attempted to use in a new way the almost unworked wealth of poetical suggestion in Catholic Christianity. But the drift of the modern mind in this direction is too large in its aim and varied in its approach to be satisfied by any definite or any fixed symbolic or hieratic method, it cannot rest within the special experience and figures of a given religion. There has been too universal a departure from all specialised forms and too general a breaking down of the old cut channels; in place of their intensive narrowness we have a straining through all that has been experienced by an age of wide intellectual curiosity to the ultimate sense of that experience. The truth behind man and Nature and things, behind intellectual and emotional and vital perception is sought to be seized by a pressure upon these things

themselves, and the highly intellectualised language and way of seeing developed by this age is either used as it is with more meaning or strained or moulded anew or given some turn or transformation which will bring in the intensity of the deeper truth and vision. An intellectualism which takes this turn can choose one of three methods. It may prolong the language and forms it already possesses and trust to the weight of the thing it has to say and the power of its vision to inform this vehicle with another spirit. It may strain, heighten, transfigure the language and forms into a more intensive force of image, mould and expression. Or it may strive for some new and direct tone, some sheer cry of intuitive speech and sound born from the spirit itself and coming near to its native harmonies. The moulds too may either be the established moulds turned or modified to a greater and subtler use or else strange unprecedented frames, magical products of a spiritual inspiration. On any of these lines the poetry of the future may arrive at its objective and cross the borders of a greater kingdom of experience and expression.

But these earlier poets came in an age of imperfect, unenriched and uncompleted intellectuality. The language which they inherited was admirable for clear and balanced prose speech, but in poetry had been used only for adequate or vigorous statement, rhetorical reasoning, superficial sentimentalising or ornate thought, narrative, description in the manner of a concentrated, elevated and eloquent prose. The forms and rhythmical movements were unsuitable for any imaginative, flexible or subtly feeling poetry. Their dealing with these forms was clear and decisive; they were thrown aside and new forms were sought for or old ones taken from the earlier masters or from song and ballad moulds and modified or developed to serve a more fluid and intellectualised mind and imagination. But the language was a more difficult problem and could not be entirely solved by such short cuts as Wordsworth's recipe of a resort to the straightforward force of the simplest speech dependent on the weight of the substance and thought for its one sufficient source of power. We find the tongue of this period floating between various possibilities. On its lower levels it is weighted down by some remnant of the character of the eighteenth century

and proceeds by a stream of eloquence, no longer artificial, but facile, fluid, helped by a greater force of thought and imagination. This turn sometimes rises to a higher level of inspired and imaginative poetic eloquence. But beyond this pitch we have a fuller and richer style packed with thought and imaginative substance, the substitute of this new intellectualised poetic mind for the more spontaneous Elizabethan richness and curiosity; but imaginative thought is the secret of its power, no longer the exuberance of the life-soul in its vision. On the other side we have a quite different note, a sheer poetical directness, which sometimes sinks below itself to poverty and insufficiency or at least to thinness, as in much of the work of Wordsworth and Byron, but, when better supported and rhythmed, rises to quite new authenticities of great or perfect utterance, and out of this there comes in some absolute moments a native voice of the spirit, in Wordsworth's revelations of the spiritual presence in Nature and its scenes and peoples, in Byron's rare forceful sincerities, in the luminous simplicities of Blake, in the faery melodies of Coleridge, most of all perhaps in the lyrical cry and ethereal light of Shelley. But these are comparatively rare moments, the mass of their work is less certain and unequal in expression and significance. Finally we get in Keats a turning away to a rich, artistic and sensuous poetical speech which prepares us for the lower fullnesses of the intellectual and aesthetic epoch that had to intervene. The greatest intuitive and revealing poetry has yet to come.

Byron and Wordsworth are the two poets who are the most hampered by this difficulty of finding and keeping to the native speech of their greater self, most often depressed in their elevation, because they are both drawn by a strong side of their nature, the one to a forceful, the other to a weighty intellectualised expression; neither of them are born singers or artists of word and sound, neither of them poets in the whole grain of their mind and temperament, not, that is to say, always dominated by the aesthetic, imaginative or inspired strain in their being, but doubled here by a man of action and passion, there by a moralist and preacher, in each too a would-be "critic of life", who gets into the way of the poet and makes upon him illegitimate demands; therefore they are readily prone to fall away to what is, however in-

teresting it may otherwise be, a lower, a not genuinely poetic range of substance and speech. But both in the deepest centre or on the highest peak of their inspiration are moved by powers for which their heavily or forcibly intellectualised language of poetry was no adequate means. It is only when they escape from it that they do their rare highest work. Byron, no artist, intellectually shallow and hurried, a poet by compulsion of personality rather than in the native colour of his mind, inferior in all these respects to the finer strain of his great contemporaries, but in compensation a more powerful elemental force than any of them and more in touch with all that had begun to stir in the mind of the time, — always an advantage, if he knows how to make use of it, for a poet's largeness and ease of execution—, succeeds more amply on the inferior levels of his genius, but fails in giving any adequate voice to his highest possibility. Wordsworth, meditative, inward, concentrated in his thought, is more often able by force of brooding to bring out that voice of his greater self, but flags constantly, brings in a heavier music surrounding his few great clear tones, drowns his genius at last in a desolate sea of platitude. Neither arrives at that amplitude of achievement which might have been theirs in a more fortunate time, if ready forms had been given to them, or if they had lived in the stimulating atmosphere of a contemporary culture harmonious with their personality.

Byron's prodigious reputation, greater and more prolonged on the continent than in his own country, led perhaps to too severely critical an undervaluing when his defects became nakedly patent in the fading away of the helpful glamour of contemporary sympathies. That is the penalty of an exaggerated fame lifted too high on the wings or the winds of the moment. But his fame was no accident or caprice of fortune; it was his due from the Time-Spirit. His hasty vehement personality caught up and crowded into its work in a strong though intellectually crude expression an extraordinary number of the powers and motives of the modern age. The passion for liberty found in him its voice of Tyrrhenian bronze. The revolt and self-assertion of the individual against the falsities and stifling conventions of society, denial, unbelief, the scorn of the sceptic for established things,

the romance of the past, the restlessness of the present, the groping towards the future, the sensuous, glittering, artificial romance of the pseudo-East, the romance of the solitary, the rebel, the individual exaggerated to himself by loneliness, the immoral or amoral superman, all that flawed romanticism, passionate sentimentalism, insatiable satiety of sensualism, cynicism, realism which are the chaotic fermentation of an old world dying and a new world in process of becoming, — a century and a half's still unfinished process, — caught hold of his mood and unrolled itself before the dazzled, astonished and delighted eyes of his contemporaries in the rapid succession of forcibly ill-hewn works impatiently cut out or fierily molten from his single personality in a few crowded years from its first rhetorical and struggling outburst in *Childe Harold* to the accomplished ease of its finale in *Don Juan.* Less than this apparent plenitude would have been enough to create the rumour that rose around the outbreak of this singular and rapid energy. No doubt, his intellectual understanding of these things was thin and poverty-stricken in the extreme, his poetic vision of the powers that moved him had plenty of force, but wanted depth and form and greatness. But he brought to his work what no other poet could give and what the mentality of the time, moved itself by things which it had not sufficient intellectual preparation to grasp, was fitted to appreciate, the native elemental force, the personality, the strength of nervous and vital feeling of them which they just then needed and which took the place of understanding and vision. To this pervading power, to this lava flood of passion and personality, were added certain pre-eminent gifts, a language at first of considerable rhetorical weight and drive, afterwards of great nervous strength, directness, precision, force of movement, a power of narrative and of vivid presentation, and always, whatever else might lack, an unfailing energy. It was enough for the immediate thing he had to do, though not at all enough for the highest assured immortality.

These things which Byron more or less adequately expressed, were the ferment of the mind of humanity in its first crude attempt to shake off the conventions of the past and struggle towards a direct feeling of itself and its surrounding world in their

immediate reality. But behind it there is something else which seems sometimes about to emerge vaguely, an element which may be called spiritual, a feeling of the greatness of man the individual spirit commensurate with Nature and his world, man in communion with the greatness of Nature, man able to stand in the world in his own strength and puissance, man affirming his liberty, the claim to freedom of a force as great within as the forces which surround and seem to overwhelm him. It is a Titanism, the spirit in man seen through the soul of desire, in revolt, not in self-possession, man the fallen archangel, not man returning to godhead: but it reposes on, it is the obscure side of a spiritual reality. He could not break through the obstructions of his lower personality and express this thing that he felt in its native tones of largeness and power. If he could have done so, his work would have been of a lasting greatness. But he never found the right form, never achieved the liberation into right thought and speech of the Daemon within him. The language and movement he started from were an intellectual and sentimental rhetoric, the speech of the eighteenth century broken down, melted and beaten into new shape for stronger uses; he went on to a more chastened and rapid style of great force, but void of delicacy, subtlety and variety; he ended in a flexible and easy tongue which gave power to even the most cynical trivialities and could rise to heights of poetry and passion: but none of these things, however adapted to his other gifts, was the style wanted for this greater utterance. Art, structure, accomplished mould were needs of which he had no idea; neither the weight of a deep and considered, nor the sureness of an inspired interpretation were at his command. But sometimes language and movement rise suddenly into a bare and powerful sincerity which, if he could have maintained it, would have given him the needed instrument: but the patience and artistic conscientiousness or the feeling for poetic truth which could alone have done this, were far from him. Considerable work of a secondary kind he did, but he had something greater to say which he never said, but only gave rare hints of it and an obscured sense of the presence of its meaning.

Wordsworth, with a much higher poetic mind than Byron's, did not so entirely miss his greatest way, though he wandered

much in adjacent paths and finally lost himself in the dry desert sands of the uninspired intellectual mentality. At the beginning he struck in the midst of some alloy full into his purest vein of gold. His earliest vision of his task was the right vision, and whatever may be the general truth of his philosophy of childhood in the great Ode, it seems to have been true of him. For as intellectuality grew on him, the vision failed; the first clear intimations dimmed and finally passed, leaving behind an unillumined waste of mere thought and moralising. But always, even from the beginning, it got into the way of his inspiration. Yet Wordsworth was not a wide thinker, though he could bring a considerable weight of thought to the aid of the two or three great things he felt and saw lucidly and deeply, and he was unfitted to be a critic of life of which he could only see one side with power and originality, — for the rest he belongs to his age rather than to the future and is limited in his view of religion, of society, of man by many walls of convention. But what the poet sees and feels, not what he opines, is the real substance of his poetry. Wordsworth saw Nature and he saw man near to Nature, and when he speaks of these things, he finds either his noblest or his purest and most penetrating tones. His view of them is native to his temperament and personality and at the opposite pole to Byron's. Not that which is wild, dynamic or tumultuously great in Nature, but her calm, her serenity, the soul of peace, the tranquil Infinite, the still, near, intimate voice that speaks from flower and bird, sky and star, mountain and stream, this he knew, felt and lived in as no poet before or after him has done, with a spiritual closeness and identity which is of the nature of a revelation, the first spiritual revelation of this high near kind to which English poetry had given voice. Some soul of man, too, he sees, not in revolt, — he has written unforgettable lines about liberty, but a calm and ordered liberty, — in harmony with this tranquil soul in Nature, finding in it some original simplicity and purity of his being and founding on it a life in tune with the order of an eternal law. On this perception the moralist in Wordsworth founds a rule of simple faith, truth, piety, self-control, affection, grave gladness in which the sentimental naturalism of the eighteenth century disappears into an ethical naturalism, a very different idealisa-

tion of humanity in the simplicity of its direct contact with Nature unspoiled by the artifice and corruption of a too developed society. All that Wordsworth has to say worth saying is confined to these motives and from them he draws his whole genuine thought inspiration.

But it is in the Nature-strain of which he is the discoverer that he is unique, for it is then that the seer in him either speaks the revelatory thought of his spirit or gives us strains greater than thought's, the imperishable substance of spiritual consciousness finding itself in sight and speech. At other times, especially when he fuses this Nature-strain with his thought and ethical motive, he writes sometimes poetry of the very greatest; at others again it is of a varying worth and merit; but too often also he passes out from his uninspired intelligence work with no stamp of endurance, much less of the true immortality. In the end the poet in him died while the man and the writer lived on; the moralist and concentred thinker had killed the singer, the intellect had walled up the issues of the imagination and spiritual vision. But even from the beginning there is an inequality and uncertainty which betray an incomplete fusion of the sides of his personality, and the heavy weight of intellectuality shadows over and threatens the spiritual light which it eventually extinguished. Except in a small number of pieces which rank among the greatest things in poetry, he can never long keep to the pure high poetic expression. He intellectualises his poetic statement overmuch and in fact states too much and sings too little, has a dangerous turn for a too obvious sermonising, pushes too far his reliance on the worth of his substance and is not jealously careful to give it a form of beauty. In his works of long breath there are terrible stretches of flattest prose in verse with lines of power, sometimes of fathomless depth like that wonderful

Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone,

interspersed or occurring like a lonely and splendid accident, *rari nantes in gurgite vasto.*[1] It has been said with justice that he talks too much in verse and sings too little; there is a deficient

[1] "Rare swimming in the vast gurge".

sense of the more subtle spirit of rhythm, a deficiency which he overcomes when moved or lifted up, but which, at other times, hampers greatly his effectiveness. His theory of poetic diction, though it has a certain truth in it, was, as he practised it, narrow and turned to unsoundness; it betrayed him into the power of the prosaic and intellectual element in his mind. These defects grew on him as the reflective moralist and monk and the conventional citizen, — there was always in him this curious amalgam, — prevailed over the seer and poet.

But still one of the seer-poets he is, a seer of the calm spirit in Nature, the poet of man's large identity with her and serene liberating communion: it is on this side that he is admirable and unique. He has other strains too of great power. His chosen form of diction, often too bare and trivial in the beginning, too heavy afterwards, helps him at his best to a language and movement of unsurpassed poetic weight and gravity charged with imaginative insight, in which his thought and his ethical sense and spiritual sight meet in a fine harmony, as in his one great Ode, in some of his sonnets, in *Ruth*, even in *Laodamia*, in lines and passages which uplift and redeem much of his less satisfying work, while when the inner light shines wholly out, it admits him to the secret of the very self-revealing voice of Nature herself speaking through the human personality in some closest intimacy with her or else uttering the greatness of an impersonal sight and truth. He has transparencies in which the spirit gets free of the life-wave, the intelligence, the coloured veils of the imagination, and poetic speech and rhythm become hints of the eternal movements and the eternal stabilities, voices of the depths, rare moments of speech direct from our hidden immortality.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Poets of the Dawn - 3

IF WORDSWORTH and Byron failed by an excess of the alloy of untransmuted intellect in their work, two other poets of the time, Blake and Coleridge, miss the highest greatness they might otherwise have attained by an opposite defect, by want of the gravity and enduring substance which force of thought gives to the poetical inspiration. They are, Coleridge in his scanty best work, Blake almost always, strong in sight, but are unable to command the weight and power in the utterance which arises from the thinking mind when it is illumined and able to lay hold on and express the reality behind the idea. They have the faculty of revelatory sense in a high degree, but little of the revelatory thought which should go with it; or, at least, though they can suggest this sometimes with the intense force which comes from spiritual feeling, they cannot command it and constantly give it greatness and distinctness of body. And their sight is only of the middle kind; it is not the highest things they see, but only those of a borderland or middle region. Their poetry has a strange and unique quality and charm, but it stops short of something which would have made it supreme. They are poets of the supernatural and of such spiritual truth as may be shadowed by it or penetrate through it, but not of the greatest truths of the spirit. And this supernature remains in them a thing seen indeed and objectively real, but abnormal; but it is only when supernature becomes normal to the inner experience that it can be turned into material of the very greatest poetry.

Coleridge more than any of his great contemporaries missed his poetic crown; he has only found and left to us three or four scattered jewels of a strange and singular beauty. The rest of his work is a failure. There is a disparateness in his gifts, an inconsequence and incoherence which prevented him from bringing them together, aiding one with the other and producing great

work rich in all the elements of his genius. Intellectuality he had in abundance, a wide, rich and subtle intellect, but he squandered rather than used it in discursive metaphysics and criticism and was most at home when pouring it out in the spontaneity of conversation or rather monologue, an outlet in which the labour of giving it the firmness of an enduring form could be avoided. The poet in him never took into himself the thinker. The consequence is that very much the greater part of his poetry, though his whole production is small enough in bulk, is unconvincing in the extreme. It has at best a certain eloquence or a turn of phrase and image which has some intellectual finish, but not either force or magic, or a fluidity of movement which fails to hold the ear. But there are three poems of his which are unique in English poetry, written in moments when the too active intellect was in abeyance, an occult eye of dream and vision opened to supraphysical worlds and by a singular felicity the other senses harmonised, the speech caught strange subtleties and coloured lucidities of speech and the ear the melodies of other realms. It is indeed only just over the mystic border that his sight penetrates and to its most inferior forms, and he does not enter into these worlds as did Blake, but catches only their light and influence upon the earth life; but it is caught with a truth and intensity which makes magical the scenes and movements of the earth life and transforms light of physical nature into light of supernature. This is to say that for the first time, except for rare intimations, the middle worlds and their beings have been seen and described with something of reality and no longer in the crude colours of vulgar tradition or in the forms of myth. The Celtic genius of second sight has begun to make its way into poetry. It is by these poems that he lives, though he has also two or three others of a more human charm and grace; but here Coleridge shows within narrow limits a superlative power and brings in a new element and opens a new field in the realms of poetic vision.

Blake lives ordinarily far up in this middle world of which Coleridge only catches some glimpses or at most stands occasionally just over its border. His seeing teems with its images, he hears around him the echoes of its sounds and voices. He is not only a seer, but almost an inhabitant of other planes and

other worlds; or, at least, this second subtle sight is his normal sight. But his power of expression is not equal to his power of vision. When he would catch the very words and express the very images of these middle realms, he speaks very often things which are unintelligible symbols to any other intelligence than his own. He is unable to translate his experience to our comprehension. It is only when he casts into some echo of the language of the luminous children of those shores the songs of their childhood and their innocence, that he becomes limpid to us and sheds upon our earth some clear charm, felicity, wonder of a half divine other-where. Here, again, we have something unique, a voice of things which had not been heard before nor has it been heard since; for the Celtic poets who sometimes give us something that is in its source akin, bring a ripe reflective knowledge and a colour of intellectuality into their speech and vision, but Blake seeks to put away from him as much as possible the intellectual mind, to see only and sing. By this effort and his singularity and absorption he stands apart solitary and remote and produces only a half effect because he has cut away the link which would help us to reach him and share his illumination.

A greater poet by nature than almost any of these, Shelley was alone of them all very nearly fitted to be a sovereign voice of the new spiritual force that was at the moment attempting to break into poetry and possess there its kingdom. He has on the one hand, one feels, been a native of the heights to which he aspires and the memory of them, not indeed quite distinct, but still environing his imagination with its luminous ethereality, is yet with him. If the idea of a being not of our soil fallen into the material life and still remembering his skies can be admitted as an actual fact of human birth, then Shelley was certainly a living example of one of these luminous spirits half obscured by earth; the very stumblings of his life came from the difficulty of such a nature moving in the alien terrestrial environment in which he is not at home nor capable of accepting its muddy vesture and iron chain, attempting impatiently to realise there the law of his own being in spite of the obstruction of the physical clay. This mind and nature cannot live at ease in their dusk day and time, but escape to dwell prophetically in a future heaven and

earth in which the lower life shall have accepted the law of his own celestial worlds. As a poet his intellect is suffused and his imagination is bathed with their light; they are steeped in the brilliances of a communion with a higher law, another order of existences, another meaning behind Nature and terrestrial things. But in addition he possesses the intellectual equipment possible in his age and can speak with a subtle beauty and perfect melody the tongue of the poetic intelligence. He is a seer of spiritual realities, much more radiantly near to them than Wordsworth, has, what Coleridge had not, a poetic grasp of metaphysical truths, can see the forms and hear the voices of higher elemental spirits and natural godheads than those seen and heard by Blake, while he has a knowledge too of some fields of the same middle realm, is the singer of a greater and deeper liberty and a purer and nobler revolt than Byron, has the constant feeling of a high spiritual and intellectual beauty, not sensuous in the manner of Keats, but with a hold on the subtler beauty of sensible things which gives us not their glow of vital warmth and close material texture, but their light and life and the rarer atmosphere that environs them on some meeting line between spirit and body. He is at once seer, poet, thinker, prophet, artist. In his own day and after, the strangeness of his genius made him unintelligible to the rather gross and mundane intellectual mind of the nineteenth century; those who admired him most, were seized only by the externalities of his work, its music, delicacy, diffusely lavish imaginative opulence, enthusiasm, but missed its inner significance. Now that we are growing more into the shape of his ideas and the forms of his seeing, we can get nearer to the hidden heart of his poetry. Still high pinnacled as is his flight, great as is his work and his name, there is in him too a limitation which prevents the perfect self-expression that we find only in the few supreme poets.

This was due to the conditions under which the evolution of his poetry had to take place and to the early death which found him at the time when it was rounding towards the full orb of its maturity. His earlier poetry shows him striving with the difficulty of the too intellectual manner of speech from which these poets of supra-intellectual truth had to take their departure. Shelley uses language throughout as a poet; he was incapable of falling

into the too hard and outward manner of Byron or yielding to the turn towards mere intellectuality which always beset Wordsworth. The grain of his mind was too saturated with the hues of poetic vision, he had too splendid and opulent an imagination, too great a gift of flowing and yet uplifted and inspired speech for such descents, and even in his earlier immature poetry, *Queen Mab*, *Alastor*, *The Revolt of Islam*, these powers are there and sustain him, but still the first form of his diction is a high, sometimes a magnificent poetic eloquence, which sometimes enforces the effect of what he has to say, but more often loses it in a flood of diffuse and over-abundant expression. It is not yet the native language of his spirit. As his power develops, the eloquence remains, but is subdued to the growing splendour of his vision and its hints and images, but the thought seems almost to disappear from the concrete grasp of the intelligence into a wonder of light and a music of marvellous sound. The *Prometheus* and *Epipsychidion* show this turn of his genius at its height; they are two of the three greatest things he has left to us on the larger scale. Here he does come near to something like the natural speech of his strange, beautiful and ethereal spirit; but the one thing that is wanting is a more ascetic force of *tapasyā* economising and compressing its powers to bring in a new, full and seizing expression of the thought element in his poetry, not merely opulent and eloquent or bright with the rainbow hues of imagination, but sovereign in poetic perfection and mastery. Towards this need his later style is turning, but except once in *Adonais* he does not seize on the right subject matter for his genius. Only in the lyric of which he has always the secret, — for of all English poets he has perhaps the most natural, spontaneous, sweet and unfailing gift of melody, and his emotion and lyrical cry are at once of the most delicate and the most intense, — is he frequently and constantly equal alike in his thought, feeling, imagery, music. But it is not often that he uses the pure lyrical form for his greatest sight, for what would now be called his "message". When he turns to that, he attempts always a large and more expansive form. The greatness of *Prometheus Unbound* which remains, when all is said, his supreme effort and one of the masterpieces of poetry, arises from the combination of this larger

endeavour and profounder substance with the constant use of the lyrical mould in which he most excelled, because it agreed with the most intimate turn of his temperament and subtly exalted spirit.

The spiritual truth which had possession of Shelley's mind was higher than anything opened to the vision of any of his contemporaries, and its power and reality which was the essence of his inspiration can only be grasped, when it is known and lived, by a changed and future humanity. Light, Love, Liberty are the three godheads in whose presence his pure and radiant spirit lived; but a celestial light, a celestial love, a celestial liberty. To bring them down to earth without their losing their celestial lustre and hue is his passionate endeavour, but his wings constantly buoy him upward and cannot beat strongly in an earthlier atmosphere. The effort and the unconquered difficulty are the cause of the ethereality, the want of firm earthly reality that some complain of in his poetry. There is an air of luminous mist surrounding his intellectual presentation of his meaning which shows the truths he sees as things to which the mortal eye cannot easily pierce or the life and temperament of earth rise to realise and live; yet to bring about the union of the mortal and the immortal, the terrestrial and the celestial is always his passion. He is himself too much at war with his age to ignore its contradictions and pass onward to the reconciliation. He has to deny God in order to affirm the Divine, and his denial brings in a note too high, discordant and shrill. He has not the symbols or the thought-forms through which he can make the spirit of light, love and freedom intimate and near to men; he has, as in the *Prometheus*, to go for them to his imagination or to some remote luminous experience of ideal worlds and to combine these beautiful ideal images, too delicately profound in their significance, too veiled in robe upon robe of light to be distinct in limb and form, with traditional names and symbols which are converted into this other sense and fail to be perfect links because by the conversion they cease to be familiar to the mind. To bring his difficult significance home he lavishes inexhaustibly image on radiant image, line on dazzling beauty of line, the sense floats in a storm of coruscations and dissolving star-showers; the more we look and accustom our

eyes to this new kind of light, the more loveliness and light we see, but there is not that immediate seizing and taking captive of the whole intelligence which is the sign of an assured and sufficient utterance.

He is in revolt too against the law of earth, in arms against its dominations and powers, and would substitute for it by some immediate and magical change the law of heaven; but so he fails to make the needed transition and reconciliation and his image of the thing to be remains too ideal, too fine and abstract in spite of the beauty of the poetical forms he gives it as its raiment or atmosphere. Heaven cannot descend to take possession of the gross, brute and violent earth he sees around him, therefore he carries up the delivered earth into a far and ideal heaven. Something of the same excess of another light than ours surrounds and veils his intercourse with the spirit in Nature. He sees her earthly forms in a peculiar radiance and light and through them the forms and spirits of his ideal world. He has not Wordsworth's distinctness and intimate spiritual communion with Nature as she is on earth; the genii of the worlds of dream and sleep cluster too thickly round all that his waking eye seizes. He tries to let them in through the force of crowding images, brilliant tossings aside of the lucent curtain, *tiraskaraṇī*, which veils them from us: but they remain half-hidden in their means of revelation. The earth-nature is seen in the light of another nature more than in its own, and that too is only half visible in the mixed luminosity, "burning through the vest that hides it." Tradition governs very largely his choice of rhythms, but wonderfully melodious as is his use or conversion of them to the mould of his spirit, one feels that he would have done better to seek more often for self-formed movements. Shelley is the bright archangel of this dawn and he becomes greater to us as the light he foresaw and lived in returns and grows, but he sings half concealed in the too dense halo of his own ethereal beauty.

As with Wordsworth and Byron, so too we find Shelley and Keats standing side by side, but with a certain antinomy. They are perhaps the two most purely poetic minds that have used the English tongue; but one sings from the skies earthwards, the other looks from earth towards Olympus. Keats is the first

entire artist in word and rhythm in English poetry, — not grandiose, classical and derived like Milton, but direct and original in his artistry, he begins a new era. His astonishing early performance leaves us wondering what might have been the masterpieces of his prime, of which even *Hyperion* and the Odes are only the unfulfilled promise. His death in the beginning of his powers is the greatest loss ever suffered by human achievement in this field. Alone of all the chief poets of his time he is in possession of a perfect or almost perfected instrument of his native temperament and genius, but he had not yet found the thing he had to say, not yet seen what he was striving to see. All the other high things that interested his great equals, had for him no interest; one godhead only he worshipped, the image of divine Beauty, and through this alone he wished to see Truth and by her to achieve spiritual delight and not so much freedom as completeness. And he saw her in three of her four forms, sensuous beauty, imaginative beauty, intellectual and ideal beauty. But it is the first only which he had entirely expressed when his thread was cut short in its beginning; the second he had carried far, but it was not yet full-orbed; towards the third and highest he was only striving, "to philosophise he dared not yet", but it was from the first the real sense and goal of his genius.

On life he had like the others — Byron alone excepted — no hold; such work as *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, in which he followed the romantic tendency of the time, was not his own deeper self-expression; they are wonderful richly woven robes of sound and word and image curiously worked and brocaded, but they clothe nothing. The Odes, where fulfilment of imaginative beauty rises out of a higher sensuous seeking and satisfaction to an admirable sweetness, fullness, largeness and opulence and admits intimations of the ideal goddess, are almost all of them among the scanty number of the chief masterpieces in this high and deliberate lyrical form. But the real soul of Keats, his inner genius, the thing he was striving to bring out of himself is not to be altogether found even here; it lay in that attempt which, first failing in *Endymion*, was again resumed in *Hyperion*. It was the discovery of the divine Idea, Power and living norm of Beauty which by its breath of delight has created

the universe, supports it and moves towards a greater perfection, inspires the harmonies of inward sight and outward form, yearns and strives towards the fullness of its own self-discovery by love and delight. Not yet in possession of his idea, he tries to find and to figure it in *Endymion* by sensuous images of a rich and dim moonlit dream with a sort of allegory or weft of symbols behind the words and thoughts, but his hand is still inexpert and fails in the execution. In *Hyperion* the idea is clearer and in bolder relief, but it is misconceived under a too intellectual, external and conventionally epic Miltonic influence, and in his second version he turns not quite happily to a renewal of the form of his first attempt. He has found a clue in thought and imagination, but not quite its realisation in the spiritual idea, has already its imaginative, sensuous, something of its intellectual suggestion, but not yet what the spirit in him is trying to reveal, its mystically intellectual, mystically sensuous, mystically imaginative vision, form and word. The intimation of it in his work, his growing endeavour to find it and the unfulfilled promise of its discovery and unique fullness of expression are the innermost Keats and by it he belongs in spirit to these prophetic, but half-foiled singers of the dawn. He lives more than any other poet in the very temple of Beauty, traverses its sculptured and frescoed courts with a mind hued and shaped to her forms and colours and prepares, but is never permitted, to enter the innermost sanctuary. The time had not yet come when these spiritual significances could be more than hinted. Therefore Keats and Shelley were taken before their powers could fully expand, Byron led far out of the path, Blake obscured in his own remoteness, Coleridge and Wordsworth drawn away to lose the poet and seer in the mere intellectual mind. All wandered round their centre of inspiration, missed something needed and stopped or were stopped short. Another age had to arrive which worshipped other and lesser godheads.

CHAPTER XIX

The Victorian Poets

THE epoch associated in England with the name of Victoria was in poetry, like that of Pope and Dryden, an age of dominant intellectualism; but, unlike that hard and sterile period, it has been an imaginative, artistic intellectualism, touched with the greater and freer breath of modern thought and its wide interest and fullness of matter, not brass-bound in furbished and narrow bands of social ease and polite refinement, but alive, astir, capable of personal energy and inspiration, aesthetical in its refinements, above all not entirely satisfied with itself, but opened up to some mountain-top prospects, struck across by some moments of prophecy. But still whether we compare it with the inspirations from which it turned or with the inspiration which followed and replaced it, it is a depression, not a height, and without being either faultily faultless or splendidly null, as epochs of a too self-satisfied intellectual enlightenment tend to look in the eyes of the more deeply thinking ages, — as the Roman Augustan, the French grand century, the pinchbeck English Augustan, — it leaves an impression of a too cramped fullness and a too level curiosity. It is a descent into a comfortable and pretty hollow or a well-cultured flatness between high, wild or beautiful mountain ranges behind and in front a great confused beginning of cliff and seashore, sands and rocks and breakers and magic of hills and sea-horizons. There is much in this work to admire, something here and there to stimulate, but only a little that lifts off the feet and carries to the summits of the poetic enthusiasm.

The descent from the uncertain but high elevations of the first romantic, half spiritual outbreak is very marked, baffling and sudden. This is not in the nature of a revolt, an energetic audacity of some new thing, — except for a moment in Swinburne, — but a change of levels, a transition to other more varied

but less elevated interests, the substitution of a more curious but less impetuous movement. The rich beauty of Keats is replaced by the careful opulent cultivated picturesqueness of Tennyson, the concentrated personal force of Byron by the many-sided intellectual robustness and energy of Browning, the intense Nature poetry and the strong and grave ethical turn of Wordsworth by the too intellectually conscious eye on Nature and the cultured moralising of Arnold, the pure ethereal lyricism of Shelley by Swinburne's turgid lyrical surge and all too self-conscient fury of foam-tossing sound, and in place of the supernatural visions of Blake and Coleridge we have the mediaeval glamour and languorous fields of dream of Rossetti and Morris. There is a considerable gain, but a deep loss; for this poetry has a more evolved richness, but in that greater richness a greater poverty. The gain is in fullness of language, a more conscious and careful art, a more informed and varied range of thought and interest; but the loss is in spiritual substance and the Pythian height of inspiration. There is a more steady working, but with it a clogged and heavier breath; a wealth of colour and nearer strain of thinking, but a lower flame of the spirit. This labour is assured and in its way always good, but it has a paucity of greatness and a too temperate impulsion.

The intellectual preparation of the previous poetry, the depth and wealth of experience which must found the greatest and most successful audacities of spiritual vision, had been insufficient, coming as it did after a shallow and superficial age of the acute, but limited cult of Reason. The work of the middle nineteenth century was to prepare anew the intellectual ground and to lead up to a more conscious, enriched and careful artistic execution. But it was a tract of intellectual effort in which there was much width of a kind and considerable invention, but a very insufficient height and profundity. In England there was the added misfortune of a reign of rampant philistinism. The Victorian period for all its activity and fruitfulness was by no means one of those great intellectual humanistic ages which the world will look back to with a satisfied sense of clarity or of uplifting. The great flood of free thinking, free inquiry, scientific and artistic vivacity, the rapid breaking of fresh ground, the noble political enthusiasms

which stirred France and Germany and Italy and created a new force of democratic humanism in Russia, swept in vain past the English shores defended by their chalk cliffs and downs of self-content or only broke across them in a few insignificant waves. It is the most unlovely and uninspiring period of the English spirit. Never was the aesthetic sense so drowned in pretentious ugliness, seldom the intelligence crusted in such an armoured imperviousness to fine and subtle thinking, the ebb of spirituality so far out and low. It was a period of smug commercial middle-class prosperity, dull mechanism, hard utilitarianism and a shoddy liberalism bursting and running over with self-content in its narrow practical rationality, spiritual poverty and intellectual ineptitude. Unteachable, it bore with a scornful complacency or bewildered anger or a listening ear of impervious indulgence the lightning shafts of Arnold's irony, the turbid fulminations of Carlyle, the fiery raids of Ruskin or saw unaffected others of its fine or great spirits turn for refuge to mediaevalism or socialistic utopias. The work of these forerunners was done in a wilderness of intellectual commonness and busy mediocre energy; it bore fruit afterwards, but only when the century was in its wane and other infant powers of the immenser future were beginning to raise their heads of cloud and light.

But this work of revolt and preparation was done chiefly in prose. Poetry flourishes best when it is the rhythmical expression of the soul of its age, of what is greatest and deepest in it, but still belongs to it, and the poetry of this period suffers by the dull smoke-laden atmosphere in which it flowered; though it profited by the European stir of thought and seeking around and held its own, achieved beauty, achieved in one or two poets a considerable energy, some largeness, occasional heights, there is still something sickly in its luxuriance, a comparative depression and poverty in its thought, a lack in its gifts, in its very accomplishment a sense of something not done. It cannot compare in power, wing, abundance of genius and talent with the contemporary work done in France: as in all intellectual ages the grand stream of poetical achievement is to be found, in spite of the greater poetic energy of the Anglo-Celtic mind, on the continent, in the clear and competent labour of the Latin intelligence. There is certainly much

imaginative beauty, much artistic or fine or strong technical execution, — a great deal more in fact of this element than at any previous time, — much excellent work high enough in the second rank, but the inner surge and satisfaction of a free or deep spirit, the strong high-riding pinion or the skyward look, these things are rare in Victorian poetry.

The fame of Tennyson, now a little dimmed and tarnished by the breath of Time, occupied this epoch with a great and immediate brilliance. He is unquestionably the representative English poet of his time. He mirrors its ordinary cultivated mind as it shaped in the English temperament and intelligence, with an extraordinary fidelity and in a richly furnished and heavily decorated mirror set round with all the art and device that could be appreciated by the contemporary taste. There has been no more consummate master of the language, and this mastery is used with a careful, sure and unfailing hand. Whatever has to be expressed, whether it be of considerable, mediocre or no worth, is yet given a greater than its intrinsic value by a power of speech which without any such remarkable or astonishing energy as would excite or exalt the mind or disturb it from a safe acquiescence and a luxurious ease of reception, has always a sufficient felicity, curiously worked even when it affects simplicity, but with a chastened if not quite chaste curiosity. The turn of phrase almost always hits the mind with a certain, sometimes easy, sometimes elaborate poetic device. It turns always to find and does find the pictorial value of the thing to be described, and even, if such a phrase can be used, the pictorial value of the thought to be seized. There is a similar happiness of device and effect in the verse; if there are no great lyrical, odic or epic outbursts to sweep us out of ourselves, there is the same well-governed craft of effective turn and invention as in the language, the same peculiar manner of easily carried elaborateness, a leisurely but never sluggish self-considering self-adorning flow which succeeds in being immediately received and accepted. The art with which the subject matter is dressed up is of the same kind; a restrained elaborateness, a curious picturesqueness of presentation, a taking, opulent and effective form. The refinement and felicity are not of a kind which call for any unusual receptive power

or aesthetic fineness to meet it and feel all its beauty; there is enough and to spare to attract the cultured, nothing to baffle or exceed the ordinary mind. This art is that of a master craftsman, a goldsmith, silversmith, jeweller of speech and substance with much of the decorative painter in his turn, who never travels beyond general, well-understood and popular ideas and forms, but gives them by his fineness of manner and felicity of image a charm and distinction which belong more properly to rarer and greater or lovelier motives. The achievement is of a kind which would hardly be worth doing more than once, but done that once and with such mastery it takes its place and compels admiration. The spirit is not filled, but the outer aesthetic mind is caught and for a time held captive.

But it is doubtful whether the future will attach to Tennyson's poetry anything at all near to the value it assumed for the contemporary English mind. When we try to estimate the substance and see what it permanently gives or what new thing it discovers for the poetic vision, we find that there is extraordinarily little in the end. Tennyson wrote much narrative poetry, but he is not a great narrative poet. There is a curious blending of incompatible intentions in all his work of this kind and even his exceptional skill could not save him from a brilliant failure. He has, on the one side, a will to convey some high spiritual and ethical intention of life through the imaginative use of tale and legend, and that gives a scope for a very noble kind of poetry, but he has not the power to lay a great hold on the ancient figures and re-create them to be symbols of a new significance. The *Idylls of the King* miss both the romantic and the idyllic beauty and arrive only at a graceful decorated effective triviality. The grand old Celtic myths and traditions already strangely mediaevalised by Malory, but full still of life and large humanity and colour are modernised into a baffling and disappointing superficiality and miss all greatness and power of life. There is no congruity between the form and symbol and the feeling and substance. They seem solely to be used to frame a conventional sentimentalism of Victorian domesticity and respectable social ethics. But the wearing of the white and scentless flower of a blameless life in a correct button-hole and a tepid sinning without

the least tinge of passion or conviction by decorated puppets who are too evidently lay-figures of very modern ladies and gentlemen disguised as knights and dames, was hardly a sufficient justification for evoking the magic figures of old legend and romance. The life so masqueraded misses reality and it does not arrive at any great compensating imaginative or interpretative representation; modernism and the affectation of mediaevalism, conventional reality and the falsetto tones of pseudo-romance destroy each other and produce a glittering incongruity. There is a void of the true sincerity of poetic vision at the heart of the original conception and no amount of craft and skill in language or descriptive detail and picture can cure that original deficiency. The poet has no meditative, no emotional, impassioned, no close or revealing grasp on life, and on the other hand no deep interpretative idea, and without one or other of these things narrative poetry of the modern kind cannot succeed; it becomes a body without soul or life-breath. Even when Tennyson confines himself to the poetic modern tale without these disguises or any motive but the ethically pointed telling, he arrives at the same result, a richly coloured triviality.

This principal work of his maturity fails; its popularity springs from its work of detail and its appeal to the superficial sentiment of the time: but some earlier work of the kind had a nobler success. In the *Morte d'Arthur* there is some natural magic and vision which if it had been sustained and kept the same delicate and mystic strain, might have made the cycle of idylls a new poetic revelation. In other poems, in the *Lotos-Eaters*, *Ulysses*, *Oenone*, where set narrative is avoided and the legend is a starting-point or support for thought, vision and beauty, some fullness of these things is reached; but still the form is greater than the substance which has no heights and only occasionally strikes depths. Tennyson does not figure largely as a lyrical poet in spite of one or two inspired and happy moments; for he has neither the lyrical passion and intoxication nor the profounder depth of lyrical feeling. In his description of Nature there is no greater seeing, but a painting of vivid details detached for simile and ornament, and though he worked up a great accuracy of observation and colour, the deeper sincerity of the born Nature-poets

is absent. Finally he gives us a good deal of thinking of a kind in often admirably telling phrase and with much art of setting, but he is not a revealing poetical thinker. His thought seldom escapes from the conventional limits of a cultivated, but not a large or original Victorian mind; it beautifies most often the obvious and commonplace or the current and acceptable ideas; with rare exceptions he has neither exaltations nor profundities nor subtleties nor surprises. A great poetical craftsman turning many forms to account for the displaying of an unusual power of descriptive and decorative language and a verse of most skilled device, but no very great purpose and substance, this he is from beginning to end of his creation. His art suffers from the excess of value of form over value of content; it incurs a liability to a besetting note of artificiality, a frequent falsetto tone of prettiness, an excessive stress, a colouring which is often too bright for the stuff it hues and is unevenly laid, but it is always taking and effective. By his very limitation of mind he becomes the representative poet of a certain side of the English mentality, not in its originality and adventurous power, but in its temperate convention and fixity, renders its liberalism and its conservatism, its love of freedom and dislike of idealism, its surface common sense of doubt and traditional belief, its successful way of dealing with its material, its formal ethicism and its absence of passion. But to all these things he brings an artistic decorative quality which is new in English poetry. He has left his stamp on the language and has given starting-points and forms for poets of a rarer force to turn to greater uses and pass beyond them to a new construction.

Tennyson is the most representative and successful poet of the Victorian epoch. Others who have not the same limitations, either fall below him in art or have a less sustained and considerable bulk and variety of work. Swinburne brings in into the poetry of the time an element to which the rest are strangers, passion, fire, lyrical sublimity and some strains of prophecy. He brings in too the continental note of denial, atheistic affirmation, sceptical revolt, passionate political idealism, but to these things he gives the Anglo-Celtic aggressiveness and vehemence, not the Latin sureness and clarity. He is a great lyrist, but like many

of his contemporaries revels too much in device and virtuosities of form and his lyrical thought and sentiment turned always towards the choric ode and dithyramb loses itself too often in a sonorous gurge and violence of sound. The quieter classical power of Arnold which voices the less confident search of a self-doubting scepticism, has more lucidity, balance and grace, a fine though restricted and tenuous strain of thought and a deep and penetrating melancholy, the mediaevalism and aesthetic mysticism of Rossetti, the slow dreamy narrative of Morris which takes us to a refuge from the blatancy and ugliness of the Victorian environment into the gracious world of old story and legend, bring in each their own significance for the age and help towards that enrichment of the language of thought and artistic poetical feeling which is the chief work of this intervening time. They have all three this characteristic that they are studious artists, — it is significant that two of them are painters and decorative craftsmen, — who are concerned to give beauty and finish to the material of poetry rather than original poets with a large power of inspiration. Their range is small, but they have brought into English poetry a turn for fine execution which is likely to be a long-abiding influence.

Among the Victorians Browning stands next to Tennyson in the importance of his poetic work and station as a representative figure of the age and creator. He surpasses him indeed in the mass and force and abundant variety of his work and the protean energy of his genius. His inventiveness of form and range and variety of subject are prodigious; he turns to every quarter of the world, seizes on every human situation, seems to be trying to exhaust a study of all possible human personalities and minds and characters and turns his eye on every age and period of history and many countries and all possible scenes and extracts from them meaning and their interest for the satisfaction of his universal curiosity and his living and inexhaustible interest in the vividness and abundance of their life of earth and man. He has an equal interest in the human mind and its turns of thinking of all kinds and its human aims, ambitions, seekings and wants to pursue it everywhere in its ramifications, in its starts of individuality, peaks, windings, even all manner of

borrowings of thought and feeling, nothing human is foreign to his research and pursuit, all enters into this prodigious embrace. This gives to his poetry a range and unceasing interest and richness of attraction which surpasses immeasurably all that his contemporaries can give us in wideness of the call of life, even though in them the poetic height to which they draw us may be greater than his. In his mass of creation he can be regarded as the most remarkable in invention and wideness if not the most significant builder and narrator of the drama of human life in his time.[1] Browning stands apart from the contemporary poets in his striking force and originality. He is in many ways the very opposite of them all. He is the one robust and masculine voice among these artists, sceptics, idealists or dreamers, always original, vigorous, inexhaustible; with a great range of interests, a buoyant hold on life, a strong and clear eye, an assured belief and hope but no traditional conventionality, he alone adequately represents the curious, critical, eager, exploring mind of the age. He has depth and force and abundance of thought which, if not of the very first greatness and originality, is open to all manner of questioning and speculation and new idea. His regard ranges over history and delights in its pictures of the stir and energy of life and its changing scenes, over man and his thought and character and emotion and action, looks into every cranny, follows every tortuous winding, seizes on each leap and start of the human machine. He is a student, critic, psychologist, thinker. He seeks to interpret, like certain French poets, the civilisations and the ages. His genius is essentially dramatic; for though he has written in many lyrical forms, the lyric is used to represent a moment in the drama of life or character, and though he uses the narrative, his treatment of it is dramatic and not narrative, as when he takes an Italian *fait-divers* and makes each personage relate or discuss it in such a way as to reveal his own motive, character, thought and passion. He does not succeed as a dramatist in the received forms because he is too analytic, too much interested in the mechanism of temperament, character, emotion and changing

[1] The passage up to here in this paragraph was dictated by Sri Aurobindo at a later time and meant to be woven into the chapter in a future edition of the book. It is not certain whether all the words were correctly taken down.

idea to concentrate sufficiently on their results in action; but he has an unrivalled force in seizing on a moment of the soul or mind and in following its convolutions as they start into dramatic thought, feeling and impulse. He of all these writers has hold of the substance of the work marked out for a poet of the age. And with all these gifts we might have had in him the great interpretative poet, one might almost say, the Shakespeare of his time. But by the singular fatality which so often pursues the English poetical genius, the one gift needed to complete him was denied. Power was there and the hold of his material; what was absent was the essential faculty of artistic form and poetic beauty, so eminent in his contemporaries, a fatal deficiency. This great creator was no artist; this strength was too robust and direct to give forth sweetness. There was no lack of a certain kind of skill. If not an artist in verse, Browning is a consummate technician, one might almost say a mechanician in verse; his very roughnesses and crudities and contortions have the appearance of device and calculation. He had an immense command of language and was never at a lack for forcible and efficient expression, but in its base it was the language of a prosaist and not a poet, of the intellect and not the imagination. He could throw into it strong colours, has sometimes though too seldom a vigorous richness and strong grace, achieves often a lyric elevation, but they supervene upon this base and do not ordinarily suffuse and change it or elevate it to a high customary level. Much strong and vigorous work he did of a great and robust substance, won many victories, but the supreme greatness cannot come in poetry without the supreme beauty.

Arnold is a third considerable Victorian poet of the epoch, though he bulks less than the two more abundant writers who have till now held the first place. But as time goes on his figure emerges and assumes in quality, not in mass of work, a first importance. His poetic work and quality may even be regarded as finer in its essence of poetic value if more tenuous in show of power than that of his two contemporaries. There is a return to the true classic style of poetry in the simplicity and straightforward directness of his diction and turn of thought that brings us back to the way of the earlier poets and gives a certain seriousness and

power which we do not find in the over-consciousness and the too studied simplicity or elaborate carefulness and purposeful artistry of the other poets of the time. This imparts a note of depth and sincerity to his passion and his pathos, a character of high seriousness to his reflection and meditative thought, a greatness and strength to his moments of height and elevated force which raise him above the ordinary levels around him and create an impression of the truest poetry, the most genuine in poetic value, if not in effect the greatest of this Victorian age. His simplicity is a true thing and not the over-studied false simplicity of Tennyson; his thought is free from the conventionality and platitude which constantly meets us in Tennyson's thinking; he can achieve the strongest effects, even the romantic effect without the overwrought romantic colour of Rossetti, Swinburne's overpitch or Tennyson's too frequent overcharge and decorative preciosity of expression. We are at ease with him and can be sure that he will not say too much but just what the true poet in him has to say and no more. For this reason he was able to bring into Victorian poetry the expression or the most characteristic trains of thought expressing the contemporary mind and temperament at its highest and best. Tennyson voices the conventional English mind, Swinburne a high-pitched cry of revolt or a revolutionary passion of freedom or even of licence; Rossetti and Morris take refuge in mediaevalism as they saw it: Arnold strikes out the more serious notes of contemporary thinking. He fails, however, to look beyond to the future. In one respect of literary workmanship he does anticipate future trends; for he makes a departure towards certain tendencies of modernist forms of verse. He made the first attempt at any regular free verse and thus attempted also an imitation of Greek dramatic form but not with Swinburne's originality and the success achieved in *Atalanta in Calydon.*[1]

This is the balance of the Victorian epoch; a considerable intellectual and artistic endeavour, contradicting, overcoming but still hampered by an ungenial atmosphere; two remarkable poets held back from the first greatness, one by imperfection of form, the other by imperfection of substance; four artists of small

[1] This paragraph also is a later dictated note for future inclusion.

range, but with work of an accomplished, but overpitched or thin or languorous beauty; an enrichment and strengthening of the language which makes it more capable of fine and varied and curious thought, and the creation of an artistic conscience which may impose in the future a check on the impulse of an over-abundant energy to imperfection of eager haste and vagary in execution. If the promise of the coming age is fulfilled, it may be remembered as a fine, if limited period of preparation for the discovery of new, more beautiful and grander fields of poetry.

CHAPTER XX

Recent English Poetry - 1

THE movement away from the Victorian type in recent and contemporary English poetry cannot be said to have yet determined its final orientation. But we may distinguish in its uncertain fluctuations, its attempts in this or that direction certain notes, certain strong tones, certain original indications which may help us to disengage the final whither of its seekings. In the mass it appears as a broadening of the English poetic mind into a full oneness with the great stream of modern thought and tendency, an opening up out of the narrower Victorian insularity to admit a greater strength, subtlety and many-sidedness of the intelligence. For this very reason it is still in the nature of a very uncertain feeling out in several directions which has not found itself and decided what shall be the centre and guide of its inspiration. There are experiments of all kinds in language and rhythm and subject and treatment, many notable names each with his special turn and personality, but no supreme decisive speech and no gathering up of the many threads into a great representative work. The whole of European literature at the present time is of this character; it is a fluid mass with a hundred conflicting tendencies, a multitude of experiments, many minor formations, which has not yet run into any clear universal mould. All that can be done is to distinguish some common characteristics of an indicative value which emerge in the more significant work and have touched more or less the performance of the lesser writers. Here we can get at least at a certain persistent element, certain potential issues.

The thing that strikes at once in a general view is that it is a period of transition, not yet a new age, but the preparation for a new age of humanity. Everywhere there is a seeking after some new thing, a discontent with the moulds, ideas and powers of the past, a spirit of innovation, a desire to get at deeper powers of

language, rhythm, form, because a subtler and vaster life is in birth, there are deeper and more significant things to be said than have yet been spoken, and poetry, the highest essence of speech, must find a fitting voice for them. The claim of tradition is still strong, but even those who keep most in the old ways, are impelled to fill in their lines with more searching things of a more compelling substance, to strike from their instrument sounds, variations, meanings for which it had not before the capacity. The attempt has not yet been supremely successful in its whole purpose, in spite of some poetic achievement of considerable beauty, originality and compass, but it has liberated at least with some initial force novel powers and opened fresh paths; a few bright streams of initiation meet the eye running to form some mighty Brahmaputra or Ganges which is not yet in sight, though we get here and there a blue Yamuna or white Saraswati or some large impetuous torrent making its way through open plain or magic woodland towards the great unseen confluence. There are many widely separate attempts, some fine or powerful beginnings, as yet no large consummation.

The straining for a new power of rhythm is the first indication of the coming change. Not quite so marked, not by any means so successful as the change in the type and power of poetical expression, it is still indicative; rhythm is the subtle soul of poetry and a change in the spirit of the rhythm must come if this change in the spirit of the poetry is fully to discover itself and altogether realise its own characteristic greatness and perfection. Mankind is moving to another spirit in its thought and life founded on another and deeper and larger truth of its inner being than it has yet in the mass been able to see, hold and put into form of living. This change must find its echo and interpretation or even some of its power of revelation and initiation in poetry, and poetry to express this greater spirit must find out a deeper, larger, more flexible, or, if one may say so, more multitudinously expressive rhythm than the great poets of the past were under the necessity of using; something of the same change has to be achieved as has been successfully accomplished in music. We see accordingly some attempt to break or enlarge, deepen or subtilise the traditional moulds, to substitute others of

a more delicate character or with a more varied and flexible principle, to search out new packed or dissolved movements. There have been some considerable successes, but nothing of such a complete, sweeping and satisfying force as would quite content a certain eagerness and impatient urge of the arriving age to find a full rhythmic basis for its own way of self-expression. And so we find too the attempt to initiate a violent and unprecedented revolution in the whole fundamental method of poetic rhythm.

This tendency in some writers goes no farther than an irregular use of metre which does not really carry us any farther towards the desired result and is in no way an improvement on the past, since it has no true artistic principle to guide us to freer and more consummate harmonies. But pushed to its logical issue it has created the still growing form of free verse of which we now find examples in most of the great literary languages and coupled with it a theory that this is the one future chance for poetry. Metre and rhyme are said to be played out, things of the past, which can no longer be allowed to chain and hamper the great and free movement which the enlarging spirit of poetry demands; as rhyme was in Milton's later view only a dainty trifle which he flung aside for the organ harmonies of his blank verse, so metre itself is a petty thing, half ornament, half fetter, which has to be flung aside for some nobly self-governed democratic anarchy that is to develop from this new type. That is a theory of very doubtful validity. In the hands of most of its exponents it seems to be in practice nothing but a license for writing prose in variously cut lengths, prose breaking off at the end of a clause or in the middle of it to go on refreshed in the line below, — I have seen even a line of free verse consisting of a majestic solitary pronoun, — and that is more an eccentric method of printing than a new rhythm. But without accepting the theory in its intolerant entirety one can appreciate the motive which moved the greater masters and more skilful craftsmen of this form, if form it can be called, to make the innovation. There is something large and many-sided and constantly mutable in the life, thought and spirit of today which needs, to express it sympathetically, vast and flowing movements or, on the contrary, brief,

sudden and abrupt paces or the alternation of these and intermediate and variant lengths and turns: there is something at the same time densely full and singularly and minutely subtle in the modern thinking mind which is with difficulty accommodable by the restricted range of subtleties, variations and fullnesses of any given poetic measure. Why not then break away from all the old hampering restrictions and find a new principle of harmony in accordance with the freedom, the breadth and largeness of view, the fineness of feeling and sensation of the modern spirit, some form which shall have the liberty of prose and yet command the intensified heights and fluctuations and falls of the cadence of poetry? There is no reason why not, if the thing can be done, — the proof of these things lies in the execution; but it may be doubted whether the method used is the right method. At any rate it has not been fully justified even in the hands of its greatest or most skilful exponents. It is used, as in Whitman, to give the roll of the sea of life or the broad and varying movements of the spirit of humanity in its vigorous experience and aspiration, or, as in Carpenter, to arrive at the free and harmonious accession of the human intelligence to profound, large and powerful truths of the spirit, or, as in certain French writers, to mould into accurate rhythm the very substance and soul and characteristic movement of soul-states, ideas or objects described and seen. These are things that need to be done, but it remains to be seen whether they cannot be done in the recognised and characteristic movement of poetry, rather than in a compromise with prose cadences. The genius of poetic measure walking in the path opened by the ancient discovery of cadenced beat and concentrated rhythm has not yet exhausted itself, nor is there any proof that it cannot accommodate its power to new needs or any sign that it can only survive in an arrested senility or fall into a refined decadence.

The most considerable representatives of this new and free form of poetic rhythm are English and American, Carpenter and Whitman. Tagore's translations of his lyrics have come in as a powerful adventitious aid, but are not really to the point in the question at issue; for these translations are nothing but a rhythmically poetic prose and that kind of writing, cadenced prose

poetry, a well recognised form, cannot and does not try to compete with the established principle of measure; it is an indulgence, a minor variation which has yet its definite place and serves certain purposes which could not otherwise be fulfilled with any adequacy. It is perhaps the only method for the work Tagore intended, a poetic translation of poetry reproductive of the exact thought and spiritual intention of the original; for a version in the fixed measures of another language not only substitutes another mould for the original movement, but by the substitution gives it almost another soul, so powerful, distinct and creative a thing is poetic rhythm; but the more flexible, less insistent cadence of poetic prose does not so seize on and recast the spirit of the original movement; it may even give a far-off minimised shadow, echo, illusion of it, if the same or a similar spirit is at work: it can never have the same power, but it may have some echo of a similar suggestion. When, for instance, Tagore writes in English, —

> "*Thou settest a barrier in thine own being and thou callest thy severed self in myriad notes. This thy self-separation has taken body in me. The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky. With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me.*" —

we have a very beautiful delicately cadenced poetic prose and nothing more. Tagore is what some of the French writers of *vers libre* are and Whitman and Carpenter are not, a delicate and subtle craftsman, and he has done his work with a perfect grace and spiritual fineness; but there is no attempt to do anything more than the just work in hand, no intention of displacing the old way of poetry in which he has done in his own language such wonderful things, by a new principle of poetic movement. If there were any such intention, it would have to be pronounced a failure. One has only to compare this English prose, beautiful as it is, with the original poetry to see how much has gone out with the change; something is successfully substituted which may satisfy the English reader, but can never satisfy the ear or the

mind that has once listened to the singer's own native and magical melodies. And this is so even though the intellectual substance, the intellectual precision and distinctness of the thought are often more effective, carry home more quickly in the translation, because in the original the intellectual element, the thought limits are being constantly overborne and are sometimes almost swallowed up by the waves of suggestion that come stealing in with the music: so much more is heard than is said that the soul listening goes floating into that infinity and counts the definite contribution of the intelligence as of a lesser value. Precisely there lies the greatest power of poetic rhythm for the very highest work that the new age has to do, and that it can be done by a new use of the poetic method without breaking the whole form of poetry, Tagore's own lyrical work[1] in his mother tongue is the best evidence.

Whitman's aim is consciently, clearly, professedly to make a great revolution in the whole method of poetry, and if anybody could have succeeded, it ought to have been this giant of poetic thought with his energy of diction, this spiritual crowned athlete and vital prophet of democracy, liberty and the soul of man and Nature and all humanity. He is a great poet, one of the greatest in the power of his substance, the energy of his vision, the force of his style, the largeness at once of his personality and his universality. His is the most Homeric voice since Homer, in spite of the modern's ruder, less elevated aesthesis of speech and the difference between that limited Olympian and this broad-souled Titan, in this that he has the nearness to something elemental which makes everything he says, even the most common and prosaic, sound out with a ring of greatness, gives a force even to his barest or heaviest phrases, throws even upon the coarsest, dullest, most physical things something of the divinity; and he has the elemental Homeric power of sufficient straightforward speech, the rush too of oceanic sound though it is here the surging of the Atlantic between continents, not the magic roll and wash of the Aegean around the isles of Greece. What he has not, is the

[1] This cannot quite be said or not in the same degree about other work of Tagore's where this great lyrist is not so much himself in his movement, though he is always a master of rhythm.

unfailing poetic beauty and nobility which saves greatness from its defects — that supreme gift of Homer and Valmiki — and the self-restraint and obedience to a divine law which makes even the gods more divine. Whitman will remain great after all the objections that can be made against his method or his use of it, but the question is whether what served his unique personality, can be made a rule for lesser or different spirits, and whether the defects which we see but do not and cannot weigh too closely in him, will not be fatal when not saved by his all-uplifting largeness. A giant can pile up Pelion and Ossa and make of it an unhewn chaotic stair to Olympus, but others would be better and more safely employed in cutting steps of marble or raising by music a ladder of sapphires and rubies to their higher or their middle heavens. Personality, force, temperament can do unusual miracles, but the miracle cannot always be turned into a method or a standard.

Whitman's verse, if it can be so called, is not simply a cadenced prose, though quite a multitude of his lines only just rise above the prose rhythm. The difference is that there is a constant will to intensify the fall of the movement so that instead of the unobtrusive ictus of prose, we have a fall of the tread, almost a beat, and sometimes a real beat, a meeting and parting, sometimes a deliberate clash or even crowding together of stresses which recall the spirit of the poetical movement, though they obey no recognised structural law of repetitions and variations. In this kind of rhythm we find actually three different levels, — the distinction may be a little rough, but it will serve, — a gradation which is very instructive. First we have a movement which just manages to be other than prose movement, but yet is full of the memory of a certain kind of prose rhythm. Here the first defect is that the ear is sometimes irritated, sometimes disappointed and baulked by a divided demand, memory or expectation, hears always the prose suggestion behind pursuing and dragging down the feet of the poetic enthusiasm. It is as if one were watching the "aerial walk" of a Hatha-yogin who had just conquered the force of gravitation, but only to the extent of a few inches, so that one is always expecting the moment which will bring him down with a bump to mother earth. It is something like a skimming just above the ground of prose, sometimes a dragging

of the feet with a frequent touch and upkicking of the dust, for inevitably the poetic diction and imaginative power of style fall to the same level. Much of Whitman's work is in this manner; he carries it off by the largeness and sea-like roll of the total impression, but others have not the same success, — even the French craftsmen are weighed down, — and in them the whole has a draggled and painful effect of an amphibious waddling incertitude. But there is a nobler level at which he often keeps which does not get out of sight of the prose plain or lift up above all its gravitation, but still has a certain poetic power, greatness and nobility of movement. But it is still below what an equal force would have given in the master measures of poetry.

But the possibilities of an instrument have to be judged by its greatest effects, and there are poems, lines, passages in which Whitman strikes out a harmony which has no kinship to nor any memory of the prose gravitation, but is as far above it as anything done in the great metrical cadences. And here, and not only in Whitman, but in all writers in this form who rise to that height, we find that consciously or unconsciously they arrive at the same secret principle, and that is the essential principle of Greek choric and dithyrambic poetry turned to the law of a language which has not the strong resource of quantity. Arnold deliberately attempted such an adaptation but, in spite of beautiful passages, with scant success; still when he writes such a line as

The too vast orb of her fate,

it is this choric movement that he reproduces. Whitman's first poem in *Sea-Drift* and a number of others are written partly or throughout in this manner. When he gives us the dactylic and spondaic harmony of his lines,

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
Out of the Ninth-month midnight,

one of them wanting only one foot to be a very perfect hexameter or the subtly varied movement of this other passage,

Over the hoarse surging of the sea,
Or flitting from brier to brier by day,
I saw, I heard at intervals the remaining one, the he-bird,
The solitary guest from Alabama,

one has almost the rhythmical illusion of listening to a Sophoclean or Aeschylean chorus. In the opening stanzas of the noble *Prayer of Columbus*, there is a continuous iambic metrical stress, but with the choric movement. One finds the same thing sometimes in French *vers libre*, — one poem at least of the kind I have seen of wonderful beauty, — though the success is not so easy in that language. Tagore has recently attempted a kind of free verse in Bengali, not so good as his regular metres, though melodious enough, as everything must be that is written by this master musician of the word, and throughout there is the same choric or dithyrambic principle of movement. This then seems to be the natural high-water mark of free poetical rhythm; it is a use of the poetic principle of measure in its essence without the limitations of a set form. Evidently much can be done in this rhythmical method. But it is yet doubtful whether in languages which lack the support of quantitative measure, poetical expression in this form can carry home with at all the same force as in the received ways of word-music.

We may get some idea of the limitations of the form by one or two examples from the poetry of Carpenter I find quoted by Mr. Cousins in his essay. Carpenter with a poetic faculty of a high order, a prophet of democracy and of the Self, like Whitman, but of a higher more spiritual truth of the Self, has like him found it impossible to restrain the largeness of his vision and personality in the bonds of metrical poetry. In both we see that the prophet and thinker predominate over the poet and artist. Less rough and great than the epic voice from the other side of the ocean, his poetry has a more harmonious, limpid and meditative fullness. But the lesser abundance of force and drive makes us feel more the limitations of his form. The thought is not only great, but poetically great and satisfying, the expression as form of thought is noble and admirable, but we miss the subtler rhythmic uplift of the poetic enthusiasm which is given

to minds of much less power by the inspiring cadence and the ordered measures of the poetic spirit, *chandas.* His flow is ordinarily of the middle kind with occasional choric turns and movements, but the latter do not carry with them the full force of the intenser poetic cadence. To cite one passage, —

> "*There in the region of equality in the world of Freedom no longer limited, standing on a lofty peak in heaven above the clouds.*
> *From below hidden. Yet to all who pass into that region most clearly visible*
> *He the Eternal appeared.*"

Whitman would have broken that up into five lines and got by it a more distinct and forcible effect, — for the breath of poetry best rises and falls in brief and intense lengths; so printed, it would be at once apparent that we have a varied choric movement, a little stumbling into half-prose just before the end, but otherwise admirable, with two sudden turns of great poetic force, where the movement is precisely that of the Greek chorus. But the total effect is the sense of what one might almost call a noble and chanting superprose rhythm.

This appears more clearly in another passage where Carpenter's movement is more at its normal level. He begins with a strain which is only just distinguishable from the prose strain, but suddenly rises from it to the beginning of a choric elevation,

> "*As one shuts a door after a long confinement in the house — so out of your own plans and purposes escaping, —*"

then comes the full choric rise,

> "*Out of the mirror-lined chambers of self (grand though they be, but O how dreary!) in which you have hitherto spent your life, —*"

where, if the line had only ended with the parenthesis, it would have been a strain of perfect choric poetry, magnificently thought,

imaged and cadenced, but the closing words spoil the effect, for they are a sharp descent towards the prose level. There are too elevations rising up from a rhythmical prose cadence but lifted high by the scriptural nobility of phrase and spiritual turn which we get so often in Carpenter. These fluctuations appear then to be inherent in the form and it seems to me that being in their nature a constant fall from the striving after a sustained perfection, they take away altogether from the claims of this "free verse". In lesser writers there is a similar but much more pronounced inadequacy; they rise little and fall or drag along with the most easily satisfied self-content in lowness. But that poets of great power should be satisfied with these deficiencies of their instrument and their most cultured readers accept them without question, indicates an inferiority, almost a depravation in the modern ear, or at least a great remissness in the austerity of the search after perfection. It is now sometimes said that the lines of poetry should follow the lines of life, and life, it might be contended, is of this kind, thought itself is of this kind, and the rhythm of poetry gains in sincerity by following them. But art is not of this kind, the poetic spirit is not of this kind; the nature of art is to strive after a nobler beauty and more sustained perfection than life can give, the nature of poetry is to soar on the wings of the inspiration to the highest intensities and keep winging, as far as may be, always near to them. A form which in the name of freedom remits and relaxes this effort, whatever its other merits and advantages, means a laxity of effort and is a dangerous downward concession.

But there is another objection which may be denied, but seems to me true, that this kind of verse does not give its full spiritual value to the poet's speech. Carpenter has a power of substance, thought-vision, image, expression which is very rare and in all these respects he would have been recognised as not only equal but superior to many who have enjoyed in their own day the reputation of poets of the first rank. That he is not so recognised is due to the inferior form, a form legitimate enough for lesser uses, but not easily capable of the greatest poetic effects. Whitman too for all his energy loses in this way; even his greatest things do not go absolutely and immediately home,

or having entered they do not so easily seize on the soul, take possession and rest in a calm, yet vibrating mastery. The real poetic cadence has that power, and to make the full use of it is the sign of the greatest masters; it has in it then something magical, immediate and miraculous, an unanalysable triumph of the spirit. But this other movement has not that stamp, it does only a little more than a highly concentrated prose might do, and this is because of the three indispensable intensities of poetry; it may have intensity of thought and soul-substance, intensity of expression, but the intensity of rhythm, which is poetry's primal need, is lowered and diluted, — even, one feels, to a certain extent in its choric movements: by that lowering the two other intensities suffer, the poet himself tends to loosen them to the level of his movement. If that is so, those who use the form to meet the demands of the new age, are on the wrong track. But a demand is there and it indicates a real need. It is evident that Whitman and Carpenter could not have expressed themselves altogether in the existing forms, even if they had made the attempt. But if the new age is to express itself with the highest poetical power, it must be by new discoveries within the principle of the intenser poetical rhythm. The recent or living masters may not have done this, though we may claim that some beginnings have been made, but the new age is only at its commencement; the decisive departures, the unforeseen creations may yet be due which will equip it with an instrument or many instruments suited to the largeness, depth and subtlety of the coming spirit.

CHAPTER XXI

Recent English Poetry - 2

THE effective stream of poetry in the English tongue has followed no such strong distinctive turn as would be able to sweep the effort of rhythmic expression along with it in one mastering direction. The poets of this age pursue much more even than their predecessors the bent of their personality, not guided by any uniting thought or standard of form, and have no other connecting link than the subtle similarities which the spirit of the age always gives to its work of creation. But the present age is so loose, fluid and many-motived that this subtler community is not easily tangible and works out in much less of an open family resemblance than in the Victorian poets or their predecessors. Only in the Celtic revival in Ireland have there been a number of considerable writers united by a common artistic motive and ideal, and it may be for that reason that a certain persistent thing which is striving to be and to get expression in the poetry of the time finds itself in a first illumination, emerges as a conscious power and seeks for its adequate form and rhythm. But we find it elsewhere too in obscurer forms; on this element we may pause to lay stress while we leave aside as of less importance the crowding variety of other temperamental and personal emphasis which hides it from view or chokes up its channels of emergence. This subtler element, although far from being yet victorious over the tradition of the past or the more clamorous powers of the present, is the most original, the most unworked and fruitful in promise for the future and represents the highest possibility of a greater coming poetry. A distinct spiritual turn, the straining towards a deeper, more potent, supra-intellectual and supra-vital vision of things is its innermost secret of creative power. Now increasingly the highest turn of the human mind indicates a large opening of its vision to the self as well as the person of man and the spirit of Nature, to supernature,

to the cosmic, the universal and the eternal, but without any loosing of the hold on life and earth, which is likely to survive and govern thought and creation and the forms of our living when the present multitude of standpoints, all the conflict and chaos of a manifold seeking and new formation, have resolved themselves into the harmony of a centralising and embracing outlook. That infinite self-discovery would be the logical outcome of the movement of the past and the present century and the widest possibility and best chance open to the human spirit: taking up the thought of the ages into a mightier arc of interpretation and realisation, it would be the crowning of one and the opening of a new and greater cycle.

The poets of yesterday and today, Whitman, Carpenter, the Irish poets, Tagore, but also others in their degree are forerunners of this new spirit and way of seeing, prophets sometimes, but at others only illumined by occasional hints or by side rays of a light which has not flooded all their vision. I may take for my purpose four of them whose names stand behind or are still with us and their station already among those whose work endures, Meredith and Phillips among recent English poets, A.E. and Yeats of the Irish singers.[1] There is a very great difference of the degree and power with which the spirit has opened to them its secret and a great difference too in the turn which they give to its promptings. The two English poets have it at moments in a high clarity, but at others it is only a suggestion behind which gives a penetrating, original and profound tone to their work. This is their native secret when they go deepest into themselves, a thing they get sometimes into clear speech perhaps by right of their Celtic inheritance; but they work in the English tradition, follow other attractions, bear the burden of a tendency of aesthetic feeling, form and treatment which lead away from the pursuit of the direct seeking and the perfect manner. The consistent note we get more constantly in the Irish poets who, freer in mind from this past tradition, though something of it must cling perhaps to all who write in the English tongue, unless they start with

[1] I take most of my citations from Mr. Cousins' book, the only source I have at present before me; but though few, they are made from the same standpoint and selected with singular felicity and serve fully my purpose.

the superb revolutionary defiance of Whitman, — are able to strike out with a less encumbered gait into new paths of thought and movement. They have too an original well of inspiration in the Celtic spirit, temperament and tradition from which they draw a magical and delicate draught of other air naturally stimulative of a subtler and more spiritual vision: they escape, and that is another supreme advantage, from the overstress of the intellectual and vital notes which in their English kindred and compeers take from the direct purity of utterance of their spirit. None of them has indeed the large and puissant voice of Whitman or his dominant force of poetic personality, though they have what he has not or did not care to evolve, the artistic faculty and genius, but each has a high peculiar power in his own way of light, is at his best, and the best is not infrequent even in the least of them, a poet of the first rank. The greatness of scope and unified plenitude of power is absent which would have been needed to make any one of them a grand representative voice of the time. But they lead and prepare, they strike great new notes, open or at least give hints of great new ways for a future poetry.

One thing that comes home to us when we take a comparative view of this poetry, when we look at the inmost strands of the expression at which it arrives in these four poets, all of them among its boldest and most original and therefore most revealing representatives, is a certain common element behind their differences, a novel use of rhythmic movement, a sudden new moving force, turn, stamp and fashion in the minting of the gold and silver of their language and as the secret of this departure a quite other innate or conscious aim, not always manifest in the visible form of the substance, though that too is there in plenty, but in the way of seeing the object on which the inner eye is turned, whether it be idea, thing or person, significant emotion or glint of soul-power in man or revealing object or suggestive hint in Nature. This aim we may perhaps best express if we take up and modify a phrase of Meredith's when he speaks of the hampered human voice that could never say

"*Our inmost in the sweetest way*" —

hampered by the austerity of its wisdom or the excess of its sense and passion. But if it is rarely that this sweetest way is found — yet do we not get near to it sometimes in Yeats and Tagore? — at least this new turn of the poetic voice is characteristically an endeavour to see and to say our inmost in the inmost way.

The natural turn of poetry, that which gives to it its soul of superiority to other ways of human utterance, is the endeavour of the interpretative cast of its mind always to look beyond the object, even to get behind it and evoke, from a something that was waiting for us within, its own inevitable speech and rhythm. That inwardness is the triumph of great poetical speech, whether the poet has his eye like Homer on physical object and power of action and the externalised thought and emotion which they throw up into the surface roll of life, or else like Shakespeare on the surge of the life-spirit and its forms of character and passion and its waves of self-interpreting thought and reflection, or on the play of the detached or half-detached seeing intellect or the inspired reason, or on the strainings of the desire-soul of man striving to find the delight of things in the thousand-coloured threads of the double web of our existence. The manner and yield of poetry vary according to the depth we penetrate into that inner something which is hidden by layer upon layer of many an intervening medium, offers and gives itself wonderfully in all of them, yet seems to retreat always and invites to a prfounder pursuit and discovery; it varies according to the insistence of the eye on the object or its liberation into the greater significance of which the object is only the seizable symbol, or according as we are stopped by the medium or break through it to some truth of the one thing in all which throws out in these various sheaths such different richnesses of form, colour and suggestion of idea and sound, but is yet one in all things to the soul that can discover its eternal unity.

But this new way of seeing is a first effort to get through the object and the medium and employ them only as suggestive instruments, to break beyond the life-force and the emotion, the imagination and the idea, not to be stopped by these things, though using the inmost life-stress, the inmost releasing force of the emotion, the inmost plunge of the imagination or its most

searching power of form, colour and symbol, the inmost penetrating subtlety of the idea and to arrive at what we may call the soul-sense, the soul-sound and as far as may be the soul-word interpretative of some yet deeper revealing truth in all their objects. There is in most recent poetry that counts, though less here, more there, some element of this kind of straining, force, pressure on sound and word and vision, and though it often turns into strange, obscure and devious paths, obstructed by the insistence of the superficial desire-soul or weighted by the intellect, — the two powers in us which modern humanity has developed into an exaggerated predominance, — still it reaches out towards this effort to see our inmost in the inmost way, and when it gets free, delivers voices of a supreme power, vision and purity. And what it must lead to in the end if it gets to its end, does not stop short or turn aside after some other lure, must be some direct seeing by the soul of the soul or self everywhere in its own delivered force of vision, — the direct vision of Indian aspiration, *ātmani ātmānam ātmanā*, — not the sensuous or the imaginative or the intellectual or the vital insistence, but a greater Potency using and surmounting them, the Soul's own delivered self-vision in all things and delight of its own greatness and light and beauty. That is the turn of mind which is now making itself heard in effort, though not in full mastery, stammered here, there sung with a slight, delicate and subtle sweetness or with an initial load of rare or crowding suggestion, but waiting still the splendour of the master song that shall rise into the light of the spirit, —

So pure that it salutes the suns,
The voice of one for millions,
In whom the millions rejoice
For giving their one spirit voice.

The inmost seeing must bring out of itself to be poetically effective the inmost word and sound, must find out a luminous purity of its steps or a profound depth of its movement, must be said in the inmost way. Rhythm is the most potent, founding element of poetic expression, and though most modern poets depend or at least lean more heavily on force of thought and

substance than on the greater musical suggestions of rhythm, — Shelley, Swinburne, Yeats are exceptions, — there must always be a change in this basis of the poet's art when there is a substantial change of the constituting spirit and motive. Especially when there is this more subtle spiritual aim, the rhythmical movement becomes of a new importance. Whether as an aid to help out by the subtle meaning of the cadence the total spiritual suggestion of the speech or, more supremely, to bring in out of the depths, as great music does, some surge or outwelling of the infinite movement and cry of the spirit and bear like a jewel of light on its breast the outbreak of the inevitable revealing word, it must be persuaded to find some new unity of measure and speech, the thought echoing with the very native sound of its Idea. We find accordingly the beginning, sometimes something more, of another spirit in the movement of this poetry. These poets use for the most part old established metrical forms or variations of them; when there are departures, they do not go very far from the familiar base: but in their way of using them we are as far as possible in its intrinsic principle from the method of the older poets. The change may be described as a more complete subordination of the metrical insistence to the inner suggestion of the movement. The old poets depended greatly on the metrical fall, made much of the external mould and its possible devices and filled it with the tones of life or thought or the excitement of the thing that possessed them and moved them to speech. Shakespeare's lines,

> *Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast*
> *Seal up the shipboy's eyes and rock his brains*
> *In cradle of the rude imperious surge?*

are a supreme instance of the manner, or Milton's

> *Those thoughts that wander through Eternity,*

or any of his stately rolling lines or periods of organ music will do for a great illustration. Pope and Dryden simply overdid the reliance on measure and chained themselves up in a monotony

of pointed metrical effect. The succeeding poets got back to the greater freedoms of tone and used them in a new way, but the principle remains the same, —as in Shelley's

Rarely, rarely comest thou,
Spirit of Delight!

or Wordsworth's

For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago, —

both of them examples of the ordinary base used with a deep simplicity of single tone and a melodious instance; or otherwise, where the tone on the contrary makes the most of the mould,

And wildroses and ivy serpentine,

or,

Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

The base of the old poetry is a march, a walk or a lilt, a measured flow, roll or surge, — or it is with less competent metrists a tripping trot, dance or gallop: but even in the freest movements there is a prevailing metrical insistence. In the new movement the old base is there, but whatever show it may make, its real importance tends to drop into a very second place. Insistence of tone has taken full possession of or even conquered the insistence of the fall. A spiritual intonation, not content to fill and at its strongest overflow the metrical mould, but insistent to take it into itself and carrying it rather than carried in it, is the secret of its melody or its harmony. There is here the sound of the coming in, perhaps only the first suggestion of a new music.

The main reliance on the metrical stress can leave room in powerful hands for very great rhythms, but it has its limitations, from which different poets try to get release by different devices.

Milton sought it in variations of pause and the engulfing swell of periods of large and resonant harmony, Swinburne by the cymbal clang of his alliterations and a rush and surge of assonant lyrical sound, Browning by a calculated roughness. Shakespeare himself under a great stress of crowding life and thought suggestions simply broke the back and joints of his instrument and tortured it into shapes from which he got out masterfully irregular harmonies sometimes of a great power, a process of which we may perhaps see in Whitmanesque free verse the far-off logical consequence. These more recent poets, whatever metrical devices they may use, depend upon something else, on a method which at its clearest becomes a principle of pure sound intonation.

Phillips' blank verse which is of a very original mould, is built on this principle. The poet first gets as his basis the most simple, direct and easy form possible of the metre, which he can loosen as much as possible, suppress or shift or add as many stresses as he chooses, or on the contrary weigh extraordinarily upon his stresses so as to give an impression of long space or burdened lingering or some echo of infinite duration; but in either case the object is to get free room for the play of tone. Four lines come together,

The history of a flower in the air
Liable but to breezes and to time,
As rich and purposeless as is the rose,
Thy simple doom is to be beautiful,

in which there are only three stresses, in the last one might almost say two and a half, a small number of quantitatively long syllables are the physical support of the verse, — as if quantity were trying to come back to first importance in a language of stresses, — and the rest is made up of varying minor tones. Or the long drawn out syllables are brought in in great abundance, in a variety of combinations, closely packed and largely spaced, as in

The fiery funeral of foliage old,

or,

With slow sweet surgery restore the brain,

or again,

The vault closed back, woe upon woe, the wheel
Revolved, the stone rebounded, for that time
Hades her interrupted life resumed.

These and others are the means used, but at their back is the principle of a free intonation. It is the tone that builds the verse, gives it its real form and the metrical mould, forced to become and to do whatever the tone chooses, whatever is needed for the intonation of the inmost thought, is a flexible convenience and a needed restraint, — for if loosened or freely spaced, it is not broken, — but no longer a chain and hardly felt even as a limitation. The significance is that the poet has a rhythm of thought and spirit already sounding somewhere within him and in bringing it out he imposes it consciously on his outer instrument with an imperious sovereignty and does not get to it, like the older masters, as the result of a faithful observance of the metrical harmony.

The other poets use a different, less open and forceful outer method, but the same principle emerges in greater or less degree as if by some spiritual necessity. Meredith's poetry belongs to an earlier technique, observes faithfully the metrical law, but the subtler thing is already coming: some curious turn is given to the beat which persistently compels it to serve some dominant soul-tone of the thought and seeing and to dance attendance on that, as in the four lines already quoted from "The Lark Ascending", or else there is the turn towards long spaces and lingering tones where the metrical sound floats and seems always on the point of drowning in some deep sea of inner intonation, —

Through widening chambers of surprise to where
Throbs rapture near an end that aye recedes.

Because his touch is infinite and lends
A yonder to all ends, —

a description which might well be applied to the whole drift and cause of this spiritual principle of rhythm. A.E. is not a great rhythmist, he is too preoccupied with his vision, more of a truth-seer than a truth-hearer of the Spirit, but when the hearing comes, the *śruti*, somehow or other without any expenditure of device the full spiritual intonation rises up and takes possession of the music, — to give one instance only,

Like winds and waters were her ways:
They heed not immemorial cries;
They move to their high destinies
Beyond the little voice that prays.

And in Yeats, a supreme artist in rhythm, this spiritual intonation is the very secret of all his subtlest melodies and harmonies and reveals itself whether in the use of old and common metres which cease to be either old or common in his hands or in delicate new turns of verse. We get it in his blank verse, taken at random, —

A sweet miraculous terrifying sound, —

or in the mounting flight of that couplet on the flaming multitude

That rise, wing upon wing, flame above flame
And like a storm cry the ineffable name.

or heard through the slowly errant footfalls of that other,

In all poor foolish things that live a day
Eternal Beauty wandering on her way, —

but most of all in the lyrical movements, —

With the earth and the sky and the water, remade,
like a casket of gold;

For my dream of your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart.

There we have, very near to the ear of the sense, that inaudible music floating the vocal music, the song unheard, or heard only behind and in the inner silence, to catch some echo of which is the privilege of music but also the highest intention of poetical rhythm.

Beyond all analysis or set provision of means that is the constant attempt to which poetry must move, if this new realm is to open to its footsteps, not to suit the metre to the intellectual or even the emotional sense or to cast it in the moulds of life, but to seize some sound, some intonation of the voice of the soul, the lyric or the epic *chandas* or the large or simple measures of its meditation and creation, which, as the old Vedic theory would say, initiate, roll out and support all the steps of the universe. This intoned music in which the outer form becomes an external subtle means and suggestion, but the building power is other and brings in a spiritual accompaniment which is the real thing we have to listen to, opens at least one line on which we can arrive at that greater hearing whose wave can bring with it the inspiring word of a higher vision. For the musical tone of the older poetry is the simply sensuous, the emotional, the thought or the life tone with the spiritual cadence as the result of some strong intensity of these things, but here is some beginning of a direct spiritual intonation.

CHAPTER XXII

Recent English Poetry - 3

THE rhythmic change which distinguishes the new poetry, may not be easy to seize at the first hearing, for it is a subtle thing in its spirit more than in its body, commencing only and obscured by the outward adherence to the apparent turn-out and method of older forms; but there is a change too, more readily tangible, in the language of this poetry, in that fusion of a concentrated substance of the idea and a transmuting essence of the speech which we mean by poetic style. But here too, if we would understand in its issues the evolution of poetic speech in a language, it is on the subtler things of the spirit, the significant inner changes that we must keep our eye; for it is these that determine the rest and are the heart of the matter. We take little account of the psychology of poetic genius and are content with saying that the word of the poet is the speech of the imagination or that he works by an inspiration. But this is an insufficient account; for imagination is of many different kinds and inspiration touches the mind at different levels and breaks out through different media before it issues through the gates of the creative imagination. What we mean by inspiration is that the impetus to poetic creation and utterance comes to us from a superconscient source above the ordinary mentality, so that what is written seems not to be the fabrication of the brain-mind, but something more sovereign breathed or poured in from above. That is the possession by the divine *enthousiasmos* of which Plato has spoken. But it is seldom that the whole word leaps direct from that source, that cavern of natal light ready-shaped and with the pure stamp of its divine origin, — ordinarily it goes through some secondary process in the brain-mind itself, gets its impulse and unformed substance perhaps from above, but subjects it to an intellectual or other earthly change; there is in that change always indeed some superior power born of the excitement of the

higher possession, but also some alloy too of our mortality. And the character, value and force of the word of the poet vary according to the action of those parts of our mentality which dominate in the change, — the vital mind, the emotional temperament, the imaginative or reflective intellect or the higher intuitive intelligence. The Tantric theory of Speech, the inspired seeing and creative goddess enthroned in our various soul-centres in her several forms and with her higher and higher stations, becomes here an actual and luminously perceptible truth of our being. But also there is in us a direct medium between that divine and this human mentality, an intuitive soul-mind supporting the rest, which has its share both in the transmission and the formal creation, and it is where this gets out into overt working, discloses its shaping touch or makes heard its transmitting voice that we get the really immortal tones of speech and heights of creation. And it is the epochs when there is in the mind of a race some enthusiastic outburst or some calm august action of this intuitive power, intermediary of the inspirations of the spirit or its revelations, that make the great ages of poetry.

In English literature this period was the Elizabethan. Then the speech of poetry got into it a ring and turn of direct intuitive power, a spontaneous fullness of vision and divine fashion in its utterance which it had not at all before and has hardly had afterwards. Even the lesser poets of the time are touched by it, but in Shakespeare it runs in a stream and condenses to a richly-loaded and crowding mass of the work and word of the intuition almost unexampled in any poetry. The difference can be measured by taking the work of Chaucer or of subsequent poets almost at their best and of Shakespeare at a quite ordinary level and feeling the effect on the poetic listener in our own intuitive being. We take Chaucer with his easy adequate limpidity, —

He was a verray parfit gentil knight,

and then pass on to Shakespeare's rapid seizing of the intuitive inevitable word and the disclosing turn of phrase which admits us at once to a direct vision of the thing he shows us, —

Of moving accidents by flood and field,
Of hair-breadth 'scapes i' the imminent deadly breach,

where with quite as simple a thing to say and a perfect force of directness in saying it, it is yet a vastly different kind of directness. The one speaks from the poetic intellect and satisfies by a just and pleasing expression, in the other the words get, one might say, into the entrails of vision and do not stop short at the clear measure of the thing seen, but evoke their very quality and give us immediately the inmost vital fibre and thrill of the life they describe and interpret. It is not merely a difference of the measure of the genius, but of its source. This language of Shakespeare's is a unique and wonderful thing; it has everywhere the royalty of the sovereign intuitive mind looking into and not merely at life and in this most myriad-minded of poets it takes like life itself many tones, but that intuitive readiness to get through, seize the lurking word and bring it out from the heart of the thing itself is almost always its secret. From that, he might have said, could he have given a better account of his own working, and not by any mere mirroring of things in Nature,

It was my hint to speak, such was the process.

We are most readily struck in Shakespeare by the lines and passages in which the word thus seized and brought out is followed swiftly on the heels by another and another of its kind, many crowding together or even fused and run into each other in a single phrase of many suggestions, — for this manner is peculiarly his own and others can only occasionally come near to it. Such passages recur to the mind as those in the soliloquy on sleep or the well-known lines in *Macbeth*,

Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart.

His is often a highly imaged style, but Shakespeare's images are not, as with so many poets, decorative or brought in to enforce and visualise the intellectual sense, they are more immediately revelatory, intimate to the thing he speaks and rather the proper stuff of the fact itself than images. But he has too a clearer, less crowded, still swifter fashion of speech in which they are absent; for an example,

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word, —

which has yet the same deep and penetrating intuitive spirit in its utterance. Or the two manners meet together and lean on each other, —

I have lived long enough: my way of life
Is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf,

or become one, as in the last speeches of Antony, —

I am dying, Egypt, dying; only
I here importune death awhile, until
Of many thousand kisses the poor last
I lay upon thy lips.

But all have the same characteristic stamp of the intuitive mind rapidly and powerfully at work; but always too, — and this is the important distinction, — that mediator between the secret spirit and our ordinary surface mentality works in him through and behind the life vision to give the vital impression, the vital psychology, the life-burden of the thought, the emotion, the act or the thing seen in Nature.

The movement that immediately followed, abandoned this power which Shakespeare and the Elizabethans had brought into English poetry; it sought after a language cut into the precision or full with the suggestions of the poetical intellect, and it gained something by its sacrifice; it purified the language, got rid of Elizabethan conceit and extravagance, laid a clearer basis of

thought, went back to ordinary speech and raised it into a fit instrument of the poetical imagination. But it lost this Shakespearian directness of intuitive vision and spontaneous power of utterance. Gray in a notable passage observes and laments the loss, without penetrating into its cause and nature, and he tried sometimes in his own way, within the cadre of an intellectualised language, to recover something of the power. The later poets get a compensation in other directions by a heightening of the clarified thought and imagination, but the basic substance of the speech seems to have irrecoverably changed and its more tenuous spirit and make impose on the searching audacities of the intuition the curbing restraints and limits of the imaginative intelligence. Shelley's

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought,

Keats'

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,

or his

To that large utterance of the early Gods,

or Wordsworth's

the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,

give the force and pitch and measure of this often clear, strong, large and luminous, but less intensely surprising and uplifting manner. English poetry has got away from the Elizabethan outbreak nearer to a kinship with the mind and manner of the Greek and Latin poets and their intellectual descendants, though still, it is to be noted, keeping something, a subtle and intimate turn, a power of fire and ether which has become native to it, a legacy from the Shakespearian speech which was not there in

its beginnings. This imaginatively intellectual basis of speech remains constant down to the end of the Victorian era.

But at the same time there emerges, at times, a certain effort to recapture the Shakespearian potency and intensity accompanied by a new and higher element in the workings of the poetic inspiration. When we try to put a name on it, — a thing which the poet himself seldom does successfully, for the creative instinct does not usually care to burden itself with a too intellectual self-consciousness, — we can see that this is an attempt to return to the fullness and the awakening turn of the direct intuitive expression on a subtler and more ethereal level. The clarified intellect observing life from above is in itself a higher thing than the vital and emotional mind which responds more immediately and powerfully to life, but is caught in its bonds; and if the direct intuitive power can be got to work on the level just above the ordinary thinking mind where that mind opens through the full intuitive intelligence to a greater supra-intellectual mass and subtlety of light, it will bring in the revelation and inspiration of mightier and profounder things than when it works from behind the mind — even the vividly thinking mind of life and its vital sight and feeling. For here, on the lower level, we get at most, as in Shakespeare, at the spirit in life with all its power of vital thought and its potency of passion and emotion; but there we shall get the greater spirit which embraces life, but shows us too all that is behind it, all that it dimly means and strives in embarrassed act and thought to bring into expression. Of this effort and this new thing we get magical first indications in the pre-Victorian poets, as in Wordsworth's

And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face,

or see the first motion towards it, the first seeking for a suitable style, as in Keats'

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon and eve's one star,

but also though less often, a sudden leaping out of the thing itself, —

Solitary thinkings; such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven,

or,

The journey homeward to habitual self!

These lines of Keats are Shakespearian in their quality, they have recovered the direct revealing word and intimate image of the full intuitive manner, but they enter into a world of thought and inner truth other than Shakespeare's; by the passage through the detaching intellect and beyond it they have got to the borders of the realm of another and greater self than the life-self, though there we include and take up life into the deeper self-vision. In the Victorian poets we get occasionally the same tendency in a stronger but less happy force; for it is weighted down by an increased intellectuality, in Browning by the robust strenuousness of the analytic intelligence, in Tennyson by the tendency to mere trimming of expression or glitter and wealth of artistic colour; but we have its voice sometimes, as in this line of the *Lotos-Eaters*, —

Portions and parcels of the dreadful past.

But it has not yet arrived, it is still seeking for itself, beating fitfully at the gates of the greater intuitive vision and expression.

But in more recent work it is precisely the recovery of this supreme power of speech on that loftier and subtler level which to one who comes freshly to this poetry breaks out with a sense of satisfying surprise and discovery. It is not complete; it is not everywhere; it is only just rising from the acquired basis of the previous heights of expression to its own realm; but it is there in a comparative abundance and it is the highest strain of its intensities. We find it in Meredith; when he writes of "Colour, the soul's bridegroom", he has got the intimate revealing image of

this fuller and higher intuitive manner, or in his lark's

silver chain of sound
Of many links without a break:

when he writes, again,

Nor know they joy of sight
Who deem the wave of rapt desire must be
Its wrecking and last issue of delight,

he has got the perfected turn of the direct intuitive word of thought in its more crowded manner of suggestion, — the kinship in the last line to the Shakespearian manner is close, — as too its more clear and limpid speech in other turns,

The song seraphically free
From taint of personality;

and in the lines,

Dead seasons quicken in one petal spot
Of colour unforgot,

he has it ready for an intuitive and vivid spiritual interpretation of Nature. We find it in Phillips'

Dreadful suspended business and vast life
Pausing,

or in his trees

Motionless in an ecstasy of rain.

In the Irish poets it comes with less of the Shakespearian kinship, though Yeats has often enough a different but corresponding manner, but most characteristically in a delicate and fine beauty of the word of vision and of an intuitive entrance into the mystery

of things, as in lines like A.E's

Is thrilled by fires of hidden day
And haunted by all mystery,

or passages already quoted from Yeats, or, to give one other instance, his

When God goes by with white footfall.

This is a style and substance which recovers something that had been lost and yet is new and pregnant of new things in English literature.

It is sufficient at present to indicate this new power of language. But we must see whence it arises and to what possibility it points in the widening of the realms of poetic interpretation. It points to a greater thing than has yet been achieved and it is itself a higher achievement, — apart from all question of the force and genius of individual poets. Shakespeare is still — though need he be always? — immeasurably the largest name in English poetry; but still, however preeminent his genius, there remain greater things to be seen by the poet than Shakespeare saw and greater things to be said in poetry than Shakespeare said, — and here we have an indication of the way on which they lie and of the gates which open to their hiding-place and own home of light and self-revelation.

CHAPTER XXIII

Recent English Poetry - 4

THE inspiring spirit and shaping substance of this new poetry, that which gives it its peculiar turn, raises the power of its style to the intuitive closeness or directness and presses on it to bring in another law of its movement, has been indicated to some extent in the core of its meaning, but it is necessary to dwell on it more perusingly, that we may get a closer glimpse of the things towards which we are moving. The change that is coming or at least striving to come, might be described on the surface as a great and subtle deepening and enlarging of the thought-mind in the race and a new profounder, closer, more intimate way of seeing, feeling, appreciating, interpreting life and Nature and existence. The thought of the middle and even the later nineteenth century was wide in its way, especially in its range and breadth of surface or in comparison with the narrower thought of the preceding ages, but it was acute rather than profound, superficial even in its attempt at penetration. It sought for its food over a great country, but it did not wing high in the breadth of the altitudes or plunge down into the largeness of the depths. Perhaps the distinction is best marked by that significant movement of philosophic thought which now repelled by these limitations rejects the supremacy of the intellect and seeks for the secret of things in the intuition, in the inmost suggestions of life, in the innate will and principle of action and points more or less obscurely through these things to a spirit or self or nameless somewhat superconscient to or at least greater than our intellectual mind and reason. The nineteenth century was intellectual, not intuitive, critical rather than creative, or creative mostly by the constructive force of the critical mind, — critically constructive, we may then say, rather than creative by any direct insight and interpretation, — curiously observative of the phenomenon of life and Nature, concerned with many interests, patient,

accurate and analytic in its method of scrutiny, occupied by a stress of many problems, moved by strong human and democratic sympathies, attracted by intellectual ideals, but mechanical and outward in stress and rather curious and inventive than deep or fine in its aesthetic feeling. It has looked much at the body and life and active idea, but little at the deeper soul and spirit of things. Poetry has been affected by the turn of the human mind in this age; it has been brilliant, curious, careful, inventive, interested and interesting, moving over a great range of subjects, closely observative and even sometimes analytical, or elaborately aesthetic, or expressive of some intellectual idealism, but without much height of wing or force from the depths or strong or fine spiritual suggestion. Or there has been only some occasional suggestion or isolated foretaste of these things. There has been much stress of thought, but not much deeply moved or spontaneous greatness of creation.

The mind and soul of the race is now moving forward on the basis of what it has gained by a century of intellectual stir and activity, towards a profounder mood and a more internal force of thought and life. The intellectual way of looking at things is being gradually transcended or is raising itself to a power beyond itself; it is moving through the observing mind and reflective reason towards an intimate self-experience, from thought to vision, from intellectual experiment to intuitive experience, from life and Nature as observed by the eye of the intellect in their appearance to life and Nature as seen and felt by the soul in their spirit and reality. Mankind is still engaged in thinking and searching with an immense stress of mental power, but it is now once more in search of its soul and of the spirit and deeper truth of things, although in a way very different from that of its past cultural ages and on the whole with a greater power and subtlety of the mind, though not as yet, but that too seems predestined to come, with a greater power of the spirit. It is, to return to a phrase already used, in search of our inmost and attempting already to find, though it has not yet altogether found, our inmost way of its sense, vision, idea, expression. This change, reflected in the poetry of the time is not an abrupt turn or a casting away of the immediate past from which it was born, but a rapid

development of new viewpoints, a shedding of restrictions and limitations and husks and externalities, a transformation by the entrance of a new force of the soul into possession of the gains of the intellectual age and a swift completion and filling of them out in a new flood of light and an at once nearer and more extended sense of their meaning. The whole view and sense of existence has deepened into a greater subjectivity. For the subjectivity of the nineteenth century was a matter of the temperament, an activity of the strongly marked psychological individuality turned upon things held under the lens as an object of the intelligence; but now there are coming a universal subjectivity of the whole spirit, an attempt towards closeness and identity, a greater community of the individual with the universal soul and mind. The wider interest in Man has not lessened in breadth, but it is changing its character. More strenuous than before, it is less concentrated on his outer life and creation, and even where it deals with them, it opens more understandingly to his future and to his inner possibilities, to the psychological and the spiritual sense of his past, to the deeper significance of his present, to his self-creation. The profounder ranges of his being are now sounded and there is an initial feeling and even some actual seeing of the greater individual and the communal or universal self of our kind. Nature is seen more in her hidden suggestions and soul meanings and in the finer impressions by which we enter into them and establish with her a spiritual relation or identity. The things that lie behind the material world are almost for the first time being touched and seen with a close and revealing intimacy. The communion of the human soul with the Divine is becoming once more a subject of thought and utterance, not now limited to the old religious and personal form, but enlightened by a sense of the Infinite and Eternal which has arisen from and vivified the larger cosmic sense for which the thinking and discovery of the last century was a training. This change amounts to a revolution of the whole attitude of man towards existence, but it is commencing by an extension of the intellectual stress and a consequent breaking down of its bounds. A self-exceeding of the intellect and a growth of man into some first freedom and power of an intuitive mentality supported by

the liberated intelligence is in its initial travail of new birth. These things have not all arrived, but they are on the way and the first waves of the surge have already broken over the dry beaches of the age of reason.

This considerable change was intellectually anticipated and to some extent prepared in the last century itself by a strain, a little thin in body, but high and continuous, of strenuous intellectuality which strove to rise beyond the level of the ordinary thought of the time to the full height and power of what the intellect of the race could then think out or create in the light of the inheritance of our ages. A small number of writers, — in the English language Emerson, Carlyle, Ruskin are the best known among these names, — build for us a bridge of transition from the intellectual transcendentalism of the earlier nineteenth century across a subsequent low-lying scientific, utilitarian, externalised intellectualism, as if from bank to bank across morass or flood, over to the age now beginning to come in towards us. But in the region of poetic thought and creation Whitman was the one prophetic mind which consciously and largely foresaw and prepared the paths and had some sense of that to which they are leading. He belongs to the largest mind of the nineteenth century by the stress and energy of his intellectual seeking, by his emphasis on man and life and Nature, by his idea of the cosmic and universal, his broad spaces and surfaces, by his democratic enthusiasm, by his eye fixed on the future, by his intellectual reconciling vision at once of the greatness of the individual and the community of mankind, by his nationalism and internationalism, by his gospel of comradeship and fraternity in our common average manhood, by almost all in fact of the immense mass of ideas which form the connecting tissue of his work. But he brings into them an element which gives them another potency and meaning and restores something which in most of the literature of the time tended to be overcast and sicklied over by an excessive intellectual tendency more leaned to observe life than strong and swift to live it and which in the practicality of the time was caught up from its healthful soul of Nature and converted into a huge grinding mechanism. He has the intimate pulse and power of life vibrating in all he utters, an almost primitive force of vita-

lity, delivered from the enormous mechanical beat of the time by a robust closeness to the very spirit of life, — that closeness he has more than any other poet since Shakespeare, — and ennobled by a lifting up of its earthly vigour into a broad and full intellectual freedom. Thought leads and all is made subject and object and substance of a free and a powerful thinking, but this insistence of thought is made one with the pulse of life and the grave reflective pallor and want of blood of an overburdened intellectualism is healed by that vigorous union. Whitman writes with a conscious sense of his high function as a poet, a clear self-conception and consistent idea of what he has to cast into speech, —

> *One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person,*
> *Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En Masse...*
> *Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power,*
> *Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine,*
> *The Modern Man I sing.*

No other writer of the time has had this large and definite consciousness of the work of a modern poet as a representative voice of his age, this inspiring vital sentiment of the nation conceived as a myriad-souled pioneer of human progress, of mankind, of universal Nature, of the vast web of a universal thought and action. His creation, triumphing over all defect and shortcoming, draws from it a unique broadness of view, vitality of force and sky-wide atmosphere of greatness.

But beyond this representation of the largest thought and life and broadest turn to the future possible to his age, there is something else which arises from it all and carries us forward towards what is now opening to man around or above, towards a vision of new reaches and a profounder interpretation of existence. Whitman by the intensity of his intellectual and vital dwelling on the things he saw and expressed, arrives at some first profound sense of the greater self of the individual, of the greater self in the community of the race and in all its immense past action opening down through the broadening eager present to an immenser future, of the greater self of Nature and of the

eternal, the divine Self and Spirit of existence who broods over these things, who awaits them and in whom they come to the sense of their oneness. That which the old Indian seers called the *mahān ātmā*, the Great Self, the Great Spirit, which is seen through the vast strain of the cosmic thought and the cosmic life, — the French poets, influenced in their form and substance by Whitman have seized on this element with the clear discernment and intellectual precision and lucidity of the Latin mind and given it the name of unanimism, — is the subject of some of his highest strains. He gets to it repeatedly through his vision of the past opening to the ideal future, the organic universal movement of bygone nations and ages and the labour and creation of the present and some nobler coming turn to a freedom of unified completion, —

The journey done, the journeyman come home,
And man and art with Nature fused again...
The Almighty leader now for once has signalled with
his wand.

And some part of his work, as in the *Passage to India*, opens out even into a fuller and profounder sense of its meaning. He sees it here as a new voyage of the human spirit, — "O farther sail!"

Sail forth — steer for the deep waters only...
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all...
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas of God?

And with a singularly clear first seeing of the ideal goal and the ideal way of the conversion of the intellectual and vital into the spiritual self, he calls the spirit of man to the adventure, —

The circumnavigation of the world begin,
Of man, the voyage of his mind's return,
To reason's early paradise,
Back, back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions,
Again with fair creation.

He casts forward too the ideal heart of this wider movement of man into the sense of the divine unity which is its completion, brings out the divinity of the soul in man and its kinship to the divinity of the Eternal, —

O Thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
Light of the light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them,
Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving,...
How should I think, how breathe a single breath, how speak, if out of myself
I could not launch to those superior universes?
Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
At nature and its wonders, Time and Space and Death,
But that I, turning, call to thee, O soul, O actual Me,
And, lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of space, —

and he foresees the coming of that kinship of God and man to conscious fruition in oneness, —

Greater than stars or suns,
Bounding, O soul, thou journeyest forth:
What love than thine and ours could wider amplify?
What aspirations, wishes outvie thine and ours, O soul?
What dreams of the ideal? what plans of purity, perfection, strength?
What cheerful willingness for others' sake to give up all?
For others' sake to suffer all?
Reckoning ahead, O soul, when thou, the time achieved,...
Surrounded, copest, frontest God, yieldest, the aim attained,
As filled with friendship, love complete, the Elder Brother found,
The Younger melts in fondness in his arms.

These passages, — one of the seers of old time reborn in ours might so have expressed himself in a modern and intellectualised language, — send forward an arclight of prophetic expression on what is at the very heart of the new movement of humanity. It is in some degree an indication of that which the twentieth century is slowly turning to lay hold of, to develop and to make its own in a closer actuality of insight and experience.

The idea in these and cognate passages anticipates the new age, but the language and method are still that of the poetic intellect straining to some fullest power of its intelligence and speech-force, and the thought and writing of those who follow Whitman, like the French "unanimist" poets, bear the same character. At the centre of English poetry, in England itself, we have found another turn of intuitive speech which is more native to that closer actuality of experience for which we seek, a turn and power brought about perhaps by the greater fire of poetic genius and imagination, the special gift of the Anglo-Celtic mind, which leaps at once to the forceful, native, instinctive energy of poetic expression of the thing it has to say. The full idea of that thing, the large and clearly conceived substance of thought and vision which should fill this mould of intuitive utterance, we do not get in any considerable degree or range, — again perhaps because of the inferior turn for large and straight thinking on the great scale, a full-orbed thinking with a sustained and total conception, which is the defect of the English mind, — but we have constant partial intuitions in detail and a treatment of life and thought and nature which presses towards the greater coming significance. That is as yet only one strain of recent poetry, but it is the most powerful and original and turns sometimes almost with a full face towards the future. These are strong touches only, but they give already some impression and mould of the thing that has to be, the ultimate creation. A new intuitive interpretation of the soul and mind of man, of the soul and mind in Nature, a thought which casts its fathom beyond the passion of life and the clarity of the intelligence and starts sounding a suggestion of the hidden and the infinite in all it touches is the shaping power and the mode of this utterance.

The citations I have already given to illustrate the new

rhythm and language indicate also this power and thought-turn in the substance. A few more citations from the same poets may help to bring it out with more precision. The early and greater poetry of Phillips has much of this stamp, — afterwards he unhappily turned to a more outward dramatic motive which was not the true and original bent of his genius, but even there his best is that which prolongs the high beauty of his first inspiration. He has no great conscious range of poetical thinking, but all the more remarkable is the power with which this new influence comes out in what he can give us. We note a new treatment of life and human emotion. The love of Idas for Marpessa is not satisfied with the old forms of passion and feeling and imaginative idealism, there are here other notes which carry the individual emotion out of itself and strive to cast it into unity with the life of Nature and the whole past life and love of humanity and the eternal continuity of passion and seeking and all the suggestion of the Infinite. The very passion for physical beauty takes on this almost mystic character; it is the passion for a body

packed with sweet
Of all this world, that cup of brimming June,
That jar of violet wine set in the air,
That palest rose sweet in the night of life.

But, says Idas,

Not for this only do I love thee, but
Because Infinity upon thee broods,
And thou art full of whispers and of shadows.
Thou meanest what the sea has striven to say
So long, and yearned up to the cliffs to tell:
Thou art what all the winds have uttered not,
What the still night suggesteth to the heart.
Thy voice is like to music heard ere birth,
Some spirit lute touched on a spirit sea;
Thy face remembered is from other worlds.
It has been died for though I know not where.
It has been sung of though I know not when.

I am aware of other times and lands,
Of births far back, of lives in many stars.

Here we have the reconciliation, already suggested by Whitman, of the full power and meaning of the individual with the full power and meaning of the universal, eternal and infinite, but it is concentrated and brought to bear on a single feeling for its enlargement with a great power of intuitive and revealing suggestion. This enlarging of the particular to meet and become one with the universal and infinite — Tennyson's knowing of what God and man is from a deep and intimate perception of all that is meant by Nature in a single little flower in the crannies — is a very characteristic and indicative feature of this new poetry.

The same turn emerges in a more indirect and subtle, but not less significant way of treatment even in lines which apparently seek only to concentrate for the thought the essence of a common human idea and emotion. When the poet speaks of

Beautiful friendship tried by sun and wind,
Durable from the daily dust of life,

or of Marpessa's maternal human longing,

And he shall give me passionate children, not
Some radiant god that will despise me quite,
But clambering limbs and little hearts that err,

the thought in itself is not uncommon, but what makes it uncommon is the turn of the utterance which by an intuitive pressure towards some deeper significance of the personal thought and emotion carries it beyond the personality of the idea and feeling into a suggestion of profound universality, a rhythm and light of some entire vibration from the depths of life caught up and held by a human self-knowledge. The same force of suggestion emerges in the treatment of Nature, whether it takes the form of an intensity of sensation,

the moment deep
When we are conscious of the secret dawn
Amidst the darkness that we feel is green

or passes through that intensity to the sense of the very soul and emotion of what seems to us in less seeing moods an inconscient and inanimate Nature, as in the

trees
Motionless in an ecstasy of rain.

Meredith with his greater force of thinking gives us the clear significance of what is here only a powerful indication, a seeing identity of the soul of man with the hidden soul in earth-nature:

I neighbour the invisible
So close that my consent
Is only asked for spirits masked
To leap from trees and flowers.
And this because with them I dwell
In thought, while calmly bent
To read the lines dear earth designs
Shall speak her life on ours.

And the same turn emerges too in direct thought on the large aspects of life, as in such a phrase as

Lonely antagonist of destiny,

or that which describes

The listless ripple of oblivion,

lines which give us by some deep suggestion to the spiritual sight a whole abiding soul aspect of man and the universe in a single revealing expression. The effort of poetry of this kind of inspiration may be defined by adapting another expression of Meredith's,

To spell the letters of the sky and read
A reflex upon earth else meaningless.

And the fullness of that which it points to beyond itself, is a movement to unite the life of the earth, not lessened, not denied, not cast away, but accepted, with its own hidden spiritual reality, the one crucial movement necessary for man before he can reach that perfection which the race shall have on its heights, when

The vile plucked out of them, the unlovely slain,
Not forfeiting the beast with which they are crossed,
To stature of the Gods they shall attain.
They shall uplift their earth to meet her Lord,
Themselves the attuning chord.

This is in substance the same strain that arises finally from the more puissant voice of Whitman, but it has if a less forceful, a profounder touch, — a more delicate, intimate and spiritual closeness of seeing, experience and utterance is its charm and distinction.

The indication that we get in these and other English poets opens to a clearer totality in the two great Irish voices. They have, helped by the strand of a spiritual lucidity of thought in the finer Celtic mind, a sustained and conscious idea of the thing that is most inwardly stirring them to utterance. That shapes into a singular light, delicacy and beauty the whole of Yeats' poetry. Here I must be content to note three of its more distinctive features, the remarkable interweaving into one, whether against a background of Irish tradition and legend or by a directer thought, of the earthly life of man with the unseen psychical life which, if we could only see it, as we can when we go back from the frontage of things into the inner soul-spaces, presses upon the earth-life and supports it, so that at times our world seems only its detached projection; the reading through the signs of life of the brighter letters of an ideal and eternal Beauty; the insistence, even when touching exclusively our external life, on the suggestion of finer soul-values which exceed its material meanings. The poetry of A.E. is still more remarkable. What the others

suggest or give us in more or less luminous glimpses, he casts into concentrated expression from a nearer spiritual knowledge, — as when he strikes out in a brief verse the living spiritual perception of the universal and infinite source of love, —

We bade adieu to love the old,
We heard another lover then,
Whose forms are myriad and untold,
Sigh to us from the hearts of men.

He lives on the spiritual plane to which so much of this poetry is an indistinct or a less distinct aspiration, and his whole self-expression is bathed, perhaps rendered sometimes a little remote and unseizable by its immergence, in an unusual light, the light of the spirit breaking through the veils of the intelligence in which it has to find its means of speech. This is not the frank marriage and close unity of the earth and heavens of which Whitman and Meredith speak, but a rare, high and exclusive pinnacle of the soul's greater sight. The rest of this side of recent poetry is a climbing or pointing up from the earth-levels to the heights of Truth; but from one region of those loftiest elevations this sight looks down and opens its eye of light on the life of man and the cycles of the universe.

CHAPTER XXIV

New Birth or Decadence?

AT THIS point we stand in the evolution of English poetry. Its course, we can see, is only one line of a common evolution, and I have singled it out to follow because, for two reasons, it seems to me the most complete and suggestive. It follows most faithfully the natural ascending curve of the human spirit in this kind of rhythmic imaginative self-expression and, again, because of all the modern European languages it has the largest freest poetic energy and natural power, it responds, on the whole, most directly of all of them — in spite of certain serious limitations of the English mind — to the fountain motives, the essential impetus of the soul of poetry in its ascent and shows them, if not always in their greatest or most perfect, yet almost always in their most characteristic and revealing form. Poetry, like everything else in man, evolves. Its fundamental nature, function and law are no doubt always the same, because each thing and each activity too in our being must be faithful to the divine idea in it, to its Dharma, and can try to depart from it only on peril, whatever momentarily it may seem to gain, of eventual inferiority and futility, or even of disintegration and death. But still there is an evolution within this law of its being. And evolution means a bringing out of new powers which lay concealed in the seed or the first form; the simple develops to the more complex, — more complex even in some apparent simplicity, — the superficial gives place to the more and more profound, the lesser gives place to the greater nature of the common manifestation. But poetry is a psychological phenomenon, the poetic impulse a highly charged force of expression of the mind and soul of man, and therefore in trying to follow out its line of evolution it is the development of the psychological motive and power, it is the kind of feeling, vision, mentality which is seeking in it for its word and idea and form of beauty and it is the power of the soul

through which it finds expression or the level of mind from which it speaks which we must distinguish to get a right idea of the progress of poetry. All else is subsidiary, variations of rhythm, language, structure; they are the form, the vehicle; they derive subtly and get their character and meaning from the psychological power and the fundamental motive.

If poetry is a highly-charged power of aesthetic expression of the soul of man, it must follow in its course of evolution the development of that soul. I put it that from this point of view the soul of man like the soul of Nature can be regarded as an unfolding of the spirit in the material world. Our unfolding has its roots in the soil of the physical life; its growth shoots up and out in many directions in the stalk and branches of the vital being; it puts forth the opulence of the buds of mind and there, nestling in the luxuriant leaves of mind and above it, out from the spirit which was concealed in the whole process must blossom the free and infinite soul of man, the hundred-petalled rose of God. Man indeed, unlike other forms of being in terrestrial Nature, though rooted in body, proceeds by the mind and all that is characteristic of him belongs to the wonderful play of mind taking up physicality and life and developing and enriching its gains till it can exceed itself and become a spiritual mind, the divine Mind in man. He turns first his view on the outward physical world and on his own life of outward action and concentrates on that or throws into its mould his life-suggestions, his thought, his religious idea, and, if he arrives at some vision of an inner spiritual truth, he puts even that into forms and figures of the physical life and physical Nature.[1] Poetry at a certain stage or of a certain kind expresses this turn of the human mentality in word and in form of beauty. It can reach great heights in this kind of mental mould, can see the physical forms of the gods, lift to a certain greatness by its vision and disclose a divine quality in even the most obvious, material and outward being and action of man; and in this type we have Homer. Arrived to a greater depth of living, seeing from a vivid half outward half inward turn of mind his thought and action and self and world and Nature, man begins to feel more sensitively the passion and power of life, its

[1] As in the hymns of the Vedic Rishis.

joy and pain, its wonder and terror and beauty and romance, to turn everything into moved thought and sentiment and sensation of the life-soul, the desire soul in him which first forces itself on his introspection when he begins to go inward. Poetry too takes this turn, rises and deepens to a new kind of greatness; and at the summit in this kind we have Shakespeare.

This way of seeing and creating, in which thought is involved in life and the view is that of the life-spirit feeling, thinking, imagining, carried forward in its own surge of self, cannot permanently hold the greater activities of the mental being. He ceases to identify himself entirely with the passion, the emotion, the thought-suggestions of life; for he needs to know from a freer height what it is and what he is, to get a clear detached idea of its workings, to dominate his emotions and vital intuitions and see with the calm eye of his reason, to probe, analyse, get at the law and cause and general and particular rule of himself and Nature. He does this at first on large and comparatively bare lines dwelling only on the salient details for a first strong and provisionally adequate view. Poetry following this movement takes on the lucid, restrained, intellectual and ideal classic form, in which high or strong ideas govern and develop the presentation of life and thought in an atmosphere of clear beauty and the vision of the satisfied intelligence; that is the greatness of the Greek and Latin poets. But afterwards the intelligence sets more comprehensively to work, opens itself to all manner of the possibilities of truth and to a crowding stream and mass of interests, a never satisfied minuteness of detail, an endless succession of pregnant generalisations. This is the type of modern intellectualism.

The poetry which arises from this mentality is full of a teeming many-sided poetic ideation which takes up the external and life motives not for their own sake, but to make them food for the poetic intelligence, blends the classical and romantic motives, adds to them the realistic, aesthetic, impressionist, idealistic ways of seeing and thinking, makes many experiments and combinations, passes through many phases. The true classic form is then no longer possible; if it is tried, it is not quite genuine, for what informs it is no longer the classic spirit; it is too crowded with

subtle thought-matter, too brooding, sensitive, responsive to many things; no new Parthenon can be built whether in the white marble subdued to the hand or in the pure and lucid spacings of the idea and the word: the mind of man has become too full, complex, pregnant with subtle and not easily expressible things to be capable of that earlier type of perfection. The romantic strain is a part of this wider intelligence, but the pure and genuine romanticism of the life-spirit which cares nothing for thought except as it enriches its own being, is also no longer possible. If it tries to get back to that, it falls into an affectation, an intellectual pose and, whatever genius may be expended upon it, this kind cannot remain long alive. That is the secret of the failure of modern romanticism in Germany and France. In Germany, Goethe and Heine alone got away from this falsity and were able to use this strain in its proper way as one enriching chord serving the complex harmonic purpose of the intelligence; the rest of German literary creation of the time is interesting and suggestive in its way, but very little of it is intimately alive and true, and afterwards Germany failed to keep up a sustained poetic impulse; she turned aside to music on the one side and on the other to philosophy and science for her field. The French mind got away very soon from romanticism and, though greatly enriched by its outbreak into that phase, went on to a more genuine intellectual and intellectually aesthetic form of creation. In England with the greater spontaneity of its poetic spirit the mistake never went so far. The poetry of the time of Wordsworth and Shelley is sometimes called romantic poetry, but it was not so in its essence, but only in certain of its moods and motives. It lives really by its greater and more characteristic element, by its half spiritual turn, by Wordsworth's force of ethical thought and communion with Nature, by Shelley's imaginative transcendentalism, Keats' worship of Beauty, Byron's Titanism and force of personality, Coleridge's supernaturalism or, as it should more properly be called, his eye for other nature, Blake's command of the inner psychic realms. Only in drama was there, owing to the prestige of Shakespeare, an attempt at pure romanticism, and therefore in this domain nothing great and living could be done, but only a record of failures. Realism is a more native turn of

this kind of intelligence, and it invades poetry too to a certain extent, but if it dominates, then poetry must decline and cease. The poetry of an age of many-sided intellectualism can live only by its many-sidedness and by making everything as it comes a new material for the aesthetic creations of the observing, thinking, constructing intelligence.

But then comes the now vital question in this cultural evolution, — in what is this intellectualism to culminate? For if it leads to nothing beyond itself, it must end, however brilliant its work, in a poetic decadence, and that must come nearer, the more intellect dominates the other powers of our being. The intellect moves naturally between two limits, the abstractions or solving analyses of the reason and the domain of positive and practical reality; its great achievements are in these two fields or in a mediation between them, and it can do most and go farthest, can achieve its most native and characteristic and therefore its greatest and completest work either in philosophy or in science. The age of developed intellectualism in Greece killed poetry; it ended in the comedy of Menander, the intellectual artificialities of Alexandrianism, the last flush of beauty in the aesthetic pseudo-naturalism of the Sicilian pastoral poetry; philosophy occupied the field. In the more rich and complex modern mind this result could not so easily come and has not yet come. At the same time the really great, perfect and securely characteristic work of the age has not been in the field of art and poetry, but in critical thought and science. Criticism and science, by a triumphant force of abstraction and analysis turned on the world of positive fact, have in this period been able to become enormously effective for life. They have been able to reign sovereignly, not so much by their contributions to pure knowledge, but by their practical, revolutionary and constructive force. If modern thought with its immense scientific achievement has not enriched life at its base or given it a higher and purer action, — it has only created a yet unrealised possibility in that direction by its idealistic side, — it has wonderfully equipped it with powerful machinery and an imposing paraphernalia and wrought conspicuous and unprecedented changes in its superstructure. But poetry in this atmosphere has kept itself alive not

by any native and spontaneous power born of agreement between its own essential spirit and the spirit of the age, but by a great effort of the imagination and aesthetic intelligence labouring for the most part to make the best of what material it could get in the shape of new thought and new viewpoints for the poetic criticism or the thoughtful presentation of life. It has been an aesthetic byplay rather than a leading or sometimes even premier force in the cultural life of the race such as it was in the ancient ages and even, with a certain limited action, in more recent times.

That a certain decline, not of the activity of the poetic mind, but of its natural vigour, importance and effective power has been felt, if not quite clearly appreciated in its causes, we can see from various significant indications. Throughout the later nineteenth century one observes a constant apprehension of approaching aesthetic decadence, a tendency to be on the look-out for it and to find the signs of it in innovations and new turns in art and poetry. The attempt to break the whole mould of poetry and make a new thing of it so that it may be easier to handle and may shape itself to all the turns, the high and low, noble and common, fair or unseemly movements of the modern mind and its varied interest in life, is itself due to a sense of some difficulty, limitation and unease, some want of equation between the fine but severely self-limiting character of this kind of creative power and the spirit of the age. At one time indeed it was hardily predicted that since the modern mind is increasingly scientific and less and less poetically and aesthetically imaginative, poetry must necessarily decline and give place to science, — for much the same reason, in fact, for which philosophy replaced poetry in Greece. On the opposite side it was sometimes suggested that the poetic mind might become more positive and make use of the materials of science or might undertake a more intellectual though always poetic criticism of life and might fill the place of philosophy and religion which were supposed for a time to be dead or dying powers in human nature; but this came to the same thing, for it meant a deviation from the true law of aesthetic creation and only a more protracted decadence.

And behind these uneasy suggestions lay the one fact that for causes already indicated an age of reason dominated by the

critical, scientific or philosophic intelligence is ordinarily unfavourable and, even when it is most catholic and ample, cannot be quite favourable to great poetic creation. The pure intellect cannot create poetry. The inspired or the imaginative reason does indeed play an important, sometimes a leading part, but even that can only be a support or an influence; the thinking mind may help to give a final shape, a great and large form, *saṁmahemā manīṣayā*, as the Vedic poets said of the Mantra, but the word must start first from a more intimate sense in the heart of the inner being, *hṛdā taṣṭān*; it is the spirit within and not the mind without that is the fount of poetry. Poetry too is an interpreter of truth, but in the forms of an innate beauty, and not so much of intellectual truth, the truths offered by the critical mind, as of the intimate truth of being. It deals not so much with things thought as with things seen, not with the authenticities of the analytic mind, but with the authenticities of the synthetic vision and the seeing spirit. The abstractions, generalisations, minute precisions of our ordinary intellectual cerebration are no part of its essence or texture; but it has others, more luminous, more subtle, those which come to us after passing through the medium and getting drenched in the light of the intuitive and revealing mind. And therefore when the general activity of thought runs predominantly into the former kind, the works of the latter are apt to proceed under rather anaemic conditions, they are affected by the pervading atmosphere; poetry either ceases or falls into a minor strain or takes refuge in virtuosities of its outer instruments and aids or, if it still does any considerable work, lacks the supreme spontaneity, the natural perfection, the sense of abundant ease or else of sovereign mastery which the touch of the spirit manifests even amidst the fullest or austerest labour of its creation.

But this incompatibility is not the last word of the matter. The truth which poetry expresses takes two forms, the truth of life and the truth of that which works in life, the truth of the inner spirit. It may take its stand on the outer life and work in an intimate identity, relation or close dwelling upon it, and then what it does is to bring some light of intuitive things, some power of revelation of the beauty that is truth and the truth that is beauty

into the outer things of life, even into those that are most common, obvious, of daily occurrence. But also it may get back into the truth of the inner spirit and work in an intimate identity, relation or close dwelling upon it, and then what it will do is to give a new revelation of our being and life and thought and Nature and the material and the psychical and spiritual worlds. That is the effort to which it seems to be turning now in its most characteristic, effective and beautiful manifestations. But it cannot fully develop in this sense unless the general mind of the age takes that turn. There are signs that this will indeed be the outcome of the new direction taken by the modern mind, not an intellectual petrifaction or a long spinning in the grooves of a critical intellectualism, but a higher and more authentic thinking and living. The human intelligence seems on the verge of an attempt to rise through the intellectual into an intuitive mentality; it is no longer content to regard the intellect and the world of positive fact as all or the intellectual reason as a sufficient mediator between life and the spirit, but is beginning to perceive that there is a spiritual mind which can admit us to a greater and more comprehensive vision. This does not mean any sacrifice of the gains of the past, but a raising and extending of them not only by a seeking of the inner as well as the outer truth of things, but also of all that binds them together and a bringing of them into true relation and oneness. A first opening out to this new way of seeing is the sense of the work of Whitman and Carpenter and some of the recent French poets, of Tagore and Yeats and A.E., of Meredith and some others of the English poets. There are critics who regard this tendency as only another sign of decadence; they see in it a morbid brilliance, a phosphorescence of decay or the phosphorescence which we observe on the sea when the sun has gone down and night occupies the waters. But this is to suppose that poetry can only repeat what it has done in the past and can accomplish no new and great thing and that a clear, strong or brilliant dealing with the outer mind and world is its last word and the one condition of its healthy creativeness. There is much that is morbid, perverse or unsound in some recent poetry; but this comes from an artificial prolongation of the past or a temporary mixed straining, it does not belong to that element in the

new poetry which escapes from it and turns firmly to the things of the future. Decadence arrives when in the decline of a culture there is nothing more to be lived or seen or said, or when the poetic mind settles irretrievably into a clumsy and artificial repetition of past forms and conventions or can only escape from them into scholastic or aesthetic prettinesses or extravagance. But an age which brings in large and new vital and spiritual truths, truths of our being, truths of the self of man and the inner self of Nature and opens vast untrod ranges to sight and imagination, is not likely to be an age of decadence, and a poetry which voices these things, — unless its creative power has been fatally atrophied by long conventionalism, and that is not at present our case, — is not likely to be a poetry of decadence.

The more perfectly intuitive poetry of the future, supposing it to emerge successfully from its present incubation, find itself and develop all its possibilities, will not be a mystic poetry recondite in expression or quite remote from the earthly life of man. Some element of the kind may be there; for always when we open into these fields, mysteries more than the Orphic or the Eleusinian revive and some of them are beyond our means of expression; but mysticism in its unfavourable or lesser sense comes when either we glimpse but do not intimately realise the now secret things of the spirit or, realising, yet cannot find their direct language, their intrinsic way of utterance, and have to use obscurely luminous hints or a thick drapery of symbol, when we have the revelation, but not the inspiration, the sight but not the word. And remoteness comes when we cannot relate the spirit with life or bring the power of the spirit to transmute the other members of our being. But the new age is one which is climbing from a full intellectuality towards some possibility of an equal fullness of the intuitive mind, and the full intuitive mind, not that of glimpses, but of a luminous totality, opens to the mind of revelation and inspiration. The aesthetic mind, whether it take form in the word of the poet or in the word of the illumined thinker, the prophet or the seer, can be one of the main gateways. And what the age will aim at is neither materialism nor an intuitive vitalism nor a remote detached spirituality, but a harmonious and luminous totality of man's being. Therefore to this

poetry the whole field of existence will be open for its subject, God and Nature and man and all the worlds, the field of the finite and the infinite. It is not a close, even a high close and ending in this or any field that the future offers to us, but a new and higher evolution, a second and greater birth of all man's powers and his being and action and creation.

CHAPTER XXV

The Ideal Spirit of Poetry

TO ATTEMPT to presage the future turn or development of mind or life in any of its fields is always a hazardous occupation. Life and mind are not like physical Nature which runs in precise mechanical grooves; these are more mobile and freer powers. The gods of life and still more the gods of mind are so incalculably self-creative that even when we can distinguish the main lines on which the working runs or has so far run, we are still unable to foresee with any certainty what turn they will yet take or of what new thing they are in labour. It is therefore impossible to predict what the poetry of the future will actually be like. We can see where we stand today, but we cannot tell where we shall stand a quarter of a century hence. All that one can do is to distinguish for oneself some possibilities that lie before the poetic mind of the race and to figure what it can achieve if it chooses to follow out certain great openings which the genius of recent and contemporary poets has made free to us, but what path it will actually choose to tread or what new heights attempt, waits still for its own yet undecided decision.

What would be the ideal spirit of poetry in an age of the increasingly intuitive mind? For the possibility of such an age is that on which we have been dwelling. I have spoken in the beginning of the Mantra as the highest intensest revealing form of poetic thought and expression. What the Vedic poets meant by the Mantra was an inspired and revealed seeing and visioned thinking, attended by a realisation, to use the ponderous but necessary modern word, of some inmost truth of God and self and man and Nature and cosmos and life and thing and thought and experience and deed. It was a thinking that came on the wings of a great soul rhythm, *chandas*. For the seeing could not be separated from the hearing; it was one act. Nor could the

living of the truth in oneself which we mean by realisation, be separated from either, for the presence of it in the soul and its possession of the mind must precede or accompany in the creator or human channel that expression of the inner sight and hearing which takes the shape of the luminous word. The Mantra is born through the heart and shaped or massed by the thinking mind into a chariot of that godhead of the Eternal of whom the truth seen is a face or a form. And in the mind too of the fit outward hearer who listens to the word of the poet-seer, these three must come together, if our word is a real Mantra; the sight of the inmost truth must accompany the hearing, the possession of the inmost spirit of it by the mind and its coming home to the soul must accompany or follow immediately upon the rhythmic message of the Word and the mind's sight of the Truth. That may sound a rather mystic account of the matter, but substantially there could hardly be a more complete description of the birth and effect of the inspired and revealing word, and it might be applied, though usually on a more lowered scale than was intended by the Vedic Rishis, to all the highest outbursts of a really great poetry. But poetry is the Mantra only when it is the voice of the inmost truth and is couched in the highest power of the very rhythm and speech of that truth. And the ancient poets of the Veda and Upanishads claimed to be uttering the Mantra because always it was this inmost and almost occult truth of things which they strove to see and hear and speak and because they believed themselves to be using or finding its innate soul rhythms and the sacrificial speech of it cast up by the divine Agni, the sacred Fire in the heart of man. The Mantra, in other words, is a direct and most heightened, an intensest and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and the presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things and with its truth and with the divine soul-forms of it, the Godheads which are born from the living Truth. Or, let us say, it is a supreme rhythmic language which seizes hold upon all that is finite and brings into each the light and voice of its own infinite.

This is a theory of poetry, a view of the rhythmic and creative self-expression to which we give that name, which is very

different from any that we now hold, a sacred or hieratic *ars poetica*, only possible in days when man believed himself to be near to the gods and felt their presence in his bosom and could think he heard some accents of their divine and eternal wisdom take form on the heights of his mind. And perhaps no thinking age has been so far removed from any such view of our life as the one through which we have recently passed and even now are not well out of its shadow, the age of materialism, the age of positive outward matter of fact and of scientific and utilitarian reason. And yet curiously enough, — or naturally, since in the economy of Nature opposite creates itself out of opposite and not only like from like, — it is to some far-off light at least of the view of ourselves at our greatest of which such ideas were a concretised expression that we seem to be returning. For we can mark that although in very different circumstances, in broader forms, with a more complex mind and an enormously enlarged basis of culture and civilisation, the gain and inheritance of many intermediate ages, it is still to something very like the effort which was the soul of the Vedic or at least the Vedantic mind that we almost appear to be on the point of turning back in the circle of our course. Now that we have seen minutely what is the material reality of the world in which we live and have some knowledge of the vital reality of the Force from which we spring, we are at last beginning to seek again for the spiritual reality of that which we and all things are. Our minds are once more trying to envisage the self, the spirit of Man and the spirit of the universe, intellectually, no doubt, at first, but from that to the old effort at sight, at realisation within ourselves and in all is not a very far step. And with this effort there must rise too on the human mind the conception of the godheads in whom this Spirit, this marvellous Self and Reality which broods over the world, takes shape in the liberated soul and life of the human being, his godheads of Truth and Freedom and Unity, his godheads of a greater more highly visioned Will and Power, his godheads of Love and universal Delight, his godheads of universal and eternal Beauty, his godheads of a supreme Light and Harmony and Good. The new ideals of the race seem already to be affected by some first bright shadow of these things, and even though it be only a tinge,

a flush colouring the duller atmosphere of our recent mentality, there is every sign that this tinge will deepen and grow, in the heavens to which we look up if not at once in the earth of our actual life.

But this new vision will not be as in the old times something hieratically remote, mystic, inward, shielded from the profane, but rather a sight which will endeavour to draw these godheads again to close and familiar intimacy with our earth and embody them not only in the heart of religion and philosophy, nor only in the higher flights of thought and art, but also, as far as may be, in the common life and action of man. For in the old days these things were Mysteries, which men left to the few, to the initiates and by so leaving them lost sight of them in the end, but the endeavour of this new mind is to reveal, to divulge and to bring near to our comprehension all mysteries, — at present indeed making them too common and outward in the process and depriving them of much of their beauty and inner light and depth, but that defect will pass, — and this turn towards an open realisation may well lead to an age in which man as a race will try to live in a greater Truth than has as yet governed our kind. For all that we know, we now tend to make some attempt to form clearly and live. His creation too will then be moved by another spirit and cast on other lines.

And if this takes place or even if there is some strong mental movement towards it, poetry may recover something of an old sacred prestige. There will no doubt still be plenty of poetical writing which will follow the old lines and minister to the old commoner aesthetic motives, and it is as well that it should be so, for the business of poetry is to express the soul of man to himself and to embody in the word whatever power of beauty he sees; but also there may now emerge too and take the first place souls no longer niggardly of the highest flame, the poet-seer and seer-creator, the poet who is also a Rishi, master singers of Truth, hierophants and magicians of a diviner and more universal beauty. There has no doubt always been something of that in the greatest masters of poetry in the great ages, but to fulfil such a role has not often been the one fountain idea of their function; the mind of the age has made other demands on them, needed

at that time, and the highest things in this direction have been rare self-exceedings and still coloured by and toned to the half light in which they sang. But if an age comes which is in common possession of a deeper and greater and more inspiring Truth, then its masters of the rhythmic word will at least sing on a higher common level and may rise more often into a fuller intenser light and capture more constantly the greater tones of which this harp of God, to use the Upanishad's description of man's created being, is secretly capable.

A greater era of man's living seems to be in promise, whatever nearer and earthier powers may be striving to lead him on a side path away to a less exalted ideal, and with that advent there must come a new great age of his creation different from the past epochs which he counts as his glories and superior to them in its vision and motive. But first there must intervene a poetry which will lead him towards it from the present faint beginnings. It will be aided by new views in philosophy, a changed and extended spirit in science and new revelations in the other arts, in music, painting, architecture, sculpture, as well as high new ideals in life and new powers of a reviving but no longer limited or obscurantist religious mind. A glint of this change is already visible. And in poetry there is already the commencement of such a greater leading; the conscious effort of Whitman, the tone of Carpenter, the significance of the poetry of A.E., the rapid immediate fame of Tagore are its first signs. The idea of the poet who is also the Rishi has made again its appearance. Only a wider spreading of the thought and mentality in which that idea can live and the growth of an accomplished art of poetry in which it can take body, are still needed to give the force of permanence to what is now only an incipient and just emerging power. Mankind satiated with the levels is turning its face once more towards the heights, and the poetic voices that will lead us thither with song will be among the high seer voices. For the great poet interprets to man his present or reinterprets for him his past, but can also point him to his future and in all three reveal to him the face of the Eternal.

An intuitive revealing poetry of the kind which we have in view would voice a supreme harmony of five eternal powers,

Truth, Beauty, Delight, Life and the Spirit. These are indeed the five greater ideal lamps or rather the five suns of poetry. And towards three of them the higher mind of the race is in many directions turning its thought and desire with a new kind and force of insistence. The intellectual side of our recent progress has in fact been for a long time a constant arduous pursuit of Truth in certain of its fields; but now the limited truth of yesterday can no longer satisfy or bind us. Much has been known and discovered of a kind which had not been found or had only been glimpsed before, but the utmost of that much appears now very little compared with the infinitely more which was left aside and ignored and which now invites our search. The description which the old Vedic poet once gave of the seeking of divine Truth, applies vividly to the mind of our age, "As it climbs from height to height, there becomes clear to its view all the much that is yet to be done." But also it is beginning to be seen that only in some great awakening of the self and spiritual being of man is that yet unlived truth to be found and that infinite much to be achieved. It is only then that the fullness of a greater knowledge for man living on earth can unfold itself and get rid of its coverings and again on his deeper mind and soul, in the words of another Vedic poet-seer, "New states come into birth, covering upon covering awaken to knowledge, till in the lap of the Mother one wholly sees." This new-old light is now returning upon our minds. Men no longer so completely believe that the world is a machine and they only so much transient thinking matter, a view of existence in the midst of which, however helpful it might be to a victorious concentration on physical science and social economy and material well-being, neither religion nor philosophic wisdom could renew their power in the fountains of the spirit nor art and poetry, which are also things of the soul like religion and wisdom, refresh themselves from their native sources of strength. Now we are moving back from the physical obsession to the consciousness that there is a soul and greater self within us and the universe which finds expression here in the life and the body.

But the mind of today insists too and rightly insists on life, on humanity, on the dignity of our labour and action. We have

no longer any ascetic quarrel with our mother earth, but rather would drink full of her bosom of beauty and power and raise her life to a more perfect greatness. Thought now dwells much on the idea of a vast creative will of life and action as the secret of existence. That way of seeing, though it may give room for a greater power of art and poetry and philosophy and religion, for it brings in real soul-values, has by its limitation its own dangers. A spirit which is all life because it is greater than life, is rather the truth in which we shall most powerfully live. Aditi, the infinite Mother, cries in the ancient Vedic hymn to Indra the divine Power now about to be born in her womb, "This is the path of old discovered again by which all the gods rose up into birth, even by that upward way shouldst thou be born in thy increase; but go not forth by this other to turn thy mother to her fall," but if, refusing the upward way, the new spirit in process of birth replies like the god, "By that way I will not go forth, for it is hard to tread, let me come out straight on the level from thy side; I have many things to do which have not yet been done; with one I must fight and with another I must question after the Truth," then the new age may do great things, as the last also did great things, but it will miss the highest way and end like it in a catastrophe. There is no reason why we should so limit our new birth in time; for the spirit and life are not incompatible, but rather a greater power of the spirit brings a greater power of life. Poetry and art most of all our powers can help to bring this truth home to the mind of man with an illumining and catholic force, for while philosophy may lose itself in abstractions and religion turn to an intolerant other-worldliness and asceticism, poetry and art are born mediators between the immaterial and the concrete, the spirit and life. This mediation between the truth of the spirit and the truth of life will be one of the chief functions of the poetry of the future.

The two other sister lamps of God, colour suns of the Ideal, which our age has most dimmed and of whose reviving light it is most sadly in need, but still too strenuously outward and utilitarian to feel sufficiently their absence, Beauty and Delight, are also things spiritual and they bring out the very heart of sweetness and colour and flame of the other three. Truth and Life

have not their perfection until they are suffused and filled with the completing power of delight and the fine power of beauty and become one at their heights with this perfecting hue and this secret essence of themselves; the spirit has no full revelation without these two satisfying presences. For the ancient Indian idea is absolutely true that delight, Ananda, is the inmost expressive and creative nature of the free self because it is the very essence of the original being of the Spirit. But beauty and delight are also the very soul and origin of art and poetry. It is the significance and spiritual function of art and poetry to liberate man into pure delight and to bring beauty into his life. Only there are grades and heights here as in everything else and the highest kinds of delight and beauty are those which are one with the highest Truth, the perfection of life and the purest and fullest joy of the self-revealing Spirit. Therefore will poetry most find itself and enter most completely into its heritage when it arrives at the richest harmony of these five things in their most splendid and ample sweetness and light and power; but that can only wholly be when it sings from the highest skies of vision and ranges through the widest widths of our being.

These powers can indeed be possessed in every scale, because on whatever grade of our ascent we stand, the Spirit, the divine Self of man is always there, can break out into a strong flame of manifestation carrying in it all its godheads in whatever form, and poetry and art are among the means by which it thus delivers itself into expression. Therefore the essence of poetry is eternally the same and its essential power and the magnitude of the genius expended may be the same whatever the frame of the sight, whether it be Homer chanting of the heroes in god-moved battle before Troy and of Odysseus wandering among the wonders of remote and magic isles with his heart always turned to his lost and far-off human hearth, Shakespeare riding in his surge of the manifold colour and music and passion of life, or Dante errant mid his terrible or beatific visions of Hell and Purgatory and Paradise, or Valmiki singing of the ideal man embodying God and egoistic giant Rakshasa embodying only fierce self-will approaching each other from their different centres of life and in their different law of being for the struggle desired by the gods,

or some mystic Vamadeva or Vishwamitra voicing in strange vivid now forgotten symbols the action of the gods and the glories of the Truth, the battle and the journey to the Light, the double riches and the sacrificial climbing of the soul to Immortality. For whether it be the inspired imagination fixed on earth or the soul of life or the inspired reason or the high intuitive spiritual vision which gives the form, the genius of the great poet will seize on some truth of being, some breath of life, some power of the spirit and bring it out with a certain supreme force for his and our delight and joy in its beauty. But nevertheless the poetry which can keep the amplitude of its breadth and nearness of its touch and yet see all things from a higher height will, the rest being equal, give more and will more fully satisfy the whole of what we are and therefore the whole of what we demand from this most complete of all the arts and most subtle of all our means of aesthetic self-expression.

The poetry of the future, if it fulfils in amplitude the promise now only there in rich hint, will kindle these five lamps of our being, but raise them up more on high and light with them a broader country, many countries indeed now hidden from our view, will make them not any longer lamps in some limited temple of beauty, but suns in the heavens of our highest mind and illuminative of our widest as well as our inmost life. It will be a poetry of a new largest vision of himself and Nature and God and all things which is offering itself to man and of its possible realisation in a nobler and more divine manhood; and it will not sing of them only with the power of the imaginative intelligence, the exalted and ecstatic sense or the moved joy and passion of life, but will rise to look at them from an intenser light and embody them in a more revealing force of the word. It will be first and most a poetry of the intuitive reason, the intuitive senses, the intuitive delight-soul in us, getting from this enhanced source of inspiration a more sovereign poetic enthusiasm and ecstasy, and then, it may even be, rise towards a still greater power of revelation nearer to the direct vision and word of the Overmind from which all creative inspiration comes.

A poetry of this kind need not be at all something high and

remote or beautifully and delicately intangible, or not that alone, but will make too the highest things near, close and visible, will sing greatly and beautifully of all that has been sung, all that we are from outward body to very God and Self, of the finite and the infinite, the transient and the Eternal, but with a new reconciling and fusing vision that will make them other to us than they have been even when yet the same. If it wings to the heights, it will not leave earth unseen below it, but also will not confine itself to earth, but find too other realities and their powers on man and take all the planes of existence for its empire. It will take up and transform the secrets of the older poets and find new undiscovered secrets, transfigure the old rhythms by the insistence of the voice of its deeper subtler spirit and create new characteristic harmonies, reveal other greater powers and spirits of language, proceeding from the past and present yet will not be limited by them or their rule and forms and canon, but compass its own altered perfected art of poetry. This at least is its possible ideal endeavour, and then the attempt itself would be a rejuvenating elixir and put the poetic spirit once more in the shining front of the powers and guides of the ever-progressing soul of humanity. There it will lead in the journey like the Vedic Agni, the fiery giver of the word, *yuvā kaviḥ, priyo atithir amartyo mandrajihvaḥ ṛtacit, ṛtāvā*, the Youth, the Seer, the beloved and immortal Guest with his honied tongue of ecstasy, the Truth-conscious, the Truth-finder, born as a flame from earth and yet the heavenly messenger of the Immortals.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Sun of Poetic Truth

WHAT is the kind of Truth which we can demand from the spirit of poetry, from the lips of the inspired singer, or what do we mean when we speak of Truth as one of the high powers and godheads of his work and of its light as a diviner sunlight in which he must see and shape from its burning rays within and around him the flame-stuff of his creation? We have all our own notions of the Truth and that gives an ambiguous character to the word and brings in often a narrow and limited sense of it into our idea of poetry. But first there is the primary objection, plausible enough if we look only at the glowing robe and not at the soul of creative expression, that the poet has nothing at all to do with any other kind of truth or with Truth at all for her own sake, but is a lover only of Beauty, she his only worshipped goddess, and not truth but imagination her winged servant and the radiant messenger of the Muse. If it cannot absolutely be said that most poetry is most feigning and the whole art amounts to a power of beautiful fiction, yet it is apparent that the poet most succeeds when he takes outward or actual truth only as a first hint and steeps most subtly whatever crude matter it gives to his mind in the delightful hues of imagination and transmutes it into the unfettered beauty of her shapes. That might seem at first sight to mean or so might be interpreted that truth and art are two unconnected or little connected things, and if truth is to be made at all the subject-matter of art, it yet does not become art unless it has come out transfigured and, it may be, unrecognisable in the imagination's characteristic process. But, in fact, it does not mean that, but only that art is not an imitation or reproduction of outward Nature, but rather missioned to give by the aid of a transmuting faculty something more inwardly true than the external life and appearance.

And next, there is the quite opposite idea, which one finds

sometimes rampant and self-confident in an age of realism and the cult of vital power, that the truth which is the material of poetry and has to be set out and rhythmed in her process, is the reality of life in its most strenuous vital sense, the reality of what we see and hear and touch and vitally feel and energetically think with the most positive impact of the mind, the raw, rough, concrete and dynamic fact of experience to be transferred without any real change to rhythmic form, relieved with image and dressed in its just idea and word. And we are even told that poetry to be faithful to life must manage not only her seeing and expression, but her rhythmic movement so as to create some subjective correspondence with life, creep and trip and walk and run and bound along with it, reproduce every bang and stumble and shuffle and thump of the vital steps, and then we shall get a quite new, large and vigorous music and in comparison with its sincere and direct power the old melodies will fade into false and flimsy sweetnesses of insipid artifice. Here what is demanded is not beauty but power or rather force. If beauty can get in, if she can dress herself in these new and strong colours, we shall gratefully accept her, provided she is not too beautiful to be true and does not bring in again with her the unreal, the romantic or remotely ideal or some novel kind of perverse[1] imagination. But if ugly, brutal and sordid things are shown powerfully in their full ugliness, brutality and sordidness without any work of transmutation, so much the better since truth of life, force of vital reality of whatever kind set and made vivid in a strong outlining illumination is what we shall henceforth demand of the artist in verse. And it cannot be denied that the crudity of actual life so treated and heightened in art — for art cannot merely reproduce, it cannot help heightening — gives us a new sensation, becomes a crude and heady wine setting up an agreeable disturbance in the midriff and bowels and a violent satisfaction in the brain and can be given by a powerful writer a wide appeal demanding no effort of taste or understanding from the

[1] In the sense in which a critic of some note, I am told, applies the epithet to Yeats' poetry. I have not read the criticism, but the expression itself is a sufficient condemnation not of the poet, but of the mind — and of its poetic theory — which can use such a word in such a connection.

average man who makes the multitude. A robust muscular and masculine poetry suitable to the Anglo-Saxon genius can no doubt be the result of this kind of aesthesis.

Then, again, there is the old academic conception, truth of the cultivated intelligence, truth of reason, philosophic and scientific truth, or, more pertinent to the matter, truth of a certain selective imagination and taste consonant with reason and strong to give a tempered beauty to just presentation and idea, the classical or in its more formal shape the pseudo-classical aesthetic rule. And in this connection we have many familiar notions chasing each other across the field, such as on one side the compatibility or incompatibility of philosophy and poetry or on the other the definition of poetry as substantially a criticism of life though sèt in an artistic form and a high and serious tone. And associated with this view also we find very commonly a dislike of free imagination and rich colour and the audacities of the fancy and the far-off and shrouded voices and things visionary, subtle and remote. The aesthetic mind varies, follows its own bent, fashions its idea of poetic truth according to its own standard of satisfaction and sets up as a canon and law its own manner of response; there is a multitude of counsels, and each has this common characteristic that it overstresses one side of the norm of poetic creation. For the spirit of poetry is many-sided and flexible in its processes, but firm and invariable in the central law of its nature.

The poetic Truth of which I am speaking has nothing to do with any of these limitations. Truth, as she is seen by us in the end, is an infinite goddess, the very front and face of Infinity and Aditi herself, the illimitable mother of all the gods. This infinite, eternal and eternally creative Truth is no enemy of imagination or even of free fancy, for they too are godheads and can wear one of her faces or one of her expressive masks, while imagination is perhaps the very colour of her creative process, her births and movements are innumerable, her walk supple and many-pathed, and through all divine powers and universal means she can find her way to her own riches, and even error is her illegitimate child and serves, though wantonly, rebelliously and through many a giddy turn, her mother's many-formed self-

adaptive world-wide aim. Now it is something of this infinite Truth which poetry succeeds in giving us with a high power, in its own way of beauty, by its own opulent appointed means. The channel is different from those of her other activities because the power is of another kind. Infinite Truth has her many distinct ways of expressing and finding herself and each way must be kept distinct and the law of one must not be applied to the law of another form of her self-expression; and yet that does not mean that the material of one cannot be used as the material of another, though it must be cast by a different power into a different mould, or that all do not meet on their tops. Truth of poetry is not truth of philosophy or truth of science or truth of religion only, because it is another way of self-expression of infinite Truth so distinct that it appears to give quite another face of things and reveal quite another side of experience. A poet may have a religious creed or subscribe to a system of philosophy or take rank himself like Lucretius or certain Indian poets as a considerable philosophical thinker or succeed like Goethe as a scientist as well as a poetic creator, but the moment he begins to argue out his system intellectually in verse or puts up a dressed-up science straight into metre or else inflicts like Wordsworth or Dryden rhymed sermons or theological disputations on us, he is breaking the law. And even if he does not move so far astray, yet the farther he goes in that direction even within the bounds of his art, he is, though it has often been done with a tolerable, sometimes a considerable or total success, treading on unfirm or at any rate on lower ground. It is difficult for him there to maintain the authentic poetic spirit and pure inspiration.

For this is another cult and worship and the moment he stands before the altar of the Muse, he has to change his robes of mind and serve the rites of a different consecration. He has to bring out into the front that other personality in him who looks with a more richly irised seeing eye and speaks with a more rapturous voice. The others have not normally the same joy of the word because they do not go to its fountainhead, even though each has its own intense delight, as philosophy has its joy of deep and comprehensive understanding and religion its hardly expressible rapture. Still it remains true that the poet may express

precisely the same thing in essence as the philosopher or the man of religion or the man of science, may even give us truth of philosophy, truth of religion, truth of science, provided he transmutes it, abstracts from it something on which the others insist in their own special form and gives us the something more which poetic sight and expression bring. He has to convert it into truth of poetry, and it will be still better for his art if he saw it originally with the poetic insight, the creative, intuitive, directly perceiving and interpreting eye; for then his utterance of truth is likely to be more poetic, authentic, inspired and compelling. This distinction between poetic and other truth, well enough felt but not always well observed, and their fusion and meeting-place are worth dwelling upon; for if poetry is to do all it can for us in the new age, it will include increasingly in its scope much that will be common to it with philosophy, religion and even in a broader sense with science, and yet it will at the same time develop more intensely the special beauty and peculiar power of its own insight and its own manner. The poetry of Tagore is already a new striking instance of what differently seen and followed out might have been a specifically philosophic and religious truth, but here turned into beauty and given a new significance by the transforming power of poetic vision.

The difference which separates these great things of the mind is a difference of the principal, the indispensable instrument we must use and of the appeal to the mind and the whole manner. There is a whole gulf of difference. The philosopher sees in the dry light of the reason, proceeds dispassionately by a severe analysis and abstraction of the intellectual content of the truth, a logical slow close stepping from idea to pure idea, a method difficult and nebulous to the ordinary, hard, arid, impossible to the poetic mind. For the poetic mind sees at once in a flood of coloured light, in a moved experience, in an ecstasy of the coming of the word, in splendours of form, in a spontaneous leaping out of inspired idea upon idea, sparks of the hoof-beats of the white flame horse Dadhikravan galloping up the mountain of the gods or breath and hue of wing striking into wing of the irised broods of Thought flying over earth or up towards heaven. The scientist proceeds also by the intellectual reason but with a microscopic

scrutiny which brings it to bear on an analysis of sensible fact and process and on the correct measure and relation of force and energy as it is seen working on the phenomenal stuff of existence, and joins continually link of fact with fact and coil of process with process till he has under his hand at least in skeleton and tissue the whole connected chain of apparent things. But to the poetic mind this is a dead mechanical thing; for the eye of the poet loves to look on breathing acting life in its perfected synthesis and rhythm, not on the constituent measures, still less on the dissected parts, and his look seizes the soul of wonder of things, not the mechanical miracle. The method of these other powers moves by the rigorously based and patiently self-assured steps of the systematising intelligence and the aspect of Truth which they uncover is a norm measured and cut out from the world of ideas and the world of sense by the eye of the intellectual reason. The brooding philosopher or the discovering scientist cannot indeed do without the aid of a greater power, intuition, but ordinarily he has to bring what that nearer more swiftly luminous faculty gives him into a more deliberate air under the critical light of the intelligence and establish it in the dialectical or analytical way of philosophy and science before the intellect as judge. The mind of the poet sees by intuition and direct perception and brings out what they give him by a formative stress on the total image, and the aspect to which he thrills is the living truth of the form, of the life that inspires it, of the creative thought behind and the supporting movement of the soul and a rhythmic harmony of these things revealed to his delight in their beauty. These fields and paths lie very wide apart, and if any voices from the others reach and claim the ear of the poetic creator, they must change greatly in their form and suit themselves to the warmth and colour of his atmosphere before they can find right of entry into his kingdom.

The meeting is not here at the base, but on the tops. The philosopher's reasoning intelligence discovers only a system of thought symbols and the reality they figure cannot be seized by the intelligence, but needs direct intuition, a living contact, a close experience by identity in our self of knowledge. That is work not for a dialectical, but a bright revelatory thinking, a

luminous body of intuitive thought and spiritual experience which carries us straight into sight, into vision of knowledge. The first effort of philosophy is to know for the sake of pure understanding, but her greater height is to take Truth alive in the spirit and clasp and grow one with her and be consciously within ourselves all the reality we have learned to know. But that is precisely what the poet strives to do in his own way by intuition and imagination, when he labours to bring himself close to and be one by delight with the thing of beauty which awakes his joy. He does not always seize the very self of the thing, but to do so lies within his power. The language of intuitive thinking moves always therefore to an affinity with poetic speech and in the ancient Upanishads it used that commonly as its natural vehicle. "The Spirit went abroad, a thing pure, bright, unwounded by sin, without body or sinew or scar; the Seer, the Thinker, the Self-born who breaks into being all around us, decreed of old all things in their nature from long eternal years." "There sun shines not nor moon nor star nor these lightnings blaze nor this fire; all this world is luminous only with his light." Are we listening, one might ask, to the voice of poetry or philosophy or religion? It is all three voices cast in one, indistinguishable in the eternal choir. And there is too and similarly a pure intuitive science which comes into the field when we enter the ranges of the psychical and spiritual being and can from there work for the discovery of greater secrets of the physical or at least of the psycho-physical world. Indian Yoga founds itself on that greater process, and there, though as in all true science the object is an assured method of personal discovery or living repetition and possession of past discovery and a working out of all the thing found, there is too a high final intention to hold the truth, the light found in our inner power of being and turn it to a power of our psychical self, our spirit, our self of knowledge, and will, our self of love and joy, our self of life and action. This too, though not the same thing in form, is akin to the higher work of poetry when it acts, as the ancients would have had it consciously act, as a purifier and builder of the soul.

The initial function of religion, again, is to make clear the approaches of the soul to the Highest, to God. And it does that

at first by laying on the mind a scheme of religious knowledge or guiding creed and dogma, a taming yoke of moral instruction or purifying law of religious conduct and an awakening call of religious emotion, worship, cult, and so far it is a thing apart in its own field, but in its truly revealing side of intuitive being and experience we find that the essence of religion is an aspiration and adoration of the soul towards the Divine, the Self, the Supreme, the Eternal, the Infinite, and an effort to get close to and live with or in that or to enjoy in love and be like or one with that which we adore. But poetry also on its heights turns to the same things in ourselves and the world, not indeed with religious adoration, but by a regarding closeness and moved oneness in beauty and delight. The characteristic method and first field of all these things is indeed wide apart, but at their end when they come into their deepest spirit, they begin to approach each other and touch; and because of this greater affinity philosophy, psychic and spiritual science and religion are found in the ancient Indian culture woven into one unity, and when they turn to the expression of their most intimate experience, it is always the poetic word which they use.

The steps of Poetry rise to these heights on her own side of the mountain of the gods. Poetry comes into being at the direct call of three powers, inspiration, beauty and delight, and brings them to us and us to them by the magic charm of the inspired rhythmic word. If it can do that at all perfectly, its essential work has been done. It is in its beginning concerned with close and simple natural things and, when it grows more subtle, still it has only to create a power of beauty, move the soul with aesthetic delight and make it feel and see, and its function seems at an end. The kind does not seem to matter, and it has nothing to do primarily or directly, nor at any time in a set formal will taking that as its function and aim, with the presentation of intellectual concepts to the reason or with truth of science or with moral betterment or the working out of religious aspiration, not often even with so near a thing to it as religious emotion and love. But yet because of that greater affinity we see it actually doing what is an equivalent to these things by its own power, in a strange and beautiful mould, with an indirect and yet subtly

direct touch. The poet too brings out sometimes as if by accident, sometimes with a conscious intention the same essential truths as the philosopher or the man of religion. An instance or two will be sufficient to show the approximation and the difference. Religion brings us a command to love our neighbour as ourselves and even our enemies, a thing impossible to our normal nature, a law honoured with the consent of the lips and universally ignored in the observance. A few only seeking perfection in spiritual experience discover in it the natural rule of our real and our highest being, quite possible if we can only get some abiding realisation of that secret oneness which is the foundation of the law of universal love. Then, not seeking this at all but only poetic delight or, if you are so inclined, the criticism of life, we listen to Creon's fierce reproach to Antigone that in her refusal to hate the national enemy she stands unnaturally apart from the mind and heart of all her people and hear suddenly start out the high and proud reply of one lonely and doomed but inflexibly true to her nature, her soul's will under the shadow of a cruel death, "Not to join in hate, but to join in love was I born!" The Athenian poet intended no moral instruction, calls up no religious emotion into his line, is concerned only with a crucial situation in life, the revolt of natural affection against the rigid claim of the law, nation, State. It is a simple cry of the voice of nature and life, yet there breathes behind it a greater thought which is not so far from the truth underlying religious teaching and spiritual experience. The poet, his eyes fixed on life, shows us as if by accident the seed in our normal nature which can grow into the prodigious spiritual truth of universal love. He has to do it in his own way in the mould of poetic beauty and delight, and if we judge by such instances, we shall say that so only he has to do it, to cast as if casually the seed of the beauty and delight of some high mood of life and nature into the mind and pass on leaving it to its work on the soul's reflecting emotional experience, perhaps hardly himself knowing what he has done since he is absorbed in sight and satisfied with the joy of beautiful creation.

And yet actually we find that we cannot quite set these limits or they are not regarded by poets of a high order. The poet

of the Gita has the conscious intention of laying the form of unity on the soul of the hearer and moving him to seek the full experience. "He is the greatest Yogin who, come happiness by that or come grief, sees wherever he turns his eyes all equally in the image of his self." That is something high, grave, couched in the language of the inspired reason, uplifted in the original by a sweet and noble diction and rhythm, religious and philosophical in its strain and yet poetical, because it adds to the fundamental idea the visualising and bringing home of the spiritual experience, the sustaining emotion of the thing felt and a touch of its life. And in the much older Yajur Veda we find breaking out with a different, a more moved and less reflective voice the same truth of experience, the same touch on the soul, "Where I am wounded, make me firm and whole. May all creatures gaze on me with the eye of the Friend, may I gaze on all creatures, may we all gaze on all with the eye of the Friend." There poetry and religious emotion become powerfully fused and one in the aspiration to the heart's perfection and the loving unity of all life. The same uniting alchemy and fusion can take place between truth of philosophy and poetic truth and it is continually found in Indian literature. And so too all the old Rig-veda, all the Vaishnava poetry of North and South had behind it an elaborate Yoga or practised psychical and spiritual science, without which it could not have come into birth in that form. Today much of the poetry of Tagore is the sign of such a Sadhana, a long inheritance of assured spiritual discovery and experience. But what is given whether directly or in symbol or in poetic image is not the formal steps of the Sadhana, but the strongly felt movement and the living outcome, the vision and life and inner experience, the spirit and power and body of sweetness and beauty and delight. The tracing of close and too meticulous bounds round the steps of poetic truth or turning of its wide continental spheres into some limiting magic circle seems therefore to have no real foundation. One may almost though not quite say that there is nothing in infinite Truth that the poet cannot make his material, even if it seems to belong to other provinces of the mind, because all forms of human experience approach each other on their sides of intuition and inner life and vision and all meet in the spirit.

The condition, the limitation is only in the way and manner, — but that means enormously much, — the necessity of the purely poetic way of seeing and the subjection of the thing seen to the law of poetic harmony and moved delight and beauty.

The real distinction therefore is in the primary or essential aim of poetry and in the imperative condition which that aim lays upon the art. Its function is not to teach truth of any particular kind, nor indeed to teach at all, nor to pursue knowledge nor to serve any religious or ethical aim, but to embody beauty in the word and give delight. But at the same time it is, at any rate, part of its highest function to serve the spirit and to illumine and lead through beauty and build by a high informing and revealing delight the soul of man. And its field is all soul experience, its appeal is to the aesthetic response of the soul to all that touches it in self or world; it is one of the high and beautiful powers of our inner and may be a power of our inmost life. All of the infinite Truth of being that can be made part of that life, all that can be made true and beautiful and living to that experience, is poetic truth and a fit subject matter of poetry. But there are always three things which we find present in the utterance and which may be taken as the tests of its measure of power. First there is a force of inspired seeing which gives us the appeal of some reality of self or mind or world, whether in this material field or the other planes of universal existence or of our own being to which imagination is one of the gates, a seeing which brings to us the power of its truth and the beauty of its image and gives it body in the mind by the word. Then there must be the touch, presence, breath of the very life, not the outward only, but the inward life, not an imitation by force of speech or the holding up of a mirror to some external movement or form of Nature, but a creative interpretation which brings home to us as much as may be of what she is or things or we are. And, again, that must carry in it and arouse in us an emotion of its touch on the soul, not the raw emotion of the vital parts, — though that comes in in certain kinds of poetry, — but a spiritual essence of feeling to which our inner strands can vibrate. The intellectual, vital, sensible truths are subordinate things; the breath of poetry should give us along with them, or it may even be apart from them,

some more essential truth of the being of things, their very power which springs in the last resort from something eternal in their heart and secrecy, *hṛdaye guhāyām*, expressive even in the moments and transiences of life. The soul of the poet, and the soul too of the hearer by a response to his word, enters into some direct contact through vision and straight touch and emotion, possesses and feels at its strongest by a union in our own stuff of being, a moved identity. A direct spiritual perception and vision called by us intuition, however helped or prepared by other powers, can alone avail to give us these things. Imagination is only the poet's most powerful aid for this discovery and interpretative creation, fancy a brilliant opener of hidden or out-of-the-way doors. The finding of a new image is itself a joy to the poet and the hearer because it reveals some new significant correspondence or sheds a stronger disclosing light on the thing seen and makes it stand out and live more opulently, luminously, with a greater delight of itself in the mind. The poet having to bring home something, even in things common, which is not obvious to surface experience, avails himself of image, symbol, whatever is just, beautiful, meaningful, suggestive. His fictions are not charming airy nothings, but as with every true artist significant figures and creations which serve to bring very real realities close to the spirit, and their immortality is the immortality of truth.

It is in this sense that we can speak of the sun of poetic truth in whose universal light the poet creates. But all depends on how he sees or uses the light. He can catch this or that sight in an isolated ray, or sometimes lights with it his own personality and kindles a lamp in the house of his own being, or looks through its radiance over the material earth and the forms and first movements of her children or searches with the lustre the surge of the life-soul and its passion and power or discovers the lesser or the greater secrets of the mind and heart of man, or looks upwards through a loftier flood of beams and sees the mid-worlds and heavens and the actions of the gods and the scenes and moments of an immortal life. And sometimes the dark sun of the Vedic image lodging in the blind cave gives him a negative light; a darkness visible revealing darkness immeasurable shows him the gloomy secrets of some city of dreadful Night, shadow of Hades

or lowest Tartarean clot of Hell. The sun of Truth may be still for him below the verge with its light already on the tops and flushing the chill of the snows, ride regal in heaven or gravely sunken or splendid in some setting light. He may stand on the earth or wander winged like the symbolic birds of the Veda still in the terrestrial atmosphere or rise into worlds beyond nearer to the sun and see in a changed light all that is below. And one or two may perhaps be strong to look with unblinded eyes into the source of all light, see that splendour which is its happiest form of all, to which approaching or entering one can say "He am I", discover the identity of his spirit with all things and find in that oneness the word of light which can most powerfully illumine our human utterance.

And where then is the highest range of sight into which the mind of the poet can rise and according to the power of his genius find a deeper and deeper and larger and larger truth of already spoken things and of new things to be spoken and as yet unattempted in prose or rhyme? If some kind of intuitive seeing is at the back of his imaginative vision and the real power that calls down the inspired word, it will be when he can rise to its source and live in the fullness of a highest intuitive mind which is greater than the awakened sense, intuitive life-vision or inspired reason, though it will see all that they can see, that he will get his fullest power, deepest sight, broadest scope. To throw light on the self of things in some power and beauty of it is after all the native aim of poetry, and that can be done entirely by this greatest intuitive mind, for it can bring near or going beyond itself actually reach the vision of identity, that seeing of our whole self and the self of the world which is the last object and the highest spirit of all our mental powers and seekings. The poetry which will accomplish that will be able to see, though in another way than that of philosophy and religion, the self of the Eternal, to know God and his godheads, to know the freedom and immortality which is our divinest aim, to see in the delight of a union in beauty the self of the Infinite, the self of Nature and the whole self of man. But so to see the self is to meet the spirit in everything and the spirit reveals to us the inner and the inmost truth of all that comes from it, life and thought and form and every image and

every power. Much has been done by the art of rhythmic self-expression; much remains to be done. To express these greatest things and to gather up all that man has come and is yet coming to see and know and feel in a new and greater light and give to him the universal spirit and power of beauty and delight behind all this existence is a work that will open to poetry a larger territory and the perfect greatness of its function. A beginning of such an endeavour we have seen to be the noblest strain in recent work; the possibility of a refreshed and long continued vitality and a hardly exhaustible fount of inspiration lies in that direction. The Veda speaks in one of its symbolic hints of the fountain of eternal Truth round which stand the illumined powers of thought and life. There under the eyes of delight and the face of imperishable beauty of the Mother of creation and bride of the eternal Spirit they lead their immortal dance. The poet visits that marvellous source in his superconscient mind and brings to us some strain or some vision of her face and works. To find the way into that circle with the waking self is to be the seer-poet and discover the highest power of the inspired word, the Mantra.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Breath of Greater Life

THE turn of poetry in the age which we have now left behind, was, as was inevitable in a reign of dominant intellectuality, a pre-occupation with reflective thought and therefore with truth, but it was not at its core and in its essence a poetic thought and truth and its expression, however artistically dressed with image and turn or enforced by strong or dexterous phrase, however frequently searching, apt or picturesque, had not often, except in one or two exceptional voices, the most moving and intimate tones of poetry. The poets of the middle nineteenth century in England and America philosophised, moralised or criticised life in energetic and telling or beautiful and attractive or competent and cultured verse; but they did not represent life with success or interpret it with high poetic power or inspired insight and were not stirred and uplifted by any deeply great vision of truth. The reasoning and observing intellect is a most necessary and serviceable instrument, but an excess of reason and intellectuality does not create an atmosphere favourable to moved vision and the uplifting breath of life, and for all its great stir of progress and discovery that age, the carnival of industry and science, gives us who are in search of more living, inner and potent things the impression of a brazen flavour, a heavy air, an inhibition of the greater creative movements, a level spirit of utility and prose. The few poets who strained towards a nearer hold upon life, had to struggle against this atmosphere which weighed upon their mind and clogged their breath. Whitman, striving by stress of thought towards a greater truth of the soul and life, found refuge in a revolutionary breaking out into new anarchic forms, a vindication of freedom of movement which unfortunately at its ordinary levels brings us nearer to the earth and not higher up towards a more illumined air; Swinburne, excited by the lyric fire within him,

had too often to lash himself into a strained violence of passion in order to make a way through the clogging thickness for its rush of sound; Meredith's strains hymning life in a word burdened and packed with thought, are strong and intimate, but difficult and few. And therefore in this epoch of a bursting into new fields and seeking for new finer and bolder impulses of creation, one of the most insistent demands and needs of the human mind, not only in poetry, but in thought itself and in spirit, has been to lessen the tyranny of the reasoning and critical intellect, to return to the power and sincerity of life and come by a greater deepness of the intuition of its soul of meaning. That is the most striking turn of all recent writing of any importance.

This turn is in itself perfectly sound and its direction is to a certain extent on the right line, even if it does not yet altogether see its own end. But the firm grasp on a greater life has not quite come and there are many mistaken directions of this urge. The enlightening power of the poet's creation is vision of truth, its moving power is a passion of beauty and delight, but its sustaining power and that which makes it great and vital is the breath of life. A poetry which is all thought and no life or a thought which does not constantly keep in touch with and refresh itself from the fountains of life, even if it is something more than a strong, elegant or cultured philosophising or moralising in skilled verse, even if it has vision and intellectual beauty, suffers always by lack of fire and body, wants perfection of grasp and does not take full hold on the inner being to seize and uplift as well as sweeten and illumine, as poetry should do and all great poetic writing does. The function of the poet even when he is most absorbed in thinking, is still to bring out not merely the truth and interest, but the beauty and power of the thought, its life and emotion, and not only to do that, not only to make the thought a beautiful and living thing, but to make it one thing with life. But words are ambiguous things and we must see what is the full extent of our meaning when we say, as we may say, that the poet's first concern and his concern always is with living beauty and reality, with life.

As we can say that the truth with which poetry is touched

is an infinite truth, all the truth that lives in the eternal and universal and fills, informs, vivifies, holds and shapes the spirit and form of creation, so we may say too that the life, something of which the poet has to re-embody in the beauty of the word, is all life, the infinite life of the spirit thrown out in its many creations. The poet's business most really, most intimately is not with the outward physical life as it is or the life of the passions and emotions only for its own sake or even with some ideal life imaged by the mind or some combining and new shaping of these things into a form of beauty, but with the life of the soul and with these other things only as its expressive forms. Poetry is the rhythmic voice of life, but it is one of the inner and not one of the surface voices. And the more of this inner truth of his function the poet brings out in his work, the greater is his creation, while it does not seem to matter essentially or not at the first whether his method is professedly subjective or objective, his ostensible power that of a more outward or a more inward spirit or whether it is the individual or the group soul or the soul of Nature or mankind or the eternal and universal spirit in them whose beauty and living reality find expression in his word. This universal truth of poetry is apt to be a little hidden from us by the form and stress of preoccupation with this or that medium of outward soul-expression in the poet's work. Mankind in its development seems to begin with the most outward things and go always more and more inward in order that the race may mount to greater heights of the spirit's life. An early poetry therefore is much occupied with a simple, natural, straightforward, external presentation of life. A primitive epic bard like Homer thinks only by the way and seems to be carried constantly forward in the stream of his strenuous action and to cast out as he goes only so much of surface thought and character and feeling as obviously emerges in a strong and single and natural speech and action. And yet it is the adventures and trials and strength and courage of the soul of man in Odysseus which makes the greatness of the Odyssey and not merely the vivid incident and picturesque surrounding circumstance, and it is the clash of great and strong spirits with the gods leaning down to participate in their struggle which makes the greatness of the Iliad and not merely the action

and stir of battle. The outward form of Shakespeare's work is a surge of emotion and passion and thought and act and event arising out of character at ferment in the yeast of feeling and passion, but it is its living interpretation of the truth and powers of the life-soul of man that are the core of greatness of his work and the rest without it would be a vain brute turmoil. The absence or defect of this greater element makes indeed the immense inferiority of the rest of Elizabethan dramatic work. And whatever the outward character or form of the poetry, the same law holds that poetry is a self-expressive power of the spirit and where the soul of things is most revealed in its very life by the rhythmic word, there is the fullest achievement of the poet's function.

And so long as the poet's medium is the outward life of things or the surface inward life of the passions and emotions, he is moving in a strong and fresh natural element and in an undivided wholeness of the inner and outer man, and his work, given the native power in him, has all the vitality of a thing fully felt and lived. But when intellectual thought has begun its reign in the mind of a more cultured race, the poet's difficulty also begins and increases as that reign becomes more sovereign and imperative. For intellectual thought makes a sort of scission in our being and on one side of the line is the vital urge carrying on life and on the other side the deliberate detached reason trying to observe it, take an intelligent view and extract from it all its thought values. The poet, as a child of the age and one of its voices, is moved to follow this turn. He too observes life, extracts the thought values of his theme, criticises while attempting to create, or even lingers to analyse his living subject, as Browning is constantly doing with the thinking and feeling mind of his characters. But this can only be done without detriment to the vital power of the poetic spirit and the all-seizing effect of its word, when there is a balance maintained between thought and life, the life passing into self-observing thought and the thought returning on the life to shape it in its own vital image. It has been remarked that the just balance between thought and the living word was found by the Greeks and not again. That is perhaps an excessive affirmation, but certainly a just balance between observing thought and life is the distinctive effort of

classical poetry and that endeavour gave it its stamp whether in Athens or Rome or in much of the epic or classical literature of ancient India. But this balance is easily lost, a difficult thing, and, once it has gone, thought begins to overweight life which loses its power and elan and joy, its vigorous natural body and its sincere and satisfied passion and force. We get more of studies of life than of creation, thought about the meaning of character and emotion and event and elaborate description rather than the living presence of these things. Passion, direct feeling, ardent emotion, sincerity of sensuous joy are chilled by the observing eye of the reason and give place to a play of sentiment, — sentiment which is an indulgence of the intelligent observing mind in the aesthesis, the *rasa* of feeling, passion, emotion, sense thinning them away into a subtle, at the end almost unreal fineness. There is then an attempt to get back to the natural fullness of the vital and physical life, but the endeavour fails in sincerity and success because it is impossible; the mind of man having got so far cannot return upon its course, undo what it has made of itself and recover the glad childhood of its early vigorous nature. There is instead of the simplicity of spontaneous life a search after things striking, exaggerated, abnormal, violent, new, in the end a morbid fastening on perversities, on all that is ugly, glaring and coarse on the plea of their greater reality, on exaggerations of vital instinct and sensation, on physical wrynesses and crudities and things unhealthily strange. The thought-mind, losing the natural full-blooded power of the vital being, pores on these things, stimulates the failing blood with them and gives itself an illusion of some forceful sensation of living. This is not the real issue, but the way to exhaustion and decadence.

The demand for life, for action, the tendency to a pragmatic and vitalistic view of things, a certain strenuous and even strident note has been loud enough in recent years. Life, action, vital power are great indispensable things, but to get back to them by thinking less is a way not open to us in this age of time, even if it were a desirable remedy for our disease of over-intellectuality and a mechanised existence. In fact we do not think less than the men of the past generation but much more insistently, with a more packed and teeming thought, with a more eager, more

absorbed hunting of the mind along all the royal high-roads and alluring byways of life. And it could not be otherwise. The very school of poetry which insists on actual life as the subject matter of the poet carries into it with or without conscious intention the straining of the thought mind after something quite other than the obvious sense of the things it tries to force into relief, some significance deeper than what either the observing reason or the normal life-sense gives to our first or our second view of existence. The way out lies not in cessation of thinking and the turn to a strenuous description of life, nor even in a more vitally forceful thinking, but in another kind of thought mind. The filled activity of the thinking mind is as much part of life as that of the body and vital and emotional being, and its growth and predominance are a necessary stage of human progress and man's self-evolution. To go back from it is impossible or, if possible, would be undesirable, a lapse and not a betterment of our spirit. But the full thought-life does not come by the activity of the intellectual reason and its predominance. That is only a step by which we get above the first immersion in the activity and excitement and vigour of the life and the body and give ourselves a first freedom to turn to a greater and higher reach of the fullness of existence. And that higher reach we gain when we get above the limited crude physical mind, above the vital power and its forceful thought and self-vision, above the intellect and its pondering and measuring reason, and tread the illumined realm of an intuitive and spiritual thinking, an intuitive feeling, sense and vision. This is not that vital intuition which is sometimes confused with a much broader, loftier, vaster and more seeing power, but the high original power itself, a supra-intellectual and spiritual intuition. The all-informing spirit, when found in all its fullness, heals the scission between thought and life, the need of a just balance between them disappears, instead there begins a new and luminous and joyful fusion and oneness. The spirit gives us not only a greater light of truth and vision, but the breath of a greater living; for the spirit is not only the self of our consciousness and knowledge, but the great self of life. To find our self and the self of things is not to go through a rarefied ether of thought into Nirvana, but to discover the

whole greatest integral power of our complete existence.

This need is the sufficient reason for attaching the greatest importance to those poets in whom there is the double seeking of this twofold power, the truth and reality of the eternal self and spirit in man and things and the insistence on life. All the most significant and vital work in recent poetry has borne this stamp; the rest is of the hour, but this is of the future. It is the highest note of Whitman, widening, as in one who seeks and sees much but has not fully found, a great pioneer poetry, an opening of a new view rather than a living in its accomplished fullness; it is constantly repeated from the earth side in Meredith, comes down from the spiritual side in all A.E.'s work, moves between earth and the life of the worlds behind in Yeats' subtle rhythmic voices of vision and beauty, echoes with a large fullness in Carpenter. The poetry of Tagore owes its sudden and universal success to this advantage that he gives us more of this discovery and fusion for which the mind of our age is in quest than any other creative writer of the time. His work is a constant music of the overpassing of the borders, a chant-filled realm in which the subtle sounds and lights of the truth of the spirit give new meanings to the finer subtleties of life. The objection has been made that this poetry is too subtle and remote and goes away from the broad, near, present and vital actualities of existence. Yeats is considered by some a poet of Celtic romance and nothing more, Tagore accused in his own country of an unsubstantial poetic philosophising, a lack of actuality, reality of touch and force of vital insistence. But this is to mistake the work of this poetry and to mistake too in a great measure the sense of life as it must reveal itself to the greatening mind of humanity now that it is growing in world-knowledge and towards self-knowledge. These poets have not indeed done all that has to be done or given the complete poetic synthesis and fusion. Their work has been to create a new and deeper manner of seeing life, to build bridges of visioned light and rhythm between the infinite and eternal and the mind and soul and life of man. The future poetry has not to stay in their achievement, but to step from these first fields into new and yet greater ranges, to fathom all the depths yet unplumbed, to complete what has been left half done or not yet

done, to bring all it can of the power of man's greater self and the universal spirit into the broadest all of life. That cannot and will not be achieved in its fullness all at once, but to make a foundation of this new infinite range of poetic vision and creation is work enough to give greatness to a whole age.

The demand for activity and realism or for a direct, exact and forceful presentation of life in poetry proceeds upon a false sense of what poetry gives or can give us. All the highest activities of the mind of man deal with things other than the crude actuality or the direct appearance or the first rough appeal of existence. A critical or a scientific thought may attempt to give an account of the actuality as it really is, though even to do that they have to go far behind its frontage and make a mental reconstruction and surprising change in its appearance. But the creative powers cannot stop there, but have to make new things for us as well as to make existing things new to the mind and eye. It is no real portion of the function of art to cut out palpitating pieces from life and present them raw and smoking or well-cooked for the aesthetic digestion. For in the first place all art has to give us beauty and the crude actuality of life is not often beautiful, and in the second place poetry has to give us a deeper reality of things and the outsides and surface faces of life are only a part of its reality and do not take us either very deep or very far. Moreover, the poet's greatest work is to open to us new realms of vision, new realms of being, our own and the world's, and he does this even when he is dealing with actual things. Homer with all his epic vigour of outward presentation does not show us the heroes and deeds before Troy in their actuality as they really were to the normal vision of men, but much rather as they were or might have been to the vision of the gods. Shakespeare's greatness lies not in his reproduction of actual human events or men as they appear to us buttoned and cloaked in life, — others of his time could have done that as well, if with less radiant force of genius, yet with more of the realistic crude colour or humdrum drab of daily truth, — but in his bringing out in his characters and themes of things essential, intimate, eternal, universal in man and Nature and Fate on which the outward features are borne as fringe and robe and which belong to all

times, but are least obvious to the moment's experience: when we do see them, life presents to us another face and becomes something deeper than its actual present mask. That is why the poet oftenest instinctively prefers to go away from the obsession of a petty actuality, from the realism of the prose of life to his inner creative self or an imaginative background of the past or the lucent air of myth or dream or on into a greater outlook on the future. Poetry may indeed deal with the present living scene, at some peril, or even with the social or other questions and problems of the day, — a task which is now often laid on the creative mind, as if that were its proper work; but it does that successfully only when it makes as little as possible of what belongs to the moment and time and the surface and brings out their roots of universal or eternal interest or their suggestion of great and deep things. What the poet borrows from the moment, is the most perishable part of his work and lives at all only by being subordinated and put into intimate relation with less transient realities. And this is so because it is the eternal increasing soul of man and the intimate self of things and their more abiding and significant forms which are the real object of his vision.

The poetry of the future can least afford to chain itself to the outward actualities which we too often mistake for the whole of life, because it will be the voice of a human mind which is pressing more and more towards the very self of the self of things, the very spirit of which the soul of man is a living power and to a vision of unity and totality which is bound to take note of all that lies behind our apparent material life. What man sees and experiences of God and himself and his race and Nature and the spiritual, mental, psychic and material worlds in which he moves, his backlook upon the past, his sweep of vision over the present, his eye of aspiration and prophecy cast towards the future, his passion of self-finding and self-exceeding, his reach beyond the three times to the eternal and immutable, this is his real life. Poetry in the past wrote much of the godheads and powers behind existence, but in the mask of legends and myths, sometimes of God, but not often with a living experience, oftener in the set forms taught by religions and churches and without true beauty and knowledge. But now the mind of man is open-

ing more largely to the deepest truth of the Divine, the Self, the Spirit, the eternal Presence not separate and distant, but near us, around us and in us, the Spirit in the world, the greater Self in man and his kind, the Spirit in all that is and lives, the Godhead, the Existence, the Power, the Beauty, the eternal Delight that broods over all, supports all and manifests itself in every turn of creation. A poetry which lives in this vision must give us quite a new presentation and interpretation of life; for of itself and at the first touch this seeing reconstructs and re-images the world for us and gives us a greater sense and a vaster, subtler and profounder form of our existence. The real faces of the gods are growing more apparent to the eye of the mind, though not yet again intimate with our life, and the forms of legend and symbol and myth must open to other and deeper meanings, as already they have begun to do, and come in changed and vital again into poetry to interpret the realities behind the veil. Nature wears already to our eye a greater and more transparent robe of her divine and her animal and her terrestrial and cosmic life and a deeper poetry of Nature than has yet been written is one of the certain potentialities of the future. The material realm too cannot for very much longer be our sole or separate world of experience, for the partitions which divide it from psychic and other kingdoms behind it are wearing thin and voices and presences are beginning to break through and reveal their impact on our world. This too must widen our conception of life and make a new world and atmosphere for poetry which may justify as perhaps never before the poet's refusal to regard as unreal what to the normal mind was only romance, illusion or dream. A larger field of being made more real to man's experience will be the realm of the future poetry.

These things are often given an appearance of remoteness, of withdrawal from the actuality of life, because to discover them the mind had at first to draw away from the insistent outward preoccupation and live as if in a separate world. The seeker of the Self and Spirit, the God-lover, tended to become the cloistered monk, the ascetic, the mystic, the eremite and to set the spiritual apart from and against the material life. The lover of Nature went away from the noise of man and daily things to

commune with her largeness and peace. The gods were found more in the lights of solitude than in the thoughts and actions of men. The seer of other worlds lived surrounded by the voices and faces of supernature. And this was legitimate seclusion, for these are provinces and realms and presences and one has often to wander apart in them or live secluded with them to know their nearest intimacies. The spirit is real in itself even apart from the world, the gods have their own home beyond our sky and air, Nature her own self-absorbed life and supernature its brilliant curtains and its dim mysterious fences. None of these things are unreal, and if the supernatural as handled by older poets seemed often mere legend, fancy and romance, it was because it was seen from a distance by the imagination, not lived in by the soul and in its spirit, as is done by the true seer and poet of this supernature or other-nature. And all these things, because they have their own reality, have their life and a poetry which makes them its subject can be as vital, as powerful, as true as the song which makes beautiful the physical life and normal passions and emotions of men and the objects of our bodily sense-experience.

But still all life is one and a new human mind moves towards the realisation of its totality and oneness. The poetry which voices the oneness and totality of our being and Nature and the worlds and God, will not make the actuality of our earthly life less but more real and rich and full and wide and living to men. To know other countries is not to belittle but enlarge our own country and help it to a greater power of its own being, and to know the other countries of the soul is to widen our bounds and make more opulent and beautiful the earth on which we live. To bring the gods into our life is to raise it to its own diviner powers. To live in close and abiding intimacy with Nature and the spirit in her is to free our daily living from its prison of narrow preoccupation with the immediate moment and act and to give the moment the inspiration of all Time and the background of eternity and the daily act the foundation of an eternal peace and the large momentum of the universal Power. To bring God into life, the sense of the self in us into all our personality and becoming, the powers and vistas of the Infinite into our mental and material existence, the oneness of the self in all into our expe-

rience and feelings and relations of heart and mind with all that is around us is to help to divinise our actual being and life, to force down its fences of division and blindness and unveil the human godhead that individual man and his race can become if they will and lead us to our most vital perfection. This is what a future poetry may do for us in the way and measure in which poetry can do these things, by vision, by the power of the word, by the attraction of the beauty and delight of what it shows us. What philosophy or other mental brooding makes precise or full to our thought, poetry can by its creative power, imaging force and appeal to the emotions make living to the soul and heart. This poetry will present to us indeed in forms of power and beauty all the actual life of man, his wonderful and fruitful past, his living and striving present, his yet more living aspiration and hope of the future, but will present it more seeingly as the life of the vast self and spirit within the race and the veiled divinity in the individual, as an act of the power and delight of universal being, in the greatness of an eternal manifestation, in the presence and intimacy of Nature, in harmony with the beauty and wonder of the realms that stretch out beyond earth and its life, in the march to godhead and the significances of immortality, in the ever clearer letters and symbols of the self-revealing mystery and not only in its first crude and incomplete actualities; these actualities will themselves be treated with a firmer and finer vision, find their own greater meaning and become to our sight thread of the fine tissue and web of the cosmic work of the Spirit. This poetry will be the voice and rhythmic utterance of our greater, our total, our infinite existence, and will give us the strong and infinite sense, the spiritual and vital joy, the exalting power of a greater breath of life.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Soul of Poetic Delight and Beauty

THE light of truth, the breath of life, great and potent things though they are, are insufficient to give poetry the touch of immortality and perfection, even a little of which is enough to carry it safe through the ages, unless the soul and form of delight and beauty take possession of the seeing of truth and give immortality to the breath and body of the life. Delight is the soul of existence, beauty the intense impression, the concentrated form of delight; and these two fundamental things tend to be one for the mind of the artist and the poet, though they are often enough separated in our cruder vital and mental experience. These twin powers meet, make a consonance of the perfect harmony of his work and are the first deities he serves, all the others only group themselves about them, strive to be admitted to the soul of delight and the privilege of beauty and have to make themselves acceptable to them before they can mix with them in a compelling and attracting oneness. For the poet the moon of beauty and delight is a greater godhead even than the sun of truth or the breath of life, as in the symbolic image of the Vedic moon-god Soma, whose plant of intoxication has to be gathered on lonely mountain heights in the moonlight and whose purified juice and essence is the sacred wine and nectar of sweetness, *rasa*, *madhu*, *amṛta*, without which the gods themselves could not be immortal. A lightest trifle, if it manages to get itself saturated with this sweetness of poetic delight and beauty, will be preserved for its sake, while the highest strenuous labour of the thinking mind and the most forceful assertion of the life-power, if deprived of or deficient in this subtlest immortalising essence, may carry on for a time, but soon drops, grows old, sinks into the gulf of oblivion or has at most a lifeless survival and belongs to the dead history of literature, not to its eternal present. But beauty and delight, whatever form it takes, — for we may

speak here of the two as one, — has an unaging youth, an eternal moment, an immortal presence.

The imperative instinct for beauty and the aesthetic demand which set that among the first needs and was not satisfied with anything else if this were neglected or put second in importance, are now things, that are almost lost, nowhere general to the human mind, but once they were the sign of the poetic and artistic peoples and the great ages of art and poetry and supreme creation. The ancient communities who created those fine many-sided cultures which still remain the fountain-head of all our evolving civilisation, had the instinct for beauty, the aesthetic turn of the temperament and formation of the mind almost, it would seem, from the beginning, planted in their spirit and their blood, colouring their outlook so that even before they got the developed intellectual consciousness of it, they created instinctively in the spirit and form of beauty and that is quite half the secret of the compelling and attractive power of the antique cultures. The earliest surviving poetry of ancient India was philosophical and religious, the Veda, the Upanishads, and our modern notions tend to divorce these things from the instinct of delight and beauty, to separate the religious and the philosophic from the aesthetic sense; but the miracle of these antique writings is their perfect union of beauty and power and truth, the word of truth coming out spontaneously as a word of beauty, the revealed utterance of that universal spirit who is described in the Upanishads as the eater of the honey of sweetness, *madhvadam puruṣam*; and this high achievement was not surprising in these ancient deep-thinking men who discovered the profound truth that all existence derives from and lives by the bliss of the eternal spirit, in the power of a universal delight, Ananda. The idea of beauty, the spontaneous satisfaction in it, the worship of it as in itself something divine, became more intellectually conscious afterwards, was a dominant strain of the later Indian mind and got to its richest outward colour and sensuous passion in the work of the classical writers, while the expression of the spiritual through the aesthetic sense is the constant sense of Indian art, as it is also the inspiring motive of a great part of the later religion and poetry. Japan and China, more especially perhaps

southern China, for the north has been weighted by a tendency to a more external and formal idea of measure and harmony, had in a different way this fusion of the spiritual and aesthetic mind and it is a distinguishing stamp of their art and culture. The Persian had a sort of sensuous magic of the transforming aesthesis born of psychic delight and vision. Ancient Greece did all its work of founding European civilisation by a union of a subtle and active intelligence with a fine aesthetic spirit and worship of beauty. The Celtic nations again seem always to have had by nature a psychic delicacy and subtlety united with an instinctive turn for imaginative beauty to which we surely owe much of the finer strain in English literature. But there these spontaneous miracles of fusion end and in the mind of later peoples who come in and take possession with a less innate, a more derivative culture, the sense of beauty works with a certain effort and is clogged by many heavier elements which are in conflict with and prevent the sureness of the aesthetic perception. There is in their cruder temperament and intelligence a barbaric strain which worships rudely the power and energy of life and is not at home with the delight of beauty, an ethical and puritanic strain which looks askance at art and beauty and pleasure, a heavy scholastic or a dry scientific intellectual strain which follows after truth with a conscientious and industrious diligence, but without vision and fine aesthesis. And the modern mind, inheritor of all this past, is a divided and complex mind which strives at its best to get back at the old thing on a larger scale and realise some oneness of its many strands of experience, but has not yet found the right meeting-place; and it is besides still labouring under the disadvantage of its aberration into a mechanical, economical, materialistic, utilitarian civilisation from which it cannot get free, though it is struggling to shake off that dullest side of it for which a naked and unashamed riot of ugliness could be indulged in without any prickings of the spiritual conscience but rather with a smug self-righteousness in the hideous, the vulgar and the ignoble. The day when we get back to the ancient worship of delight and beauty, will be our day of salvation; for without these things there can be neither an assured nobility and sweetness in poetry and art, nor a satisfied dignity

and fullness of life nor a harmonious perfection of the spirit.

An insufficiently profound and intimate perception of the real deep soul of poetic delight and beauty is the first obstacle to a recovery of the old strong soundness of the aesthetic sense and spontaneity of the aesthetic impulse. This comes from the peculiar character of the modern intelligence and its want of harmony between our internal selves and our external experience; there is little spontaneous joy of their meeting, an active labour to assimilate, but no happy, deep or satisfied possession either of self or life, a continual seeking but no repose in the thing found, a feverish restlessness without home and abiding-place. The spirit of man can make its home in either one of two things, the depths of our self arrived at through vision of self-knowledge, through power of self-mastery or through ecstasy, or a profound, a glad and satisfied acceptance of the truth, the delight and beauty of the world and life, of existence and experience. And either of these things can help too to bring in the other, — possess the inner self and life can become happy and illumined by a full sense of its hidden significance, or get hold of the complete delight and beauty of life and the world and you have then only a thin layer of shining mist to break through to get also at the self and spirit behind it, the eater of the honey of sweetness who is seated in the soul of man and extends himself through the universe. The ancient peoples had in a very large measure this foundation of satisfaction and harmony, took the greatest interest in the reality of the inner self, as once in India and China, the Atman, the Tao, and life and the world as its field of expression and self-experience or, like the Greeks, felt at once the naturalness and profundity of human existence and gave to it an immediate and subtle aesthetic response. The modern mind, on the contrary, looks little into our deepest self, takes little interest in sounding that depth and has hardly any confidence in its reality, and concentrates not on the truth and delight and beauty of life, but upon the stress of its results and circumstances, which in themselves have only an incidental and no satisfying and harmonious meaning, and on the agitating or attractive turmoil of the mind excited by their contact or their siege.[1]

[1] This is the result perhaps of an ill-assimilated Christian influence intervening on the

This difference results in a fundamental difference of aesthesis. The pure aesthetic spirit ought to be left free, trusted in, made master of its own action and creation and it will then create with greatness and beauty, in a calm and satisfied ecstasy, and yet safely harmonise its action with the other spiritual powers of our existence, the need of the life-soul, the insistent seeking of the thought-mind, the demand of the active will and the senses. But we now make the aesthetic sense and intelligence a servant of these other powers; it is condemned to serve first and foremost our external interest in life or our interest in thought or in troubled personality or the demand of the senses or passions and bidden to make them beautiful or vivid to us by an active aesthetic cerebration and artistic manufacture of the word or a supply of carefully apt or beautiful forms and measures. The secondary things are put in the first rank, the primary, the one thing needful has to get in as best it can to give some firm base to the creation. This aesthesis aided by the vast curiosity of the modern intelligence has done some great and much interesting work, but it arrives with difficulty at the readily fused harmonies and assured stamp of the perfect way of spiritual creation.

There is a profound intrinsic delight and beauty in all things and behind all experience whatever face it wears to the surface mind, which makes it to a spirit housed within us other than its first appearance, makes it, that is to say, no longer a thing exciting mental interest, pain, pleasure, but rather a revelation of the truth and power and delight of being and our feeling of it a form of the universal Ananda of the old philosophical thinkers, the calm yet moved ecstasy with which the spirit of existence regards itself and its creation. This deeper spiritual feeling, this Ananda is the fountain of poetic delight and beauty. It springs from a supreme essence of experience, a supreme aesthesis which is in its own nature spiritual, impersonal, independent of the personal reactions and passions of the mind, and that is why the poet is able to transmute pain and sorrow and the most tragic and terrible and ugly things into forms of poetic beauty, because

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external vitalism of the Teutonic temperament and on Latin intellectualism, and bringing in new needs and experiences which disturbed the mind and emotions without possessing the soul with peace or arriving at a harmony of spiritual emotion and spiritual self-knowledge.

of this impersonal joy of the spirit in all experience, whatever its nature. And as, therefore, the subject of the poet is all that he can feel of the infinite life of the spirit that creates in existence and all that he can seize of the infinite truth of God and Nature and our own and the world's being, so too what he brings out from his subjects is all that he can pour into speech of his vision of eternal and universal beauty, all that he can express of the soul's universal delight in existence. That is what he has to reveal, and to make others share in, to render more expressive and firmly present to them what experience they have of it and help the race towards its greater fullness in the soul of man and embodiment in our mind and life. This Ananda is not the pleasure of a mood or a sentiment or the fine aesthetic indulgence of the sense in the attraction of a form, superficial results and incidents which are often mistaken for that much deeper and greater thing by the minor poetic faculty, the lesser artistic mind, but the enduring delight which, as the ancient idea justly perceived, is the essence of spirit and being and the beauty which all things assume when the spirit lives in the pure joy of creation and experience.

The universality of this delight and beauty does not mean that we can take whatever we will straight from life and experience, just as it is, and by making it precise and vivid through word and image or dressing it in imaginative colour achieve poetic effect and beauty. That is the theory by which a great deal of our modern endeavour at poetry seems to be guided, as it is the ruling method of inferior poets and the mark too of the lesser or unsuccessful or only partially successful work of greater writers. The error made is to confuse the sources of poetic delight and beauty with the more superficial interest, pain and pleasure which the normal mind takes in the first untransmuted appeal of thought and life and feeling. That in its first crude form or a little deepened by sensitiveness of emotion and a reflective intelligence is the response to existence of the natural mind, the only instrument of the majority, and what it is apt to expect from the poet is that this is what he too shall give to the world and only think it more profoundly, feel it more sensitively, live it with a greater excitement and find for it beauty of word

and attraction of rhythm. The poet has in him a double personality, a double instrument of his response to life and existence. There is in him the normal man absorbed in mere living who thinks and feels and acts like others, and there is the seer of things, the supernormal man, the super-soul or delight-soul in touch with the impersonal and eternal fountains of joy and beauty who creates from that source and transmutes by its alchemy all experience into a form of the spirit's Ananda. It is easy for him, if the demand of his genius is not constant or if he is not held back by a natural fineness of the poetic conscience, to subject this deeper and greater power to the lower and general demand and put it at the service of his superficial mental experience. He has then to rely on the charm and beauty of word and form to save the externality of his substance. But the genius in him when he is faithful to it, knows that this is not his high way of perfection nor the thing his spirit gave him to do; it is a spiritual transmutation of the substance got by sinking the mental and vital interests in a deeper soul experience which brings the inevitable word and the supreme form and the unanalysable rhythm. The poet is then something more than a maker of beautiful word and phrase, a favoured child of the fancy and imagination, a careful fashioner of idea and utterance or an effective poetic thinker, moralist, dramatist or story-teller; he becomes a spokesman of the eternal spirit of beauty and delight and shares that highest creative and self-expressive rapture which is close to the original ecstasy that made existence, the divine Ananda.

This rapture, the Platonic divine possession and enthusiasm, is born not of mental, but of soul experience, and the more the surface mind gets into the way, the more this divine passion is weakened and diluted by a less potent spirit. The surface mind is powerfully attracted by the stir of the outward passion and excitement, the stress of immediate thought, life and action, hastens to embody it in speech or in deed and has no leisure to transmute life into those greater abiding values of which the soul in its depths is alone capable. But the higher faculties are given us as keys to a deeper experience; the seer, the poet, the artist, the children of the spirit's light and intuition are only true to

themselves when they live in the depths of the soul, refuse to be hurried away by the surface call of mind and life and wait rather for their own greater voices. The poetry which insists on an external effectiveness, on immediate thought and life and experience, may seize very powerfully the ear of the moment, but is singularly frail in its affectation of power and even if it has strength of body, is hollow and null inside; it fails because it is concerned with immediately vital things perhaps, but not with that which is immortal. That is just why patriotic poetry, war poetry or poetry of the occasion and the moment are so difficult to write greatly and, although it would seem that these things are among the most dynamic and should move most easily to powerful utterance, are oftenest poor in poetic substance and inferior in value. For life they may be dynamic, but they are not so readily dynamic for art and poetry, and precisely because the vital interest, the life attraction is so strong that it is difficult to draw back from the external to the spiritual delight and the spiritual significance. A great poet may do it sometimes, because the constant instinct of his genius is to look beyond the surface and the moment to that which is universal and eternal behind the personal experience and the occasion is only for him an excuse for its utterance. The drama of action and mere passion is for the same reason short-lived in its gusto of vitality, fades in a century or less into a lifeless mask, while the drama of the soul abides, because it gets near to the subtler eternal element, the soul's essential aesthesis, the spirit's delight in self-creation and experience. Philosophical and religious poetry too fails so often by a neglect of the same fine distinction, because the interest of the thought pursued by the intellectual activity, the interest of the mind in its surface religious ideas and feelings get the upper hand and do not consent to sink themselves in the spiritual emotion of the seeing of truth and the abiding spiritual experience. The mental and vital interest, pleasure, pain of thought, life, action is not the source of poetic delight and beauty and can be turned into that deeper thing only when they have sunk into the soul and been transmuted in the soul's radiant memory into spiritual experience, — that perhaps was what the Greeks meant when they made Mnemosyne the eternal mother of the muses; the passions can only change into

poetic matter when they have been spiritualised in the same bright sources and have undergone the purification, the *katharsis*, spoken of by the Greek critic; the life values are only poetic when they have come out heightened and changed into soul values. The poetic delight and beauty are born of a deeper rapture and not of the surface mind's excited interest and enjoyment of life and existence.

The ancient Indian critics defined the essence of poetry as *rasa* and by that word they meant a concentrated taste, a spiritual essence of emotion, an essential aesthesis, the soul's pleasure in the pure and perfect sources of feeling. The memory of the soul that takes in, broods over and transmutes the mind's thought, feeling and experience, is a large part of the process which comes by this aesthesis, but it is not quite the whole thing; it is rather only a common way by which we get at something that stands behind, the spiritual being in us which has the secret of the universal delight and the eternal beauty of existence. That which we call genius works or comes out from something deep within which calls down the word, the vision, the light and power from a level above the normal mind and it is the sense of the inrush from above which makes the rapture and the enthusiasm of illumination and inspiration. That source, when we know better the secrets of our being, turns out to be the spiritual self with its diviner consciousness and knowledge, happier fountains of power, inalienable delight of existence. The cultures that were able directly or indirectly to feel the joy of this self and spirit, got into the very strain of their aesthesis the touch of its delight, its Ananda, and this touch was the secret of the generalised instinct for beauty which has been denied to a later mind limited by intellectual activity, practical utility and the externals of life: we have to go for it to exceptional individuals gifted with a finer strain, but the widespread aesthetic instinct has been lost and has yet to be recovered for the common mind and recognised once more as a part of human perfection as indispensable as intellectual knowledge and at least as necessary to happiness as vital well-being. But this Ananda, this delight, this aesthesis which is the soul of poetic beauty works like other things, like poetic truth or the poetic breath of life on different levels, in different pro-

vinces of its actions with the same law that we have observed in the rest, of the emergence of a richer and profounder face of itself the more it gets inward and upward from the less to the more occult powers of its revelation. This finer soul of delight throws itself out on the physical mind and being, takes up its experiences and turns them by its own innate and peculiar power into things of beauty, fuses into itself the experiences of the life soul and transmutes to beauty their power and passion in the surge of its poetic ecstasy, takes up all life and form into the reflective thought-mind and changes them in the beauty and rapture of thought discovering and embodying new values of soul and Nature and existence. And in all its working there is felt its own essence of an intuitive delight which acts in these moulds and gets into them whatever it can of its own intimate and eternal delight values. But when that intuitive mind self-finding, self-seeing, self-creating in a higher power of light and vision than is possible on the intellectual or other levels gets out into full play, and now there is some sign of this emergence, then we come nearer to the most potent sources of universal and eternal delight and beauty, nearer to its full and wide seeing, and its all-embracing rapture. This inner mind is the first native power of the self and spirit dropping its lower veils and the very life and aesthesis of the spirit in its creation is a life of self-experiencing spiritual delight and a luminous Ananda.

The beauty and delight of such a greater intuitive inspiration, a poetry of this spiritual Ananda making all existence luminous and wonderful and beautiful to us may be one of the gifts of the future. It is that of which we stand in need and of which there is some promise in the highest strains that we have now begun to hear. This change will mean that poetry may resume on a larger scale, with a wider and more shining vision the greater effect it once had on the life of the race in the noble antique cultures. At one time poetry was a revelation to the race of the life of the gods and man and the meaning of the world and the beauty and power of existence and through its vision and joy and the height and clarity of its purpose it became creative of the life of the people. Ananda, the joy of the spirit in itself carrying in it a revelation of the powers of its conscious being, was to the

ancient Indian idea the creative principle, and ancient poetry did thus creatively reveal to the people its soul and its possibilities by forms of beauty and suggestions of power in a way we have to a great extent lost by our later pettier use of this always great art and medium. One might almost say that ancient India was created by the Veda and Upanishads and that the visions of inspired seers made a people. That sublime poetry with its revelation of godhead and the joy and power of life and truth and immortality or its revelation of the secrets of the self and the powers of its manifestation in man and the universe and of man's return to self-knowledge got into the very blood and mind and life of the race and made itself the fountain-head of all that incessant urge to spirituality which has been its distinguishing gift and cultural motive. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana revealing to it in forms of noble beauty and grandiose or beautiful or telling types of character the joy of its forms of life, the significance of its spiritual, ethical and aesthetic ideals, the powers and dangers of the human soul, its godheads and its titanisms have played a great and well-recognised formative part second only to religion and the stress of religio-social training in the life of the Indian peoples. And even later the religious poetry of the Vaishnavas, Shaivas, Shaktas has entered powerfully into the life of the nation and helped to shape its temperament and soul-type. The effect of the Homeric poems in Greece, the intimate connection of poetry and art with the public life of Athens sprang from a similar but less steep height of poetic and artistic motive. The epic poems revealed the Hellenic people to itself in the lucid and clear nobility and beauty of an uplifting of life and an aesthetic sense of the humanity and divinity of man; the later art and poetry interpreted to Athens her religious ideas, her thought, her aesthetic instincts, the soul of grandeur and beauty of her culture.

And in all these instances, as in others like the art and poetry of Japan and of China, a more or less profoundly intuitive creation from the depths and expression through poetic delight of the soul of a people has been the secret of this effect and this power of creation or influence. But in other times and places poetry has been more a servant of aesthetic pleasure than a creative

master of life and great spiritual agent; when it is at all great, it cannot fail to be that to a certain extent, but it has not so acted as a whole, centrally, in the same large and effective way or with the same high conscience of its function. It has leaned too much on the surface or external interests of life for the pleasure of the intellect and imagination and failed too much to create life from within by a deeper delight in the power of vision of the soul and spirit. The high energy of English poetry has done great and interesting things; it has portrayed life with charm and poetic interest in Chaucer, made thought and character and action and passion wonderful to the life soul in us in Shakespeare, seen and spoken with nobility and grandeur of vision and voice in Milton, intellectualised vigorous or pointed commonplace in Pope and Dryden, played with elegance and beauty on the lesser strings with the Victorians or cast out here and there a profounder strain of thought or more passionate and aspiring voice, and if the most spiritual strains have been few, yet it has dreamed in light in Shelley or drawn close in Wordsworth to the soul in Nature. And it may seem hard to say in the face of all this splendour and vigour and glow and beauty and of the undeniable cultural influence, that something was too often lacking which would have made the power of this poetry more central and intimate and a greater direct force on the life of the people, and yet this is, I think, true in spite of exceptions, not only here, but of almost all the later European literature. To get back to a profounder centre, to create from within in a more universal power of the spirit and its vision and delight of existence will supply the missing element and make poetry once again young and mighty and creative and its word deeply effective on life by the power of a greater Ananda.

The mind of man, a little weary now of the superficial pleasure of the life and intellect, demands, obscurely still, not yet perceiving what will satisfy it, a poetry of the joy of self, of the deeper beauty and delight of existence. A merely cultured poetry fair in form and word and playing on the surface strings of mind and emotion will not serve its purpose. The human mind is opening to an unprecedented largeness of vision of the greatness of the worlds, the wonder of life, the self of man, the mystery of

the spirit in him and the universe. The future poetry must seek in that vision its inspiration, and the greater its universality of joy in existence, the more it seeks through intuitive sight and aesthesis the deepest fountains of poetic delight and beauty, the more it will become powerfully creative of a greater life for the race. The modern poet is perfectly right in a way in breaking down in whatever direction the bounds erected by the singers of the past around their magic palace and its grounds; he must claim all things in heaven or earth or beyond for his portion: but that care for a fine poetic beauty and delight which they safeguarded by excluding all or most that did not readily obey its law or turn to fair material of poetic shaping, he must preserve as jealously and satisfy by steeping all that he finds in his wider field in that profoundest vision which delivers out of each thing its spiritual Ananda, the secret of truth and beauty in it for which it was created; it is in the sense of that spiritual joy of vision, and not in any lower sensuous, intellectual or imaginative seeing, that Keats' phrase becomes true for the poet, beauty that is truth, truth that is beauty, and this all that we need to know as the law of our aesthetic knowledge. He is right too in wishing to make poetry more intimately one with life, but again in this sense only, in going back to those creative fountains of the spirit's Ananda from which life is seen and reshaped by the vision that springs from a moved identity, — the inmost source of the authentic poet vision. The beauty and delight of all physical things illumined by the wonder of the secret spiritual self that is the inhabitant and self-sculptor of form, the beauty and delight of the thousand-coloured, many-crested million-waved miracle of life made a hundred times more profoundly meaningful by the greatness and the sweetness and attracting poignancy of the self-creating inmost soul which makes of life its epic and its drama and its lyric, the beauty and delight of the spirit in thought, the seer, the thinker, the interpreter of his own creation and being who broods over all he is and does in man and the world and constantly re-sees and shapes it new by the stress and power of his thinking, this will be the substance of the greater poetry that has yet to be written. And that can be discovered only if and so far as the soul of man looks or feels beyond even these things

and sees and voices the eternal and knows its godheads and gets to some close inward touch of the infinite ecstasy which is the source of the universal delight and beauty. For the nearer we get to the absolute Ananda, the greater becomes our joy in man and the universe and the receptive and creative spiritual emotion which needs for its voice the moved tones of poetic speech.

CHAPTER XXIX

The Power of the Spirit

A POETRY born direct from and full of the power of the spirit and therefore a largest and a deepest self-expression of the soul and mind of the race is that for which we are seeking and of which the more profound tendencies of the creative mind seem to be in travail. This poetry will be a voice of eternal things raising to a new significance and to a great satisfied joy in experience the events and emotions and transiences of life which will then be seen and sung as the succession of signs, the changing of the steps of an eternal manifestation; it will be an expression of the very self of man and the self of things and the self of Nature; it will be a creative and interpretative revelation of the infinite truth of existence and of the universal delight and beauty and of a greater spiritualised vision and power of life. This can only come if the mind of the race takes actually the step over which it is now hesitating and passes from the satisfaction of the liberated intellect which has been its preoccupation for the last two centuries to the pursuit of the realisation of the larger self, from the scrutiny of the things that explain to the experience of the things that reveal, the truths of the spirit. The progress of the mind of humanity takes place by a constant enlarging attended with a constant transmutation of its experience which is reflected in its ways of self-expression, and the tendency of this progression is always more and more inward, a movement that cannot cease till we get to the inmost, and even then there can be no real cessation because the inmost is the infinite. The progress of poetry, as it has been viewed in these pages, has been an index of an advance of the cultural mind of humanity which has enlarged its scope by a constant raising of the scale of the soul's experience and has now risen to a great height and breadth of intellectual vision and activity, and the question is at present of the next step in the scale of ascension, and whether it can now be

firmly taken or will be missed once more with a fall back to another retracing of the psychological circuit. That will determine the character of the coming era of the mind and life of man and consequently the character of all his methods of aesthetic self-expression.

The one thing that man sees above the intellect is the spirit, and therefore the developed intellect of the race, if it is at all to go forward, must open now to an understanding and seeing spirituality, other than the rather obscure religionism of the past which belonged to the lower levels of the life and the emotion and which has had its bounds broken and its narrownesses condemned by the free light of intellectual thought: this will be rather an illumined self-knowledge and God-knowledge and a world-knowledge too which transmuted in that greater light will spiritualise the whole view and motive of our existence. That is the one development to which an accomplished intellectualism can open and by exceeding itself find its own right consummation. The alternative is a continual ringing of changes in the spinnings of the intellectual circle which leads nowhere or else a collapse to the lower levels which may bring human civilisation down with a run to a new corrupted and intellectualised barbarism. This is a catastrophe which has happened before in the world's history, and it was brought about ostensibly by outward events and causes, but arose essentially from an inability of the intellect of man to find its way out of itself and out of the vital formula in which its strainings and questionings can only exhaust itself and life into a full illumination of the spirit and an enlightened application of the saving spiritual principle to mind and life and action. The possibility of such a catastrophe is by no means absent from the present human situation. On the one hand the straining of the intellect to its limits of elasticity has brought in a recoil to a straining for unbridled vital, emotional and sensational experience and a morbid disorder in the economy of the nature and on the other there have come in, perhaps as a result, perturbations of the earth system that threaten to break up the mould of civilisation, and the problem of the race is whether a new and greater mould can be created or instead a collapse and decadence intervene and a recommencing of the circle. The hope

of the race in this crisis lies in the fidelity of its intellect to the larger perceptions it now has of the greater self of humanity, the turning of its will to the inception of delivering forms of thought, art and social endeavour which arise from those perceptions and the raising of the intellectual mind to the intuitive supra-intellectual spiritual consciousness which can alone give the basis for a spiritualised life of the race and the realisation of its diviner potentialities. The meaning of spirituality is a new and greater inner life of man founded in the consciousness of his true, his inmost, highest and largest self and spirit by which he receives the whole of existence as a progressive manifestation of the self in the universe and his own life as a field of a possible transformation in which its divine sense will be found, its potentialities highly evolved, the now imperfect forms changed into an image of the divine perfection, and an effort not only to see but to live out these greater possibilities of his being. And this consciousness of his true self and spirit must bring with it a consciousness too of the oneness of the individual and the race and a harmonious unity of the life of man with the spirit in Nature and the spirit of the universe.

The voice of a new deeper intuitive poetry can be a powerful aid to this necessary change of seeing and aspiration, because what the thought comprehends with a certain abstraction, it can make living to the imagination by the word and a thing of beauty and delight and inspiration for the soul's acceptance. This poetry will speak of new things and of old things in a new way and with a new voice, not by any exclusion or diminution of its province, but by a great heightening above, a great intimacy within, a great enlargement and wideness around, a vision of inmost things and therefore a changed vision of the world and life and the untold potentialities of the soul's experience. It will restore to us the sense of the Eternal, the presence of the Divine which has been taken from us for a time by an intellect too narrowly and curiously fixed on the external and physical world, but it will not speak of these things in the feeble and conventional tones of traditional religion, but as a voice of intuitive experience and the rhythm and chant of the revelation of an eternal presence. The voice of the poet will reveal to us by the inspired rhythmic word the God who

is the Self of all things and beings, the Life of the universe, the Divinity in man, and he will express all the emotion and delight of the endeavour of the human soul to discover the touch and joy of that Divinity within him in whom he feels the mighty founts of his own being and life and effort and his fullness and unity with all cosmic experience and with Nature and with all creatures. The note which has already begun and found many of its tones in Whitman and Carpenter and A.E. and Tagore will grow into a more full and near and intimate poetic knowledge and vision and feeling which will continue to embrace more and more, no longer only the more exceptional inner states and touches which are the domain of mystic poetry, but everything in our inner and outer existence until all life and experience has been brought within the mould of the spiritual sense and the spiritual interpretation. A poetry of this kind will be in a supreme way what all art should be, a thing of harmony and joy and illumination, a solution and release of the soul from its vital unrest and questioning and struggle, not by any ignoring of these things but by an uplifting into the strength of the self within and the light and air of its greater view where there is found not only the point of escape but the supporting calmness and power of a seated knowledge, mastery and deliverance. In the greatest art and poetry there should be something of the calm of the impersonal basing and elevating the effort and struggle of the personality, something of the largeness of the universal releasing and harmonising the troubled concentrations of the individual existence, something of the sense of the transcendent raising the inferior, ignorant and uncertain powers of life towards a greater strength and light and Ananda. And when art and poetry can utter the fullest sense of these things, it is then that they will become the greatest fortifiers and builders of the soul of man and assure it in the grandeur of its own largest self and spirit. The poetry of Europe has been a voice intensely eager and moved but restless, troubled and without a sure base of happiness and repose, vibrating with the passion of life and avid of its joy and pleasure and beauty, but afflicted also by its unrest, grief, tragedy, discord, insufficiency, incertitude, capable only of its lesser harmonies, not of any great release and satisfaction. The

art and poetry of the East have been the creation of a larger and quieter spirit, intensely responsive as in the Far East to deeper psychic significances and finding there fine and subtle harmonies of the soul's experience or, as in India, expressing in spite of the ascetic creed of vanity and illusion much rather the greatness and power and satisfied activity of human thought and life and action and behind it the communion of the soul with the Eternal. The poetry of the future reconciling all these strains, taking the highest as its keynote and interpreting the rest in its intensity and its largeness, will offer to the human mind a more complex aesthetic and spiritual satisfaction, express a more richly filled content of self-experience raised to a more persistent sight of things absolute and infinite and a more potent and all comprehending release into the calm and delight of the spirit.

And this poetry must bring with it too a new depth of the intimacies of the soul with Nature. The early poetry of Nature gave us merely the delight of the forms of objects and the beauty of the setting of the natural world around man's life, but not any inner communion between him and the universal Mother. A later tone brought in more of the subtleties of the vital soul of the natural world and a response of the moved sensation and emotion of the life-spirit in us and out of this arose an intellectual and aesthetic sense of hidden finer and subtler things and, more profound, in the poetry of Wordsworth, Byron and Keats and Shelley an attempt at communion with a universal presence in Nature and a living principle of peace or light and love or universal power or conscious delight and beauty. A more deeply seeing and intimate poetry will take up these things into a yet greater Nature sense, and vision and make us aware of the very self and soul and conscious being of Nature, her profoundest psychic suggestion and significance, the spirit in her and the intuition of all that she keeps hidden in her forms and veils and reveals more and more to the soul that has entered into unity with that spirit. The more intuitive human mind of the future, delivered from its present limitation of sympathy by the touch of the one self in all being, will feel as has not been felt before a unity with other consciousness in Nature and hear the voice of self-revelation of all that is mute to us, the soul and life of things that now seem inert

and lifeless, the soul and life of the animal world, the soul and life of the things that grow in silence and are enclosed in the absorbed dream of their own half-conscient existence. And it will open to and interpret not only man and terrestrial Nature, for a poetry concerned with that alone excludes large ranges of self-experience, but other domains also of our spirit. It will give the key of the worlds of supernature, and allow us to move among the beings and scenes, images and influences and presences of the psychic kingdoms which are near to us behind their dark or luminous curtain and will not be afraid to enter into vaster realms of the self and other universal states and the powers that stand behind our life and the soul's eternal spaces. It will do this not merely in a symbol of greatened human magnitudes, as the old poets represented the gods, or in hues of romantic glamour or in the far-off light of a mystic remoteness, but with the close directness and reality that comes from intimate vision and feeling, and make these things a part of our living experience.

A poetry of large spiritual inspiration must necessarily be, when it is not dealing directly with eternal things and turns its eye on the movement of time and the actual life and destiny of man, largely present and futurist in its insistence. The poet will continue though in a new way and with a new eye to transfigure the past for us, but will not feel that need to live in an imaginative preoccupation with the past which withdraws compelled from the unmanageable and transformable actuality of the present: for to live in the spirit is to be able to distinguish the eternal in the transient forms of the moment and to see too in these forms a revelation of the spirit's greater significances. His vision will search all the ways of the present and interpret deeply to man the sense of that which is making him and which he is making: it will reveal the divinity in all its disguises, face all even that is ugly and terrible and baffling in the enigma of our actual human life, find its deeper aesthesis, disengage what is struggling untransformed in its outsides and make out of it by poetic sympathy material of spiritual truth and beauty. This is a strain that has been growing in recent poetic creation and it suffers as yet too often from an insufficient fineness of insight and a too crude handling, but, that immaturity once overcome, must hold

a large and assured place among the great poetic motives. But especially a clearer and more inspiring vision of the destiny of the spirit in man will be a large part of the poetry of the future. For the spiritual eye is not only able to see the divinity in man as he is, the divinity in his struggle and victory and failure and even in his sin and offence and littleness, but the spirit is master of the future, its past and present in time not only the half-formed stuff of its coming ages, but in a profound sense it is the call and attraction of the future that makes the past and present, and that future will be more and more seen to be the growth of the godhead in the human being which is the high fate of this race that thinks and wills and labours towards its own perfection. This is a strain that we shall hear more and more, the song of the growing godhead of the kind, of human unity, of spiritual freedom, of the coming supermanhood of man, of the divine ideal seeking to actualise itself in the life of the earth, of the call to the individual to rise to his godlike possibility and to the race to live in the greatness of that which humanity feels within itself as a power of the spirit which it has to deliver into some yet ungrasped perfect form of clearness. To embellish life with beauty is only the most outward function of art and poetry, to make life more intimately beautiful and noble and great and full of meaning is its higher office, but its highest comes when the poet becomes the seer and reveals to man his eternal self and the godheads of its manifestation.

These new voices must needs be the result of the growth of the power of the spirit on the mind of man which is the promise of a coming era. It is always indeed the spirit in him that shapes his poetic utterance; but when that spirit is preoccupied with the outward life, the great poets are those who make his common life and action and its surroundings splendid and beautiful and noble to him by the power of their vision; when it is the intellect through which it labours, the great poets are those who give a profound enlightening idea and creative interpretation of the world and Nature and all that man is and does and thinks and dreams, but when the spirit turns to its own large intuitive will and vision, then it is yet profounder things to which the great poet must give utterance, the inmost sense of things, the

inmost consciousness of Nature, the movement of the deepest soul of man, the truth that reveals the meaning of existence and the universal delight and beauty and the power of a greater life and the infinite potentialities of our experience and self-creation. These may not be the only strains, but they will be the greatest and those which the highest human mind will demand from the poet and they will colour all the rest by their opening of new vistas to the general intelligence and life sense of the race. And whatever poetry may make its substance or its subject, this growth of the power of the spirit must necessarily bring into it a more intense and revealing speech, a more inward and subtle and penetrating rhythm, a greater stress of sight, a more vibrant and responsive sense, the eye that looks at all smallest and greatest things for the significances that have not yet been discovered and the secrets that are not on the surface. That will be the type of the new utterance and the boundless field of poetic discovery left for the inspiration of the humanity of the future.

CHAPTER XXX

The Form and the Spirit

A CHANGE in the spirit of poetry must necessarily bring with it a change of its forms, and this departure may be less or greater to the eye, more inward or more outward, but always there must be at least some subtle and profound alteration which, whatever the apparent fidelity to old moulds, is certain to amount in fact to a transmutation, since even the outward character and effect become other than they were and the soul of substance and movement a new thing. The opening of the creative mind into an intuitive and revelatory poetry need not of itself compel a revolution and total breaking up of the old forms and a creation of altogether new moulds: it may, especially where a preparatory labour in that sense has been doing a work of modification and adaptation, be effected for the most part by an opening up of new potentialities in old instruments and a subtle inner change of their character. Actually, however, while the previous revolutions in the domain of poetry have moved within the limits of the normal and received action of the poetic intelligence, the upward and inward movement and great widening of which the human mind is now in labour is an effort of such rapidity and magnitude that it appears like an irresistible breaking out of all familiar bounds and it is natural that the mentality in its effort at a completely new creation should wish to break too the old moulds as a restriction and a fettering narrowness and be desirous of discovering novel and unprecedented forms, fitting tenements and temples of the freer, subtler, vaster spirit that is preparing to enter into occupation. To remould seems to be an insufficient change, the creation of a new body for a quite new spirit the commanded discovery and labour. There must certainly take place in order to satisfy the changed vision a considerable departure in all the main provinces of poetic creation, the lyric, the drama, the narrative or epic, and the question

for solution is how far and in what way the technique of each kind will necessarily be affected or should with advantage be transformed so as to allow free room for the steps and the constructive figures of a finer and ampler poetic idea and a changed soul movement and a just correspondence to it in the art of the poet.

The lyrical impulse is the original and spontaneous creator of the poetic form, song the first discovery of the possibility of a higher because a rhythmic intensity of self-expression. It wells out from the intensity of touch and the spiritualised emotion of a more delicate or a deeper and more penetrating sight and feeling in the experience, captures and sustains the inevitable cadences of its joy or its attraction, sets the subtle measure of its feeling and keeps it by the magic of its steps in sound vibrating on the inner strings and psychic fibres. The lyric is a moment of heightened soul experience, sometimes brief in a lightness of aerial rapture, in a poignant ecstasy of pain, of joy or of mingled emotion or in a swift graver exaltation, sometimes prolonged and repeating or varying the same note, sometimes linking itself in a sustained succession to other moments that start from it or are suggested by its central motive. It is at first a music of simple melodies coming out of itself to which the spirit listens with pleasure and makes eternal by it the charm of self-discovery or of reminiscence. And the lyrical spirit may rest satisfied with these clear spontaneities of song or else it may prefer to weight its steps with thought and turn to a meditative movement or, great-winged, assume an epic elevation, or lyricise the successive moments of an action, or utter the responses of heart to heart, mind to mind, soul to soul, move between suggestions and counter-suggestions of mood and idea and feeling and devise a lyrical seed or concentration of drama. The widest in range as it is the most flexible in form and motive of all the poetic kinds, the others have grown out of it by the assumption of a more settled and deliberate and extended speech and a more ample structure. It is therefore in the lyric nearest to the freshness of an original impulse that a new spirit in poetry is likely to become aware of itself and feel out for its right ways of expression and to discover with the most adaptable freedom and variety its own essential motives and cadences, first forms and simpler structures before

it works out victoriously its greater motions or ampler figures in narrative and drama.

The freshest and most spontaneous liquidities of song utterance abounded in past literature at times when the direct movement of the life-spirit, whether confined to simple primary emotion and experience or deepening to the more vivid probings of its own richer but still natural self-aesthesis, has been the fountain-head of a stirred poetic utterance. It is then that there come the pure lyric outbursts and the poet is content to sing and let the feeling create its own native moulds of music. The thought satisfied with its own emotion is not too insistent to elaborate the lyrical form for its more intricate purposes or to give it certainly a weightier but almost inevitably a less simply rapturous movement. The intellectual ages sing less easily. It is their care to cut and carve the lyrical form with a self-conscious and considering art and their practice arrives at measures and movements of a consummate literary perfection, much power of modulation, a moved thinking and sentiment deliberately making the most of its own possibilities; but except in the voices of the one or two who are born with the capacity and need of the pure lyrical impulse, the too developed intellect cannot often keep or recover life's first fine careless rapture or call the memory of it into its own more loaded tones and measures. The lyric poetry of the ancient classical tongues is largely of this character and we find it there confined to a certain number of highly developed forms managed with a perfect and careful technique, and the movement of poetic feeling, sometimes grave, sometimes permitted a lighter and more rapid impulsion, is chastened and subdued to the service of the reflective poetic intelligence. The absolute simplicities and spontaneities of the soul's emotion which were the root of the original lyric impulse get only an occasional opportunity of coming back to the surface, and in their place there is the movement of a more thoughtful and often complex sentiment and feeling, not freshets of song, but the larger wave of the chant and elegy and ode: the flowers of the field and mountain self-sown on the banks or near the sources are replaced by the blossoms of a careful culture. Still, however reined in or penetrated and rendered grave by thought, the life of feeling

is still there and the power and sincerity of the lyrical impulse abide as the base of the workings of the moved intelligence. But in the literary ages that are classical by imitation, there is ordinarily a great poverty, an absence or thinness of the lyrical element, the sincerity and confident self-pleasure of the feeling indispensable to the lyrical movement wither under the coldly observant and too scrutinising eye of the reflective reason, and the revival of song has to await the romantic movement of interest of a more eager and a wider intelligence which will endeavour to get back to some joy of the intimate powers of life and the vivid lyricism of the heart and the imagination. There is then a return by an imaginative effort to old cultivated forms of lyrical expression and to early simple movements like the ballad motive and in the end a great variety of experiments in new metrical moulds and subtle modifications of old structures, an attempt of the idea to turn back the thought mind to grave or happy sincerities of emotion or impose on it a more absolute assent to bare simplicities of thought and feeling and finally a living curiosity of the intelligence in the expression of all kinds and shades of sensation and emotion. The work of this developed poetic intellectuality differs from the early work whose spirit and manner it often tries hard to recover because it is the thought that is primarily at work and the form less a spontaneous creation of the soul than a deliberately intelligent structure, and while the movement of the pure lyrical impulse is entirely shaped by the feeling and the thought only accompanies it in its steps, here the thought actively intervenes and determines and cannot but sophisticate the emotional movement. This distinction has many consequences and most this pregnant result that even the simplicities of a developed poetical thought are willed simplicities and the end is a curiosity of work that has many triumphs of aesthetic satisfaction but not often any longer the native tones of the soul when the pure lyrical feeling was still possible.

The turn to a more direct self-expression of the spirit must find out its way first by the emergence of a new kind of lyrical sincerity which is neither the directness of the surface life emotions nor the moved truth of the thought mind seizing or observing the emotion and bringing out its thought significances. There

are in fact only two pure and absolute sincerities here, the power of the native intuition of itself by life which has for its result a direct and obvious identity of the thing felt and its expression, and the power of identity of the spirit when it takes up thought and feeling and life and makes them one with some inmost absolute truth of their and our existence. There is a power too of the sincerities of thought, but that is an intermediary between life and the spirit and only poetic when it fills itself with the sense of one of the others or links them together or aids to bring them to oneness. It is therefore a transition from the lyricism of life weighted by the stresses of thought to the lyricism of the inmost spirit which uses but is beyond thought that has to be made. And here we notice a significant tendency, an endeavour to present life in an utmost clarity of its intention and form and outline stripped and discharged of the thought's abundant additions, made naked of the haze of the reflective intelligence, the idea being that we shall thus get at its bare truth and feeling, its pure vital intuition where that starts out of the subconscious suggestion and meets the seeing mind and a conscious identity can be created with its sense in our souls by the revealing fidelity of the expression. There is often added to this endeavour the injunction that the rhythmic movement should follow the fluctuations of life with a subtle adaptation of the verbal music, and this notion is used to justify the now common free or else irregular and often broken-backed verse which is supposed to be the medium of a subtler correspondence than is at all possible to the formal rigidity of fixed metres. But in actual fact this kind of verse, whatever its power of lyric intention, sensibly fails to give us the satisfaction of a true lyrical form, because it ignores the truth that what sustains the lyrical spirit is the discovery and consistent following of some central cadence revealing the very spirit of the feeling and not at all the sole pursuit of its more outward movements and changes: these can only rightly come in as a modulation of the constant essential music. This double need may possibly be met by a very skilful free movement, but not so easily, straightforwardly and simply as in a fidelity, much more really natural than these overdone niceties, to the once discovered fixed cadence. And besides the bare truth of the vital

intuition is not that inmost truth of things our minds are striving to see; that is something much greater, profounder, more infinite in its content and unending in its suggestion; not our identity in sight and spiritual emotion with the limited subconscient intention of life, but rather a oneness with something in it at once superconscient, immanent and comprehensive of which that is only a blind index will be the moving power of a greater utterance. And until we have found, whether by spiritual experience or poetic insight, this identity and its revelations in ourselves and in things, we shall not have laid a sound and durable basis for the future creation.

The essential and decisive step of the future art of poetry will perhaps be to discover that it is not the form which either fixes or reveals the spirit but the spirit which makes out of itself the form and the word and this with so sure a discovery, once we can live in it and create out of it without too much interference from the difficult and devising intellect, that their movement becomes as spontaneously inevitable as the movements and their mould as structurally perfect as the magical formations of inconscient Nature. Nature creates perfectly because she creates directly out of life and is not intellectually self-conscious, the spirit will create perfectly because it creates directly out of self and is spontaneously supra-intellectually all-conscious. It is no doubt this truth of a spiritually just and natural creation that some of the present ideas and tendencies are trying to adumbrate, but not as yet as understandingly as one could desire. The decisive revealing lyrical outburst must come when the poet has learnt to live creatively only in the inmost spiritual sight and identity of his own self with the self of his objects and images and to sing only from the deepest spiritual emotion which is the ecstasy of feeling of that identity or at least of some extreme nearness to its sheer directness of touch and vision. And then we may find that this Ananda, this spiritual delight, for it is something more intimate and rapturous than emotion, has brought with it an unprecedented freedom of manifold and many-suggestioned and yet perfectly sufficient and definite formation and utterance. The poetry born from the inmost spirit will not bind the poet in any limiting circle or narrow theory of an intellectual

art principle, but create at will according to the truth of the spirit's absolute moments. According to the innate rightnesses of the motive and its needed cadence the spirit will move him to discover infinite possibilities of new spiritual measure and intonation in time-old lyrical rhythms or to find a new principle of rhythm and structure or to make visible developments which will keep past treasures of sound and yet more magically innovate than can be done by any breaking up of forms in order to build a new order out of chaos. The intimate and intuitive poetry of the future will have, on the one side, all the inexhaustible range and profound complexities of the cosmic imagination of which it will be the interpreter and to that it must suit a hundred single and separate and combined and harmonic lyrical tones of poignantly or richly moved utterance, and on the other it will reach those bare and absolute simplicities of utter and essential sight in which thought sublimates into a translucidity of light and vision, feeling passes beyond itself into sheer spiritual ecstasy and the word rarefies into a pure voice out of the silence. The sight will determine the lyrical form and discover the identities of an inevitable rhythm and no lesser standard prevail against the purity of this spiritual principle.

A spiritual change must equally come over the intention and form of the drama when once the age has determined its tendencies, and this change is already foreshadowed in an evolution which is still only at its commencement and first tentatives. Hitherto there have been two forms consecrated by great achievements, the drama of life, whether presenting only vivid outsides and significant incidents and morals and manners or expressive of the life-soul and its workings in event and character and passion, and the drama of the idea or, more vitally, of the idea-power that is made to work itself out in the life movement, lay its hold on the soul's motions, create the type, use the character and the passion for its instruments and at its highest tension appear as an agent of the conflict of ideal forces that produce the more lofty tragedies of human action. The paucity of great creation in the modern drama after one very considerable moment of power and vision has been due largely to an inability to decide between these two motives or to discover a great poetic

form for the drama of the idea or effect in the poetic imagination some fusion of the intellectual and the life motive which would be an effective dramatic rendering of the modern way of seeing man and his life. The only recent vital and effective dramatic writing has been in prose and that has taken the questionable shape of the problem play which is peculiarly congenial to the dominating interests of the highly intellectualised but always practical mind of humanity today. The poetic form has long been for the most part a reproduction of past moulds and motives without any roots of vitality in the living mind of the age; but recently there has been a more inward and profounder movement which promises some chance of replacing this sort of unsatisfying imitation by a novel and a sincerer kind of dramatic poetry. An attempt has been initiated to create an inner drama of the soul with the soul itself for the real stage. There is in the spirit and the forms of this endeavour a predominance as yet of the lyrical rather than the dramatic motive, an insufficient power of making the characters living beings rather than unsubstantial types or shadows of soul movements or even the figures of a veiled allegory and parable; and there is needed perhaps for a greater vitality a freer and more nobly aesthetic stage which would not be limited by the external realism that now stands in the way of a living revival of the poetic and artistic theatre. Nevertheless this attempt is a true though not a complete index of the direction the creative mind must take in the future.

The soul of man, a many-motioned representative of the world-spirit, subsisting and seeking for itself and its own meanings amid the laws and powers and moving forces of the universe and discovering and realising its spiritual relations with others will be the vision and intention of a dramatic poetry fully reflective of the now growing intuitive mind of the future. All drama must be a movement of life and of action because its mode of presentation is through the speech of living beings and the interaction of their natures, but equally the real interest except in the least poetic kinds is an internal movement and an action of the soul because dramatic speech is poetically interesting only when it is an instrument of human self-expression and not merely a support for a series of stirring incidents. The drama of the

future will differ from the romantic play or tragedy because the thing which dramatic speech will represent will be something more internal than the life soul and its brilliant pageant of passion and character. The external web of events and action, whether sparing or abundant, strongly marked or slight in incidence, will only be outward threads and indices and the movement that will throughout occupy the mind will be the procession of the soul phases or the turns of the soul action: the character, whether profusely filled in in detail in the modern fashion or simply and strongly outlined in the purer ancient method, will not be mistaken for the person, but accepted as only an inner life notation of the spirit: the passions, which have hitherto been prominently brought forward as the central stuff of the drama, will be reduced to their proper place as indicative colour and waves on the stream of spiritual self-revelation. And this greater kind will differ too from the classical tragedy of which the method was some significant and governing idea working out its life issues, because the idea will only be to a larger human mind better instructed in the secret of existence the self-view by the soul of its own greater and more intimate issues and of the conscient turns of its existence. The personage of the play will be the spirit in man diversified or multitudinous in many human beings whose inner spiritual much more intimately than their external life relations will determine the development, and the culminations will be steps of solution of those spiritual problems of our existence which after all are at the root of and include and inform all the others. The drama will be no longer an interpretation of Fate or self-acting Karma or of the simple or complex natural entanglements of the human life-movement, but a revelation of the Soul as its own fate and determiner of its life and its Karma and behind it of the powers and the movements of the spirit in the universe. It will not be limited by any lesser idealisms or realisms, but representing at will this and other worlds, the purpose of the gods and the actions of men, man's dreams and man's actualities each as real as the other, the struggles and the sufferings and the victories of the spirit, the fixities of Nature and her mutabilities and significant perversions and fruitful conversions, interpret in dramatic form the inmost truth of the action of man the infinite. It will

not be limited either by any old or new formal convention, but transmute old moulds and invent others and arrange according to the truth of its vision its acts and the evolution of its dramatic process or the refrain of its lyrical or the march of its epic motive. This clue at least is the largest and the most suggestive for a new and living future creation in the forms of the drama.

The spirit and intention of the narrative and epic forms of poetry must undergo the same transmuting change. Hitherto the poetical narrative has been a simple relation or a vivid picturing or transcript of life and action varied by description of surrounding circumstance and indication of mood and feeling and character or else that with the development of an idea or a mental and moral significance at the basis with the story as its occasion or form of its presentation. The change to a profounder motive will substitute a soul significance as the real substance, the action will not be there for its external surface interest but as a vital indication of the significance, the surrounding circumstance will be only such as helps to point and frame it and bring out its accessory suggestions and mood and feeling and character, its internal powers and phases. An intensive narrative, intensive in simplicity or in richness of significant shades, tones and colours, will be the more profound and subtle art of this kind in the future and its appropriate structures determined by the needs of this inner art motive. A first form of the intensive and spiritually significant poetic narrative has already been created and attempts to replace the more superficially intellectual motives, where the idea rather supervened upon the story or read into it the sense of its turns or its total movement, but here the story tends more to be the living expression of the idea and the idea itself vibrant in the speech and description and action the index of a profounder soul motive. The future poetry will follow this direction with a more and more subtle and variable inwardness and a greater fusion and living identity of soul motive, indicative idea, suggestive description and intensely significant speech and action. The same governing vision will be there as in lyric and drama; the method of development will alone be different according to the necessities of the more diffused, circumstanced and outwardly processive form which is proper to narrative.

The epic is only the narrative presentation on its largest canvas and, at its highest elevation, greatness and amplitude of spirit and speech and movement. It is sometimes asserted that the epic is solely proper to primitive ages when the freshness of life made a story of large and simple action of supreme interest to the youthful mind of humanity, the literary epic an artificial prolongation by an intellectual age and a genuine epic poetry no longer possible now or in the future. This is to mistake form and circumstance for the central reality. The epic, a great poetic story of man or world or the gods, need not necessarily be a vigorous presentation of external action: the divinely appointed creation of Rome, the struggle of the principles of good and evil as presented in the great Indian poems, the pageant of the centuries or the journey of the seer through the three worlds beyond us are as fit themes as primitive war and adventure for the imagination of the epic creator. The epics of the soul most inwardly seen as they will be by an intuitive poetry, are his greatest possible subject, and it is this supreme kind that we shall expect from some profound and mighty voice of the future. His indeed may be the song of greatest flight that will reveal from the highest pinnacle and with the largest field of vision the destiny of the human spirit and the presence and ways and purpose of the Divinity in man and the universe.

CHAPTER XXXI

The Word and the Spirit

A DEVELOPMENT of the kind of which we are speaking must affect not only the frames of poetry, but initiate also a subtle change of its word and rhythmic movement. The poetic word is a vehicle of the spirit, the chosen medium of the soul's self-expression, and any profound modification of the inner habit of the soul, its thought atmosphere, its way of seeing, its type of feeling, any change of the light in which it lives and the power of the breath which it breathes, greatening of its elevations or entry into deeper chambers of its self must reflect itself in a corresponding modification, changed intensity of light or power, inner greatening and deepening of the word which it has to use, and if there is no such change or if it is not sufficient for the new intention of the spirit, then there can be no living or no perfect self-expression. The old habits of speech cannot contain the new spirit and must either enlarge and deepen themselves and undergo a transformation or else be broken up and make way for another figure. The conservatism of the human mind stands in the way of the transforming force and insists for a time on the authority of traditional or already current standards of literary and poetic perfection, but the eternally self-renewing spirit must have eventually its way or else there will come a petrifaction, a decay by too much stability, which is a much worse danger than the decadence predicted by the purist when faced by what seems to him a morbid strangeness and distortion of the poetic moulds of speech or a perilous departure from safe and enduring rules of perfection. A change of this kind very considerable in its magnitude and force of renovation has been for some time at work in most living literatures.

I have already suggested that the governing spirit and intention of this change, not always very clearly envisaged even by those who are most active in bringing it about, is a turn to a more

intimate and directly or fully intuitive speech and rhythm. The thing is in itself so subtle that it can better be indicated than analysed, adequately described or made precise to the intelligence. And moreover all poetry except that of the most outward kind, — a verse movement which is separable rather by distinction of form than power of the soul from prose, — is in its inmost inspiration and character intuitive, more a creation of the vision and feeling than of the intelligence, and the change made is one of the level or the depth of the self from which the poetic intuition, usually modified in transmission, immediately acts, and of its intervening psychological instrument rather than its primary initiating movement. The initiating inspiration must always be intuitive in a greater or lesser degree and it is the form or expression that differs. The intellect in its use of speech is apt to regard it as an intellectual device, a means for the precise connotation of object and idea or at most an elegant and pleasing or an effective and forceful presentation. The poetic view and use of speech is of a very different kind and enters more into the vital reality of the word and the more mystic connection between the movement of the spirit and the significances of the mental utterance. The poet has to do much more than to offer a precise, a harmonious or a forcefully presented idea to the intelligence: he has to give a breath of life to the word and for that must find out and make full use of its potential power of living suggestion; he has to make it carry in it not only the intellectual notion but the emotion and the psychical sensation of the thing he would make present to us; he has to erect an image of its presence and appeal with which we can inwardly live as we live with the presence and appeal of the objects of the actual universe. As in the Vedic theory the Spirit was supposed to create the worlds by the Word, so the poet brings into being in himself and us by his creative word fragmentarily or largely, in isolated pieces or massed spaces an inner world of beings, objects and experiences. But all creation is a mystery in its secret of inmost process and it is only at best the most outward or mechanical part of it which admits analysis; the creative faculty of the poetic mind is no exception. The poet is a magician who hardly knows the secret of his own spell; even the part taken by the consciously critical

or constructive mind is less intellectual than intuitive; he creates by an afflatus of spiritual power of which his mind is the channel and instrument and the appreciation of it in himself and others comes not by an intellectual judgment but by a spiritual feeling. It is that which must tell him whether the word that comes is the true body of his vision or whether he has to seek or to wait for another that shall be felt as its adequate, its effective, its illuminative, its inspired or its inevitable utterance. The distinction that I am trying to draw here between the various powers of the always intuitive speech of poetry can therefore better be felt than critically stated, but at the same time certain indications may serve to make it more clearly sensed in its spirit with the sympathetic aid of the critical intelligence.

The words which we use in our speech seem to be, if we look only at their external formation, mere physical sounds which a device of the mind has made to represent certain objects and ideas and perceptions, — a machinery nervous perhaps in origin, but developed for a constantly finer and more intricate use by the growing intelligence; but if we look at them in their inmost psychological and not solely at their more external aspect, we shall see that what constitutes speech and gives it its life and appeal and significance is a subtle conscious force which informs and is the soul of the body of sound: it is a superconscient Nature-Force raising its material out of our subconscience, but growingly conscious in its operations in the human mind that develops itself in one fundamental way and yet variously in language. It is this Force, this Shakti to which the old Vedic thinkers gave the name of Vak, the goddess of creative Speech, and the Tantric psychists supposed that this Power acts in us through different subtle nervous centres on higher and higher levels of its force and that thus the word has a graduation of its expressive powers of truth and vision. One may accept as a clue of great utility this idea of different degrees of the force of speech, each separately characteristic and distinguishable, and recognise one of the grades of the Tantric classification, Pashyanti the seeing word, as the description of that degree of power to which the poetic mind is called to elevate itself and which is original and native to its manner of expression. The degree of word-force

characteristic of prose speech avails ordinarily to distinguish and state things to the conceptual intelligence; the word of the poet sees and presents in its body and image to a subtle visual perception in the mind awakened by an inner rhythmic audition truth of soul and thought experience and truth of sense and life, the spiritual and living actuality of idea and object. The prosaist may bring to his aid more or less of the seeing power, the poet dilute his vision with intellectual observation and statement, but the fundamental difference remains that ordinary speech proceeds from and appeals to the conceiving intelligence while it is the seeing mind that is the master of poetic utterance.

This seeing speech has itself, however, different grades of its power of vision and expression of vision. The first and simplest power is limited to a clear poetic adequacy and at its lowest difficult to distinguish from prose statement except by its more compact and vivid force of presentation and the subtle difference made by the rhythm which brings in a living appeal and adds something of an emotional and sensational nearness to what would otherwise be little more than an intellectual expression; but in a higher and much finer clarity this manner has the power to make us not only conceive adequately, but see the object or idea in a certain temperate lucidity of vision. The difference can best be illustrated by an example of each kind taken at random, one from Dryden,

Whate'er he did was done with so much ease,
In him alone, 'twas natural to please —

and the other, from Wordsworth,

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company.

The first is in the manner of terse prose statement, but made just poetical by a certain life and vividness and a rhythmic suggestion touching though not deeply some emotional centre of

response just sufficient to make it a thought felt and not merely presented to the conception: the other though not going beyond a luminously clear and strong poetical adequacy in its manner of speech is far away from this doubtful borderland and from the beginning a thing seen and lived within us and awakening a satisfied soul response. It has the native action of the seeing word and bears the stamp of a spiritual sincerity greater, profounder, more beautiful than that of the intelligence.

The second power tries to go beyond this fine and perfect adequacy in its intensities, attempts a more rich or a more powerful expression, not merely sound and adequate to poetic vision, but dynamic and strongly effective. In prose also there is this difference and on its lower levels its attempt at effect takes the shape of rhetoric and appeals to a kind of nervous energy of the intelligence but, when its mood is more intellectually deep and sincere, it prefers to arrive rather by subtler means, suggestive turn, aptness and vividness and richness and beauty of phrase. Poetic speech follows the same methods but in another and higher manner and with a different atmosphere. There is indeed a poetic rhetoric which differs from prose rhetoric only in the same way as the lower kind of poetic adequacy differs from prose adequacy by just managing to bring in some element of rhythmic emotion and vision, and of this kind we may take an effective example from Pope, —

> *'Atoms or systems into ruin hurled*
> *And now a bubble burst, and now a world.*

A greater spirit and a less intellectual and more imaginative sincerity and elevation of thought, feeling and vision will give us a sublimer poetic rhetoric, as in certain lines of Milton belonging to his more external manner, —

> *Hurled headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky*
> *With hideous ruin and combustion down*
> *To bottomless perdition.*

At a more temperate pitch and more capable of a certain subtlety

of suggestion we can see the adequate changing into the more rhetorical poetic manner, as in many passages of Wordsworth, —

And oft, when in my heart was heard
Thy timely mandate, I deferred
The task, in smoother walks to stray.

A richer, subtler and usually a truer poetic effectivity is attained not by this rhetorical manner, but through a language succeeding by apt and vivid metaphor and simile, richness and beauty of phrase or the forceful word that makes the mind see the body of the thought with a singularly living distinctness or energy of suggestion and nearness, — Wordsworth's

Her eyes as stars of Twilight fair;
Like Twilight's, too, her dusky hair;
But all things else about her drawn
From May-time and the cheerful Dawn:

Shelley's

When hearts have once mingled
Love first leaves the well-built nest;
The weak one is singled
To endure what it once possessed;

or

Its passions will rock thee
As the storms rock the ravens on high;
Bright reason will mock thee,
Like the sun from a wintry sky.

In this manner English poetry is especially opulent and gets from it much of its energy and power; but yet we feel that this is not the highest degree of which poetic speech is capable. There is a more intimate vision, a more penetrating spiritual emotion, a more intense and revealing speech, to which the soul can be more vibrantly sensible.

This comes to its first self-discovery when either the adequate or the dynamically effective style is raised into a greater illumination in which the inner mind sees and feels object, emotion, idea not only clearly or richly or distinctly and powerfully, but in a flash or outbreak of transforming light which kindles the thought or image into a disclosure of new significances of a much more inner character, a more profoundly revealing vision, emotion, spiritual response. This illuminating poetic speech comes suddenly and rarely, as in Dryden's

And Paradise was opened in his face

breaking out of a surrounding merely effective poetical eloquence, or intervening at times as in Shelley's

The heart's echoes render
No song when the spirit is mute:—
No song but sad dirges,
Like the wind through a ruined cell,

where the effective force of image and feeling that makes us see and respond by a strong suggestion, at work throughout the rest of the lyric, passes now beyond itself into an illuminative closeness and then we feel, we bear, we ourselves live at the moment through the power of the poetic word the authentic identity of the experience. It comes in luminous phrases emerging from a fine and lucid adequacy and the justice or the delicacy makes place for a lustrous profundity of suggestion, as in Shelley's

And now, alas! the poor sprite is
Imprisoned, for some fault of his
In a body like a grave;—

or it strikes across a movement of strong and effective poetical thinking, as in Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty*,

Me this unchartered freedom tires;

or leaps up at once to set the tone of a poem,

She was a Phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight;
A lovely Apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament.

And supreme examples within the limits of this power which will bring out all their difference from the more common texture of poetry, may be taken from the same poets, — Shelley's

...the silent Moon,
In her interlunar swoon,

and Wordsworth's

They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.

Here we get the pure illuminative speech of poetry not mixed with or arising out of the lucid adequate or the richly or forcefully effective or dynamic manner, but changed into an altogether supra-intellectual light of intuitive substance and vision and utterance.

The difference here we find to be an increasing intensity and finally a concentrated purity and fullness of the substance and language of intuitive expression. In the less intense styles the thing conveyed is indeed something suggested to and by the intuitive mind, — only the least inspired poetry is purely intellectual in substance, — but it is expressed with a certain indirectness or else with a dilution of the body of the intuitive light, and this is due to an intellectualised language or to the speech of an imagination which tries to bridge the gulf between the intuitive mind and the normal intelligence. The two powers seem to lean on and support each other, at a certain point are brought very close and even up to the point of fusion, and then suddenly the border is crossed, the difficulty of getting out through the doors of the mind the pure untranslated language of intuitive vision

overcome and we have a word of intense light in which the intellect and its imagination count for nothing and the mind's language, even while remaining in material the same, undergoes an unanalysable alchemy and spiritual change. And beyond this first language of intuitive illumination we arrive at a more uplifted range of an inspired poetic speech which brings to us not only pure light and beauty and inexhaustible depth, but a greater moved ecstasy of highest or largest thought and sight and speech and at its highest culminates in the inevitable, absolute and revealing word. This too is sometimes a magical transformation of the adequate manner, as in Wordsworth's

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides —

sometimes of the richer or more dynamic imaged style,

Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are
fresh and strong; —

and sometimes it is the illuminative speech powerfully inspired and rising suddenly into the highest revealing word,

The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep;
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong;
I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep.

There the inspiration takes up the effort of the poetic intelligence and imagination into a stirred concentration of the speech of sight and in its last movement seems to leap even beyond itself and beyond any pursuit or touch of the intellect into a pure revelatory spiritual vision.

The genius of the poet can do work of a high beauty or of a considerable greatness in any of these degrees of poetic speech, but it is the more purely intuitive, inspired or revelatory utterance that is the most rare and difficult for the human mind to command, and it is these kinds that we peculiarly value. Their power not only moves and seizes us the most, but it admits the soul to a most spiritually profound light of seeing and ecstasy of feeling even of ordinary ideas and objects and in its highest force to thoughts and things that surpass the manner and range and limits of depth of the normal intelligence. The greatest poets have been those in whom these moments of a highest intensity of intuitive and inspired speech have been of a frequent occurrence and in one or two, as in Shakespeare, of a miraculous abundance. There is, however, this subtle farther variation that this kind of utterance, though essentially the same always, takes a different colour according to the kind of object vision and subjective vision which is peculiar to the mind of the poet in its normal action. The citations I have made have been all taken from writers in whom the poetic intelligence and its type of imagination have been the leading forces. The same power in poets who speak more with the direct voice of the life-soul assumes quite another hue and seems even of a very different texture of language. The characteristic distinction of its note from that of the more intellectualised intuition can best be illustrated from Shakespeare and by such a passage as the speech of Claudio,

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendant world;

and the rest. There is an illumination, an intuitive intensity of the life-spirit and its feeling in that thought and its speech which

we can no longer command in the same direct and essential manner. And even the ideas that seem to belong to the region of the thinking intelligence have subtly in these poets the same inspiration. It is sufficient to compare Shakespeare's

Life's but a walking shadow,...
...it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing —

and Shelley's voicing of a kindred idea of transience,

Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments.

The one has the colour of an intuition of the life-soul in one of its intense moods and we not only think the thought but seem to feel it even in our nerves of mental sensation, the other is the thought-mind itself uttering in a moved, inspired and illuminative language an idea of the pure intelligence. It would be difficult for the present human mind to recover the same spirit as moved Shakespeare's speech; it is nearer to that of the later poets and their voice of the brooding or the moved poetic intelligence or of the intuitive mind rising out of the intellect and still preserving something of its tones. Still the manner of the coming poetry is likely to recover and hold as its central secret something akin to the older poet, a greater straight impact and natural body of intuitive intensity, because it too will take up the thought and feeling into a concentrated expression of an equal though a different directness. It will be the language of a higher intuitive mind swallowing up the intellectual tones into the closenesses and identities of a supra-intellectual light and Ananda.

The future poetry, assuming it to be of the kind I have suggested, its object to express some inmost truth of the things which it makes its subject, must to be perfectly adequate to its task express them in the inmost way, and that can only be done if, tran-

scending the more intellectualised or externally vital and sensational expression, it speaks wholly in the language of an intuitive mind and vision and imagination, intuitive sense, intuitive emotion, intuitive vital feeling, which can seize in a peculiarly intimate light of knowledge by a spiritual identity the inmost thought, sight, image, sense, life, feeling of that which it is missioned to utter. The voice of poetry comes from a region above us, a plane of our being above and beyond our personal intelligence, a supermind which sees things in their innermost and largest truth by a spiritual identity and with a lustrous effulgency and rapture and its native language is a revelatory, inspired, intuitive word limpid or subtly vibrant or densely packed with the glory of this ecstasy and lustre. It is the possession of the mind by the supramental touch and the communicated impulse to seize this sight and word that creates the psychological phenomenon of poetic inspiration and it is the invasion of it by a superior power to that which it is normally able to harbour that produces the temporary excitement of brain and heart and nerve which accompanies the inrush of the influence. The inspired word comes, as said of old the Vedic seers, from the home of Truth, *sadanād ṛtasya*, the high and native level of a superior self which holds the light of a reality that is hidden by the lesser truth of the normal sense and intelligence. It is rarely, however, that it comes direct and unaltered, ready embodied and perfect and absolute: ordinarily there is an influx and a suggestion of its light and speech hidden in a cloud of formless lustre and we have to receive as best we can, to find and disengage or to reshape word and substance with the aid of our mental powers while they are still possessed and excited and enlightened by the influence. The word comes secretly from above the mind, but it is plunged first into our intuitive depths and emerges imperfectly to be shaped by the poetic feeling and intelligence, *hṛdā taṣṭān, manīṣā*. An intuitive self in the depth of each of our parts of being, hid in sense, life, heart, mind, is the transmitting agent, a subliminal power concealed in some secret cavern within of which the curtained and crystal doors disclose only occasional and partial transparencies or are sometimes half open or ajar, — *nihitam guhāyām, guhāhitam gahvareṣṭham.* The less we are near and awake to this agent, the more externally

intellectualised and vitalised becomes the tone and substance of the poetic speech; the more we can bring in of its direct power and vision, the more intuitive and illumined becomes the word of our utterance. And the more we can light up the veil and have the direct transmission, the greater the force of inspiration and revelation and the nearer we shall get to an absolute and inevitable word straight from the supramental sight and language.

The most characteristic trend of recent poetry has been an attempt, sometimes lucid, sometimes half understanding or obscure, to break open the doors of the luminous cavern and to get the seeing and phrase which would be that of this intuitive self of our intelligence and imagination and sensation and life and feeling. In a certain kind of continental poetry it is a search for the sheer intuitivities of sensation and of the more vital emotions and states and experiences and relations with objects and persons, the spirit's sense of itself, as it were, externalised and made vital and physical and some illumination of the inner meaning of this externality, that motives a new kind of utterance. Much of present-day English poetry drives in the same direction but with less subtlety and a more forceful outwardness of sight and tone. The Irish poets and in a different way the few Indians, Tagore and Chattopadhyay and Mrs. Naidu, who have written in English or transferred their poetical thought into that medium, aim at pure intuitivities of a more psychic feeling, sensation and life-vision or a subtle and psychic or spiritualised imagination and intelligence. All, however, are secretly moved to their very different and often contradictory tendencies by the same fundamental endeavour of the Time-spirit. The difficulty has been to find the intuitive language which will be the true medium and the condition of perfect success of this endeavour. The old habits of poetic speech still cling around and encrust or dilute the subtler subtlety, the more luminous light, the intenser intensities, the deeper depths sought for by the intuitive utterance. These things, however, are already there and are shaping a new manner of speech, a basis for the more inner and illumined poetic language of the future. At its best, and oftenest in the greater poets, it emerges from the admixture of older methods and manifests the whole and pure characteristic note of the intuitive manner.

It is the greatening, deepening and making normal of this kind that is likely to bring the perfect voice of the poetry of the future.

The character of this change is a raising of what I have called the adequate and the dynamic degrees of poetic speech to the third intuitive and illuminative power or a touching and penetrating of them with its peculiar lustre. The more potent inspired or revelatory inevitable word occasionally intervenes as in the older poets, but it is the greater generalising of the intermediate, the first more purely intuitive degree that is the common feature, the level of the endeavour, the distinctive stamp where it succeeds of this new utterance. It takes the clear and strong or the lucid and delicate poetical adequacy of speech from which the older poets started and takes too the dynamic poetical eloquence or the richer suggestive and imaginatively effective power of language and tries to effect commonly what they were content to do only in moments of greater elevation, — to put into its mould or even surcharge it with a stronger or subtler content of illumination and this also to discharge of the intellectual tone and colour which so usually holds or else makes its way into all but their rarest utterances and to arrive at a pure intuitive expression of sensation and feeling and thought or of an inwardly intuitive vital vision or of a strong or a subtle psychic or spiritualised intelligence. This is a language which aims at bare or strange or subtle or pregnant identities between the mind's intuitive thought and perception and emotion and a rarer than the surface truth and meaning of the object or experience. And very often the work is done not so much by the language as the subtle sense suggestion of the rhythm and word music, the sound doing the alchemic labour of transfiguration which the expression is not yet strong and adult enough to lead and compass.

These are beginnings and beyond lies much that has to be done to effectuate the complete change; an uncertain transition has yet to pass into a great transformation. The moulds or at least the spirit and manner of poetic expression have to be recast, very much as Shakespeare and his contemporaries recast the poetic speech of the English tongue so as to give shape and room to the surge of self-seeing and self-feeling and self-thinking of the life-soul of man: but this time it has to be done in many languages

by the minds of many nation entities at once and to make shape and room for the multitudinous vastitudes, the finer and finer subtleties, the absolute transparencies of the seeing, feeling and thinking of the inmost self and spirit in man in intimate touch with the opening truths of all the levels of his existence and all his surroundings in Nature and in supernature. The voices we already have, the as yet strange and not yet universally accepted subtleties of some, the immature strainings and violences of others, the work of those who have something of the new substance but not a mastery of its native expression and those who have the new speech and rhythm but a poverty of the substance that should have made it rich and ample, the perfections attained even, are to be regarded only as incipient efforts and successes and stimulations to a more complete disclosure of the unfolding spirit. The speech that opens more constantly the doors of the intuitive self in the caverns of light of our nature has not done all that is to be done. The speech also has to be found that shall come by the rending or removal of the golden lid between our intelligence and the effulgent supra-intelligence and effect a direct and sovereign descent and pouring of some absolute sight and word of the spirit into the moulds of human language.

CHAPTER XXXII

Conclusion

THE poetry of the future has to solve, if the suggestions I have made are sound, a problem new to the art of poetic speech, an utterance of the deepest soul of man and of the universal spirit in things, not only with another and a more complete vision, but in the very inmost language of the self-experience of the soul and the sight of the spiritual mind. The attempt to speak in poetry the inmost things of the spirit or to use a psychical and spiritual seeing other than that of the more outward imagination and intelligence has indeed been made before, but for the most part and except in rare moments of an unusually inspired speech it has used some kind of figure or symbol more than a direct language of inmost experience; or else, where it has used such a language, it has been within the limited province of a purely inward experience as in the lofty philosophic and spiritual poetry of the Upanishads, the expression of a peculiar psychic feeling of Nature common in Far Eastern poets or the poetic setting of mystic states or of an especial religious emotion and experience of which we have a few examples in Europe and many in the literature of Western Asia and India. It is a different and much larger creative and interpretative movement that we now see in its first stages, an expansion of the inner way of vision to outer no less than to inner things, to all that is subjective to us and all that is objective, a seeing by a closer identity in the self of man with the self of things and life and Nature and of all that meets him in the universe. The poet has to find the language of these identities, and even symbol and figure, when brought in to assist the more direct utterance, must be used in a different fashion, less as a veil, more as a real correspondence.

The first condition of the complete emergence of this new poetic inspiration and this significance of poetic speech must be the completion of an as yet only initial spiritualised turn of our

general human feeling and intelligence. At present the human mind is occupied in passing the borders of two kingdoms. It is emerging out of a period of active and mostly materialistic intellectualism towards a primary intuitive seeking to which the straining of the intellect after truth has been brought in the very drive of its own impulse by a sort of slipping over unexpected borders. There is therefore an uncertain groping in many directions some of which are only valuable as a transitional effort and, if they could be the end and final movement, might lead only to a brilliant corruption and decadence. There is a vitalistic intuitivism sometimes taking a more subjective form, sometimes a more objective, that stays amid dubious lights on the border and cannot get through its own rather thick and often violent lustres and colours to a finer and truer spiritual vision. There is an emotional and sensational psychical intuitivism half emerging from and half entangled in the vitalistic motive that has often a strange beauty and brilliance, sometimes stained with morbid hues, sometimes floating in a vague mist, sometimes — and this is a common tendency — strained to an exaggeration of vital-psychic motive. There is a purer and more delicate psychic intuition with a spiritual issue, that which has been brought by the Irish poets into English literature. The poetry of Whitman and his successors has been that of life, but of life broadened, raised and illumined by a strong intellectual intuition of the self of man and the large soul of humanity. And at the subtlest elevation of all that has yet been reached stands or rather wings and floats in a high intermediate region the poetry of Tagore, not in the complete spiritual light, but amid an air shot with its seekings and glimpses, a sight and cadence found in a psycho-spiritual heaven of subtle and delicate soul experience transmuting the earth tones by the touch of its radiance. The wide success and appeal of his poetry is indeed one of the most significant signs of the tendency of the mind of the age. At the same time one feels that none of these things are at all the whole of what we are seeking or the definite outcome and issue. That can only be assured when a supreme light of the spirit, a perfect joy and satisfaction of the subtlety and complexity of a finer psychic experience and a wide strength and amplitude of the life-soul sure of the earth

and open to the heavens have met, found each other and fused together in the sovereign unity of some great poetic discovery and utterance.

It is possible that it may be rather in Eastern languages and by the genius of Eastern poets that there will come the first discovery of this perfection: the East has always had in its temperament a greater constant nearness to the spiritual and psychic sight and experience and it is only a more perfect turning of this sight on the whole life of man to accept and illuminate that is needed for the realisation of that for which we are still waiting. On the other hand, the West has this advantage that though it is only now emerging not so much into the spiritual light as into an outer half-lit circle and though it is hampered by an excessive outward, intellectual and vital pressure, it has at present a more widely ranging thought and a more questing and active eye, and if these once take the right direction, the expression is not so much encircled by past spiritual forms and traditions. It is, in any case, the shock upon each other of the oriental and occidental mentalities, on the one side the large spiritual mind and inward eye turned upon self and eternal realities, on the other the free inquiry of thought and the courage of the life energy assailing the earth and its problems that is creating the future and must be the parent of the poetry of the future. The whole of life and of the world and Nature seen, fathomed, accepted, but seen in the light of man's deepest spirit, fathomed by the fathoming of the self of man and the large self of the universe, accepted in the sense of its inmost and not only its more outward truth, the discovery of the divine reality within it and of man's own divine possibilities, — this is the delivering vision for which our minds are seeking and it is this vision of which the future poetry must find the inspiring aesthetic form and the revealing language.

The world is making itself anew under a great spiritual pressure, the old things are passing away and the new things ready to come into being, and it may be that some of the old nations that have been the leaders of the past and the old literatures that have been hitherto the chosen vehicles of strong poetic creation may prove incapable of holding the greater breath of the new spirit and be condemned to fall into decadence. It may be that we shall

have to look for the future creation to new poetical literatures that are not yet born or are yet in their youth and first making or, though they have done something in the past, have still to reach their greatest voice and compass. A language passes through its cycle and grows aged and decays by many maladies: it stagnates perhaps by the attachment of its life to a past tradition and mould of excellence from which it cannot get away without danger to its principle of existence or a straining and breaking of its possibilities and a highly coloured decadence; or, exhausted in its creative vigour, it passes into that attractive but dangerous phase of art for art's sake which makes of poetry no longer a high and fine outpouring of the soul and the life but a hedonistic indulgence and dilettantism of the intelligence. These and other signs of age are not absent from the greater European literary tongues, and at such a stage it becomes a difficult and a critical experiment to attempt at once a transformation of spirit and of the inner cast of poetic language. There is yet in the present ferment and travail a compelling force of new potentiality, a saving element in the power that is at the root of the call to change, the power of the spirit ever strong to transmute life and mind and make all young again, and once this magical force can be accepted in its completeness and provided there is no long-continued floundering among perverted inspirations or half motives, the old literatures may enter rejuvenated into a new creative cycle.

The poetry of the English language in direct relation to which I have made these suggestions, has certain disadvantages for the task that has to be attempted but also certain signal advantages. It is a literature that has long done great things but has neither exhausted its great natural vigour nor fixed itself in any dominant tradition, but rather has constantly shown a free spirit of poetical adventure and a perfect readiness to depart from old moorings and set its sail to undiscovered countries. It has an unsurpassed power of imaginative and intuitive language and has shown it to a very high degree in the intuitive expression of the life soul and to some degree in that of the inspired intelligence. It seems therefore a predestined instrument for the new poetic language of the intuitive spirit. The chief danger of failure arises from the external direction of the Anglo-Saxon

mind. That has been a source of strength in combination with the finer Celtic imagination and has given English poetry a strong hold on life, but the hold has been also something of a chain continually drawing it back from the height and fullness of some great spiritual attempt to inferior levels. Today, however, the language is no longer the tongue only of the English people: the Irish mind with its Celtic originality and psychic delicacy of vision and purpose has entered into this poetic field. It is receiving too for a time an element or at least an embassy and message from the higher spiritual mind and imagination of India. The countries beyond the seas, still absorbed in their material making, have yet to achieve spiritual independence, but once that comes, the poetry of Whitman shows what large and new elements they can bring to the increase of the spiritual potentialities of the now wide-spreading language. On the whole, therefore, it is here among European tongues that there is the largest present chance of the revolution of the human spirit finding most easily its poetic utterance. It is also here by the union of a great vital energy and a considerable possibility of the spiritual vision that there may be most naturally a strong utterance of that which most has to be expressed, the seen and realised unity of life and the spirit.

The pouring of a new and greater self-vision of man and Nature and existence into the idea and the life is the condition of the completeness of the coming poetry. It is a large setting and movement of life opening a considerable expansion to the human soul and mind that has been in the great ages of literature the supreme creative stimulus. The discovery of a fresh intellectual or aesthetic 'motive of the kind that was common in the last century initiates only an ephemeral ripple on the surface and seldom creates work of the very first order. The real inspiration enters with a more complete movement, an enlarged horizon of life, a widening of the fields of the idea, a heightening of the flight of the spirit. The change that is at present coming over the mind of the race began with a wider cosmic vision, a sense of the greatness and destiny and possibilities of the individual and the race, the idea of humanity and of the unity of man with man and a closer relation too and unity of his mind with the life of

Nature. It is the endeavour to make the expression of these things one with the expression of life that imparts to the poetry of Whitman so much more large and vital an air than the comparatively feeble refinement and careful art of most of the contemporary poetry of Europe — not that the art has to be omitted, but that it must be united with a more puissant sincerity of spirit and greatness of impulse and a sense of new birth and youth and the potencies of the future. The intellectual idea was yet not enough, for it had to find its own greater truth in the spiritual idea and its finer cultural field in a more delicate and complex and subtle psychic sight and experience. It is this that has been prepared by recent and contemporary poets. The expression of this profounder idea and experience is again not enough until the spiritual idea has passed into a complete spiritual realisation and not only affected individual intellect and psychic mind and imagination, but entered into the general sense and feeling of the race and taken hold upon all thought and life to reinterpret and remould them in their image. It is this spiritual realisation that the future poetry has to help forward by giving to it its eye of sight, its shape of aesthetic beauty, its revealing tongue and it is this greatening of life that it has to make its substance.

It is in effect a larger cosmic vision, a realising of the godhead in the world and in man, of his divine possibilities as well of the greatness of the power that manifests in what he is, a spiritualised uplifting of his thought and feeling and sense and action, a more developed psychic mind and heart, a truer and a deeper insight into his nature and the meaning of the world, a calling of diviner potentialities and more spiritual values into the intention and structure of his life that is the call upon humanity, the prospect offered to it by the slowly unfolding and now more clearly disclosed Self of the universe. The nations that most include and make real these things in their life and culture are the nations of the coming dawn and the poets of whatever tongue and race who most completely see with this vision and speak with the inspiration of its utterance are those who shall be the creators of the poetry of the future.

LETTERS ON POETRY, LITERATURE AND ART

Section One

THE PROCESS, FORM AND SUBSTANCE OF POETRY

THREE ELEMENTS OF POETIC CREATION

Poetry, or at any rate a truly poetic poetry, comes always from some subtle plane through the creative vital and uses the outer mind and other external instruments for transmission only. There are three elements in the production of poetry; there is the original source of inspiration, there is the vital force of creative beauty which contributes its own substance and impetus and often determines the form, except when that also comes ready made from the original source; there is finally the transmitting outer consciousness of the poet. The most genuine and perfect poetry is written when the original source is able to throw its inspiration pure and undiminished into the vital and there takes its true native form and power of speech exactly reproducing the inspiration, while the outer consciousness is entirely passive and transmits without alteration what it receives from the godheads of the inner or the superior spaces. When the vital mind and emotion are too active and give too much of their own initiation or a translation into more or less turbid vital stuff, the poetry remains powerful but is inferior in quality and less authentic. Finally, if the outer consciousness is too lethargic and blocks the transmission or too active and makes its own version, then you have the poetry that fails or is at best a creditable mental manufacture. It is the interference of these two parts either by obstruction or by too great an activity of their own or by both together that causes the difficulty and labour of writing. There would be no difficulty if the inspiration came through without obstruction or interference in a pure transcript — that is what happens in a poet's highest or freest moments when he writes not at all out of his own external human mind but by inspiration, as the mouthpiece of the Gods.

The originating source may be anywhere; the poetry may arise or descend from the subtle physical plane, from the higher or lower vital itself, from the dynamic or creative intelligence, from the plane of dynamic vision, from the psychic, from the illumined mind or Intuition, — even, though this is the rarest, from the Overmind widenesses. To get the Overmind inspira-

tion is so rare that there are only a few lines or short passages in all poetic literature that give at least some appearance or reflection of it. When the source of inspiration is in the heart or the psychic there is more easily a good will in the vital channel, the flow is spontaneous; the inspiration takes at once its true form and speech and is transmitted without any interference or only a minimum of interference by the brain-mind, that great spoiler of the higher or deeper splendours. It is the character of the lyrical inspiration, to flow in a jet out of the being — whether it comes from the vital or the psychic, it is usually spontaneous, for these are the two most powerfully impelling and compelling parts of the nature. When on the contrary the source of inspiration is in the creative poetic intelligence or even the higher mind or the illumined mind, the poetry which comes from this quarter is always apt to be arrested by the outer intellect, our habitual thought-production engine. This intellect is an absurdly overactive part of the nature; it always thinks that nothing can be well done unless it puts its finger into the pie and therefore it instinctively interferes with the inspiration, blocks half or more than half of it and labours to substitute its own inferior and toilsome productions for the true speech and rhythm that ought to have come. The poet labours in anguish to get the one true word, the authentic rhythm, the real divine substance of what he has to say, while all the time it is waiting complete and ready behind; but it is denied free transmission by some part of the transmitting agency which prefers to translate and is not willing merely to receive and transcribe. When one gets something through from the illumined mind, then there is likely to come to birth work that is really fine and great. When there comes with labour or without it something reasonably like what the poetic intelligence wanted to say, then there is something fine or adequate, though it may not be great unless there is an intervention from the higher levels. But when the outer brain is at work trying to fashion out of itself or to give its own version of what the higher sources are trying to pour down, then there results a manufacture or something quite inadequate or faulty or, at the best, "good on the whole", but not the thing that ought to have come.

2. 6. 1931

THE CREATIVE POWER OF INSPIRATION AND THE HUMAN INSTRUMENT

A poem may pre-exist in the timeless as all creation pre-exists there or else in some plane where the past, present and future exist together. But it is not necessary to presuppose anything of the kind to explain the phenomena of inspiration. All is here a matter of formation or creation. By the contact with the source of inspiration the creative Power at one level or another and the human instrument, receptacle or channel get into contact. That is the essential point, all the rest depends upon the individual case. If the substance, rhythm, form, words come down all together ready-formed from the plane of poetic creation, that is the perfect type of inspiration; it may give its own spontaneous gift or it may give something which corresponds to the idea or the aspiration of the poet, but in either case the human being is only a channel or receptacle, although he feels the joy of the creation and the joy of the *āveśa*, *enthousiasmos*, elation of the inrush and the passage. On the other hand it may be that the creative source sends down the substance or stuff, the force and the idea, but the language, rhythm etc. are found somewhere in the instrument; he has to find the human transcription of something that is there in diviner essence above; then there is an illumination or excitement, a conscious labour of creation swift or slow, hampered or facile. Something of the language may be supplied by the mind or vital, something may break through from somewhere behind the veil, from whatever source gets into touch with the transcribing mind in the liberating or stimulating excitement or uplifting of the consciousness. Or a line or lines may come through from some plane and the poet excited to creation may build around them constructing his material or getting it from any source he can tap. There are many possibilities of this nature. There is also the possibility of an inspiration not from above, but from somewhere within on the ordinary levels, some inner mind, emotional, vital etc. which the mind practised in poetical technique works out according to its habitual faculty. Here again in a different way similar phenomena, similar variations may arise.

As for the language, the tongue in which the poem comes or the whole lines from above, that offers no real difficulty. It all depends on the contact between the creative Power and the instrument or channel, the Power will naturally choose the language of the instrument or channel, that to which it is accustomed and can therefore readily hear and receive. The Power itself is not limited and can use any language, but although it is possible for things to come through in a language unknown or ill-known — I have seen several instances of the former — it is not a usual case, since the *saṁskāras* of the mind, its habits of action and conception would normally obstruct any such unprepared receptiveness; only a strong mediumistic faculty might be unaffected by this difficulty. These things, however, are obviously exceptional, abnormal or supernormal phenomena.

If the parts of a poem come from different planes, it is because one starts from some high plane but the connecting consciousness cannot receive uninterruptedly from there and as soon as it flickers or wavers it comes down to a lower, perhaps without noticing it, or the lower comes in to supply the continuation of the flow or on the contrary the consciousness starts from a lower plane and is lifted in the *āveśa* perhaps occasionally, perhaps more continuously higher for a time or else the higher force attracted by the creative will breaks through or touches or catches up the less excited inspiration towards or into itself. I am speaking here especially of the Overhead planes where this is quite natural; for the Overmind, for instance, is the ultimate source of intuition, illumination or heightened power of the planes immediately below it. It can lift them up into its own greater intensity or give out of its intensity to them or touch or combine their powers together with something of its own greater power — or they can receive or draw something from it or from each other. On the lower planes beginning from the mental downwards there can also be such variations, but the working is not the same, for the different powers here stand more on a footing of equality whether they stand apart from each other, each working in its own right, or co-operate.

29. 4. 1937

THREE ESSENTIALS FOR WRITING POETRY

I have gone through your poems. For poetry three things are necessary. First, there must be emotional sincerity and poetical feeling and this your poems show that you possess. Next, a mastery over language and a faculty of rhythm perfected by a knowledge of the technique of poetic and rhythmic expression; here the technique is imperfect, true faculty is there but in the rough and there is not yet an original and native style. Finally, there must be the power of inspiration, the creative energy, and that makes the whole difference between the poet and the good verse-writer. In your poems this is still very uncertain — in some passages it almost comes out, but in the rest it is not evident.

I would suggest to you not to turn your energies in this direction at present. Allow your consciousness to grow. If when the consciousness develops, a greater energy of inspiration comes, not out of the ordinary but out of the Yogic consciousness, then you can write and, if it is found that the energy not only comes from the true source but is able to mould for itself the true transcription in rhythm and language, can continue.

6. 6. 1932

ESSENCE OF INSPIRATION

There can be inspiration also without words — a certain intensity in the light and force and substance of the knowledge is the essence of inspiration.

18. 6. 1933

POETIC FLUENCY

It is precisely the people who are careful, self-critical, anxious for perfection who have interrupted visits from the Muse. Those who don't mind what they write, trusting to their genius, vigour or fluency to carry it off are usually the abundant writers. There are exceptions, of course. "The poetic part caught in the

mere mind" is an admirable explanation of the phenomenon of interruption. Fluent poets are those who either do not mind if they do not always write their very best or whose minds are sufficiently poetic to make even their "not best" verse pass muster or make a reasonably good show. Sometimes you write things that are good enough, but not your best, but both your insistence and mine — for I think it essential for you to write your best always, at least your "level best" — may have curbed the fluency a good deal.

The check and diminution forced on your prose was compensated by the much higher and maturer quality to which it attained afterwards. It would be so, I suppose, with the poetry; a new level of consciousness once attained, there might well be a new fluency. So there is not much justification for the fear.

INSPIRATION AND EFFORT

1

Inspiration is always a very uncertain thing; it comes when it chooses, stops suddenly before it has finished its work, refuses to descend when it is called. This is a well-known affliction, perhaps of all artists, but certainly of poets. There are some who can command it at will; those who, I think, are more full of an abundant poetic energy than careful for perfection; others who oblige it to come whenever they put pen to paper but with these the inspiration is either not of a high order or quite unequal in its levels. Again there are some who try to give it a habit of coming by always writing at the same time; Virgil with his nine lines first written, then perfected every morning, Milton with his fifty epic lines a day, are said to have succeeded in regularising their inspiration. It is, I suppose, the same principle which makes Gurus in India prescribe for their disciples a meditation at the same fixed hour every day. It succeeds partially of course, for some entirely, but not for everybody. For myself, when the inspiration did not come with a rush or in a stream, — for then there is no difficulty, — I had only one way, to allow a certain

kind of incubation in which a large form of the thing to be done threw itself on the mind and then wait for the white heat in which the entire transcription could rapidly take place. But I think each poet has his own way of working and finds his own issue out of inspiration's incertitudes.

2

Few poets can keep for a very long time a sustained level of the highest inspiration. The best poetry does not usually come by streams except in poets of a supreme greatness though there may be in others than the greatest long-continued wingings at a considerable height. The very best comes by intermittent drops, though sometimes three or four gleaming drops at a time. Even in the greatest poets, even in those with the most opulent flow of riches like Shakespeare, the very best is comparatively rare.

All statements are subject to qualification. What Lawrence states[1] is true in principle, but in practice most poets have to sustain the inspiration by industry. Milton in his later days used to write every day fifty lines; Virgil nine which he corrected and recorrected till it was within half way of what he wanted. In other words he used to write under any conditions and pull at his inspiration till it came. Usually the best lines, passages, etc. come like that.

3

Merciful heavens, what a splashing and floundering! When you miss a verse or a poem, it is better to wait in an entire quietude about it (with only a silent expectation) until the true inspiration comes, and not to thrash the inner air vainly for possible variants — like that the true form is much more likely to come, as people go to sleep on a problem and find it solved when they awake. Otherwise, you are likely to have only a series of misses, the half-gods of the semi-poetic mind continually intervening with their false enthusiasms and misleading voices.

11. 7. 1931

[1] "One can only write creative stuff when it comes — otherwise it is not much good."

4

Perhaps one reason why your mind is so variable is because it has learned too much and has too many influences stamped upon it; it does not allow the real poet in you who is a little at the back to be himself — it wants to supply him with a form instead of allowing him to breathe into the instrument his own notes. It is, besides, too ingenious. What you have to learn is the art of allowing things to come through and recognising among them the one right thing — which is very much what you have to do in Yoga also. It is really this recognition that is the one important need — once you have that, things become much easier.

3. 2. 1932

THE TRUE ARTISTIC TEMPER

1

It is no use being disgusted because there is a best you have not reached yet; every poet should have that feeling of "a miraculous poetic creation existing on a plane" he has not reached, but he should not despair of reaching it; but rather he has to regard present achievement not as something final but as steps towards what he hopes some day to write. That is the true artistic temper.

1. 5. 1934

2

You seem to suffer from a mania of self-depreciatory criticism. Many artists and poets have that; as soon as they look at their work they find it awfully poor and bad. (I had that myself often varied with the opposite feeling, A also has it); but to have it while writing is its most excruciating degree of intensity. Better get rid of it if you want to write freely.

14. 12. 1936

3

Impatience does not help; intensity of aspiration does. The use

of keeping the consciousness uplifted is that it then remains ready for the flow from above when that comes. To get as early as possible to the highest range one must keep the consciousness steadily turned towards it and maintain the call. First one has to establish the permanent opening — or get it to establish itself, then the ascension and frequent, afterwards constant descent. It is only afterwards that one can have the ease.

21. 4. 1937

INSPIRATION AND MENTAL UNDERSTANDING

Yes, the mind is used as a medium. It might be an understanding transcribing agent or it may be only a passive channel. If an agent, it transcribes what comes from above, understands but does not pass its opinion — only transmits. If it is only a channel then it sees the words and passes them but knows no more.

Not to improve; for that would mean the mind interfering, refusing to be a medium and trying to do better on its own active account. But to understand is desirable. If the mind is watchful and awake to the symbols being used or the images it can acquire the habit or knack of understanding.

CORRECTION BY SECOND INSPIRATION

1

It is a second inspiration which has come in improving on the first. When the improving is done by the mind and not by a pure inspiration then the retouches spoil more often than they perfect.

2

How can "anything" be used in a poem? A slight change makes all the difference between something forceful and a mere literary expression that misses its mark.

27. 5. 1936

JOY OF POETIC CREATION

Poetry can start from any plane of consciousness although like all art — or, one might say, all creation — it must always come through the vital if it is to be alive. And as there is always a joy in creation, that joy along with a certain *enthousiasmos* — not enthusiasm, if you please, but *ānandamaya āveśa* — must always be there whatever the source. But your poetry differs from the lines you quote. Your inspiration comes from the linking of the vital creative instrument to a deeper psychic experience, and it is that which makes the whole originality and peculiar individual power and subtle and delicate perfection of your poems. It was indeed because this linking-on took place that the true poetic faculty suddenly awoke in you; for it was not there before, at least on the surface. The joy you feel, therefore, was no doubt partly the simple joy of creation, but there comes also into it the joy of expression of the psychic being which was seeking for an outlet since your boyhood. It is this that justifies your poetry-writing as a part of your Sadhana.

PRESSURE OF CREATIVE FORMATION

I know very well this pressure of a creative formation to express itself and be fulfilled. When it presses like that there is nothing to do but to let it have its way, so as to leave the mind unoccupied and clear; otherwise it will be pushed two ways and would not be in the condition of ease necessary for concentration.

FORM AND SUBSTANCE OF POETRY

On the general question the truth seems to me to be very simple. It may be quite true that fine or telling rhythms without substance (substance of idea, suggestion, feeling) are hardly poetry at all, even if they make good verse. But that is no ground for belittling beauty or excellence of form or ignoring its supreme importance for poetic perfection. Poetry is after all an art and a poet ought

to be an artist of word and rhythm, even though necessarily, like other artists, he must also be something more than that, even much more. I hold therefore that harshness and roughness are not merits, but serious faults to be avoided by anyone who wants his work to be true poetry and survive. One can be strong and powerful, full of sincerity and substance without being harsh, rough or aggressive to the ear. Swinburne's later poetry is a mere body of rhythmic sound without a soul, but what of Browning's constant deliberate roughness or, let us say, excessive sturdiness which deprives much of his work of the claim to be poetry — it is already much discredited and it is certain there is much in it that posterity will carefully and with good reason forget to read. Energy enough there is and abundance of matter and these carry the day for a time and give fame, but it is only perfection that endures. Or if the cruder work lasts, it is only by association with the perfection of the same poet's work at his best. I may say also that if mere rhythmic acrobacies of the kind to which you very rightly object condemn a poet's work to inferiority and a literature deviating on to that line to decadence, the drive towards a harsh strength and rough energy of form and substance may easily lead to another kind of undesirable acrobacy, an opposite road towards individual inferiority and general decadence. Why should not Bengali poetry go on to the straight way of its progress without running either upon the rocks of roughness or into the shallows of mere melody? Austerity of course is another matter; rhythm can either be austere to bareness or sweet and subtle, and a harmonious perfection can be attained in either of these extreme directions if the mastery is there.

As for rules — rules are necessary but they are not absolute; one of the chief tendencies of genius is to break old rules and make departures which create new ones. English poetry of today luxuriates in movements which to the mind of yesterday would have been insanity or chaotic license, yet it is evident that this freedom of experimentation has led to discoveries of new rhythmic beauty with a very real charm and power and opened out possible lines of growth, — however unfortunate many of its results may be. Not the formal mind, but the ear must be the judge.

Moreover the development of a new note — the expression of a deeper Yogic or mystic experience in poetry — may very well demand for its fulness new departures in technique, a new turn or turns of rhythm, but these should be, I think, subtle in their difference rather than aggressive.

4. 1. 1932

RHYTHM AND SIGNIFICANCE

You seem to suggest that significance does not matter and need not enter into the account in judging and feeling poetry! ... Rhythm and word-music are indispensable, but are not the whole of poetry.... Certainly, the significance and feeling suggested and borne home by the words and rhythm are a capital part of the value of poetry. Shakespeare's lines

Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,

have a skilful and consummate rhythm and word-combination, but this gets its full value as the perfect embodiment of a profound and moving significance, the expression in a few lines of a whole range of human world-experience.

GRADES OF PERFECTION IN POETRY

To the two requisites you mention which are technical — "the rightness of individual words and phrases, the rightness of the general lingual reconstruction of the poetic vision, — that is, the manner, syntactical and psychological, of whole sentences and their co-ordination", — two others have to be added, a certain smiling sureness of touch and inner breath of perfect perfection, born not made, in the words themselves, and a certain absolute winging movement in the rhythm. Without an inevitable rhythm there can be no inevitable wording. If you under-

stand all that, you are lucky. But how to explain the inexplicable, something that is self-existent? That simply means an absoluteness, one might say, an inexplicably perfect and in-fitting thisness and thereness and thatness and everythingelseness so satisfying in every way as to be unalterable. All perfection is not necessarily inevitability. I have tried to explain in *The Future Poetry* — very unsuccessfully I am afraid — that there are different grades of perfection in poetry: adequateness, effectivity, illumination of language, inspiredness — finally, inevitability. These are things one has to learn to feel, one can't analyse.

All the styles, "adequate", "effective", etc., can be raised to inevitability in their own line.

The supreme inevitability is something more even than that, a speech overwhelmingly sheer, pure and true, a quintessential essence of convincingly perfect utterance. That goes out of all classifications and is unanalysable. Instances would include the most different kinds of style — Keats' "magic casements", Wordsworth's Newton and his "fields of sleep", Shakespeare's "Macbeth has murdered sleep", Homer's descent of Apollo from Olympus, Virgil's "Sunt lachrymae rerum" and his "O passi graviora".

Homer's passage translated into English would be perfectly ordinary. He gets the best part of his effect from his rhythm. Translated it would run merely like this: "And he descended from the peaks of Olympus, wroth at heart, bearing on his shoulders arrows and doubly pent-in quiver, and there arose the clang of his silver bow as he moved, and he came made like unto the night." His words too are quite simple but the vowellation and the rhythm make the clang of the silver bow go smashing through the world into universes beyond while the last words give a most august and formidable impression of godhead.

I don't think there is any co-ordination between the differences of style and the different planes of inspiration — unless one can say that the effective style comes from the higher mind, the illumined from the illumined mind, the inspired from the plane of intuition. But I don't know whether that would stand at all times — especially when each style reaches its inevitable power.

POETIC AUSTERITY AND EXUBERANCE

1

It is not easy to say precisely what is austerity in the poetic sense — for it is a quality that can be felt, a spirit in the writer and the writing, but if you put it in the strait-waistcoat of a definition or of a set technical method you are likely to lose the spirit altogether. In the spirit of the writing you can feel it as a something constant, self-gathered, grave and severe; it is the quality that one at once is aware of in Milton, Wordsworth, Aeschylus and which even their most fervent admirers would hardly attribute to Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Euripides. But there is also an austerity in the poetic manner and that is more difficult to describe or to fix its borders. At most one can say that it consists in a will to express the thing of which you write, thought, object or feeling, in its just form and exact power without addition and without exuberance. The austerer method of poetry avoids all lax superfluity, all profusion of unnecessary words, excess of emotional outcry, self-indulgent daub of colour, overbrilliant scattering of images, all mere luxury of external art or artifice. To use just the necessary words and no others, the thought in its simplicity and bare power, the one expressive or revealing image, the precise colour and nothing more, just the exact impression, reaction, simple feeling proper to the object, — nothing spun out, additional, in excess. Any rioting in words, colour, images, emotions, sound, phrase for their own sake, for their own beauty, attraction, luxury of abundant expression would, I suppose, be what your friend means by *ucchvāsa*. Even, an extreme contemporary tendency seems to condemn the use of image, epithet, colour, pitch or emphasis of any kind, except on the most sparing scale, as a vice. Length in a poem is itself a sin, for length means padding — a long poem is a bad poem, only brief work, intense, lyrical in spirit can be throughout pure poetry. Milton, for example, considered austere by the common run of mortals, would be excluded from the list of the pure for his sprawling lengthiness, his epic rhetoric, his swelling phrases, his cult of the grandiose. To be perfect you must be small, brief

and restrained, meticulous in cut and style.

This extremism in the avoidance of excess is perhaps itself an excess. Much can be done by bareness in poetry — a poetic nudism if accompanied by either beauty and grace or strength and power has its excellence. There can be a vivid or striking or forceful or a subtle, delicate or lovely bareness which reaches to the highest values of poetic expression. There can be also a compact or a stringent bareness — the kind of style deliberately aimed at by Landor; but this can be very stiff and stilted as Landor is in his more ambitious attempts — although he did magnificent things sometimes, like his lines on Rose Aylmer, — you can see there how emotion itself can gain by a spare austerity in self-expression. But it is doubtful whether all these kinds — Wordsworth's lyrics, for example, the *Daffodils*, the *Cuckoo* — can be classed as austere. On the other hand, there can be a very real spirit and power of underlying austerity behind a considerable wealth and richness of expression. Arnold in one of his poems gives the image of a girl beautiful, rich and sumptuous in apparel on whose body, killed in an accident, was found beneath the sumptuousness, next to the skin, an under-robe of sackcloth. If that is admitted, then Milton can keep his claim to austerity in spite of his epic fullness and Aeschylus in spite of the exultant daring of his images and the rich colour of his language. Dante is, I think, the perfect type of austerity in poetry, standing between the two extremes and combining the most sustained severity of expression with a precise power and fullness in the language which gives the sense of packed riches — no mere bareness anywhere.

But, after all, exclusive standards are out of place in poetry; there is room for all kinds and all methods. Shakespeare was to the French classicists a drunken barbarian of genius; but his spontaneous exuberance has lifted him higher than their willed severity of classical perfection. All depends on the kind one aims at — expressing what is in oneself — and an inspired faithfulness to the law of perfection in that kind. That needs some explanation, perhaps; but I have here perforce to put a dash and finish.

8. 10. 1932

2

I said that Aeschylus like Milton was austere *au fond* — there is as in Dante a high serious restrained power behind all they write; but the outward form in Milton is grandiose, copious, lavish of strength and sweep, in Aeschylus bold, high-imaged, strong in colour, in Dante full of concise, packed and significantly forceful turn and phrase. These external riches might seem not restrained enough to the purists of austerity: they want the manner and not the *fond* only to be impeccably austere. I did not mean that Dante reached the summit of austerity in this sense; in fact I said he stood between the two extremes of bare austerity and sumptuosity of language. But even in his language there is a sense of *tapasyā*, of concentrated restraint in his expressive force. A in his translation of Dante has let himself go in the direction of eloquence more than Dante who is too succinct for eloquence and he has used also a mystical turn of phrase which is not Dante's — yet he has got something of the spirit in the language, something of Dante's concentrated force of expression into his lines. You have spread yourself out even more than A, but still there is the Dantesque in your lines also, — very much so, I should say, — with only this difference that Dante would have put it into fewer words than you do. It is the Dantesque stretching itself out a little — more large-limbed, permitting itself more space.

Aeschylus' manner cannot be described as *ucchvāsa*, at least in the sense given to it in my letter. He is not carefully restrained and succinct in his language like Dante, but there is a certain royal measure even in his boldness of colour and image which has in it the strength of *tapasyā* and cannot be called *ucchvāsa*. I suppose in Bengali this term is used a little indiscriminately for things that are not quite the same in spirit. If mere use of bold image and fullness of expression, epithet, colour, splendour of phrase is *ucchvāsa*, apart from the manner of their use, I would say that austerity and *ucchvāsa* of a certain kind are perfectly compatible. At any rate two-thirds of the poetry hitherto recognised as the best in different literatures comes of a combination of these two elements. If I find time I shall one day try to explain

this point with texts to support it.

I don't know the Bengali for austerity. *Gāmbhīrya* and other kindred things are or can be elements of austerity, but are not austerity itself. *Anucchvāsa* is not accurate; one can be free from *ucchvāsa* without being austere. The soul of austerity in poetry as in Yoga is *ātmasaṁyama*; all the rest is variable, the outward quality of the austerity itself may be variable.

9. 10. 1932

3

I am still at a loss what to answer about *ucchvāsa*, because I still don't understand exactly what your correspondent is aiming at in his criticism. There is not more *ucchvāsa* in Bengali poetry than in English, if by the word is meant rhetoric, free resort to imagery, prolific weaving of words and ideas and sentiments around what one has to say. Indian poetry in the Sanskritic languages — there are exceptions of course — was for the most part more restrained and classic in taste or else more impressionist and incisive than most English poetry; the qualities or defects noted above came into Bengali under the English influence. I don't see therefore the point of his remark that the English language cannot express the Indian temperament. It is true of course to a certain extent, first, because, no foreign language can express what is intimate and peculiar to a national temperament, it tends at once to become falsified and seems exotic, and especially the imagery or sentiment of one language does not go well with that of another; least of all can the temperament of an oriental tongue be readily transferred into a European tongue. What is perfectly simple and straightforward in one becomes emphatic or over-coloured or strange in the other. But that has nothing to do with *ucchvāsa* in itself. As to emotion — if that is what is meant — your word effusiveness is rather unfortunate, for effusiveness is not praiseworthy in poetry anywhere; but vividness of emotion is no more reprehensible in English than in Bengali poetry. You give as examples of *ucchvāsa* among other things Madhusudan's style, Tagore's poem to me, a passage from Govindadas. I don't think there is anything in Madhu-

sudan which an English poet writing in Bengali would have hesitated to father. Tagore's poem is written at a high pitch of feeling perfectly intelligible to anyone who had passed through the exaltation of the Swadeshi days, but not more high pitched than certain things in Milton, Shelley, Swinburne. In Govindadas's lines, — let us translate them into English —

Am I merely thine? O Love, I am there clinging
In every limb of thine — there ever in my creation and
my dissolution —

the idea is one that would not so easily occur to an English poet, it is an erotic mysticism, easily suggested to a mind familiar with the experiences of Vedanta or Vaishnava mystics; but this is not effusiveness, it is intensity — and an English writer — e.g. Lawrence — could be quite as intense, but would use a different idea or image.

1. 10. 1932

4

I am afraid the language of your appreciations or criticisms here is not apposite. There is nothing "bare and rugged" in the two lines you quote —

A rhythmic fire that opens a secret door,
And the treasures of eternity are found;

on the contrary they are rather violently figured — the *osé* image of a fire opening a door of a treasure-house would probably be objected to by Cousins or any other purist. The language of poetry is called bare when it is confined rigorously to just the words necessary to express the thought or feeling or to visualise what is described, without superfluous epithets, without images, without any least rhetorical turn in it. E.g. Cowper's

Toll for the brave —
The brave! who are no more —

is bare. Byron's

Jehovah's vessels hold
The godless heathen's wine

does not quite succeed because of a rhetorical tinge that he is not able to keep out of the expression. When Baxter (I think it was Baxter) writes

I spoke as one who ne'er would speak again[1]
And as a dying man to dying men,

that might be taken as an example of strong and bare poetic language. I have written of Savitri waking on the day of destiny —

Immobile in herself, she gathered force.
This was the day when Satyavan must die —

that is designedly bare.

But none of these lines or passages can be called rugged; for ruggedness and austerity are not the same thing; poetry is rugged when it is rough in language and rhythm or rough and unpolished but sincere in feeling. Donne is often rugged, —

Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see
That spectacle of too much weight for me.
Who sees God's face that is self-life must die,
What a death were it then to see God die?

but it is only the first line that is at all bare.

On the other side you describe the line of your preference

My moments pass with moon-imprinted sail

by the epithets "real, wonderful, flashing". Real or surreal? It is precisely its unreality that makes the quality of the line; it is surreal, not in any depreciatory sense, but because of its supra-

[1] The original line reads: I preach'd as never sure to preach again,

physical imaginativeness, its vivid suggestion of occult vision; one does not quite know what it means, but it suggests something that one can vividly see. It is not flashing — gleaming or glinting would be nearer the mark — it penetrates the imagination and awakens sight and stirs or thrills with a sense of beauty but it is not something that carries one away by its sudden splendour.

You say that it is more poetic than the other quotation — perhaps, but not for the reason you give, rather because it is more felicitously complete in its image and more suggestive. But you seem to attach the word poetic to the idea of something remotely beautiful, deeply coloured or strangely imaged with a glitter in it or a magic glimmer. On the whole what you seem to mean is that this line is "real" poetry, because it has this quality and because it has melodious sweetness of rhythm, while the other is of a less attractive character. Your solar plexus refuses to thrill where these qualities are absent — obviously that is a serious limitation in the plasticity of your solar plexus, not that it is wrong in thrilling to these things but that it is sadly wrong in thrilling to them only. It means that your plexus will remain deaf and dead to most of the greater poetry of the world — to Homer, Milton, Valmiki, Vyasa, a great part even of Shakespeare. That is surely a serious limitation of the appreciative faculty. What is strange and beautiful has its appeal, but one ought to be able also to stir to what is great and beautiful, or strong and noble, or simple and beautiful, or pure and exquisite. Not to do so would be like being blind of one eye and seeing with the other only very vividly strange outlines and intensely bright colours.

I may add that if really I appreciate any lines for something which I see behind them but they do not actually suggest or express, then I must be a very bad critic. The lines you quote not only say nothing about the treasures except that they are found, but do not suggest anything more. If then I see from some knowledge that has nothing to do with the actual expression and suggestion of the lines all the treasures of eternity and cry "How rich" — meaning the richness, not of the treasures, but of the poetry, then I am doing something quite illegitimate which is the sign of a great unreality and confusion in my mind, very undesir-

able in a critic. It is not for any reason of that kind that I made a mark indicating appreciation but because I find in the passage a just and striking image with a rhythm and expression which are a sufficient body for the significance.

3. 11. 1938

5

There is probably a defect in your solar plexus which makes it refuse to thrill unless it receives a strong punch from poetry — an ornamental, romantic or pathetic punch. But there is also a poetry which expresses things with an absolute truth but without effort, simply and easily, without a word in excess or any laying on of colour, only just the necessary. That kind of achievement is considered as among the greatest things poetry can do.

A phrase, word or line may be quite simple and ordinary and yet taken with another phrase, line or word become the perfect thing.

A line like "Life that is deep and wonder-vast" has what I have called the inevitable quality; with a perfect simplicity and straightforwardness it expresses something in a definite and perfect way that cannot be surpassed; so does "lost in a breath of sound" with less simplicity but with the same inevitability. I do not mean that highly coloured poetry cannot be absolutely inevitable, it can, e.g. Shakespeare's "In cradle of the rude imperious surge" and many others. But most often highly coloured poetry attracts too much attention to the colour and its brilliance so that the thing in itself is less felt than the magnificence of its dress. All kinds are legitimate in poetry; poetry can be great or perfect even if it uses simple or ordinary expressions, e.g. Dante simply says "In His will is our peace" and in writing that in Italian produces one of the greatest lines in all poetic literature.

1. 4. 1938

6

Simplicity and beauty are not convertible terms. There can be a difficult beauty. What about Aeschylus then? or Blake?

7

Too violent condensations of language or too compressed thoughts always create a sense either of obscurity or, if not that, then of effort and artifice, even if a powerful and inspired artifice. Yet very great poets and writers have used them, so great a poet as Aeschylus or so great a prose stylist as Tacitus. Then there are the famous "knots" in the Mahabharata. I think one can say that these condensations are justified when they say something with more power and depth and full, if sometimes recondite, significance than an easier speech would give, but to make it a constant element of the language (without a constant justification of that kind) would turn it into a mannerism or artifice.

8

"Young heart", "thrilled companionship", "warm hour", "lip to lip", "passionate unease" are here poorly sensuous *clichés* — they or any one or two of them might have been carried off in a more moved and inspired style, gathering colour from their surroundings or even a new and rich life; but here they stand out in a fashionable dressed-up insufficiency. This secret of fusing all in such a white heat or colour heat of sincerity of inspiration that even the common or often-used phrases and ideas catch fire and burn brilliantly with the rest is one of the secrets of the true poetic afflatus. But if you stop short of that inspiration and begin to write efficient poetry, then you must be careful of your P's and Q's.

19. 3. 1932

9

The line[1] strikes at once the romantically sentimental note of more than a hundred years ago which is dead and laughed out of court nowadays. Especially in writing anything about vital love, avoid like the plague anything that descends into the sentimental or, worse, the namby-pamby.

30. 5. 1932

[1] "...so grief-hearted, strangely lone."

10

An expression of the lower vital lashed to imaginative fury is likely to produce not poetry but simply "sound and fury", — "tearing a passion to tatters" and in its full furiousness may even rise to rant and fustian. Erotic poetry more than any other needs the restraint of beauty and form and measure, otherwise it risks being no longer poetic but merely pathologic.

14. 6. 1932

EPIC GREATNESS AND SUBLIMITY

I don't know how I differentiate between the epic and the other kinds of poetic power. Victor Hugo in the *Légende des Siècles* tries to be epic and often succeeds, perhaps even on the whole. Marlowe is sometimes great or sublime, but I would not call him epic. There is a greatness or sublimity that is epic, there is another that is not epic, but more of a romantic type. Shakespeare's line

In cradle of the rude imperious surge

is as sublime as anything in Homer or Milton, but it does not seem to me to have the epic ring, while a very simple line can have it, e.g. Homer's

Bē de kat' oulumpoïo karēnōn chōomenos kēr
(*He went down from the peaks of Olympus wroth at heart*)

or Virgil's

Disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque laborem,
Fortunam ex aliis —

or Milton's

Fall'n Cherub, to be weak is miserable.

What is there in these lines that is not in Shakespeare's and makes them epic (Shakespeare's of course has something else as valuable)? For the moment at least, I can't tell you, but it is there. A tone of the inner spirit perhaps, expressing itself in the rhythm and the turn of the language.... Dante has the epic spirit and tone, what he lacks is the epic élan and swiftness. The distinction you draw — "epic sublimity has a more natural turn of imagination than the non-epic: it is powerfully wide or deep or high without being outstandingly bold, it also displays less colour" — applies, no doubt, but I do not know whether it is the essence of the thing or only one result of a certain austerity in the epic Muse. I do not know whether one cannot be coloured provided one keeps that austerity which, be it understood, is not incompatible with a certain fineness and sweetness.

9. 5. 1937

POETIC NOBILITY AND GRANDEUR: EPIC AND BALLAD MOVEMENTS

1

I am unable to agree that Chapman's poetry is noble or equal, even at its best, to Homer and it seems to me that you have not seized the subtler quality of what Arnold means by noble. "Muscular vigour, strong nervous rhythm" are forceful, not noble. Everywhere in your remarks you seem to confuse nobility and forcefulness but there is between the two a gulf of difference. Chapman is certainly forceful, next to Marlowe, I suppose, the most forceful poet among the Elizabethans. Among the lines you quote from him to prove your thesis, there is only one that approaches nobility:

Much have I suffered for thy love, much laboured, wishèd much

— and even then it is spoilt for me by the last two words which are almost feeble. The second quotation:

When the unmeasured firmament bursts to disclose her light

has a rhythm which does not mate with the idea and the diction; these are exceedingly fine and powerful — but not noble. There is no nobility at all in the third:

> *And such a stormy day shall come, in mind and soul I know,*
> *When sacred Troy shall shed her towers for tears of overthrow.*

The first line of the couplet is rhetorical and padded, the second is a violent, indeed extravagant conceit which does not convey any true and high emotion but is intended to strike and startle the intellectual imagination. One has only to compare Homer's magnificent lines absolute in their nobility of restrained yet strong emotion, in which the words and rhythm give the very soul of the emotion, but in its depth, not with any outward vehemence. In the fourth quotation:

> *Heard Thetis' foul petition and wished in any wise*
> *The splendour of the burning ships might satiate his eyes*

— the first line has the ordinary ballad movement and diction and cannot rank, the second is very fine poetry, vivid, powerful, impressive, with a beginning of grandeur — but the nobility of Homer, Virgil or Milton is not there. The line strikes at the mind with a great vehemence in order to impress it — nobility in poetry enters in and takes possession with an assured gait by its own right. It would seem to me that one has only to put the work of these greater poets side by side with Chapman's best to feel the difference. Chapman no doubt lifts rocks and makes mountains suddenly to rise — in that sense he has elevation or rather elevations; but in doing it he gesticulates, wrestles, succeeds finally with a shout of triumph; that does not give a noble effect or a noble movement. See in contrast with what a self-possessed grandeur, dignity or godlike ease Milton, Virgil, Homer make their ascensions or keep their high levels.

Then I come to Arnold's example of which you question the nobility on the strength of my description of one essential of the poetically noble. Mark that the calm, self-mastery, beautiful control which I have spoken of as essential to nobility is a poetic,

not an ethical or Yogic calm and control. It does not exclude the poignant expression of grief or passion, but it expresses it with a certain high restraint so that even when the mood is personal it yet borders on the widely impersonal. Cleopatra's words[1] are an example of what I mean; the disdainful compassion for the fury of the chosen instrument of self-destruction which vainly thinks it can truly hurt her, the call to death to act swiftly and yet the sense of being high above what death can do, which these few simple words convey has the true essence of nobility. "Impatience" only! You have not caught the significance of the words "poor venomous fool", the tone of the "Be angry, and despatch", the tense and noble grandeur of the suicide scene with the high light it sheds on Cleopatra's character. For she was a remarkable woman, a great queen, a skilful ruler and politician, not merely the erotic intriguer people make of her. Shakespeare is not good at describing greatness, he poetised the *homme moyen*, but he has caught something here. The whole passage stands on a par with the words of Antony "I am dying, Egypt, dying" (down to "A Roman by a Roman, valiantly vanquished") which stand among the noblest expressions of high, deep, yet collected and contained emotion in literature — though that is a masculine and this a feminine nobility. There is in the ballad of Sir Patrick Spense the same poignancy and restraint — something that gives a sense of universality and almost impersonality in the midst of the pathetic expression of sorrow. There is a quiver but a high compassionate quiver, there is no wail or stutter or vehemence. As for the rhythm, it may be the ballad "alive", but it is not "kicking" — and it has the overtones and undertones which ballad rhythm has not at its native level. Then for the other example you have given — lines didactic in intention can be

[1] If thou and nature can so gently part,
The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
Which hurts, and is desir'd.
.....
.....Come, thou mortal wretch,
With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate
Of life at once untie; poor venomous fool,
Be angry, and despatch.
— Shakespeare

noble, as for instance, the example quoted by Arnold from Virgil,

> *Disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque laborem,*
> *Fortunam ex aliis,*

or the line quoted from Apollo's speech about the dead body of Hector and Achilles' long-nourished and too self-indulgent rage against it. Johnson's two lines,

> *Still raise for good the supplicating voice,*
> *But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice,*

are less fine and harmonious in their structure; there is something of a rhetorical turn and therefore it reaches a lower height of nobility, but nobility there is, especially in the second line of the couplet. I do not find it cold; there is surely a strong touch of poetic emotion there.

I may say, however, that grandeur and nobility are kindred but not interchangeable terms. One can be noble without reaching grandeur — one can be grand without the subtle quality of nobility. Zeus Olympius is grand and noble; Ravana or Briareus with the thousand arms is grand without being noble. Lear going mad in the storm is grand, but too vehement and disordered to be noble. I think the essential difference between the epic movement and ballad rhythm and language lies in this distinction between nobility and force — in the true ballad usually a bare, direct and rude force. The ballad metre has been taken by modern poets and lifted out of its normal form and movement, given subtle turns and cadences and made the vehicle of lyric beauty and fervour or of strong or beautiful narrative; but this is not the true original ballad movement and ballad motive. Scott's movement is narrative, not epic — there is also a lyrical narrative movement and that is the quality reached by Coleridge, perhaps the finest use yet made of the ballad movement. It is doubtful whether the ballad form can bear the epic lift for more than a line or two, a stanza or two — under the epic stress the original jerkiness remains while the lyric flow smooths it out. When it tries to lift to the epic height, it does so with a

jerk, an explosive leap or a quick canter; one feels the rise, but there is still something of the old trot underneath the movement. It is at least what I feel throughout in Chesterton — there is a sense of effort, of disguise with the crudity of the original form still showing through the brilliantly coloured drapery that has been put upon it. If there is no claim to epic movement I do not mind and can take it for what it can give, but comparisons with Homer and Virgil and the classic hexameter are perilous and reveal the yawning gulf between the two movements. As to the line of fourteen syllables, Chapman often overcomes its difficulties but the jog-trot constantly comes out. It may be that all that can be surmounted but Chapman and Chesterton do not surmount it — whatever their heights of diction or imagination, the metre interferes with their maintenance, even, I think, with their attaining their full eminence. Possibly a greater genius might wipe out the defect — but would a greater genius have cared to make the endeavour?

I have left myself no space or time for Chesterton as a poet and it is better so because I have not read *The Ballad of the White Horse* and know him only by extracts. Your passages establish him as a poet, a fine and vivid poet by intervals, but not as a great or an epic poet — that is my impression. Sometimes I find your praise of particular passages extravagant, as when you seem to put Marlowe's mighty line

See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament

and Chesterton's facetious turn about the stretched necks and burned beards on a par. Humour can be poetic and even epic, like Kaikeyi's praise of Manthara's hump in the Ramayana; but this joke of Chesterton's does not merit such an apotheosis. That is ballad style, not mighty or epic. Again all that passage about Colan and Earl Harold is poor ballad stuff — except the first three lines and the last two — poor in diction, poor in movement. I am unable to enthuse over

It smote Earl Harold over the eye
And blood began to run.

The lines marrying the soft sentimentalism of the "small white daisies" with the crude brutality of the "blood out of the brain" made me at first smile with the sense of the incongruous, it seemed almost like an attempt at humour — at least at the grotesque. I prefer Scott's Tunstall; in spite of its want of imagination and breadth it is as good a thing as any Scott has written; on the contrary, these lines show Chesterton far below his best. The passage about the cholera and wheat is less flat; it is even impressive in a way, but impressive by an exaggerated bigness and forced attempt at epic greatness on one side and a forced and exaggerated childish sentimentalism on the other. The two do not fuse and the contrast is grotesque. This cholera image might be fine out of its context, it is at least forceful and vivid, but applied to a man (not a god or a demigod) it sounds too inflated — while the image of the massacrer muttering sentimentally about bread while he slew is so unnatural as to tread on or over the borders of the grotesque — it raises even a smile like the poor small white daisies red with blood out of Earl Harold's brain. I could criticise further, but I refrain. On the other hand, Chesterton is certainly very fine by flashes. His images and similes and metaphors are rather explosive, sometimes they are mere conceits like the "cottage in the clouds", but all the same they have very often a high poetic quality of revealing vividness. At times also he has fine ideas finely expressed and occasionally he achieves a great lyrical beauty and feeling. He is terribly unequal and unreliable, violent, rocketlike, ostentatious, but at least in parts of this poem he does enter into the realms of poetry. Only, I refuse to regard the poem as an epic — a sometimes low-falling, sometimes high-swinging lyrical narrative is the only claim I can concede to it.

2

"Noble" has a special meaning, also "elevation" is used in a certain sense by Arnold. In that sense these words do not seem to me to be applicable either to Chapman or to the ballad metre. Strong, forceful, energetic, impressive they may be — but nobility is a rarer, calmer, more self-mastered, highly harmonious

thing than these are. Also, nobility and grandeur are not quite the same thing.

2. 2. 1935

3

I have not much taste for the English ballad form; it is generally either too flat or too loud and artificial and its basic stuff is a strenuous popular obviousness that needs a very rare genius to transform it.

20. 11. 1932

PHILOSOPHY IN POETRY

1

What does your correspondent mean by "philosophy" in a poem? Of course if one sets out to write a metaphysical argument in verse like the Greek Empedocles or the Roman Lucretius, it is a risky business and is likely to land you into prosaic poetry which is a less pardonable mixture than poetic prose. Even when philosophising in a less perilous way, one has to be careful not to be flat or heavy. It is obviously easier to be poetic when singing about a skylark than when one tries to weave a robe of verse to clothe the attributes of the Brahman. But that does not mean that there is to be no thought or no spiritual thought or no expression of truth in poetry; there is no great poet who has not tried to philosophise. Shelley wrote about the skylark, but he also wrote about the Brahman.

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,

is as good poetry as

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!

There are flights of unsurpassable poetry in the Gita and the

Upanishads. These rigid dicta are always excessive and there is no reason why a poet should allow the expression of his personality or the spirit within him or his whole poetic mind to be clipped, cabined or stifled by any theories or "thou shalt not"-s of this character.

7. 12. 1931

P.S. And if one were to take stock of your correspondent's theories (that no poems should ever have any philosophy, etc.), then half the world's poetry would have to disappear. Truth and Thought and Light cast into forms of beauty cannot be banished in that cavalier way. Music and art and poetry have striven from the beginning to express the vision of the deepest and greatest things and not the things of the surface only, and it will be so as long as there are poetry and art and music.

2

If H had indicated that the God spoken of was not the sole Divinity he would have spoiled the poem. For the purpose of the poem he has to be spoken of as the sole Divinity. Why must we take the poem as an exercise in philosophy? A poem is a poem, not a doctrine. It expresses something in the poet's mind or his feeling. If it agrees with the total truth or the highest truth of the universe, so much the better, but we cannot demand that of every poet and every poem. My appreciation was given from the purely aesthetic standpoint. Even if a poet were to extol a false doctrine such as a malevolent God creating a painful universe, still if it were a fine poem I would enjoy and praise it — although it would be there too an appearance of the universe but not spoiled by putting it forward as a doctrine.

1. 2. 1935

SAMENESS AND VARIETY IN POETRY

1

Ordinary poems (and novels) always write about love and similar

things. Is it one point against ordinary (non-spiritual) poetry? If there is sameness of expression in spiritual poems, it is due either to the poet's binding himself by the tradition of a fixed set of symbols (e.g. Vaishnava poets, Vedic poets) or to his having only a limited field of expression or imagination or to his deliberately limiting himself to certain experiences or customs that are dear to him. To readers who feel these things it does not appear monotonous. Those who listen to Mirabai's songs, don't get tired of them, nor do I get tired of reading the Upanishads. The Greeks did not tire of reading Anacreon's poems though he always wrote of wine and beautiful boys (an example of sameness in unspiritual poetry). The Vedic and Vaishnava poets remain immortal in spite of their sameness which is in another way like that of the poetry of the troubadours in mediaeval Europe, deliberately chosen. Variety, *vaicitra*, is all very well, but it is the power of the poetry that really matters. After all every poet writes always in the same style, repeats the same vision of things in "different garbs".

25. 5. 1938

2

Well, and if a poet is a spiritual seeker what does Tagore[1] want him to write about? Dancing girls? A has done that. Wine and women? Hafiz has done that. But he can only use them as symbols as a rule. Must he write about politics? Why should he describe the outer aspects of world nature, *viśva-prakṛti*, for their own sake, when his vision is of something else within or even apart from her? Merely for the sake of variety? He then becomes a mere *littérateur*. Of course if a man simply writes to get poetic fame and a lot of readers, if he is only a poet, Tagore's advice may be good for him.

25. 5. 1938

3

Obviously, it is desirable not to repeat oneself or, if one has to,

[1] These remarks are apropos of Tagore's view that only spiritual inspiration dealing with things spiritual should not bind a poet's creation.

it is desirable to repeat in another language and in a new light. Still, even that cannot be overdone. The difficulty with most writers of spiritual poetry is that they have either a limited field of experience or are tacked on to a limited inspiration though an intense one. How to get out of it? The only recipe I know is to widen oneself (or one's receptivity) always. Or else perhaps wait in the eternal quietude for a new "white word" to "break" it — if it does not come, telephone.

30. 8. 1937

POETIC INTUITION AND CRITICAL INTELLECT

What you have written as the general theory of the matter seems to be correct and it does not differ substantially from what I wrote. But your phrase about unpurposive repetition might carry a suggestion which I would not be able to accept; it might seem to indicate that the poet must have a "purpose" in whatever he writes and must be able to give a logical account of it to the critical intellect. That is surely not the way in which the poet or at least the mystic poet has to do his work. He does not himself deliberately choose or arrange word and rhythm but only sees it as it comes in the very act of inspiration. If there is any purpose of any kind, it also comes by and in the process of inspiration. He can criticise himself and the work; he can see whether it was a wrong or an inferior movement, he does not set about correcting it by any intellectual method but waits for the true thing to come in its place. He cannot always account to the logical intellect for what he has done; he feels or intuits, and the reader or critic has to do the same.

26. 4. 1946

POETIC IMAGINATION AND EXPERIENCE

But is it necessary to say which is which? It is not possible to deny that it was an experience, even if one cannot affirm it — not being in the consciousness of the writer. But even if it is an

imagination, it is a powerful poetic imagination which expresses what would be the exact feeling in the real experience. It seems to me that that is quite enough. There are so many things in Wordsworth and Shelley which people say were only mental feelings and imaginations and yet they express the deeper seeings or feelings of the seer. For poetry it seems to me the point is irrevelant.

27. 5. 1936

POETIC EXPRESSION AND PERSONAL FEELING OF THE POET

1

What you say is quite true. Poets are mediums for a force of vision and expression that is not theirs, so they need not feel except by reflection the emotions they utter. But of course that is not always the case — sometimes they express what they feel or at any rate what a part of their being feels.

25. 9. 1934

2

What the poets feel when writing (those who are truly inspired) is the great Ananda of creation, possession by a great Power superior to their ordinary minds which puts some emotion or vision of things into a form of beauty. They feel the emotion of the thing they express, but not always as a personal feeling, but as something which seizes hold of them for self-expression. But the personal feeling also may form a basis for the creation.

26. 9. 1934

POETIC EXPRESSION AND PERSONAL ATTITUDE OF THE POET

These designations, a magnified ego, an exalted outlook of the vital mind apply in Sadhana, but hardly to poetic expression which lifts or ought to lift to a field of pure personal-impersonal

bhāva. An utterance of this kind can express a state of consciousness or an experience which is not necessarily the writer's personal position or ego attitude but that of an inner spirit. So long as it is so the question of ego does not arise. It arises only if one turns away from the poem to the writer and asks in what mood he wrote it and that is a question of psychological fact alien to the purpose of poetry.

29. 6. 1935

THE TWO PARTS OF THE POETIC CREATOR

Your poem is forcible enough, but the quality is rather rhetorical than poetic. Yet at the end there are two lines which are very fine poetry:

Gay singing birds caught in a ring of fire

and

A silent scorn that sears Eternity.

If you could not write the whole in that strain which would have made it epic almost in pitch, it is, I think, because your indignation was largely mental and moral, the emotion though very strong being too much intellectualised in expression to give the poetic intensity of speech and movement. Indignation, the *saeva indignatio* of Juvenal, can produce poetry, but it must be either vividly a vital revolt which stirs the whole feeling into a white heat of self-expression — as in Milton's famous sonnet[1] — or a high spiritual or deep psychic rejection of the undivine. Besides, it is well known that the emotion of the external being, in the raw as it were, does not make good material for poetry; it has to be transmuted into something deeper, less externally personal, more permanent before it can be turned into good poetry. There are always two parts of oneself which collaborate in poetry — the instrumental which lives and feels what is written, makes a sort of projective identification with it, and the Seer-Creator with-

[1] *On the late Massacre in Piedmont*

in who is not involved, but sees the inner significance of it and listens for the word that shall entirely express this significance. It is in some meeting-place of these two that what is felt or lived is transmuted into true stuff of poetry. Probably you are not sufficiently detached from this particular life-experience and the reactions it created to go back deeper into yourself and transmute it in this way. And yet you have done it in the two magnificent lines I have noted, which have the virtue of seizing the inner significance behind the thing experienced in the poetic or interpretative and not in the outward mental way. The first of these two lines conveys the pathos and tragedy of the thing and also the stupidity of the waste much more effectively than pages of denunciation or comment and the other stresses with an extraordinary power in a few words the problem as flung by the revolting human mind and life against the Cosmic Impersonal.

The detachment of which you speak, comes by attaining the poise of the Spirit, the equality, of which the Gita speaks always, but also by sight, by knowledge. For instance, looking at what happened in 1914 — or for that matter at all that is and has been happening in human history — the eye of the Yogin sees not only the outward events and persons and causes, but the enormous forces which precipitate them into action. If the men who fought were instruments in the hands of rulers and financiers, these in turn were mere puppets in the clutch of those forces. When one is habituated to see the things behind, one is no longer prone to be touched by the outward aspects — or to expect any remedy from political, institutional or social changes; the only way out is through the descent of a consciousness which is not the puppet of these forces but is greater than they are and can compel them either to change or disappear.

17. 7. 1931

NEED OF LIFE-EXPERIENCE FOR LITERARY CREATION

1

Emotion alone is not enough for producing anything that can

be called creation, at best it can give form to something lyrical and passionate or to something charming or appealing. For any considerable creation there must be a background of life, a vital rich and stored or a mind and an imagination that has seen much and observed much or a soul that has striven and been conscious of its strivings. These are needed, or one or other of them, but the purdah is not likely to produce them, though there may be a lucky accident in the worst circumstances, but one can't count on accidents. A George Eliot, a George Sand, a Virginia Woolf, a Sappho, or even a Comtesse de Noailles grew up in other circumstances.

30. 4. 1933

2

The great novelists like the great dramatists have been usually men who lived widely or intensely and brought a world out of the combination of their inner and their outer observation, vision, experience. Of course if you have a world in yourself, that is another matter.

RELATION BETWEEN THE PERSONAL CHARACTER AND LIFE EXPERIENCE AND THE WORK OF AN ARTIST

The point that a man's poetry or art need not express anything that has happened in his personal life is rather too obvious to be made so much of. The point is how far it can be supposed to be a transcript of his mind or mental life. It is obvious that his vital cast, his character may have very little to do with his writing, it might be its very opposite; his physical mind also need not determine the character of his writings; the physical mind of a romantic poet or artist may have been that of a commonplace respectable bourgeois; one who in his fiction is a benevolent philanthropist reformer full of cheery optimistic sunshine may have been in actual life selfish, hard, even cruel. All that is now well known and illustrated by numerous examples in the lives of great poets and artists. It is evidently in the inner mental personality

of a man that the key to his creation must be discovered, not in his outward mind or life. Here again a poem or work of art need not be (though it may be) an exact transcription of a mental or spiritual experience; nor, if the creating mind takes up an incident of the life, a vital impression, emotion or reaction that had actually taken place, need it be more than a starting-point for the poetic creation. The "I" of a poem is more often than not a dramatic or representative I, nothing less and nothing more. But it does not help to fall back on the imagination and say that all is only the imagination working with whatever material it may happen to choose. The question is how the imagination of a poet came to be cast in this peculiar mould which differentiates him as a creator not only from the millions who do not create but from all other poetic creators. There are two possible answers. A poet or artist may be merely a medium for a creative Force which uses him as a channel and is concerned only with expression in art and not with the man's personality or his inner or outer life. Or, man being a multiple personality, a crowd of personalities which are tangled up on the surface but separate within, the poet or artist in him may be only one of these many personalities and concerned only with its inner and creative function; its work done, it may retire and leave the man to the others. It may or may not use the experiences of the others as material for its work; it may also meddle with the activity of the others and try to square their make-up and action to its own images and ideals. In fact it is a mixture of the two things that creates the poet. He is a medium for the creative Force which acts through him; it uses or picks up anything stored up in his mind from his inner life or his memories or impressions of outer life and things, anything it can or cares to make use of and this it moulds and turns to its purpose. But still it is through the poet personality in him that it works and this poet personality may be either a mere reed through which the Spirit blows but laid aside after the tune is over, or it may be an active power having some say even in the surface mental composition and vital and physical activities of the total composite creature. In that general possibility there is room for a hundred degrees and variations and no rule can be laid down that covers all cases.

LITERARY STYLE AND HEREDITARY INFLUENCES

It seems to me that this statement[1] is quite untrue. A man's style expresses himself, not the sum and outcome of his ancestors.

24. 1. 1937

THE ILLUSION OF REALISM

1

I am afraid your correspondent is under the grip of what I may call the illusion of realism. What all artists do is to take something from life — even if it be only a partial hint — and transfer it by the magic of their imagination and make a world of their own; the realists, e.g., Zola, Tolstoi, do it as much as anybody else. Each artist is a creator of his own world — why then insist on this legal fiction that the artist's world must appear as an exact imitation of the actual world around us? Even if it does so seem, that is only a skilful make-up, an appearance. It may be constructed to look like that — but why must it be? The characters and creations of even the most strongly objective fiction, much more the characters and creations of poetry live by the law of their own life, which is something *in the inner mind of their creator* — they cannot be constructed as copies of things outside.

30. 1. 1933

2

Why should a creative artist write only about problems?

What a stupidly rigid principle! Can X really write nothing except what he has seen or experienced? What an unimaginative man *he must be and how limited!*

I wonder whether Victor Hugo had to live in a convict's

[1] "For style in the full sense is more than the deliberate and designed creation, more even than the unconscious and involuntary creation, of the individual man, who therein expresses himself. The self that he thus expresses is a bundle of inherited tendencies that come, the man himself can never know whence." Havelock Ellis, *The Dance of Life*, Constable & Co., London, 1923, p. 175.

prison before he created Jean Valjean. Certainly one has to look at life, but there is no obligation to copy faithfully from life. The man of imagination carries a world in himself and a mere hint or suggestion from life is enough to start it going. It is recognised now that Balzac and Dickens created out of themselves their greatest characters which were not at all faithful to the life around them. Balzac's descriptions of society are hopelessly wrong, he knew nothing about it, but his world is much more striking and real than the actual world around him which he misrepresented — even, life has imitated the figures he made, rather than the other way round.

Besides, who is living in entire seclusion in Pondicherry? There are living men and women around you and human nature is in full play here as much as in the biggest city — only one has to have an eye to see what is within them and the imagination that takes a few bricks and can make out of them a great edifice. One must be able to see that human nature is one everywhere and pick out of it the essential things that can be turned into great art.

26. 5. 1934

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

Art for Art's sake? But what, after all, is meant by this slogan and what is the real issue behind it? Is it meant, as I think it was when the slogan first came into use, that the technique, the artistry is all in all? The contention would then be that it does not matter what you write or paint or sculpt or what music you make or about what you make it so long as it is beautiful writing, competent painting, good sculpture, fine music. It is very evidently true in a certain sense, — in this sense that whatever is perfectly expressed or represented or interpreted under the conditions of a given art proves itself by that very fact to be legitimate material for the artist's labour. But that free admission cannot be confined only to all objects, however common or deemed to be vulgar, — an apple, a kitchen pail, a donkey, a dish of carrots, — it can give a right of citizenship in the domain of art to a moral

theme or thesis, a philosophic conclusion, a social experiment; even the Five Years' Plan or the proceedings of a District Board or the success of a drainage scheme, an electric factory or a big hotel can be brought, after the most modern or the still more robustious Bolshevik mode, into the artist's province. For, technique being all, the sole question would be whether he as poet, novelist, dramatist, painter or sculptor has been able to triumph over the difficulties and bring out creatively the possibilities of his subject. There is no logical basis here for accepting an apple and rejecting the Apple-Cart. But still you may say that at least the object of the artist must be art only, — even if he treats ethical, social or political questions, he must not make it his main object to wing with the enthusiasm of aesthetic creation a moral, social or political aim. But if in doing it he satisfies the conditions of his art, shows a perfect technique and in it beauty, power, perfection, why not? The moralist, preacher, philosopher, social or political enthusiast is often doubled with an artist — as shining proofs and examples there are Plato and Shelley, to go no farther. Only, you can say of him on the basis of this theory that as a work of art his creation should be judged by its success of craftsmanship and not by its contents; it is not made greater by the value of his ethical ideas, his enthusiasms or his metaphysical seekings.

But then, the theory itself is true only up to a certain point. For technique is a means of expression; one does not write merely to use beautiful words or paint for the sole sake of line and colour; there is something that one is trying through these means to express or to discover. What is that something? The first answer would be — it is the creation, it is the discovery of Beauty. Art is for that alone and can be judged only by its revelation or discovery of Beauty. Whatever is capable of being manifested as Beauty is the material of the artist. But there is not only physical beauty in the world — there is moral, intellectual, spiritual beauty also. Still, one might say that "Art for Art's sake" means that only what is aesthetically beautiful must be expressed and all that contradicts the aesthetic sense of beauty must be avoided. Art has nothing to do with Life in itself, things in themselves, Good, Truth or the Divine for their own sake, but

only in so far as they appeal to some aesthetic sense of beauty, — and that would seem to be a sound basis for excluding the Five Years' Plan, a moral sermon or a philosophical treatise. But here, again, what after all is Beauty? How much is it in the thing itself and how much in the consciousness that perceives it? Is not the eye of the artist constantly catching some element of aesthetic value in the plain, the ugly, the sordid, the repellent and triumphantly conveying it through his material, — through the word, through line and colour, through the sculptured shape?

There is a certain state of Yogic consciousness in which all things become beautiful to the eye of the seer, simply because they spiritually are — because they are a rendering in line and form of the quality and force of existence, of the consciousness, of the Ananda that rules the worlds, — of the hidden Divine. What a thing is to the exterior sense may not be, often is not beautiful for the ordinary aesthetic vision, but the Yogin sees in it the something More which the external eye does not see, he sees the soul behind, the self and spirit, he sees too lines, hues, harmonies and expressive dispositions which are not to the first surface sight visible or seizable. It may be said that he brings into the object something that is in himself, transmutes it by adding out of his own being to it — as the artist too does something of the same kind but in another way. It is not quite that, however; what the Yogin sees, what the artist sees, is there, his is a transmuting vision because it is a revealing vision; he discovers behind what the object appears to be, the something More that it is. And so from this point of view of a realised supreme harmony all is or can be subject-matter for the artist, because in all he can discover and reveal the Beauty that is everywhere. Again, we land ourselves in a devastating catholicity; for here too one cannot pull up short at any given line. It may be a hard saying that one must or may discover and reveal beauty in a pig or its poke or in a parish pump or an advertisement of somebody's pills, and yet something like that seems to be what modern Art and Literature are trying with vigour and conscientious labour to do. By extension one ought to be able to extract beauty equally well out of morality or social reform or a political caucus or allow at least that all these things can, if he wills, become legitimate subjects for

the artist. Here, too, one cannot say that it is on condition he thinks of beauty only and does not make moralising or social reform or a political idea his main object. For if with that idea foremost in his mind he still produces a great work of art, discovering Beauty as he moves to his aim, proving himself in spite of his unaesthetic preoccupations a great artist, it is all we can justly ask from him, whatever his starting-point, to be a creator of Beauty. Art is discovery and revelation of Beauty, and we can say nothing more by way of prohibitive or limiting rule.

But there is one thing more that can be said, and that makes a big difference. In the Yogin's vision of universal beauty, all becomes beautiful, but all is not reduced to a single level. There are gradations, there is a hierarchy in this All-Beauty and we see that it depends on the ascending power (Vibhuti) of Consciousness and Ananda that expresses itself in the object. All is the Divine, but some things are more divine than others. In the artist's vision too there are or can be gradations, a hierarchy of values. Shakespeare can get dramatic and therefore aesthetic values out of Dogberry and Malvolio and he is as thorough a creative artist in his treatment of them as in his handling of Macbeth or Lear. But if we had only Dogberry or Malvolio to testify to Shakespeare's genius, no Macbeth, no Lear, would he be so great a dramatic artist and creator as he now is? It is in the varying possibilities of one subject or another that there lies an immense difference. Apelles' grapes deceived the birds that came to peck at them, but there was more aesthetic content in the Zeus of Pheidias, a greater content of Consciousness and therefore of Ananda to express and with it to fill in and intensify the essential principle of Beauty, even though the essence of beauty may be realised perhaps with equal aesthetic perfection by either artist and in either theme.

And that is because just as technique is not all, so even Beauty is not all in Art. Art is not only technique or form of Beauty, not only the discovery or the expression of Beauty — it is a self-expression of Consciousness under the conditions of aesthetic vision and a perfect execution. Or, to put it otherwise, there are not only aesthetic values, but life-values, mind-values, soul-values that enter into Art. The artist puts out into form not

only the powers of his own consciousness, but the powers of the Consciousness that has made the worlds and their objects. And if that Consciousness according to the Vedantic view is fundamentally equal everywhere, it is still in manifestation not an equal power in all things. There is more of the Divine expression in the Vibhuti than in the common man, *prākṛto janaḥ*; in some forms of life there are less potentialities for the self-expression of the Spirit than in others. And there are also gradations of consciousness which make a difference, if not in the aesthetic value or greatness of a work of art, yet in its contents-value. Homer makes beauty out of man's outward life and action and stops there. Shakespeare rises one step further and reveals to us a life-soul and life-forces and life-values to which Homer had no access. In Valmiki and Vyas there is the constant presence of great Idea-Forces and Ideals supporting life and its movements which were beyond the scope of Homer and Shakespeare. And beyond the Ideals and Idea-Forces even there are other presences, more inner or inmost realities, a soul behind things and beings, the spirit and its powers, which could be the subject-matter of an art still more rich and deep and abundant in its interest than any of these could be. A poet finding these and giving them a voice with a genius equal to that of the poets of the past might not be greater than they in a purely aesthetic valuation, but his art's contents-value, its consciousness-values could be deeper and higher and much fuller than in any achievement before him. There is something here that goes beyond any consideration of Art for Art's sake or Art for Beauty's sake; for while these stress usefully sometimes the indispensable first elements of artistic creation, they would limit too much the creation itself if they stood for the exclusion of the something More that compels Art to change always in its constant seeking for more and more that must be expressed of the concealed or the revealed Divine, of the individual and the universal or the transcendent Spirit.

If we take these three elements as making the whole of Art, perfection of expressive form, discovery of beauty, revelation of the soul and essence of things and the powers of creative consciousness and Ananda of which they are the vehicles, then we

shall get perhaps a solution which includes the two sides of the controversy and reconciles their difference. Art for Art's sake certainly; Art as a perfect form and discovery of Beauty; but also Art for the soul's sake, the spirit's sake and the expression of all that the soul, the spirit wants to seize through the medium of beauty. In that self-expression there are grades and hierarchies, widenings and steps that lead to the summits. And not only to enlarge Art towards the widest wideness but to ascend with it to the heights that climb towards the Highest is and must be part both of our aesthetic and our spiritual endeavour.

17. 4. 1933

Section Two

SOURCES OF POETIC INSPIRATION AND VISION — MYSTIC AND SPIRITUAL POETRY

POETRY OF PHYSICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

1

Certainly — Homer and Chaucer are poets of the physical consciousness. I have pointed that out in *The Future Poetry*.[1]

2

You can't drive a sharp line between the subtle physical and physical like that in these matters. If a poet wrote from the outward physical only, his work is likely to be more photographic than poetic.

31. 5. 1937

3

The Vedic times were an age in which men lived in the material consciousness as did the heroes of Homer. The Rishis were the mystics of the time and took the form of their symbolic imagery from the material life around them.

20. 10. 1936

MENTAL AND VITAL POETRY

All poetry is mental or vital or both, sometimes with a psychic tinge; the power from above mind comes in only in rare lines and passages lifting up the mental and vital inspiration towards its own light and power. To work freely from that hidden inspiration is a thing that has not been done though certain tendencies of modern poetry seem to be an unconscious attempt to prepare for that. But in the mind and vital there are many provinces and kingdoms and what you have been writing recently is by no means from the ordinary mind or vital; its inspiration comes from a higher or deeper occult or inner source.

17. 5. 1937

[1] See pp. 59-62.

CHARACTERISTICS OF VITAL POETRY

What I mean by vital poetry is that in which appeal to sense or sensation, to the vital thrill, is so dominant that the mental content of the poetry takes quite a secondary place. Either word and sound tend to predominate over sense or else the nerves and blood are thrilled (e.g. in war poetry) but the mind and soul do not find an equal satisfaction. This does not mean that there is to be no vital element in poetry — without the vital nothing living can be done.

THE WORLD OF WORD-MUSIC

N seems to have put himself into contact with an inexhaustible source of flowing words and rhythm — with the world of word-music, which is one province of the World of Beauty. It is part of the vital world no doubt and the joy that comes of contact with that beauty is vital but it is a subtle vital which is not merely sensuous. It is one of the powers by which the substance of the consciousness can be refined and prepared for sensibility to a still higher beauty and Ananda. Also it can be made a vehicle for the expression of the highest things. The Veda, the Upanishad, the Mantra, everywhere owe half their power to the rhythmic sound that embodies their inner meanings.

2. 3. 1936

EARTH-MEMORY — SUBTLE-VITAL WORLD OF CREATIVE ART — DREAM INSPIRATION

There is an earth-memory from which one gets or can get things of the past more or less accurately according to the quality of the mind that receives them. But this experience is not explicable on that basis — for the Gopis here are evidently not earthly beings and the place R saw was not a terrestrial locality. If she had got it from the earth-mind at all, it could only be from the world of images created by Vaishnava tradition with perhaps a

personal transcription of her own. But this also does not agree with all the details.

It is quite usual for poets and musicians and artists to receive things — they can even be received complete and direct, though oftenest with some working of the individual mind and consequent alteration — from a plane above the physical mind, a vital world of creative art and beauty in which these things are prepared and come down through the fit channel. The musician, poet or artist, if he is conscious, may be quite aware and sensitive of this transmission, even feel or see something of the plane from which it comes. Usually, however, this is in the waking state and the contact is not so vivid as that felt by R.

There are such things as dream inspirations — it is rare, however, that these are of any value. For the dreams of most people are recorded by the subconscient. Either the whole thing is a creation of the subconscient and turns out, if recorded, to be incoherent and lacking in any sense, or, if there is a real communication from a higher plane, marked by a sense of elevation and wonder, it gets transcribed by the subconscient and what that forms is either flat or ludicrous. Moreover, this was seen between sleep and waking — and things so seen are not dreams, but experiences from other planes either mental or vital or subtle physical or more rarely psychic or higher plane experiences.

In this case it is very possible that she got into some kind of connection with the actual world of Krishna and the Gopis through the vital. This seems to be indicated first by the sense of extreme rapture and light and beauty and secondly, by the contact with the "Blue Radiance" that was Krishna — that phrase and the expressions she uses have a strong touch of something that was authentic. I say through the vital, because of course it was presented to her in forms and words that her human mind could seize and understand; the original forms of that world would be something that could hardly be seizable by the human sense. The Hindi words of course belong to the transcribing agency. That would not mean that it was a creation of her personal mind, but only a transcription given to her, just within the bounds of what it could seize, even though unfamiliar to her waking consciousness. Once the receptivity of the mind awak-

ened, the rest came to her freely through the channel created by the vision. That her mind did not create the song is confirmed by the fact that it came in Hindi with so much perfection of language and technique.

To anyone familiar with occult phenomena and their analysis these things will seem perfectly normal and intelligible. The vision-mind in us is part of the inner being, and the inner mind, vital, physical are not bound by the dull and narrow limitations of our outer physical personality and the small scope of the world it lives in. Its scope is vast, extraordinary, full of inexhaustible interest and, as one goes higher, of glory and sweetness and beauty. The difficulty is to get it through the outer human instruments which are so narrow and crippled and unwilling to receive them.

9. 6. 1935

THE HIGHER MIND AND POETIC INTELLIGENCE — THE INNER MIND AND DYNAMIC VISION

I mean by the Higher Mind a first plane of spiritual consciousness where one becomes constantly and closely aware of the Self, the One everywhere and knows and sees things habitually with that awareness; but it is still very much on the mind level although highly spiritual in its essential substance; and its instrumentation is through an elevated thought-power and comprehensive mental sight — not illumined by any of the intenser upper lights but as if in a large strong and clear daylight. It acts as an intermediate state between the Truth-Light above and the human mind; communicating the higher knowledge in a form that the Mind intensified, broadened, made spiritually supple, can receive without being blinded or dazzled by a Truth beyond it. The poetic intelligence is not at all part of that clarified spiritual seeing and thinking — it is only a high activity of the mind and its vision moving on the wings of imagination, but still akin to the intellect proper, though exalted above it. The Higher Mind is a spiritual plane, — this does not answer to that description. But the larger poetic intelligence like the larger philosophic,

though in a different cast of thinking, is nearer to the Higher Mind than the ordinary intellect and can more easily receive its influence. When Milton starts his poem

> *Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit*
> *Of that forbidden tree —*

he is evidently writing from the poetic intelligence. There is nothing of the Higher Mind knowledge or vision either in the style or the substance. But there is often a largeness of rhythm and sweep of language in Milton which has a certain distant kinship to the manner natural to a higher supra-intellectual vision, and something from the substance of the planes of spiritual seeing can come into this poetry whose medium is the poetic intelligence and uplift it.

Milton is a classical poet and most classical poetry is fundamentally a poetry of the pure poetic intelligence. But there are other influences which can suffuse and modify the pure poetic intelligence, making it perhaps less clear by limitation but more vivid, colourful, vivid with various lights and hues; it becomes less intellectual, more made of vision and a flame of insight. Very often this comes by an infiltration of the veiled inner Mind which is within us and has its own wider and deeper fields and subtler movements, — and can bring also the tinge of a higher afflatus to the poetic intelligence, sometimes a direct uplifting towards what is beyond it. It must be understood however that the greatness of poetry as poetry does not necessarily or always depend on the level from which it is written. Shelley has more access to the inner Mind and through it to greater things than Milton, but he is not the greater poet.

When I say that the inner Mind can get the tinge or reflection of the higher experience I am not speaking here of the "descent" in Yoga by which the higher realisation can come down into the inferior planes and enlighten or transform them. I mean that the Higher Mind is itself a spiritual plane and one who lives in it has naturally and normally the realisation of the Self, the unity and harmony everywhere, and a vision and activity of knowledge that proceeds from this consciousness but the inner

Mind has not that naturally and in its own right, yet can open to its influence more easily than the outer intelligence. All the same, between the reflected realisation in the mind and the automatic and authentic realisation in the spiritual mental planes there is a wide difference.

There is also a plane of dynamic vision which is a part of the inner Mind and perhaps should be called not a plane but a province. There are many kinds of vision in the inner Mind and not this dynamic vision alone. So, to fix invariable characteristics for the poetry of the inner Mind is not easy or even possible; it is a thing to be felt rather than mentally definable. A certain spontaneous intensity of vision is usually there, but that large or rich sweep or power which belongs to the Illumined Mind is not part of its character. Moreover, it is subtle and fine and has not the wideness which is the characteristic of the planes that rise towards the vast universality of the Overmind level.

That is why the lower planes cannot express the Spirit with its full and native voice as the higher planes do — unless something comes down into them from the higher and overrides their limitations for the moment.

1936

POETIC INTELLIGENCE AND DYNAMIC VISION

On one [the plane of poetic intelligence] the creation is by thought, by the idea-force and images constructed by the idea, mind-images; on the other [the plane of dynamic vision] one creates by sight, by direct vision either of the thing in itself or by some living significant symbol or expressive body of it. This dynamic sight is not the vision that comes by an intense reconstruction of physical seeing or through vital experience (e.g. Shakespeare's), it is a kind of occult sight which sees the things behind the veil, the forms that are more intimate and expressive than any outward appearance. It is a very vivid sight and the expression that comes with it is also extremely vivid and living but with a sort of inner super-life. To be able to write at will from this plane is sufficiently rare, — though a poet habitually writing from some

other level may stumble into it from time to time.

9. 7. 1931

SPIRITUAL INSPIRATION AND POETIC RHETORIC

Manmohan's poem[1] has a considerable elevation of thought, diction and rhythm. It is certainly a fine production and, if all had been equal to the first three lines which are pure and perfect in inspiration, the sonnet might have stood among the finest things in the English language. But somehow it fails as a whole. The reason is that the intellectual mind took up the work of transcription and a Miltonic rhetorical note comes in; all begins to be thought rather than seen or felt; the poet seems to be writing what he thinks he ought to write on such a subject and doing it very well — one admires, the mind is moved and the vital stirred, but the deeper satisfying spiritual thrill which the first lines set out to give is no longer there. Already in the fourth line there is the touch of poetic rhetoric. The original afflatus continues to persist behind, but can no longer speak itself out in its native language; there is a mental translation. It tries indeed to get back —

> *Eyes elder than the light; cheek that no flower*
> *Remembers —*

then loses almost altogether — what follows is purely mental.

[1] Augustest! dearest! whom no thought can trace,
Name murmuring out of birth's infinity,
Mother! like heaven's great face is thy sweet face,
Stupendous with the mystery of me.
Eyes elder than the light; cheek that no flower
Remembers; brow at which my infant care
Gazed weeping up and saw the skies enshower
With tender rain of vast mysterious hair!
Thou, at whose breast the sunbeams sucked, whose arm
Cradled the lisping ocean, art thou she,
Goddess! at whose dim heart the world's deep charm,
Tears, terrors, throbbing things were yet to be?
She, from whose tearing pangs in glory first
I and the infinite wide heavens burst?

— Manmohan Ghose

Another effort brings the eighth line which is undoubtedly very fine and has sight behind it. Then there is a compromise; the spiritual seeing mind seems to say to the thinking poetic intellect, "All right, have it your own way — I will try at least to keep you up at your best", and we have the three lines that follow those two others that are forcible and vivid poetic (very poetic) rhetoric — finally a close that goes back to the level of the "stupendous mystery". No, it is not a "splendid confusion" — the poem is well-constructed from the point of view of arrangement of the thought, so there can be no confusion. It is the work of a poet who got into touch with some high level of spiritual sight, a living vision of some spirit truth, but, that not being his native domain, could not keep its perfect voice throughout and mixed his inspiration — that seems to me the true estimate. A very fine poem, all the same.

1934

A PERSONAL APPRECIATION

1

It is not a relapse, but an oscillation which one finds in almost every poet. Each has a general level, a highest level and a lower range in which some defects of his poetical faculty come out. You have three manners: (1) a sort of decorative romantic manner that survives from your early days — this at a lower pitch turns to too much dressiness of an ornamental kind, at a higher to post-Victorian, Edwardian or Georgian rhetoric with a frequent saving touch of Yeats; (2) a level at which all is fused into a fine intuitive authenticity and beauty, there is seldom anything to change; (3) a higher level of grander movement and language in which you pull down or reach the influences of the Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Overmind Intuition. The last you have not yet fully mastered so as to write with an absolute certainty and faultlessness except by lines and stanzas or else as a whole in rare moments of total inspiration, but you are moving towards mastery in it. Sometimes these inspirations get mixed up toge-

ther. It is this straining towards greater height that creates the difficulty, yet it is indispensable for the evolution of your genius. It is not surprising, therefore, that inspiration comes with difficulty often, or that there are dormant periods or returns of the decorative inspiration. All that is part of the day's work and dejection is quite out of place.

20. 4. 1937

2

The defect of what was called Georgian poetry — though I suppose it would more properly be called late-Victorian-Edwardian-early-Georgian — is that it has fullness of language which fails to go home — things that ought to be very fine, but miss being so; so much of the poetry of Rupert Brooke as I have seen, for instance, always gives me that impression. In our own language I might say that it is an inspiration which tries to come from the Higher Mind but only succeeds in inflating the voice of the poetic intelligence.

1. 11. 1936

3

It ["poetic eloquence"] belongs to the poetic intelligence, but as in most of Milton, it can be lifted up by the touch of the Higher Mind rhythm and language.

29. 11. 1936

4

The line[1] is strong and dignified, but it impresses me as too mental and Miltonic. Milton has very usually (in *Paradise Lost*) some of the largeness and rhythm of the Higher Mind, but his substance is — except at certain heights — mental, mentally grand and noble. The interference of the mental Miltonic is one of the great stumbling-blocks when one tries to write from "above".

17. 11. 1936

[1] "An ultimate crown of inexhaustible joy."

5

By pseudo-Miltonic I mean a certain kind of traditional poetic eloquence which finds its roots in Milton but even when well done lacks in originality and can easily be vapid and sometimes hollow.... An expression like "lofty region", "vasty region", "myriad region" even expresses nothing but a bare intellectual fact — with no more vision in it than would convey mere wideness without any significance in it.

13. 10. 1936

6

Certainly if you want to achieve a greater poetry, more unique, you will yourself have to change, to alter the poise of your consciousness. At present you write, as you do other things, too much with the brain, the mere human intelligence. To get back from the surface vital into the psychic and psychic vital, to raise the level of your mental from the intellect to the Illumined Mind is your need both in poetry and in Yoga. I have told you already that your best poetry comes from the Illumined Mind, but as a rule it either comes from there with too much of the transcription diminished in its passage through the intellect or else is generated only in the creative poetic intelligence. But so many poets have written from that intelligence. If you could always write direct from the Illumined Mind — finding there not only the substance, as you often do, but the rhythm and language, that indeed would be a poetry exquisite, original and unique. The intellect produces the idea, even the poetic idea, too much for the sake of the idea alone; coming from the Illumined Mind the idea in a form of light and music is itself but the shining body of the Light Divine.

On the other hand to cease writing altogether might be a doubtful remedy. By your writing here you have at least got rid of most of your former defects, and reached a stage of preparation in which you may reasonably hope for a greater development hereafter. I myself have more than once abstained for some time from writing because I did not wish to produce any-

thing except as an expression from a higher plane of consciousness but to do that you must be sure of your poetic gift, that it will not rust by too long a disuse!

4.9.1931

7

I do not know why this fancy has seized on you to follow in the trace of others. No good work is likely to come out of such a second-hand motive. Let me add that this poem[1] of Coleridge is a masterpiece, not because it is the quintessence of romantic poetry, but because it is a genuine supraphysical experience caught and rendered in a rare hour of exaltation with an absolute accuracy of vision and authenticity of rhythm. Further, romantic poetry could be genuine in the early nineteenth century, but the attempt to walk back into it in the year 1931 is not likely to be a success, it can only result in an artificial literary exercise. You have a genuine vein of poetic inspiration somewhere above your intellect which comes through sometimes when the said intellect can be induced to be quiet and the lower vital does not meddle. If I were you, I should try to find that always and make the access to it free and the transcriptions from it pure (for then your writing becomes marvellously good); that would be a truer line of progress than these exercises.

21.8.1931

8

What have you to do with what others have achieved? If you write poetry, it should be from the standpoint that you have something of your own which has not yet found full expression, a power within which you can place at the service of the Divine and which can help you to grow — you have to get rid of all in it that is merely mental or merely vital, to develop what is true and fine in it and leave the rest until you can write from a higher level of consciousness things that come from the deepest self and the highest spiritual levels. Your question is that of a *littérateur* and

[1] *Kubla Khan*

not in the right spirit. Besides, even from a mental point of view, such comparisons are quite idle.... You have another turn and gift and you have in the resources of Yoga a chance of constant progression and growth and of throwing all imperfections behind you. Measure what you do by the standard of your own possible perfection; what is the use of measuring it by the achievement of others?

1931

POETRY OF THE ILLUMINED MIND AND THE INTUITION

The poetry of the Illumined Mind is usually full of a play of lights and colours, brilliant and striking in phrase, for illumination makes the Truth vivid — it acts usually by a luminous rush. The poetry of the Intuition may have a play of colour and bright lights, but it does not depend on them — it may be quite bare, it tells by a sort of close intimacy with the Truth, an inward expression of it. The Illumined Mind sometimes gets rid of its trappings, but even then it always keeps a sort of lustrousness of robe which is its characteristic.

1934

POETRY OF THE INTUITIVE MIND

The intuitive mind, strictly speaking, stretches from the Intuition proper down to the intuitivised inner mind — it is therefore at once an overhead power and a mental intelligence power. All depends on the amount, intensity, quality of the intuition and how far it is mixed with mind or pure. The inner mind is not necessarily intuitive, though it can easily become so. The mystic mind is turned towards the occult and spiritual, but the inner mind can act without direct reference to the occult and spiritual, it can act in the same field and in the same material as the ordinary mind, only with a larger and deeper power, range and light and in greater unison with the Universal Mind; it can open also more easily to what is within and what is above. Intuitive intelli-

gence, mystic mind, inner mind intelligence are all part of the inner mind operations. In today's poem, for instance — *A Poet's Stammer*[1] — it is certainly the inner mind that has transformed the idea of stammering into a symbol of inner phenomena and into that operation a certain strain of mystic mind enters, but what is prominent is the intuitive inspiration throughout. It blends with the intuitive poetic intelligence in the first stanza, gets touched by the overhead intuition in the second, gets full of it in the third and again rises rapidly to that in the two last lines of the fourth stanza.This is what I call poetry of the intuitive mind.

13. 5. 1937

"OVERHEAD" POETRY

What you are writing now is "overhead" poetry — I mean poetry inspired from those planes; before you used to write poems very often from the intuitive mind — these had a beauty and perfection of their own. What I mean by absoluteness here is a full intensely inevitable expression of what comes from above. These lines are original, convincing, have vision, they are not to be rejected, but they are not the highest flight except in single lines. Such variations are to be expected and will be more prominent if you were writing longer poems, for then to keep always or even usually to that highest level would be an extraordinary feat — no poet has managed as yet to write always at his highest flight and

[1] My dream is spoken
As if by sound
Were tremulously broken
Some vow profound.
A timeless hush
Draws ever back
The winging music-rush
Upon thought's track.
Though syllables sweep
Like golden birds,
Far lonelihoods of sleep
Dwindle my words.
Beyond life's clamour,
A mystery mars
Speech-light to a myriad stammer
Of flickering stars.

here in that kind of poetry it would be still more difficult. The important point is not to fall below a certain level.

POETRY OF SPIRITUAL VISION

The spiritual vision must never be intellectual, philosophical or abstract, it must always give the sense of something vivid, living and concrete, a thing of vibrant beauty or a thing of power. An abstract spiritual poetry is possible but that is not A's manner. The poetry of spiritual vision as distinct from that of spiritual thought abounds in images, unavoidably because that is the straight way to avoid abstractness; but these images must be felt as very real and concrete things, otherwise they become like the images used by the philosophic poets, decorative to the thought rather than realities of the inner vision and experience.

28. 5. 1937

MYSTIC AND SPIRITUAL POETRY

1

I used the word mystic in the sense of a certain kind of inner seeing and feeling of things, a way which to the intellect would seem occult and visionary — for this is something different from imagination and its work with which the intellect is familiar. It was in this sense that I said D had not the mystic mind and vision. One can go far in the spiritual way, have plenty of spiritual experiences, spiritual knowledge, spiritual feelings, significant visions and dreams even without having this mystic mind and way of seeing things. So too one may write poetry from different planes or sources of inspiration and expressing spiritual feelings, knowledge, experiences and yet use the poetic intelligence as the thought medium which gives them shape in speech; such poems are not of the mystic type. One may be mystic in this sense without being spiritual — one may also be spiritual without being mystic; or one may be both spiritual and mystic in one. Poems ditto.

2

Mystic poetry has a perfectly concrete meaning much more than intellectual poetry which is much more abstract. The nature of the intellect is abstraction; spirituality and mysticism deal with the concrete by their very nature.

8. 12. 1936

3

Mystic poetry does not mean anything exactly or apparently; it means things suggestively and reconditely, — things that are not known and classified by the intellect.

What you are asking is to reduce what is behind to intellectual terms, which is to make it something quite different from itself.

SUNLIGHT AND MOONLIGHT MYSTIC POETRY — INSPIRATION AND REVELATION

I find no difficulty in the last stanza of J's poem nor any in connecting it with the two former stanzas. It is a single feeling and subjective idea or vision expressing itself in three facets. In the full night of the spirit there is a luminosity from above in the very heart of the darkness — imaged by the moon and stars in the bosom of the Night. (The night-sky with the moon (spiritual light) and the stars is a well-known symbol and it is seen frequently by Sadhaks even when they do not know its meaning.) In that night of the spirit is the Dream to which or through which a path is found that in the ordinary light of waking day one forgets or misses. In the night of the spirit are shadowy avenues of pain, but even in that shadow the Power of Beauty and Beatitude sings secretly and unseen the strains of Paradise. But in the light of day the mystic heart of moonlight sorrowfully weeps, suppressed, for even though the nectar of it is there behind, it falters away from this garish light because it is itself a subtle thing of dream, not of conscious waking mind-nature. That is how I understand or

rather try mentally to express it. But it is putting a very abstract sense into what should be kept vague in outline but vivid in feeling — by mentalising one puts at once too much and too little in it.

I do not remember the context of the passage you quote from *The Future Poetry*, but I suppose I meant to contrast the veiled utterance of what is usually called mystic poetry with the luminous and assured clarity of the fully expressed spiritual experience. I did not mean to contrast it with the mental clarity which is aimed at usually by poetry in which the intelligence or thinking mind is consulted at each step. The concreteness of intellectual imaged description is one thing and spiritual concreteness is another. "Two birds, companions, seated on one tree, but one eats the fruit, the other eats not but watches his fellow"[1] — that has an illumining spiritual clarity and concreteness to one who has had the experience, but mentally and intellectually it might mean anything or nothing. Poetry uttered with the spiritual clarity may be compared to sunlight, poetry uttered with the mystic veil to moonlight. But it was not my intention to deny beauty, power or value to the moonlight. Note that I have distinguished between two kinds of mysticism, one in which the realisation or experience is vague, though inspiringly vague, the other in which the experience is revelatory and intimate, but the utterance it finds is veiled by the image, not thoroughly revealed by it. I do not know to which Tagore's recent poetry belongs, I have not read it. But the latter kind of poetry (where there is the intimate experience) can be of great power and value — witness Blake. Revelation is greater than inspiration — it brings the direct knowledge and seeing; inspiration gives the expression, but the two are not always equal. There is even an inspiration without revelation, when one gets the word but the thing remains behind the veil; the transcribing consciousness expresses something with power, like a medium, of which it has not itself the direct sight or the living possession. It is better to get the sight of the thing itself than merely express it by an inspiration which comes from behind the veil, but this kind of poetry too has often a great light and power in it. The highest inspiration brings the

[1] *Mundaka Upanishad*, Chap. III. I. 1.

intrinsic word, the spiritual Mantra; but even where the inspiration is less than that, has a certain vagueness or fluidity of outline, you cannot say of such mystic poetry that it has no inspiration, not the inspired word at all. Where there is no inspiration there can be no poetry.

10. 6. 1936

SYMBOLIC AND MYSTIC POETRY

I suppose the poem you sent me might be described as the poetic rendering of a symbolic vision — it is not a mystic poem. A poem no doubt can be symbolic and mystic at the same time. For instance N's English poem of the vision of the Lion-flame and the Deer-flame, beauty and power, was symbolic and mystic at once. It is when the thing seen is spiritually lived and has an independent vivid reality of its own which exceeds any conceptual significance it may have on the surface that it is mystic. Symbols may be of various kinds; there are those that are concealing images capable of intellectual interpretation but still different from either symbolic or allegorical figures — and there are those that have a more intimate life of their own and are not conceptual so much as occultly vital in their significance; there are still others that need a psychic or spiritual or at least an inner and intuitive sight to identify oneself fully with their meaning. In a poem which uses conceptual symbols the mind is more active and the reader wants to know what it means to the mind; but as minds differ, the poet may attach one meaning to it and the reader may find another, if the image used is at all an enigmatic one, not mentally clear and precise. In the more deeply symbolist — still more in the mystic — poem the mind is submerged in the vividness of the reality and any mental explanation falls far short of what is felt and lived in the deeper vital or psychic response. This is what Housman in his book tries to explain with regard to Blake's poetry, though he seems to me to miss altogether the real nature of the response. It is not the mere sensation to which what he calls pure poetry appeals but to a deeper inner life or life-soul within us which has profounder depths than the thinking mind and responds with a certain kind of soul-excitement or ecstasy

— the physical vibrations on which he lays stress are merely a very outward result of this sudden stir within the occult folds of the being. Mystic poetry can strike still deeper — it can stir the inmost and subtlest recesses of the life-soul and the secret inner mind at the same time; it can even, if it is of the right kind, go beyond these also to the pure inmost psychic.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN ARJAVA'S "TOTALITARIAN"[1] AND WALTER DE LA MARE'S "LISTENERS"

De la Mare's poem has a delicate beauty throughout and a sort of daintily fanciful suggestion of the occult world. I do not know if there is anything more. The weakness of it is that it reads like a thing imagined — the images and details are those that might be written of a haunted house on earth which has got possessed by some occult presences. Arjava must no doubt have taken his starting-point from a reminiscence of this poem, but there is nothing else in common with De la Mare — his poem is an extraordinarily energetic and powerful vision of an occult world and every phrase is intimately evocative of the beyond as a thing vividly seen and strongly lived — it is not on earth, this courtyard and this crescent moon, we are at once in an unearthly world and in a place somewhere in the soul of man and all the details, sparing, with a powerful economy of phrase and image and brevity of movement but revelatory in each touch as opposed to the dim moonlight suggestions supported by a profusion of detail and long elaborating development in De la Mare — of course that has its value also — make us entirely feel ourselves there. I therefore maintain my description "original" not only for the latter part of the poem but for the opening also. It is not an echo, it is an independent creation. Indeed the difference of the two poems comes out most strongly in these very (first eight) lines.

...the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
That goes down to the empty hall,

[1] See Arjava (J. A. Chadwick), *Poems*, John Watkins, London, 1941, p. 215.

...the dark turf,
'Neath the starred and leafy sky

are a description of things on earth made occult only by the presence of the phantom listeners. But

....the empty eerie courtyard
With no name

or

....a crescent moon swung wanly,
White as curd

are not earthly, they belong to a terrible elsewhere, while the latter part of the poem carries the elsewhere into a province of the soul. This is the distinction and makes the perfect successfulness of Arjava's poem.

15. 10. 1936

A COMPARISON BETWEEN A'S "PHARPHAR" AND WALTER DE LA MARE'S "ARABIA"

It is indeed charming — De la Mare seems to have an unfailing beauty of language and rhythm and an inspired loveliness of fancy that is captivating. But still it is fancy, the mind playing with its delicate imaginations. A hint of something deeper tries to get through sometimes, but it does not go beyond a hint. That is the difference between his poem and the one it inspired from you. There is some kinship though no sameness in the rhythm and the tone of delicate remoteness it brings with it. But in your poem that something deeper is not hinted, it is caught — throughout — in all the expressions, but especially in such lines as

When the magic ethers of evening
Wash one the various day

or

The beautiful body of Pharphar
Or its soul of secret sound

or

This river of infinite distance,
Pharphar.

These expressions give a sort of body to the occult without taking from it its strangeness and do not leave it in mist or in shadowy image or luminous silhouette. That is what a fully successful spiritual or occult poetry has to do, to make the occult and the spiritual real to the vision of the consciousness, the feeling. The occult is most often materialised as by Scott and Shakespeare or else pictured in mists, the spiritual mentalised, as in many attempts at spiritual poetry — a reflection in the mind is not enough. For success in the former, Arjava's "Totalitarian" with the stark occult reality of its vision is a good example; for the latter there are lines both in his poems and yours that I could instance, but I cannot recall them accurately just now — but have you not somewhere a line

The mute unshadowed spaces of her mind?

That would be an instance of the concrete convincing reality of which I am speaking — a spiritual state not hinted at or abstractly put as the metaphysical poets most often do it but presented with a tangible accuracy which one who has lived in the silent wideness of his spiritualised mind can at once recognise as the embodiment in word of his experience.

I do not mean for a moment to deny the value of the exquisite texture of dream in De la Mare's representation, but still this completer embodiment achieves more.

16. 10. 1936

TRUTH BEHIND POETIC IMAGES

There are truths and there are transcriptions of truths; the

transcriptions may be accurate or may be free and imaginative. The truth behind a poetic creation is there on some plane or other — supra-physical generally — and from there the suggestion of the image too originally comes; even the whole transcription itself can be contributed from there, but ordinarily it is the mind's faculty of imagination which gives it form and body. Poetic imagination is very usually satisfied with beauty of idea and image only and the aesthetic pleasure of it, but there is something behind it which supplies the Truth in its images, and to get the transcription also direct from that something or somewhere behind should be the aim of mystic or spiritual poetry. When Shelley made the spirits of Nature speak, he was using his imagination, but there was something behind in him which felt and knew and believed in the truth of the thing he was expressing — he felt that there were forms more real than living man behind the veil. But his method of presentation was intellectual and imaginative, so one misses the full life in these impalpable figures. To get a more intimate and spiritually concrete presentation should be the aim of the mystic poet.

Symbolic poems always come from a mystic region; the allegorical may come from the intellect, but often the allegory itself rests on a concealed symbol and then there is a mystic element.

November, 1933

POETIC CONCEIT

When an image comes out of the mind not properly transmuted in the inner vision or delivered by the alchemy of language, it betrays itself as coin of the fancy or the contriving intellect and is then called a conceit.

MYSTIC SYMBOLS

1

If you expect matter of fact verisimilitude from X or a scientific

ornithologically accurate swan, you are knocking at the wrong door. But I don't see exactly the point of your objection. The lake in this poem is not a lake but a symbol; the swan is not a swan but a symbol. You can't expect the lake merely to ripple and do nothing else. It is as much a symbol as the Bird of Fire or the Bird of the Vedic poet who faced the guardians of the Soma and brought the Soma to Indra (or was it to a Rishi? I have forgotten) — perhaps carrying a pot or several pots in his claws and beak!! for I don't know how else he could have done it. How is he to use the symbol if you don't make allowances for a miraculous Swan? If the Swan does nothing but what an ordinary swan does, it ceases to be a symbol and becomes only a metaphor. The animals of these symbols belong not to earth but to Wonderland.

2

The objection that stars do not get *nata* [bent] stands only if the poem describes objective phenomena or aims at using purely objective images. But if the vision behind the poem is subjective, the objection holds no longer. The mystic subjective vision admits a consciousness in physical things and gives them a subtle physical life which is not that of the material existence. If a consciousness is felt in the stars and if that consciousness expresses itself in subtle physical images to the vision of the poet, there can be no improbability of a star being *nata* — such expressions attribute a mystical life to the stars and can appropriately express this in mystic images. I agree with you about the fineness of the line.

27. 5. 1936

SYMBOLISM AND ALLEGORY

1

There is a considerable difference between symbolism and allegory; they are not at all the same thing. Allegory comes in

when a quality or other abstract thing is personalised and the allegory proper should be something carefully stylised and deliberately sterilised of the full aspect of embodied life so that the essential meaning or idea may come out with sufficient precision and force of clarity. One can find this method in the old mystery plays and it is a kind of art that has its value. Allegory is an intellectual form; one is not expected to believe in the personalisation of the abstract quality, it is only an artistic device. When in an allegory as in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* the personalisation, the embodiment takes first place and absorbs the major part of the mind's interest, the true style and principle of this art have been abandoned. The allegorical purpose here becomes a submerged strain and is really of secondary importance, our search for it a by-play of the mind; we read for the beauty and interest of the figures and movements presented to us, not for this submerged significance. An allegory must be intellectually precise and clear in its representative figures as well as in their basis, however much adorned with imagery and personal expression; otherwise it misses its purpose. A symbol expresses on the contrary not the play of abstract things or ideas put into imaged form, but a living truth or inward vision or experience of things, so inward, so subtle, so little belonging to the domain of intellectual abstraction and precision that it cannot be brought out except through symbolic images — the more these images have a living truth of their own which corresponds intimately to the living truth they symbolise, suggests the very vibration of the experience itself, the greater becomes the art of the symbolic expression. When the symbol is a representative sign or figure and nothing more, then the symbolic approaches nearer to an intellectual method, though even then it is not the same thing as allegory. In mystic poetry the symbol ought to be as much as possible the natural body of the inner truth or vision, itself an intimate part of the experience.

2

Lord, what an incorrigible mentaliser and allegorist you are! If the bird were either consciousness or the psychic or light, it

would be an allegory and all the mystic beauty would be gone. A living symbol and a mental allegorical symbol are not the same thing. You can't put a label on the Bird of Marvel any more than on the Bird of Fire or any other of the fauna or flora or population of the mystic kingdoms. They can be described, but to label them destroys their life and makes them only stuffed specimens in an allegorical museum. Mystic symbols are living things, not abstractions. Why insist on killing them? J has described the Bird and told you all that is necessary about it, the rest you have to feel and live inside, not dissect and put the fragments into neatly arranged drawers.

8. 8. 1936

PSYCHIC AND ESOTERIC POETRY

These poems are quite new in manner — simple and precise and penetrating. What you describe is the psychic fire, *agni pāvaka*, which burns in the deeper heart and from there is lighted in the mind, the vital and the physical body. In the mind Agni creates a light of intuitive perception and discrimination which sees at once what is the true vision or idea and the wrong vision or idea, the true feeling and the wrong feeling, the true movement and the wrong movement. In the vital it is kindled as a fire of right emotion and a kind of intuitive feeling, a sort of tact which makes for the right impulse, the right action, the right sense of things and reaction to things. In the body it initiates a similar but still more automatic correct response to the things of physical life, sensation, body experience. Usually it is the psychic light in the mind that is first lit of the three, but not always — for sometimes it is the psycho-vital flame that takes precedence.

In ordinary life also there is no doubt an action of the psychic — without it man would be only a thinking and planning animal. But its action there is very much veiled, needing always the mental or vital to express it, usually mixed and not dominant, not unerring therefore; it does often the right thing in the wrong way, is moved by the right feeling but errs as to the appli-

cation, person, place, circumstance. The psychic, except in a few extraordinary natures, does not get its full chance in the outer consciousness; it needs some kind of Yoga or Sadhana to come by its own and it is as it emerges more and more in front that it gets clear of the mixture. That is to say, its presence becomes directly felt, not only behind and supporting, but filling the frontal consciousness and no longer dependent or dominated by its instruments — mind, vital and body, but dominating them and moulding them into luminosity and teaching them their true action.

It is not easy to say whether the poems are esoteric; for these words "esoteric" and "exoteric" are rather ill-defined in their significance. One understands the distinction between exoteric and esoteric religion — that is to say, on one side, creed, dogma, mental faith, religious worship and ceremony, religious and moral practice and discipline, on the other an inner seeking piercing beyond the creed and dogma and ceremony or finding their hidden meaning, living deeply within in spiritual and mystic experience. But how shall we define esoteric poetry? Perhaps what deals in an occult way with the occult may be called esoteric — e.g., the *Bird of Fire*,* *Trance*,* etc. *The Two Moons** is, it is obvious, desperately esoteric. But I don't know whether an intimate spiritual experience simply and limpidly told without veil or recondite image can be called esoteric — for the word usually brings the sense of something kept back from the ordinary eye, hidden, occult. Is *Nirvana** for instance an esoteric poem? There is no veil or symbol there — it tries to state the experience as precisely and overtly as possible. The experience of the psychic fire and psychic discrimination is an intimate spiritual experience, but it is direct and simple like all psychic things. The poem which expresses it may easily be something deeply inward, esoteric in that sense, but simple, unveiled and clear, not esoteric in the more usual sense. I rather think, however, the term "esoteric poem" is a misnomer and some other phraseology would be more accurate.

30. 4. 1935

* Poems by Sri Aurobindo. See *Collected Poems*, Centenary Edition, 1972.

PSYCHIC AND OVERHEAD INSPIRATION

1

There is too the psychic source of inspiration which can give a beautiful spiritual poetry. The psychic has two aspects — there is the soul principle itself which contains all soul possibilities and there is the psychic personality which represents whatever soul-power is developed from life to life or put forward for action in our present life-formation. The psychic being usually expresses itself through its instruments, mental, vital and physical; it tries to put as much of its own stamp on them as possible. But it can seldom put on them the full psychic stamp — unless it comes fully out from its rather secluded and overshadowed position and takes into its hands the direct government of the nature. It can then receive and express all spiritual realisations in its own way and manner. For the turn of the psychic is different from that of the overhead planes — it has less of greatness, power, wideness, more of a smaller sweetness, delicate beauty; there is an intense beauty of emotion, a fine subtlety of true perception, an intimate language. The expression "sweetness and light" can very well be applied to the psychic as the kernel of its nature. The spiritual plane, when it takes up these things, gives them a wider utterance, a greater splendour of light, a stronger sweetness, a breath of powerful audacity, strength and space.

1936

2

To get the psychic being to emerge is not easy, though it is a very necessary thing for *sādhanā* and when it does it is not certain that it will switch on to the above-head planes at once. But obviously anyone who could psychicise his poetry would get a unique place among the poets.

The direct psychic touch is not frequent in poetry. It breaks in sometimes — more often there is only a tinge here and there.

19. 10. 1936

3

I don't suppose the emergence of the psychic would interfere at all with the inspiration from above. It would be more likely to help it by making the connection with these planes more direct and conscious.

20. 10. 1936

INSPIRATION FROM THE ILLUMINED MIND AND THE PSYCHIC

Your question —

"What distinguishes, in manner and quality, a pure inspiration from the illumined mind from that which has the psychic for its origin?" — reads like a poser in an examination paper. Even if I could give a satisfactory definition, Euclideanly rigid, I don't know that it would be of much use or would really help you to distinguish between the two kinds: these things have to be felt and perceived by experience. I would prefer to give examples. I suppose it would not be easy to find a more perfect example of psychic inspiration in English literature than Shelley's well-known lines,

I can give not what men call love;
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heavens reject not, —
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow?

— you will find there the true rhythm, expression and substance of poetry full of the psychic influence. For full examples of the poetry which comes from the illumined mind purely and simply and that in which the psychic and the spiritual illumination meet together, one has to go to poetry that tries to express a spiritual experience. You have yourself written things which can illus-

trate the difference. The lines

The longing of ecstatic tears
From infinite to infinite

will do very well as an instance of the pure illumination, for here what would otherwise be a description of a spiritual heart-experience, psychic therefore in its origin, is lifted up to a quite different spiritual level and expressed with the vision and language sufficiently characteristic of a spiritual-mental illumination. In another passage there is this illumination but it is captured and dominated by the inner heart and by the psychic thrill, a certain utterance of the yearning and push of psychic love for the Divine incarnate.

If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow
Its mortal longings, lean down from above,
Temper the unborn Light no thought can trace,
Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow;
For 'tis with mouth of clay I supplicate:
Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,
And all Thy formless glory turn to love
And mould Thy love into a human face.

July, 1931

OVERHEAD POETRY

What super-excellence? as poetry? When I say that a line comes from a higher or overhead plane or has the Overmind touch I do not mean that it is superior in pure poetic excellence to others from lower planes — that A's lines outshine Shakespeare or Homer for instance. I simply mean that it has some vision, light, etc. from up there and the character of its expression and rhythm are from there. You do not appreciate probably because you catch only the surface mental meaning. The line[1] is very

[1] Flickering no longer with the cry of clay,

fine from the technical point of view, the distribution of consonantal and vowel sounds being perfect. That, however, is possible on any level of inspiration. These are technical elements, the Overmind touch does not consist in that but in the undertones or overtones of the rhythmic cry and a language which carries in it a great depth or height or width of spiritual vision, feeling or experience. But all that has to be felt, it is not analysable. If I say that the second line[1] is a magnificent expression of an inner reality most intimate and powerful and the first line, with its conception of the fire once "flickering" with the "cry" of clay but now no longer, is admirably revelatory — you would probably reply that it does not convey anything of the kind to you. That is why I do not usually speak of these things in themselves or in their relation to poetry — only with A who is trying to get his inspiration into touch with these planes. Either one must have the experience — e.g., here one must have lived in or glimpsed the mystic mind, felt its fire, been aware of the distances that haunt it, heard the cry of clay mixing with it and the consequent unsteady flickering of its flames and the release into the straight upward burning and so known that this is not mere romantic rhetoric, not mere images or metaphors expressing something imaginative but unreal (that is how many would take it perhaps) but facts and realities of the self, actual and concrete, or else there must be a conspiracy between the solar plexus and the thousand-petalled lotus which makes one feel, if not know, the suggestion of these things through the words and rhythm. As for technique, there is a technique of this higher poetry but it is not analysable and teachable. If, for instance, A had written "No longer flickering with the cry of clay", it would no longer have been the same thing though the exact mental meaning would be just as before — for the overtone, the rhythm would have been lost in the ordinary staccato clipped movement and with the overtone the rhythmic significance. It would not have given the suggestion of space and wideness full with the cry and the flicker, the intense impact of that cry and the agitation of the fire which is heard through the line as it is. But to realise that, one must have the inner sight and inner ear for these things; one

[1] The distance-haunted fire of mystic mind

must be able to hear the sound-meaning, feel the sound-spaces with their vibrations. Again, if he had written "Quivering no longer with the touch on clay", it would have been a good line, but meant much less and something quite different to the inner experience, though to the mind it would have been only the same thing expressed in a different image — not so to the solar plexus and the thousand-petalled lotus. In this technique it must be the right word and no other, in the right place and in no other, the right sounds and no others, in a design of sound that cannot be changed even a little. You may say that it must be so in all poetry; but in ordinary poetry the mind can play about, chop and change, use one image or another, put this word here or that word there — if the sense is much the same and has a poetical value, the mind does not feel that all is lost unless it is very sensitive and much influenced by the solar plexus. In the overhead poetry these things are quite imperative, it is all or nothing — or at least all or a fall.

OVERMIND RHYTHM AND INSPIRATION

In the lines you quote from Wordsworth —

> *The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep;*
> *No more shall grief of mine the season wrong;*
> *I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,*
> *The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,*

—,the Overmind movement is not there in the first three lines; in the last line there is something of the touch, not direct but through some high intuitive consciousness and, because it is not direct, the fully characteristic rhythm is absent or defective. The poetic value or perfection of a line, passage or poem does not depend on the plane from which it comes; it depends on the purity and authenticity and power with which it transcribes an intense vision and inspiration from whatever source. Shakespeare is a poet of the vital inspiration, Homer of the subtle physical, but there are no greater poets in any literature. No doubt, if one

could get a continuous inspiration from the Overmind, that would mean a greater, sustained height of perfection and spiritual quality in poetry than has yet been achieved; but it is only in short passages and lines that even a touch of it is attainable. One gets nearer the Overmind rhythm and inspiration in another line of Wordsworth —

...a mind...
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone

or a line like Milton's

Those thoughts that wander through eternity.

One has the sense here of a rhythm which does not begin or end with the line, but has for ever been sounding in the eternal planes and began even in Time ages ago and which returns into the infinite to go sounding on for ages after. In fact, the word-rhythm is only part of what we hear; it is a support for the rhythm we listen to behind in "the Ear of the ear", *śrotrasya śrotram*. To a certain extent, that is what all great poetry at its highest tries to have, but it is only the Overmind rhythm to which it is altogether native and in which it is not only behind the word-rhythm but gets into the word-movement itself and finds a kind of fully supporting body there.

10. 7. 1931

P.S. Lines from the higher intuitive mind-consciousness, as well as those from the Overmind, can have a mantric character — the rhythm too may have a certain kinship with mantric rhythm, but it may not be the thing itself, only the nearest step towards it.

THE MANTRA

The *mantra* as I have tried to describe it in *The Future Poetry* is a word of power and light that comes from the Overmind inspiration or from some very high plane of Intuition. Its charac-

teristics are a language that conveys infinitely more than the mere surface sense of the words seems to indicate, a rhythm that means even more than the language and is born out of the Infinite and disappears into it, and the power to convey not merely the mental, vital or physical contents or indications or values of the thing uttered, but its significance and figure in some fundamental and original consciousness which is behind all these and greater. The passages you mention from the Upanishad and the Gita have certainly the Overmind accent. But ordinarily the Overmind inspiration does not come out pure in human poetry — it has to come down to an inferior consciousness and touch it or else to lift it by a seizure and surprise from above into some infinite largeness. There is always a mixture of the two elements, not an absolute transformation though the higher may sometimes dominate. You must remember that the Overmind is a superhuman consciousness and to be able to write always or purely from an Overmind inspiration would mean the elevation of at least a part of the nature beyond the human level.

But how do you expect a supramental inspiration to come down here when the Overmind itself is so rarely within human reach? That is always the error of the impatient aspirant, to think he can get the Supermind without going through the intervening stages or to imagine that he has got it when in fact he has only got something from the illumined or intuitive or at the highest some kind of mixed Overmind consciousness.

22. 6. 1931

USE OF "HIGH LIGHT" WORDS IN SPIRITUAL POETRY

A.E.'s remarks about "immensity", etc. are very interesting to me; for these are the very words, with others like them, that are constantly recurring at short intervals in my poetry when I express not spiritual thought but spiritual experience. I knew perfectly well that this recurrence would be objected to as bad technique or an inadmissible technique; but this seems to me a reasoning from the conventions of a past order which cannot apply to a new poetry dealing with spiritual things. A new art

of words written from a new consciousness demands a new technique. A.E. himself admits that this rule makes a great difficulty because these "high light" words are few in the English language. His solution may do well enough where the realisations which they represent are mental realisations or intuitions occurring on the summits of the consciousness, rare "high lights" over the low tones of the ordinary natural or occult experience (ordinary, of course, to the poet, not to the average man); there his solution would not violate the truth of the vision, would not misrepresent the balance or harmony of its actual tones. But what of one who lives in an atmosphere full of these high lights — in a consciousness in which the finite, not only the occult but even the earthly finite, is bathed in the sense of the eternal, the illimitable infinite, the immensities or intimacies of the timeless? To follow A.E.'s rule might well mean to falsify this atmosphere, to substitute a merely aesthetic fabrication for a true seeing and experience. Truth first — a technique expressive of the truth in the forms of beauty has to be found, if it does not exist. It is no use arguing from the spiritual inadequacy of the English language; the inadequacy does not exist and, even if it did, the language will have to be made adequate. It has been plastic enough in the past to succeed in expressing all that it was asked to express, however new; it must now be urged to a farther new progress. In fact, the power is there and has only to be brought out more fully to serve the full occult, mystic, spiritual purpose.

5. 2. 1932

USE OF UNDIGNIFIED WORDS IN POETRY

I dispute the legitimacy of the comment. It is based on a conventional objection to undignified and therefore presumably unpoetic words and images — an objection which has value only when the effect is uncouth or trivial, but cannot be accepted otherwise as a valid rule. Obviously, it might be difficult to bring in "bobbing" in an epic or other "high" style, although I suppose Milton could have managed it and one remembers the famous

controversy about Hugo's *Mouchoir*. But in poetry of a mystic (occult or spiritual) kind this does not count. The aim is to bring up a vivid suggestion of the thing seen and some significance of the form, movement, etc. through which one can get at the life behind and its meaning; a familiar adjective here can serve its purpose very well as a touch in the picture and there are occasions when no other could be as true and living or give so well the precise movement needed.

It is the same with the metre — an identical principle applies, a natural kinship between the subject or substance of the poem and its soul-movement. For instance, a certain lightness, a suggestion of faery dance or faery motion may be needed as one element and this would be lost by the choice of a heavier, more dignified rhythm. After all, subject to a proper handling, that is the first important desideratum, an essential harmony between the metrical rhythm and the thing it has to express.

5. 2. 1932

INDEPENDENT GREATNESS OF OVERHEAD LINES IN POETRY — GREATNESS AND BEAUTY IN POETRY

The context of Virgil's line[1] has nothing to do with and cannot detract from its greatness and its overhead character. If we limit its meaning so as to unify it with what goes before, if we want Virgil to say in it only, "Oh yes, even in Carthage, so distant a place, these foreigners too can sympathise and weep over what has happened in Troy and get touched by human misfortune," then the line will lose all its value and we would only have to admire the strong turn and *recherché* suggestiveness of its expression. Virgil certainly did not mean it like that; he starts indeed by stressing the generality of the fame of Troy and the interest taken everywhere in her misfortunes but then he passes from the particularity of this idea and suddenly rises from it to a feeling of the universality of mortal sorrow and suffering and of the chord of human sympathy and participation which responds to it from all who share that mortality. He rises indeed much higher

[1] *Sunt lacrimae rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt.*

than that and goes much deeper: he has felt a brooding cosmic sense of these things, gone into the depth of the soul which answers to them and drawn from it the inspired and inevitable language and rhythm which came down to it from above to give this pathetic perception an immortal body. Lines like these seldom depend upon their contexts, they rise from it as if a single Himalayan peak from a range of low hills or even from a flat plain. They have to be looked at by themselves, valued for their own sake, felt in their own independent greatness. Shakespeare's lines upon sleep —

> *Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast*
> *Seal up the shipboy's eyes, and rock his brains*
> *In cradle of the rude imperious surge?* —

depend not at all upon the context which is indeed almost irrelevant, for he branches off into a violent and resonant description of a storm at sea which has its poetic quality, but that quality has something comparatively quite inferior, so that these few lines stand quite apart in their unsurpassable magic and beauty. What has happened is that the sudden wings of a supreme inspiration from above have swooped down upon him and abruptly lifted him for a moment to highest heights, then as abruptly dropped him and left him to his own normal resources. One can see him in the lines that follow straining these resources to try and get something equal to the greatness of this flight but failing except perhaps partly for one line only. Or take those lines in *Hamlet* —

> *Absent thee from felicity awhile*
> *And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain.*

They arise out of a rapid series of violent melodramatic events but they have a quite different ring from all that surrounds them, however powerful that may be. They come from another plane, shine with another light: the close of the sentence — "to tell my story"—which connects it with the thread of the drama slips down in a quick incline to a lower inspiration. It is not a dramatic inte-

rest we feel when we read these lines; their appeal does not arise from the story but would be the same anywhere and in any context. We have passed from the particular to the universal, to a voice from the cosmic self, to a poignant reaction of the soul of man and not of Hamlet alone to the pain and sorrow of this world and its longing for some unknown felicity beyond. Virgil's

O passi graviora, dabit deus his quoque finem...
...forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit

is only incidentally connected with the storm and wreck of the ships of Aeneas; its appeal is separate and universal and for all time; it is again the human soul that is speaking moved by a greater and deeper inspiration of cosmic feeling with the thought only as a mould into which the feeling is poured and the thinking mind only as a passive instrument. This applies to many or most of the distinctly overhead lines we meet or at least to those which may be called overhead transmissions. Even the lines that are perfect and absolute, though not from the overhead, tend to stand out, if not away, from their surroundings. Long passages of high inspiration there are or short poems in which the wing-beats of some surpassing Power and Beauty gleam out amidst flockings of an equal or almost equal radiance of light. But still the absolutely absolute is rare: it is not often that the highest peaks crowd together.

As to the translations of Virgil's great line I may observe that the English translation you quote[1] repeats the "here, too" of the previous line and so rivets his high close to its context, thus emphasising unduly the idea of a local interest and maiming the universality. Virgil has put in no such rivetting, he keeps a bare connection from which he immediately slips away: his single incomparable line rises sheer and abrupt into the heights both in its thought and in its form out of the sustained Virgilian elegance of what precedes it. The psychological movement by which this happens is not at all mysterious; he speaks first of the local and particular, then in the penultimate line passes to the general —

[1] "Here, too, virtue has its due reward; here, too, there are tears for misfortune and mortal sorrows touch the heart." — A. R. Fairclough.

"here too as everywhere where there are human beings are rewards for excellence", and then passes to the universal, to the reaction of all humanity, to all that is human and mortal in a world of suffering. In your prose translation[1] also there are superfluities which limit and lower the significance. Virgil does not say "tears for earthly things", "earthly" is your addition; he says nothing about "mortal fortunes" which makes the whole thing quite narrow. His single word "rerum" and his single word "mortalia" admit in them all the sorrow and suffering of the world and all the affliction and misery that beset mortal creatures in this transient and unhappy world, *anityam asukham lokam imam.* The superfluous words bring in a particularising intellectual insistence which impoverishes a great thought and a great utterance. Your first hexametric version[2] is rather poor; the second[3] is much better and the first half is very fine; the second half is good but it is not an absolute hit. I would like to alter it to

Haunted by tears is the world and our hearts by the
touch of things mortal.

But this version has a density of colour which is absent from the bare economy and direct force Virgil manages to combine with his subtle and unusual turn of phrase. As for my own translation —"the touch of tears in mortal things" — it is intended not as an accurate and scholastic prose rendering but as a poetic equivalent. I take it from a passage in *Savítri* where the mother of Savitri is lamenting her child's fate and contrasting the unmoved and unfeeling calm of the gods with human suffering and sympathy. I quote from memory,

We sorrow for a greatness that has passed
And feel the touch of tears in mortal things.
Even a stranger's anguish rends my heart,
And this, O Narad, is my well-loved child.

[1] "Here too there is reward for honour, there are tears for earthly things and mortal fortunes touch the heart."

[2] Tears are in all things and touched is our heart by the fate of the mortals.

[3] Haunted by tears is the world; on our heart is the touch of things mortal.

In Virgil's line the two halves are not really two separate ideas and statements; they are one idea with two symmetrical limbs; the meaning and force of "mortalia tangunt" derives wholly from the "lacrimae rerum" and this, I think, ought to be brought out if we are to have an adequate poetic rendering. Three capital words, "lacrimae", "mortalia", "tangunt", carry in them in an intimate connection the whole burden of the inner sense; the touch which falls upon the mind from mortal things is the touch of tears "lacrimae rerum". I consider therefore that the touch of tears is there quite directly enough, spiritually, if not syntactically, and that my translation is perfectly justifiable.

As to the doubt you have expressed, I think there is some confusion still about the use of the word "great" as distinct from the beautiful. In poetry greatness must, no doubt, be beautiful in the wider and deeper sense of beauty to be poetry, but the beautiful is not always great. First, let me deal with the examples you give, which do not seem to me to be always of an equal quality. For instance, the lines you quote from Squire[1] do not strike me as deserving supreme praise. There is one line "on rocks forlorn and frore" which is of a very high beauty, but the rest is lofty and eloquent poetry and suggestive of something deep but not more than that; above all, there is a general lack of the rhythm that goes home to the soul and keeps sounding there except indeed in that one line and without such a rhythm there cannot be the absolute perfection; a certain kind of perfection there can be with a lesser rhythmic appeal but I do not find it here, the pitch of sound is only that of what may be described as the highly moved intellect. In the lines from Dryden[2] the second has indeed the true note but the first is only clever and forcible with that apposite, striking and energetic cleverness which abounds in the

[1] And that aged Brahmapootra
Who beyond the white Himalaya
Passes many a lamissery
On rocks forlorn and frore,
A block of gaunt grey stone walls
With rows of little barred windows
Where shrivelled young monks in yellow silk
Are hidden for evermore. — J. C. Squire

[2] In liquid burnings or in dry to dwell
Is all the sad variety of hell. — Dryden

chief poets of that period and imposes their poetry on the thinking mind but usually fails to reach deeper. Of course, there can be a divine or at least a deified cleverness, but that is when the intellect after finding something brilliant transmits it to some higher power for uplifting and transfiguration. It is because that is not always done by Pope and Dryden that I once agreed with Arnold in regarding their work as a sort of half poetry; but since then my view and feeling have become more catholic and I would no longer apply that phrase, — Dryden especially has lines and passages which rise to a very high poetic peak, — but still there is something in this limitation, this predominance of the ingenious intellect which makes us understand Arnold's stricture. The second quotation from Tennyson[1] is eloquent and powerful, but absolute perfection seems to me an excessive praise for these lines, — at least I meant much more by it than anything we find here. There is absolute perfection of a kind, of sound and language at least, and a supreme technical excellence in his moan of doves and murmur of bees.[2] As to your next comparison, you must not expect me to enter into a comparative valuation of my own poetry[3] with that of Keats;[4] I will only say that the "substance" of these lines of Keats is of the highest kind and the expression is not easily surpassable, and even as regards the plane of their origin it is above and not below the boundary of the overhead lines. The other lines you quote have their own perfection; some have the touch from above while others, it might be said, touch the overhead from below.

But what is the point? I do not think I have ever said that all overhead poetry is superior to all that comes from other sources.

[1] Well is it that no child is born of thee;
The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin and the breaking up of laws. — Tennyson

[2] The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees. — Tennyson

[3] Above the reason's brilliant slender curve,
Released like radiant air dimming a moon,
White spaces of a vision without line
Or limit... — Sri Aurobindo

[4] ...solitary thinkings; such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven,
Then leave the naked brain. — Keats

I am speaking of greatness and said that greatness of substance does count and gives a general superiority; I was referring to work in the mass and not to separate lines and passages. I said, practically, that art in the sense of perfect mastery of technique, perfect expression in word and sound was not everything and greatness and beauty of substance of the poetry entered into the reckoning. It might be said of Shakespeare that he was not predominantly an artist but rather a great creator, even though he has an art of his own, especially an art of dramatic architecture and copious ornament; but his work is far from being always perfect. In Racine, on the other hand, there is an unfailing perfection; Racine is the complete poetic artist. But if comparisons are to be made, Shakespeare's must surely be pronounced to be the greater poetry, greater in the vastness of its range, in its abundant creativeness, in its dramatic height and power, in the richness of his inspiration, in his world-view, in the peaks to which he rises and the depths which he plumbs — even though he sinks to flatnesses which Racine would have abhorred — and generally a glory of God's making which is marvellous and unique. Racine has his heights and depths and widenesses, but nothing like this; he has not in him the poetic superman, he does not touch the superhuman level of creation. But all this is mainly a matter of substance and also of height and greatness in language, not of impeccable beauty and perfection of diction and rhythm which ought to rank higher on the principle of art for art's sake.

That is one thing and for the sake of clarity it must be seen by itself in separation from the other points I put forward. The comparison of passages each perfectly beautiful in itself but different in their kind and source of inspiration is a different matter. Here it is a question of the perfection of the poetry, not of its greatness. In the valuation of whole poems Shelley's *Skylark* may be described as a greater poem than his brief and exquisite lyric — "I can give not what men call love" — because of its greater range and power and constant flow of unsurpassable music, but it is not more perfect; if we take separate lines and passages, the stanza "We look before and after" is not superior in perfection or absoluteness to that in the other poem "The desire of the moth for the star", even though it strikes a deeper note

and may be said to have a richer substance. The absolute is the absolute and the perfect perfect, whatever difference there may be in the origin of inspiration; but from the point of view of greatness one perfection may be said to be greater, though not more perfect than another. I would myself say that Wordsworth's line about Newton is greater, though not more perfect than many of those which you have put side by side with it. And this I say on the same principle as the comparison between Shakespeare and Racine: according to the principle of art for art's sake Racine ought to be pronounced a poet superior to Shakespeare because of his constant and impeccable flawlessness of word and rhythm, but on the contrary Shakespeare is universally considered greater, standing among the few who are supreme. Theocritus is always perfect in what he writes, but he cannot be ranked with Aeschylus and Sophocles. Why not, if art is the only thing? Obviously, because what the others write has an ampler range, a much more considerable height, breadth, depth, largeness. There are some who say that great and long poems have no true value and are mainly composed of padding and baggage and all that matters are the few perfect lines and passages which shine like jewels among a mass of inferior half-worked ore. In that case, the "great" poets ought to be debunked and the world's poetic production valued only for a few lyrics, rare superb passages and scattered lines that we can rescue from the laborious mass production of the artificers of word, sound and language.

I come now to the question of the Overmind and whether there is anything in it superior or more perfectly perfect, more absolutely absolute than in the lower planes. If it is true that one can get the same absolute fully on any plane and from any kind of inspiration, whether in poetry or other expressions of the One, then it would seem to be quite useless and superfluous for any human being to labour to rise above mind to Overmind or Supermind and try to bring them down upon earth; the idea of the transformation would become absurd since it would be possible to have the "form" perfect and absolute anywhere and by a purely earthly means, a purely earthly force. I am reminded of X's logical objection to my idea of the descent of the Divine into us or into the world on the ground, as he put it, that "the Divine is here, from

where is He to descend?" My answer is that obviously the Divine is here, although very much concealed; but He is here in essence and He has not chosen to manifest all His powers or His full power in Matter, in Life, in Mind; He has not even made them fit by themselves for some future manifestation of all that, whereas on higher planes there is already that manifestation and by a descent from them the full manifestation can be brought here. All the planes have their own power, beauty, some kind of perfection realised even among their imperfections; God is everywhere in some power of Himself though not everywhere in His full power, and even if His face does not appear, the rays and glories from it do fall upon things and beings through the veil and bring something of what we call perfect and absolute. And yet perhaps there may be a more perfect perfection, not in the same kind but in a greater kind, a more utter revelation of the absolute. Ancient thought speaks of something that is highest beyond the highest, *parātparam*: there is a supreme beyond what is for us or seems to us supreme. As Life brings in something that is greater than Matter, as Mind brings in something that is greater than Life, so Overmind brings in something that is greater than Mind, and Supermind something that is greater than Overmind — greater, superior not only in the essential character of the planes, but in all respects, in all parts and details, and consequently in all its creation.

But you may say each plane and its creations are beautiful in themselves and have their own perfection and there is no superiority of one to the other. What can be more perfect, greater or more beautiful than the glories and beauties of Matter, the golden splendour of the sun, the perpetual charm of the moon, the beauty and fragrance of the rose or the beauty of the lotus, the yellow mane of the Ganges or the blue waters of the Jamuna, forests and mountains, and the leap of the waterfall, the shimmering silence of the lake, the sapphire hue and mighty roll of the ocean and all the wonder and marvel that there is on the earth and in the vastness of the material universe? These things are perfect and absolute and there can be nothing more perfect or more greatly absolute. Life and mind cannot surpass them; they are enough in themselves and to themselves; Brindavan

would have been perfect even if Krishna had never trod there. It is the same with Life: the lion in its majesty and strength, the tiger in its splendid and formidable energy, the antelope in its grace and swiftness, the bird of paradise, the peacock with its plumes, the birds with their calls and their voices of song have the perfection that Life can create and thinking man cannot better that; he is inferior to the animals in their own qualities, superior only in his mind, his thought, his power of reflection and creation: but his thought does not make him stronger than the lion and the tiger or swifter than the antelope, more splendid to the sight than the bird of paradise or the human beauty of the most beautiful man and woman superior to the beauty of the animal in its own kind and perfect form. Here too there is a perfection and absoluteness which cannot be surpassed by any superior greatness of nature. Mind also has its own types of perfection and its own absolutes. What intrusion of Overmind or Supermind could produce philosophies more perfect in themselves than the systems of Shankara or Plato or Plotinus or Spinoza or Hegel, poetry superior to Homer's, Shakespeare's, Dante's or Valmiki's, music more superb than the music of Beethoven or Bach, sculpture greater than the statues of Phidias and Michael Angelo, architecture more utterly beautiful than the Taj Mahal, the Parthenon or Boro Budoor or St. Peter's or the great gothic cathedrals? The same may be said of the crafts of ancient Greece and Japan and the Middle Ages or structural feats like the pyramids or engineering feats like Dnieper Dam or inventions and manufactures like the great modern steamships and the motor car. The mind of man may not be equally satisfied with life in general or with its own dealings with life, it may find all that very imperfect, and here perhaps it may be conceded that the intrusion of a higher principle from above might have a chance of doing something better: but here too there are sectional perfections, each complete and sufficient for its purpose, each perfectly and absolutely organised in its own type, the termite society for instance, the satisfying structure of ant societies or the organised life of the beehive. The higher animals have been less remarkably successful than these insects, though perhaps a crows' parliament might pass a resolution that the life of the rookery was

one of the most admirable things in the universe. Greek societies like the Spartan evidently considered themselves perfect and absolute in their own type and the Japanese structure of society and the rounding off of its culture and institutions were remarkable in their pattern of perfect organisation. There can be always variations in kind, new types, a progress in variation, but a progress in itself towards a greater perfection or towards some absolute is an idea which has been long indulged in but has recently been strongly denied and at least beyond a certain point seems to have been denied by fact and event. Evolution there may be, but it only creates new forms, brings in new principles of consciousness, new ingenuities of creation but not a more perfect perfection. In the old Hebrew scriptures it is declared that God created everything from the first, each thing in its own type, and looked on his own creation and saw that it was good. If we conclude that Overmind or Supermind do not exist or, existing, cannot descend into mind, life and body or act upon them or, descending and acting, cannot bring in a greater or more absolute perfection into anything man has done, we should, with the modification that God has taken many ages and not six days to do his work, be reduced to something like this notion, at any rate in principle.

It is evident that there is something wrong and unsatisfying in such a conclusion. Evolution has not been merely something material, only a creation of new forms of Matter, new species of inanimate objects or animate creatures as physical science has at first seen it: it has been an evolution of consciousness, a manifestation of it out of its involution and in that a constant progress towards something greater, higher, fuller, more complete, ever increasing in its range and capacity, therefore to a greater and greater perfection and perhaps finally to an absolute of consciousness which has yet to come, an absolute of its truth, an absolute of its dynamic power. The mental consciousness of man is greater in its perfection, more progressive towards the absolute than the consciousness of the animal, and the consciousness of the overman, if I may so call him, must very evidently be still more perfect, while the consciousness of the superman may be absolute. No doubt, the instinct of the animal is superior to that of man and we may say that it is perfect and absolute within its

limited range and in its own type. Man's consciousness has an infinitely greater range and is more capable in the large, though less automatically perfect, in the details of its work, more laborious in its creation of perfection. The Overmind when it comes will decrease whatever deficiencies there are in human intelligence and the Supermind will remove them altogether; they will replace the perfection of instinct by the more perfect perfection of intuition and what is higher than intuition and thus replace the automatism of the animal by the conscious and self-possessed automatic action of a more luminous gnosis and finally, of an integral Truth-Consciousness. It is, after all, the greater consciousness that comes in with mind that enables us to develop the idea of values and this idea of the quality of certain values which seem to us perfect and absolute is a viewpoint which has its validity but must be completed by others if our perception of things is to be entire. No single and separate idea of the mind can be entirely true by itself, it has to complete itself by others which seem to differ from it, even others which seem logically to contradict it, but in reality only enlarge its viewpoints and put its idea in its proper place. It is quite true that the beauty of material things is perfect in itself and you may say the descent of Overmind cannot add to the glory of the sun or the beauty of the rose. But, in the first place, I must point out that the rose as it is is something evolved from the dog-rose or the wild rose and is largely a creation of man whose mind is still creating further developments of this type of beauty. Moreover, it is to the mind of man that these things are beautiful, to his consciousness as evolution has developed it, in the values that mind has given to them, to his perceptive and sometimes his creative aesthesis: Overmind, I have pointed out, has a greater aesthesis and, when it sees objects, sees in them what the mind cannot see, so that the value it gives to them can be greater than any value that the mind can give. That is true of its perception, it may be true also of its creation, its creation of beauty, its creation of perfection, its expression of the power of the absolute.

This is in principle the answer to the objection you made, but pragmatically the objection may still be valid; for what has been done by any overhead intervention may not amount for the

present to anything more than the occasional irruption of a line or a passage or at most of a new still imperfectly developed kind or manner of poetry which may have larger contents and a higher or richer suggestion but is not intrinsically superior in the essential elements of poetry, word and rhythm and cannot be confidently said to bring in a more perfect perfection or a more utter absolute. Perhaps it does sometimes, but not so amply or with such a complete and forcible power as to make it recognisable by all. But that may be because it is only an intervention in mind that it has made, a touch, a partial influence, at most a slight infiltration; there has been no general or massive descent or, if there has been any such descent in one or two minds, it has been fundamental but not yet completely organised or applied in every direction; there has been no absolute transformation of the whole being, whole consciousness and whole nature. You say that if the Overmind has a superior consciousness and a greater aesthesis it must also bring in a greater form. That would be true on the Overmind level itself: if there were an Overmind language created by the Overmind itself and used by Overmind beings not subject to the limitations of the mental principle or the turbidities of the life principle or the opposition of the inertia of Matter, the half light of ignorance and the dark environing wall of the Inconscient, then indeed all things might be transmuted and among the rest there might be a more perfect and absolute poetry, perfect and absolute not only in snatches and within boundaries but always and in numberless kinds and in the whole: for that is the nature of Overmind, it is a cosmic consciousness with a global perception and action tending to carry everything to its extreme possibility; the only thing lacking in its creation might be a complete harmonisation of all possibles, for which the intervention of the highest Truth-Consciousness, the Supermind, would be indispensable. But at present the intervention of Overmind has to take mind, life and Matter as its medium and field, work under their dominant condition, accept their fundamental law and method; its own can enter in only initially or partially and under the obstacle of a prevailing mental and vital mixture. Intuition entering into the human mind undergoes a change; it becomes what we may call

the mental intuition or the vital intuition or the intuition working inconsciently in physical things: sometimes it may work with a certain perfection and absoluteness, but ordinarily it is at once coated in mind or life with the mental or vital substance into which it is received and gets limited, deflected or misinterpreted by the mind or the life; it becomes a half intuition or a false intuition and its light and power gives indeed a greater force to human knowledge and will but also to human error. Life and mind intervening in Matter have been able only to vitalise or mentalise small sections of it, to produce and develop living bodies or thinking lives and bodies but they have not been able to make a complete or general transformation of the ignorance of life, of the inertia and inconscience of Matter and large parts of the minds, lives and forms they occupy remain subconscient or inconscient or are still ignorant, like the human mind itself or driven by subconscient forces. Overmind will certainly, if it descends, go further in that direction, effect a greater transformation of life and bodily function as well as mind but the integral transformation is not likely to be in its power; for it is not in itself the supreme consciousness and does not carry in it the supreme force: although different from mind in the principle and methods of its action, it is only a highest kind of mind with the pure intuition, illumination and higher thought as its subordinates and intermediaries; it is an instrument of cosmic possibilities and not the master. It is not the supreme Truth-Consciousness; it is only an intermediary light and power.

As regards poetry, the Overmind has to use a language which has been made by mind, not by itself and therefore fully capable of receiving and expressing its greater light and greater truth, its extraordinary powers, its forms of greatness, perfection and beauty. It can only strain and intensify this medium as much as possible for its own uses, but not change its fundamental or characteristically mental law and method; it has to observe them and do what it can to heighten, deepen and enlarge. Perhaps what Mallarmé and other poets were or are trying to do was some fundamental transformation of that kind, but that incurs the danger of being profoundly and even unfathomably obscure or beautifully and splendidly unintelligible. There is

here another point of view which it may be useful to elaborate. Poets are men of genius whose consciousness has in some way or another attained to a higher dynamis of conception and expression than ordinary men can hope to have — though ordinary men often have a good try for it, with the result that they sometimes show a talent for verse and an effective language which imposes itself for a time but is not durable. I have said that genius is the result of an intervention or influence from a higher consciousness than the ordinary human mental, a greater light, a greater force; even an ordinary man can have strokes of genius resulting from such an intervention but it is only in a few that the rare phenomenon occurs of a part of the consciousness being moulded into a habitual medium of expression of its greater light and force. But the intervention of this higher consciousness may take different forms. It may bring in, not the higher consciousness itself but a substitute for it, an uplifted movement of mind which gives a reflection of the character and qualities of the overhead movement. There is a substitute for the expression of the Higher Thought, the Illumination, the pure Intuition giving great or brilliant results, but these cannot be classed as the very body of the higher consciousness. So also there can be a mixed movement, a movement of mind in its full force with flashes from the overhead or even a light sustained for some time. Finally, there can be the thing itself in rare descents, but usually these are not sustained for a long time though they may influence all around and produce long stretches of a high utterance. All this we can see in poetry but it is not easy for the ordinary mind to make these distinctions or even to feel the thing and more difficult still to understand it with an exact intelligence. One must have oneself lived in the light or have had flashes of it in oneself in order to recognise it when it manifests outside us. It is easy to make mistakes of appreciation: it is quite common to miss altogether the tinge of the superior light even while one sees it or to think and say only, "Ah, yes, this is very great poetry."

There are other questions that can arise, objections that can be raised against our admission of a complete equality between the best of all kinds in poetry. First of all, is it a fact that all

kinds of poetry actually stand on an equal level or are potentially capable by intensity in their own kind, of such a divine equality? Satirical poetry, for instance, has often been considered as inferior in essential quality to the epic or other higher kinds of creation. Can the best lines of Juvenal, for instance, the line about the *graeculus esuriens* be the equal of Virgil's *O passi graviora*, or his *sunt lacrimae rerum*? Can Pope's attack on Addison, impeccable in expression and unsurpassable in its poignancy of satiric point and force and its still more poignant conclusion

Who but must laugh, if such a man there be?
Who would not weep, if Atticus were he?

be put on a same poetical level with the great lines of Shakespeare which I have admitted as having the Overmind inspiration? The question is complicated by the fact that some lines or passages of what is classed as satirical verse are not strictly satirical but have the tone of a more elevated kind of poetry and rise to a very high level of poetic beauty, — for instance, Dryden's descriptions of Absalom and Achitophel as opposed to his brilliant assault on the second duke of Buckingham. Or can we say that apart from this question of satire we can equal together the best from poetry of a lighter kind with that which has a high seriousness or intention, for instance, the mock epic with the epic? There are critics now who are in ecstasies over Pope's *Rape of the Lock* and put it on the very highest level, but we could hardly reconcile ourselves to classing any lines from it with a supreme line from Homer or Milton. Or can the perfect force of Lucan's line,

Victrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni,

which has made it immortal induce us to rank it on a level of equality with the greater lines of Virgil? We may escape from this difficulty of our own logic by pointing out that when we speak of perfection we mean perfection of something essential for poetic beauty and not only perfection of speech and verse however excellent and consummate in its own inferior kind. Or we may

say that we are speaking not only of perfection but of a kind of perfection that has something of the absolute. But then we may be taxed with throwing overboard our own first principle and ranking poetry according to the greatness or beauty of its substance, its intention and its elevation and not solely on its artistic completeness of language and rhythm in its own kind.

We have then to abandon any thorough-going acceptance of the art for art's sake standpoint and admit that our proposition of the equality of absolute perfection of different kinds, different inspirations of poetry applies only to all that has some quintessence of highest poetry in it. An absolutely accomplished speech and metrical movement, a sovereign technique, are not enough; we are thinking of a certain pitch of flight and not only of its faultless agility and grace. Overmind or overhead poetry must always have in its very nature that essential quality, although owing to the conditions and circumstances of its intervention, the limitation of its action, it can only sometimes have it in any supreme fullness or absoluteness. It can open poetry to the expression of new ranges of vision, experience and feeling, especially the spiritual and the higher mystic, with all their inexhaustible possibilities, which a more mental inspiration could not so fully and powerfully see and express except in moments when something of the overhead power came to its succour; it can bring in new rhythms and a new intensity of language: but so long as it is merely an intervention in mind, we cannot confidently claim more for it. At the same time if we look carefully and subtly at things we may see that the greatest lines or passages in the world's literature have the Overmind touch or power and that they bring with them an atmosphere, a profound or an extraordinary light, an amplitude of wing which, if the Overmind would not only intervene but descend, seize wholly and transform, would be the first glimpse of a poetry, higher, larger, deeper and more consistently absolute than any which the human past has been able to give us. An evolutionary ascent of all the activities of mind and life is not impossible.

20. 11. 1946

Section Three

POETIC RHYTHM AND TECHNIQUE

TWO FACTORS IN POETIC RHYTHM

1

If your purpose is to acquire not only metrical skill but the sense and the power of rhythm, to study the poets may do something, but not all. There are two factors in poetic rhythm, — there is the technique (the variation of movement without spoiling the fundamental structure of the metre, right management of vowel and consonantal assonances and dissonances, the masterful combination of the musical element of stress with the less obvious element of quantity, etc.), and there is the secret soul of rhythm which uses but exceeds these things. The first you can learn, if you read with your ear always in a *tapasyā* of vigilant attention to these constituents, but without the second what you achieve may be technically faultless and even skilful, but poetically a dead letter. This soul of rhythm can only be found by listening in to what is behind the music of words and sounds and things. You will get something of it by listening for that subtler element in great poetry, but mostly it must either grow or suddenly open in yourself. This sudden opening can come if the Power within wishes to express itself in that way. I have more than once seen a sudden flowering of capacities in every kind of activity come by a rapid opening of the consciousness, so that one who laboured long without the least success to express himself in rhythm becomes a master of poetic language and cadences almost in a day. Poetry is a question of the right concentrated silence or seeking somewhere in the mind with the right openness to the Word that is trying to express itself — for the Word is there ready to descend in those inner planes where all artistic forms take birth, but it is the transmitting mind that must change and become a perfect channel and not an obstacle.

2

As for the technique, there are two different things, the intellectual knowledge which one applies, and the intuitive cognition

which acts in its own right, even if it is not actually possessed by the worker. Many poets for instance have little knowledge of metrical or linguistic technique and cannot explain how they write or what are the qualities and elements of their success, but they write, all the same, things that are perfect in rhythm and language. Intellectual knowledge of tehnique helps of course, provided one does not make of it a mere device or a rigid fetter. There are some arts that cannot be done well without some technical knowledge, e.g. painting, sculpture.

14. 5. 1936

IMPORTANCE OF METRE AND TECHNIQUE

1

I don't know that Swinburne failed for this reason — before assenting to such a dictum I should like to know which were these poems he spoiled by too much artistry of technique. So far as I remember, his best poems are those in which he is most perfect in artistry, most curious or skilful, most subtle. I think his decline began when he felt himself too much at ease and poured himself out in an endless waste of melody without caring for substance and the finer finenesses of form. Attention to technique harms only when a writer is so busy with it that he becomes indifferent to substance. But if the substance is adequate, the attention to technique can only give it greater beauty. Even devices like a refrain, internal rhymes, etc. can indeed be great aids to the inspiration and the expression — just as can ordinary rhyme. It is in my view a serious error to regard metre or rhyme as artificial elements, mere external and superfluous equipment restraining the movement and sincerity of poetic form. Metre, on the contrary, is the most natural mould of expression for certain states of creative emotion and vision, it is much more natural and spontaneous than a non-metrical form; the emotion expresses itself best and most powerfully in a balanced rather than in a loose and shapeless rhythm. The search for technique is simply the search for the best and most appropriate form for expressing what

has to be said and once it is found, the inspiration can flow quite naturally and fluently into it. There can be no harm therefore in close attention to technique so long as there is no inattention to substance.

There are only two conditions about artistry: (1) that the artistry does not become so exterior as to be no longer art and (2) that substance (in which of course I include *bhāva*) is not left behind in the desert or else art and *bhāva* not woven into each other.

24. 8. 1935

2

Swinburne's defect is preference of sound to sense, but I would find it difficult to find fault with his music or his rhythmical method. There is no reason why one should not use assonance and alliteration, if one knows how to use them as Swinburne did. Everybody cannot succeed like that and those who cannot must be very careful and restrained in their use.

RHYME AND INSPIRATION

Some rhyme with ease, others find a difficulty. The coming of the rhyme is a part of the inspiration just like the coming of the power of language. The rhyme often comes of itself and brings the language and the connection of ideas with it. For all these things are quite ready behind somewhere and it is only a matter of reception and transmission. It is the physical mind and brain that make the difficulty.

2. 2. 1934

INSPIRATION AND STUDY OF TECHNIQUE

You do not need at all to afflict your inspiration by studying metrical technique — you have all the technique you need, within you. I have never studied prosody myself — in English, at least; what I know I know by reading and writing and following my

ear and using my intelligence. If one is interested in the technical study of prosody for its own sake, that is another matter — but it is not at all indispensable.

28. 4. 1934

RHYTHMICAL OVERTONES AND UNDERTONES

I was speaking of rhythmical overtones and undertones. That is to say, there is a metrical rhythm which belongs to the skilful use of metre — any good poet can manage that; but besides that there is a music which rises up into that of the rhythm or a music that underlies it, carries it as it were as the movement of the water carries the movement of a boat. They can both exist together in the same line, but it is more a matter of the inner than the outer ear and I am afraid I can't define further. To go into the subject would mean a long essay. But to give examples —

Journeys end in lovers meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know,

is excellent metrical rhythm, but there are no overtones and undertones. In

Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust

there is a beginning of undertone, but no overtone, while the "Take, O take those lips away" (the whole lyric) is all overtones. Again

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him

has admirable rhythm, but there are no overtones or undertones. But

In maiden meditation, fancy-free

has beautiful running undertones, while

In the dark backward and abysm of time

is all overtones, and

Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain

is all overtones and undertones together. I don't suppose this will make you much wiser, but it is all I can do for you at present.

11. 5. 1937

ENGLISH QUANTITATIVE VERSE AND CLASSICAL METRES — MELODY OF ENGLISH AND BENGALI LANGUAGES

There have been attempts to write in English quantitative verse on the Greek and Latin principle with the classical metres, attempts which began in the Elizabethan times, but they have not been successful because the method was either too slipshod or tried to adhere too rigidly to the rules of quantity natural to Greek and Latin but not to the English tongue instead of making an adaptation of it for the English ear or, still better, discovering directly in English itself the true principle of an English quantitative metre. I believe it is perfectly possible to acclimatise the quantitative principle in English and with great advantage. I have not seen Bridges' attempts, but I do not see why his failure — if it was one — should damn the possibility. I think one day it will be done.

It is true that English rhythm falls most naturally into the iambic movement. But I do not admit the adverse strictures passed on the other (trochaic, anapaestic, dactylic) bases of metre. All depends on how you handle them, — if as much pains are bestowed on them, as on the iambic, the fault attributed to them will disappear. Even as it is, the trochaic metre in the hands of great poets like Milton, Shelley, Keats does not pall — I do not get tired of the melody of the *Skylark.* Swinburne's anapaestic metres, as in *Dolores*, are kept up for pages without difficulty with the most royal ease, without fatigue either to the writer or the

reader. Both trochee and anapaest are surely quite natural to the language. The dactyl is more difficult to continue, but I believe it can be done, even in a long dactylic metre like the hexameter, if interspersed with spondees (as the metre allows) and supported by subtle modulations of rhythm, variations of pause and caesura. The iambic metre itself was at first taxed with monotony in a drumming beat until it was used in a more plastic way by Shakespeare and Milton. All depends on the skill which one brings to the work and the tool is quarrelled with only when the workman does not know how to use it.

The English language is not naturally melodious like the Italian or Bengali — no language with a Teutonic base can be — but it is capable of remarkable harmonic effects and also it can by a skilful handling be made to give out the most beautiful melodies. Bengali and Italian are soft, easy and mellifluous languages — English is difficult and has to be struggled with in order to produce its best effects, but out of that very difficulty has arisen an astonishing plasticity, depth and manifold subtlety of rhythm. These qualities do not repose on metrical handling alone but much more on the less analysable elements of the entire rhythmic structure. The metrical basis itself is a peculiar and subtle combination on which English rhythm depends without explicitly avowing it, — a skilful and most extraordinarily variable combination of three elements, — the numeric foot dependent on the number of syllables, the use of the stress foot and a play of stresses, and a recognisable but free and plastic use of quantitative play (not quantitative feet), all three running into each other.

I am afraid your estimate here is marred by the personal or national habit. One is always inclined to make this claim for one's own language because one can catch every shade and element of it while in another language, however well-learned, the ear is not so clairaudient. I cannot agree that the examples you give of Bengali melody beat hollow the melody of the greatest English lyrists. Shakespeare, Swinburne's best work in *Atalanta* and elsewhere, Shelley at his finest and some others attain a melody that cannot be surpassed. It is a different kind of melody but not inferior.

Bengali has a more melodious basis, it can accomplish me-

lody more easily than English, it has a freer variety of melodies now, for formerly as English poetry was mostly iambic, Bengali poetry used to be mostly *akṣaravṛtta.* (I remember how my brother Manmohan would annoy me by denouncing the absence of melody, the featureless monotony of Bengali rhythm and tell me how Tagore ought to be read to be truly melodious — like English in stress, with ludicrous effects. That however is by the way.) What I mean is that variety of melodic bases was not very conspicuous at that time in Bengali poetry. Nowadays this variety is there and undoubtedly opens possibilities such as perhaps do not exist in other languages.

I do not see, however, how the metrical aspect by itself can really be taken apart from other more subtle elements; I do not mean the spirit and feeling or the sense of the language only, though without depth or adequacy there metrical melody is only a melodious corpse, but the spirit and feeling or subtle (not intellectual) elements of rhythm and it is on these that English depends for the greater power and plasticity of its harmonic and even, if to a less extent, of its melodic effects. In a word, there is truth in what you say but it cannot be pushed so far as you push it.

May, 1934

ACCLIMATISATION OF CLASSICAL METRES IN ENGLISH

In the attempt to acclimatise the classical scansions in English, everything depends on whether they are acclimatised or not. That is to say, there must be a spontaneous, natural, seemingly native-born singing or flowing or subtly moving rhythm. The lines must glide or run or walk easily or, if you like, execute a complex dance, stately or light, but not stumble, not shamble and not walk like the Commander's statue suddenly endowed with life but stiff and stony in its march. Now the last is just what happens to classical metres in English when they are not acclimatised, naturalised, made to seem even naturally English, although new. It is like cardboard cut into measures, there is no life or movement of life.... It was this inability to naturalise that

ruined the chances of the admission of classical metres in the attempts of earlier poets — we must avoid that mistake.

23. 11. 1933

FAILURE OF EARLY ENGLISH HEXAMETER

Former poets failed in the attempt at hexameter because they did not find the right basic line and measure; they forgot that stress and quantity must both be considered in English. Even though in theory the stress alone makes the quantity, there is another kind of true quantity which must be given a subordinate but very necessary recognition; besides, even in stress there are kinds, true and fictitious, major and minor. In analysing the movement of an English line, one could make three independent schemes according to these three bases and the combination would give the value of the rhythm. You can ignore all this in an established metre and go safely by the force of instinct and habit; but for making so difficult an innovation as the hexameter, instinct and habit were not enough, a clear eye upon all these constituents was needed and it was not there. Longfellow, even Clough, went on the theory of accentual quantity alone and in spite of their talent as versifiers made a mess — producing something that discredited the very idea of the creation of an English hexameter. Other poets made no serious or sustained endeavour. Arnold was interesting so long as he theorised about it, but his practical specimens were disastrous. I have not time to make my point clearer for the moment; I may return to it hereafter.

COMMENTS ON MILFORD'S VIEWS ON QUANTITY IN ENGLISH VERSE

Milford accepts the rule that two consonants after a short vowel make the short vowel long, even if they are outside the word and come in another word following it. To my mind that is an absurdity. I shall go on pronouncing the *y* of *frosty* as short whether it has two consonants after it or only one or none; it remains

frosty whether it is a *frosty scalp* or *frosty top* or a frosty anything. In no case have I pronounced it or could I consent to pronounce it as *frostee*. My hexameters are intended to be read naturally as one would read any English sentence. But if you admit a short syllable to be long whenever there are two consonants after it, then Bridges' scansions are perfectly justified. Milford does not accept that conclusion; he says Bridges' scansions are an absurdity. But he bases this on his idea that quantitative length does not count in English verse. It is intonation that makes the metre, he says, high tones or low tones — not longs and shorts, and stress is there of the greatest importance. On that ground he refuses to discuss my idea of weight or dwelling of the voice or admit quantity or anything else but tone as determinative of the metre and declares that there is no such thing as metrical length. Perhaps also that is the reason why he counts *frosty* as a spondee before *scalp*; he thinks that it causes it to be intoned in a different way. I don't see how it does that; for my part, I intone it just the same before *top* as before *scalp*. The ordinary theory is, I believe, that the *sc* of *scalp* acts as a sort of stile (because of the two consonants) which you take time to cross, so that *ty* must be considered as long because of this delay of the voice, while the *t* of *top* is merely a line across the path which gives no trouble. I don't see it like that; at most, *scalp* is a slightly longer word than *top* and that affects perhaps the rhythm of the line but not the metre; it cannot lengthen the preceding syllable so as to turn a trochee into a spondee. Sanskrit quantitation is irrelevant here (it is the same as Latin or Greek in this respect) for both Milford and I agree that the classical quantitative conventions are not reproducible in English: we both spew out Bridges' eccentric rhythms.

This answers also your question as to what Milford means by "fundamental confusion" regarding *aridity*. He refuses to accept the idea of metrical length. But I am concerned with metrical as well as natural vowel quantities. My theory is that natural length in English depends, or can depend, on the dwelling of the voice giving metrical value or weight to the syllable; in quantitative verse one has to take account of all such dwelling or weight of the voice, both weight by ictus (stress) and weight

by prolongation of the voice (ordinary syllabic length); the two are different, but for metrical purposes in a quantitative verse can rank as of equal value. I do not say that stress turns a short vowel into a long one.

Milford does not take the trouble to understand my theory — he ignores the importance I give to modulations and treats cretics and antibacchii and molossi as if they were dactyls, whereas they are only substitutes for dactyls; he ignores my objection to stressing short insignificant words like *and*, *with*, *but*, *the* — and thinks that I do that everywhere, which would be to ignore my theory. In fact I have scrupulously applied my theory in every detail of my practice. Take, for instance,

> *Art thou not heaven-bound even as I with the*
> *earth? Hast thou ended.*[1]

Here *art* is long by natural quantity though unstressed, which disproves Milford's criticism that in practice I never put an unstressed long as the first syllable of a dactylic foot or spondee, as I should do by my theory. I don't do it often because normally in English rhythm stress bears the foot — a fact to which I have given full emphasis in my theory. That is the reason why I condemn the Bridgesean disregard of stress in the rhythm, — still I do it occasionally whenever it can come in quite naturally.[2]

[1] A line from *Ahana*, a poem by Sri Aurobindo. See *Collected Poems* (Centenary Edition, 1972).

[2] E.g. Opening tribrachs are very frequent in my hexameter. See *Ahana*:

> Is he the first? was there none then before him? shall none come after?

But Milford thinks I have stressed the first short syllable to make them into dactyls — a thing I abhor. See also *Ahana*, (initial anapaest):

> In the hard / reckoning made by the grey-robed accountant at even

or (two anapaests):

> Yet survives / bliss in the rhythm of our heart-beats, yet is there / wonder,

or again:

> And we go / stumbling, maddened and thrilled to his dreadful embraces

or in my poem *Ilion*:

> And the first / Argive fell slain as he leaped on the Phrygian beaches.

There are even opening amphibrachs here and there, see *Ahana*:

> Illumi/nations, trance-seeds of silence, flowers of musing,

My quantitative system, as I have shown at great length, is based on the natural movement of the English tongue, the same in prose and poetry, not on any artificial theory.

24. 12. 1942

QUANTITATIVE METRE IN BENGALI POETRY

This question of quantity is one in which I find it difficult to arrive at a conclusion. You can prove that it can be done and has been successfully done in Bengali, and you can prove and have proved it yourself over again by writing these poems and bringing in the rhythm, the Kallole, which is absent in S. It is quite true also that stylisation is permissible and a recognised form of art — I mean professed and overt stylisation and not that which hides itself under a contrary profession of naturalness or faithful following of external nature. The only question is how much of it Bengali poetry can bear. I do not think the distinction between song and poem goes at all to the root of the matter. The question is whether it is possible to have ease of movement in this kind of quantitative metre. For a few lines it can be very beautiful or for a short poem or a song — that much cannot be doubted. But can it be made a spontaneous movement of Bengali poetry like the ordinary *mātrāvṛttas* or the others, in which one can walk or run at will without looking at one's steps to see that one does not stumble and without concentrating the reader's mind too much on the technique so that his attention is diverted from the sense and *bhāva*? If you can achieve some large and free structure in which quantity takes a recognised place as part of the foundation, — it need not be reproduction of a Sanskrit metre, — that would solve the problem in the affirmative.

31. 5. 1932

ACCENT IN ENGLISH RHYTHM

Is it true that the *laghu-guru* is to the Bengali ear as impossible as would be to the English ear the line made up by Tagore:

"Autumn flaunteth in his bushy bowers"? In English such a violence could not be entertained for a moment. It was because Spenser and others tried to base their hexameters and pentameters on this flagrant violation of the first law of English rhythm that the first attempt to introduce quantitative metres in English proved a failure. Accent cannot be ignored in English rhythm — it is why in my attempts at quantitative metre I always count a strongly accentuated syllable, even if the vowel is short, as a long one — for the stress does really make it long for metrical purposes.

21. 7. 1936

THE ALEXANDRINE

I suppose the Alexandrine has been condemned because no one has ever been able to make effective use of it as a staple metre. The difficulty, I suppose, is its normal tendency to fall into two monotonously equal halves while the possible variations on that monotony seem to stumble often into awkward inequalities. The Alexandrine is an admirable instrument in French verse because of the more plastic character of the movement, not bound to its stresses but only to an equality of metric syllables capable of a sufficient variety in the rhythm. In English it does not work so well; a single Alexandrine or an occasional Alexandrine couplet can have a great dignity and amplitude of sweep in English, but a succession fails or has most often failed to impose itself on the ear. All this, however, may be simply because the secret of the right handling has not been found: it is at least my impression that a very good rhythmist with the Alexandrine movement secretly born somewhere in him and waiting to be brought out could succeed in rehabilitating the metre.

5. 2. 1932

OCTOSYLLABIC METRE

The regular octosyllabic metre is at once the easiest to write and the most difficult to justify by a strong and original rhythmic treatment; it may be that it is only by filling it with very original

thought-substance and image and the deeper tones and sound-significances which these would bring that it could be saved from its besetting obviousness. On the other hand, the melody to which it lends itself, if raised to a certain intensity, can be fraught with a seizing charm that makes us forget the obviousness of the metre.

4. 2. 1932

IAMBIC PENTAMETER

An inspiration which leans more on a sublimated or illumined thought than on some strong or subtle or very simple psychic or vital intensity and swiftness of feeling, seems to call naturally for the iambic pentameter, though it need not confine itself to that form. I myself have not yet found another metre which gives room enough along with an apposite movement — shorter metres are too cramped, the longer ones need a technical dexterity (if one is not to be either commonplace or clumsy) for which I have not leisure.

5. 3. 1932

COMBINATION OF IAMBICS AND ANAPAESTS

Iambics and anapaests can be combined in English verse at any time, provided one does not set out to write a purely iambic or a purely anapaestic metre. Mixed anapaest and iamb make a most beautifully flexible lyric rhythm. It has no more connection with free verse than the constellation of the Great Bear has to do with a cat's tail. "Free" verse indicates verse free from the shackles of rhyme and metre, but rhythmic (or trying to be rhythmic) in one way or another. If you put rhymes, that will be considered a shackle and the "free" will kick at the chain.

THE PROBLEM OF FREE VERSE

The problem of free verse is to keep the rhythm and afflatus of

poetry while asserting one's liberty as in prose to vary the rhythm and movement at will instead of being tied down to metre and to a single unchangeable form throughout the whole length of a poem. But most writers in this kind achieve prose cut up into lines or something that is half and half and therefore unsatisfying. I think few have escaped this kind of shipwreck.

18. 9. 1936

CONDITIONS FOR WRITING SUCCESSFUL BLANK VERSE

1

Building of each line, building of the passage, variation of balance, the arrangement of tone and stress and many other things have to be mastered before you can be a possessor of the instrument — unless you are born with a blank verse genius, but that is rare.

7. 7. 1933

2

It looks as if you were facing the problem of blank verse by attempting it under conditions of the maximum difficulty. Not content with choosing a form which is based on the single line blank verse (I mean, of course, each line a clear-cut entity by itself) as opposed to the flowing and freely enjambed variety you try to unite flow lines and single line and farther undertake a form of blank verse quatrains! I have myself tried the blank verse quatrain; even, when I attempted the single-line blank verse on a large scale in *Savitri* I found myself falling involuntarily into a series of four-line movement. But even though I was careful in the building, I found it led to a stiff monotony and had to make a principle of variation — one line, two line, three line, four line or longer passages (paragraphs as it were) alternating with each other; otherwise the system would be a failure.

In attempting the blank verse quatrain one has to avoid like

poison all flatness of movement — a flat movement immediately creates a sense of void and sets the ear asking for the absent rhyme. The last line of each verse especially must be a powerful line acting as a strong close so that the rhyming close-cadence is missed no more. And, secondly, there must be a very careful building of the structure. A mixture of sculpture and architecture is indicated — there should be plenty of clear-cut single lines but they must be built into a quatrain that is itself a perfect structural whole. In your lines it is these qualities that are lacking, so that the poetic substance fails in its effect owing to rhythmic insufficiency. One closing line of yours will absolutely not do — that of the fourth stanza — its feminine ending is enough to damn it; you may have feminine endings but not in the last line of the quatrain, and its whole movement is an unfinished movement. The others would do, but they lose half their force by being continuations of clauses which look back to the previous line for their sense. They can do that sometimes, but only on condition of their still having a clear-cut wholeness in themselves and coming in with a decisive force. In the structure you have attempted to combine the flow of the lyrical quatrain with the force of a single line blank verse system. I suppose it can be done, but here the single line has interfered with the flow and the flow has interfered with the single line force.

18. 7. 1933

IMPERFECT RHYMES

1

It is no use applying a Bengali ear to English rhythms any more than a French ear to English or an English ear to French metres. The Frenchman may object to English blank verse because his own ear misses the rhyme or the Englishman to the French Alexandrine because he finds it rhetorical and monotonous. Irrelevant objections both. Imperfect rhymes are regarded in English metre as a source of charm in the rhythmic field bringing in possibilities of delicate variation in the constant clang of exact rhymes.

One cannot expect to seize in poetry the finer and more elusive tones, which are so important, in a learned language, however well-learnt, as in one's native and natural tongue — unless of course one succeeds in making it natural, if not native.

2

They are called in English imperfect rhymes and can be freely but not too freely used. Only you have to understand the approximations and kinships of vowel sounds in English, otherwise you will produce illegitimate children like "splendour" and "wonder" which is not a rhyme but an assonance.

19. 12. 1935

BENGALI GADYA-CHHANDA

I can't say that I have studied or even read Bengali *gadya-chanda*, so I am unable to pronounce. In fact what is *gadya-chanda*? Is it the equivalent of European free verse? But there the essence of the thing is that you model each line freely as you like — regularity of any kind is out of court there. Is it the aim to create a kind of rhymed prose metre? On what principle? N seems to want a movement which will give more volume, strength and sonority than Bengali verse can succeed in creating, but which is yet poetry, not prose arranged in lines and not even, at the best, poetic prose cut into lines of different lengths. All things can be tried — the test is success, true poetic excellence. N has sent me some of his *gadya-chanda* before. It seemed to me to have much flow and energy, but there is something hanging on to it which weighs, almost drags — is it the ghost of prose? But that is only a personal impression; as I have said, on this subject I am not a qualified judge.

INVENTION OF NEW METRES

Of course, X is right about the desirability of inventing new

chandas and metres. Your friend who combats this view probably means that the very greatest poets seldom invented a metre. I suppose they were too royally lazy to give themselves the trouble and preferred stealing other people's rhythms and polishing them up to perfection, — just as Shakespeare stole bodily all his plots from wherever he could find any worth the lifting. But if that applies to Shakespeare or Virgil, still there are others whose achievements made a consummate metrical invention a companion of a high poetic genius — Alcaeus, Sappho, Catullus, Horace. These poets did a great thing in inventing or transferring from other tongues metres new to the language or introducing Greek metrical forms into Latin or perfecting them in the direction of a more careful balance or a more flawless elegance. But, apart from such illustrious precedents, a good thing such as the combination of metrical invention with perfect poetry would still be worth doing even if no one had had the good sense to do it before.

UNPOPULARITY OF NEW METRES — CRYPTIC POETRY

It is certainly not true that a good metre must necessarily be an easy metre — easy to read or easy to write. In fact, even with old-established perfectly familiar metres, how many of the readers of poetry have an ear which seizes the true movement and the whole subtlety and beauty of the rhythm? It is only in the more popular kind of poems that it gets in their hearing its full value. It is all the more impossible when you bring in not only new rhythms but a new principle of rhythm — or at least one that is not very familiar — to expect it to be easily followed at first by the many. It is only if you are already a recognised master that by force of your reputation you can impose whatever you like on your public, for then even if they do not catch your drift, they will still applaud you and will take some pains to learn the new principle. If you are imposing a principle not only of rhythm but of scansion to which the ear in spite of past attempts is not trained so as to seize the basic law of the movements in all its variations, a fair amount of incomprehension, some difficulty

in knowing how to read the verse is very probable. Easier forms of a new rhythm may be caught in their movements, even if some will not be able to scan it; but other difficult forms may give trouble. All that is no true objection to the attempt at something new: novelty is difficult for the human mind — or ear — to accept, but novelty is asked for all the same in all human activities for their growth, amplitude, richer life. As you say the ear has to be educated — once it is trained, familiar with the principle, what was a difficulty becomes easy, the unusual, first condemned as abnormal or impossible, becomes a normal and daily movement.

As for the charge of being cryptic, that is quite another matter. On what does it base itself? Obscurity due to inadequate expression is one thing, but the cryptic may be simply the expression of more than can be seized at first sight by the ordinary mind. It may be that the ideas are not of a domain in which that mind is accustomed to move or that there is a new turn of expression other than the kind which it has been trained to follow. Again the ordinary turn of Bengali writing is lucid, direct, easy (in that it resembles French); if you bring into it a more intricate and suggestive manner in which the connections or transitions of thought are less obvious, that may create a difficulty. To which of these causes is the accusation of being cryptic due? Certainly not the first, since you are accused of having too adequate and not too inadequate a vocabulary. If it is any of the others, then the objection has no great force. A poet can be too easy to read, because there is not much in what he writes and it is exhausted at the first glance, or too difficult because you have to burrow for the meaning. But otherwise it makes no difference to the excellence of the work, if the reader can catch its burden at the first glance or has to dwell a little on it for the full force of it to come to the surface. One has perhaps sometimes to do the latter in your poems, but I do not find anything unduly cryptic — certainly there is nothing that can be really called obscure. The feeling, the way of expression, the combinations of thought, word or image tend often to be new and unfamiliar, but that can be very well a strength and a merit, not an element of failure.

28. 1. 1933

1

The poem[1] is a very good one. The one thing that can be said against it is that you need to go through it twice or thrice before the full beauty of the thought, rhythm and imagery comes to the surface — but is that a demerit? Poems that are too easily read, as a French critic puts it, are not always the best.... There is a great beauty and significant force in the imagery and a remarkably successful fusion of the supporting object (physical symbol) into the revealing or transmuting image and the image into the object, which is part of the highest art of symbolic or mystic poetry. "Heard before"? If you refer to elements of the rhythm, words or phrases here and there, or images used before though not in the same way, where is the poetry in so old and rich a literature as the English that altogether escapes this suspicion of "heard before"? Absolute originality in that sense is rare, almost non-existent; we are all those who went before us with something new added that is ourselves, and it is this something added that transfigures and is the real originality. In this sense there is a great impression of original power in the beauty of the first verse and hardly less in the second. It seems to me very successful, and "triviality" is the description that can be least applied to it while it could lack interest only to those who have no mind for poetry of this character.

[1] Harsh like the shorn head high of a gaunt grey-hooded friar
Who fears the beauty and use of sculptured limbs
(Branding the sculptor-archetype a liar),
O moon but lately risen from the foam where the sea-mew skims —
Form that a wan light cassocks, grace that a tonsure dims.

Joy that the leaden curse is rolled away to leave the golden
Tresses of earth-transforming gramarye
Whereby our wildered flesh-fret is enfolden —
O fair as the foam-fashioned goddess that awoke from the wondering sea,
Love with the earth-shroud lifted, star from the shade set free!
— Arjava, *New-Risen Moon's Eclipse* in *Poems*, p. 20.

2

[About the same poem:]

Surely, one cannot be accused of being Hopkinsian, merely because of a successfully copious alliteration and an alliterative compound? These things have happened before Hopkins and will go on happening after him even if he is no longer read. It may be that these turns came to Arjava because of the influence of Hopkins — to that only he can plead Yes or No. What I say is that the way he uses them is *not* Hopkinsian, not Swinburnian, but Arjavan. "Flesh-fret" has not the least resemblance to "bugle-blue" or "cuckoo-call" or "fast-flying", still less to "dapple-dawn-drawn" except the mere external fact of the alliterative structure; its spiritual quality is quite different. To take an idea or a formation or anything else from a former poet, — as Molière took his "*bon*" wherever he found it, — is common to every maker of verse; we don't write on a blank slate virgin of the past. Indian sculpture or architecture may have taken this form from the Greeks or that form from the Persians; but neither is in the least degree Achaemenian or Hellenistic.

1. 4. 1932

THE POETIC "DAIMON"

What is exactly your theory? There is one thing — influences — everybody undergoes influences, absorbs them or rejects, makes them disappear in one's own developed style or else keeps them as constituent strands. There is another thing — Lines of Force. In the universe there are many lines of Force on which various personalities or various achievements and formations spring up — e.g. the line Pericles-Caesar-Napoleon or the line Alexander-Jenghis-Tamerlane-Napoleon — meeting together there — so it may be too in poetry, lines of poetic force prolonging themselves from one poet to another, meeting and diverging. Yours seems to be a third — a Daimon or individual Spirit of Poetry migrating from one individual to another, several perhaps meeting together

in one poet who gives them all a full expression. Is that it? If so, it is an interesting idea and arguable.

17.2.1935

COMMENTS ON SOME EXPERIMENTS IN METRE

1

I think you failed [in your experiment in the classical metre]... because you had no unwritten rhythm behind your mind when you started writing and none came through by accident — or what seems one — as sometimes happens. There is an inspiration of language and there is an inspiration of rhythm and the two must fuse together for poetic perfection to come. As it is, you set out to manufacture your rhythm and piece together its parts — that must be the cause of this result. Your failure does not predestine you to eventual failure. Most people fail at first when they try this kind of departure from the established norms — this rejuvenation of the old in the new. I do not remember my own previous attempts in the classical metres but I feel sure they were failures of the kind I stigmatise. If I succeed now, it will be by the grace of God, in other words the established Yoga consciousness, for in that consciousness things come through from behind the veil with ease, — so long as a veil exists at all. Of course with genius too in its moments of inspiration — surer than the layman imagines; but genius also is a kind of accidental Yoga, a contact, an opening into an occult Power.

25.11.1933

2

This liability to be read as an iambic pentameter is the pitfall of this metre[1] — everything else is easy, this is the critical point in the movement. All the same, it seems to me that it is only the standing convention which imposes the iambic movement here. The reason why it can do so at all is that in both the lines you

[1] Quantitative trimeter.

keep up what one accustomed to the ordinary rhythms would take to be three successive trochees and would be irresistibly tempted to go on on the same lines. In order to get the right pace, the reader in dealing with these transplanted classic metres must be prepared to make the most of quantities and stresses (true ones) and then, if the verse is well executed, there should be no difficulty. One can help him sometimes by a crowding of stresses in the first part of the line and a refusal of all but the lightest sounds in the close with of course a strong stress at the end.

22. 10. 1933

3

I think the principle of this metre[1] should be to say a few very clear-cut things in a little space. At least it looks so to me at present — though a more free handling of the metre might show that the restriction was not justifiable.

I had chosen this metre — or rather it came to me and I accepted it — because it seemed to me both brief and easy, so suitable for an experiment. But I find now that it was only seemingly easy and in fact very difficult. The ease with which I wrote it only came from the fact that by a happy inspiration the right rhythm for it came into my consciousness and wrote itself out by virtue of the rhythm being there. If I had consciously experimented I might have stumbled over the same difficulties as have come in your way.

The *Bird of Fire** was written on two consecutive days and afterwards revised. The *Trance** at one sitting — it took only a few minutes. You may have the date as they were both completed on the same day and sent to you the next.

4

[2]These are things decided by the habit or training of the ear.

[1] Quantitative trimeter.

* Poems by Sri Aurobindo. See *Collected Poems* (Centenary Edition, 1972).

[2] This is in reply to the following questions put by Arjava (J. A. Chadwick) apropos of

The intervention of a dactylic (or, if you like, anapaestic) line followed by an Alexandrine would to the ear of a former generation have sounded abrupt and inadmissible. But, I suppose, it would not to an ear accustomed to the greater liberty — or even licence — of latter-day movements.

I do not find that the rhythm of the first three lines is well-worn, though that of the first and third are familiar in type. The second seems to me not only not familiar, but unusual and very effective.

The canter of anapaests can, I suppose, be only relieved by variation or alternation with another metre, as you have done here — or by a very powerful music which would turn the canter into a torrent rush or an oceanic sweep or surge. But the proper medium for the latter up till now has been a large dactylic movement like the Greek or Latin hexameter; Swinburne has tried to get it into the anapaest, but with only occasional success because of his excessive facility and looseness, which makes the sound empty owing to want of spiritual substance. But this third line seems to be naturally dactylic and not anapaestic. Can one speak of catalectic and acatalectic hexameters? If so, this is a very beautiful catalectic hexameter.

I may say that the four lines seem to be in their variation very remarkably appropriate and effective, each exactly expressing by the rhythm the spirit and movement of the thing inwardly

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some lines in his poem *Sundown*:

> "The wind hush comes, the varied colours westward stream:
> Were they joy-tinted coral, or song-light seen-heard in a shell fitfully,
> Drifted ashore by the hours as a waif from the day-wide sea
> Of Loveliness that smites awake our sorrow-dream?

"Is there some way of keeping the loose swinging gait of anapaests within bounds? If one has used them freely in one or more lines, does it sound too abrupt to close with a strict iambic line — as in the final Alexandrine of the above?

"It is perhaps a pity that the rhythm of the first three lines runs in such well-worn familiar channels. Is this intensified by the sing-song of the second line, which slipped into the Saturnian metre lengthened out by anapaests?

"I was intending the third line to scan

> Drifted ashore by the hours

"But I see it could also be taken as four dactyls followed by the spondee 'day-wide' and the monosyllabic foot 'sea'. Which is the scansion which you would prefer? And would the four dactyls make the earlier part of a passable hexameter, or would at least one spondee be needed to break up the monotony and too-obvious lilt?"

seen. I am speaking of each line by itself; the only objection that could be made is to the coming together of so many variations in so brief a whole (if it had been longer, I imagine it would not have mattered) as disturbing to the habit of the ear; but I am inclined to think that this objection would rest less on a reality than a prejudice. The habit of the ear is not fundamental, it can change. What is fundamental in the inner hearing is not, I think, disturbed by the swiftness of the change from the controlled flow of the first line to the wave dance and shimmer of the second, the rapid drift of the third and then the deliberate subtlety of the last line.

Is there in recent poetry an unconscious push towards a new metrical basis altogether for English poetry — shown by the outbreak of free verse, which fails because it is most often not verse at all — and the seeking sometimes for irregularity, sometimes for greater plasticity of verse-movement? Originally, Anglo-Saxon verse depended, if I remember right, on alliteration and rhythm, not on measured feet; Greece and Rome through France and Italy imposed the foot measure on English; perhaps the hidden seeking for freedom, for elbow-room, for the possibility of a varied rhythmic expression necessitated by the complexity of the inner consciousness might find some vent in a measure which would depend not on feet but on lengths and stresses. I have sometimes thought that and it recurred to me while looking at your second line, for on that principle it might be read

Were they joy-tinted coral, or song-light
seen-heard in a shell fitfully.

One could imagine a measure made of lines in a given number of lengths like that and each length allowed a given number of stresses; there would be many combinations and variations possible. For example (not of good poetry, but of the form),

A far sail on the unchangeable monotone of
a slow slumbering sea,
A world of power hushed into symbols of hue,
silent unendingly;

Over its head like a gold ball the sun tossed
by the gods in their play
Follows its curve, — a blazing eye of Time
watching the motionless day.

Perhaps it is only a curious imagination, too difficult and complex to realise, but it came on me strongly, so I put it down on paper.

I have written two more stanzas of the stress-scansion poem so as to complete it and send them to you. In this scansion as I conceive it, the lines may be analysed into feet, as you say all good rhythm can, but in that case the foot measures must be regarded as a quite subsidiary element without any fixed regularity — just as the (true) quantitative element is treated in ordinary verse. The whole indispensable structure of the lines depends upon stress and they must be read on a different principle from the current view — full value must be given to the true stresses and no fictitious stresses, no weight laid on naturally unstressed syllables should be allowed — that is the most important point. Thus:

IN HORIS AETERNUM

A far sail on the unchangeable monotone of
a slow slumbering sea,
A world of power hushed into symbols of hue,
silent unendingly;
Over its head like a gold ball the sun tossed
by the gods in their play
Follows its curve, — a blazing eye of Time
watching the motionless day.

Here or otherwhere, — poised on the unreachable
abrupt snow-solitary ascent
Earth aspiring lifts to the illimitable Light,
then ceases broken and spent,
Or in the glowing expanse, arid, fiery and
austere, of the desert's hungry soul, —

A breath, a cry, a glimmer from Eternity's
face, in a fragment the mystic Whole.

Moment-mere, yet with all eternity packed,
lone, fixed, intense,
Out of the ring of these hours that dance and
die, caught by the spirit in sense,
In the greatness of a man, in music's outspread
wings, in a touch, in a smile, in a sound,
Something that waits, something that wanders and settles
not, a once Nothing that was all and is found.

It is an experiment and I shall have to do more before I can be sure that I have caught the whole spirit or sense of this movement; nor do I mean to say that stress-scansion cannot be built on any other principle, — say, on one with more concessions to the old music or with less, breaking more away in the direction of free verse; but the essential, I think, is there.

19. 4. 1932

P.S. It is with some hesitation that I write "a once Nothing", because I am far from sure that the "once" does not overweight the rhythm and make the expression too difficult and compact; but on the other hand without it the sense appears ambiguous and incomplete, — for "a Nothing that was all" might be taken in a too metaphysical light and my object is not to thrust in a metaphysical subtlety but to express the burden of an experience. In the final form I shall probably risk the ambiguity and reject the intruding "once".

5

I certainly think feet longer than the three syllable maximum can be brought in and ought to be. I do not see for instance why a foot like this ⏑ ⏑ ⏑ — should not be as legitimate as the anapaest. Only, of course, if frequently used, they would mean the institution of another principle of harmony not provided for

by the essentially melodic basis of English prosody in the past; as

Ĭntĕrspērsed / ĭn thĕ ĭmmēnse / ănd ŭnăvaī/lĭng
vŏid, / wĭnging thĕir / līght throŭgh thĕ /
dārknĕss ĭn/ăne. /

Or,

Ĭntĕrspērsed / ĭn thĕ ĭmmēnse / ănd ŭnăvaī/lĭng
vŏid, / scāttĕring / thĕir līght throŭgh / thĕ
dārknĕss / ĭnāne. /

I agree that this freedom would be more pressingly needed in longer metres than in short ones, but they need not be excluded from the short ones either.

6

I have to admit that I am beaten by your metre. I have written something, but I am afraid it is a fake. I will first produce the fake:

A gold moon/-raft floats / and swings / slowly
And it casts / a fire / of pale / holy / blue light
On the dra/gon tail / aglow / of the / faint night
That glim/mers far, — / swimming,
The illu/mined shoals / of stars / skimming,
Overspread/ing earth / and drown/ing the / heart in sight
With the / ocean-depths / and breadths / of the / Infinite.

That is the official scansion, and except in the last foot of the two last lines it professes to follow very closely the metre of N's poem. But in fact it is full of sins and the appearance is a counterfeit. In the first line the first foot is really an anti-bacchius: "A gold moon/-raft floats...", and quantitatively, though not accentually, the second is a spondee which also disturbs the true rhythmic movement. "Slowly" and "holy" are in truth trochees disguised

as pyrrhics, and if "slowly" can pass off the deceit a little, "holy" is quite unholy in the brazenness of its pretences. If I could have got a compound adjective like "god-holy", it would have been all right and saved the situation, but I could find none that was appropriate. The next three lines are, I think, on the true model and have an honest metre. But the closing cretic of my last two lines is nothing but a cowardly flight from the difficulty of the spondee. I console myself by remembering that even Hector ran when he found himself in difficulties with Achilles and that the Bhagavat lays down *palāyanam* (flight) as one of the ordinary occupations of the Avatar. But the evasion is a fact and I am afraid it spoils the correspondence of the metres. I have some idea of adding a second stanza, — this one will look less guilty perhaps if it has a companion in sin, — but if you wish to use this, you need not wait for the other as it may never take birth at all.

MOON OF TWO HEMISPHERES

A gold moon-raft floats and swings slowly
And it casts a fire of pale holy blue light
On the dragon tail aglow of the faint night
That glimmers far, — swimming,
The illumined shoals of stars skimming,
Overspreading earth and drowning the heart in sight
With the ocean depths and breadths of the Infinite.

A gold moon-ship sails or drifts ever
In our spirit's skies and halts never, blue-keeled,
And it throws its white-blue fire on this grey field,
Night's dragon loop, — speeding,
The illumined star-thought sloops leading
To the Dawn, their harbour home, to the Light unsealed,
To the sun-face Infinite, the Untimed revealed.

7

Lines from *Ilion*, an unfinished poem in English hexameter (quantitative):

Īdă / rōse wĭth hĕr / gōd-haūntĕd / peāks ‖ ĭntŏ /
dĭāmŏnd / lūstrĕs, /
Īdă, / fĭrst ŏf thĕ / hĭlls, ‖ wĭth thĕ / rānges / sīlĕnt
bĕ/yōnd hĕr /
Wātchĭng thĕ / dāwn ĭn thĕir / gĭānt / cŏmpānĭĕs, / ‖
ās sĭnce thĕ / āgĕs /
Fĭrst bĕ/gān thĕy hăd / wātched hĕr, ‖ ŭp/bēarĭng /
Tĭme ŏn thĕir / sūmmĭts. /

Triumph and agony changing hands in a desperate measure
Faced and turned as a man and a maiden trampling the grasses
Face and turn and they laugh for their joy in the dance and each other.
These were gods and they trampled lives. But though Time is immortal,
Mortal his works are and ways and the anguish ends like the rapture.
Artisans satisfied now with their works in the plan of the transience,
Beautiful, wordless, august, the Olympians turned from the carnage.
Vast and unmoved they rose up mighty as eagles ascending,
Fanning the world with their wings. In the bliss of a sorrowless ether
Calm they reposed from their deeds and their hearts were inclined to the Stillness.
Less now the burden laid on our race by their star-white presence,
There was a respite from height; the winds breathed freer, delivered.
But their immortal content from the struggle titanic departed.
Vacant the noise of the battle roared like a sea on the shingles;
Wearily hunted the spears their quarry, strength was disheartened;
Silence increased with the march of the months on the tents of the leaguer.[1]

The principle is a line of six feet, preponderantly dactylic, but anywhere the dactyl can be replaced by a spondee; but in English hexameter a trochee can be substituted, as the spondee

[1] From an early version.

comes in rarely in English rhythm. The line is divided by a caesura, and the variations of the caesura are essential to the harmony of the verse.

An example of Alcaics from the *Jivanmukta* (Alcaics is a Greek metre invented by the poet Alcaeus):

There is / a si/lence / greater than / any / known /
To earth's / dumb spi/rit, / motionless / in the / soul /
That has / become / eter/nity's foot/hold,
Touched by the / infini/tudes for / ever / .

In the Latin it is:

-/-/⏑-/-/-⏑⏑/-⏑/-/
-/-/⏑-/-/-⏑⏑/-⏑/-/
-/-/⏑-/-/⏑-/-/
-⏑⏑/-⏑⏑/-⏑/-⏑/

But in English, variations (modulations) are allowed, only one has to keep to the general plan.

Swinburne's Sapphics are to be scanned thus:

All the / night sleep / came not u/pon my / eyelid / ,
Shed not / dew, nor / shook nor un/closed a / feather / ,
Yet with / lips shut / close and with / eyes of / iron
Stood and be/held me / .

Two trochees at the beginning, two trochees at the end, a dactyl separating the two trochaic parts of the line — that is the Sapphics in its first three lines, then a fourth line composed of a dactyl and a trochee.

May, 1934

REGULAR AND IRREGULAR SONNET RHYMES

The two regular sonnet rhyme-sequences are (1) the Shakespearean ab ab cd cd ef ef gg — that is, three quatrains with alternate rhymes with a closing couplet and (2) the Miltonic with an

octet abba abba (as in your second and third quatrains) and a sestet of three rhymes arranged according to choice. The Shakespearean is closer to the natural lyric rhythm, the Miltonic to the ode movement — i.e. something large and grave. The Miltonic is very difficult, for it needs either a strong armoured structure of the thought or a carefully developed unity of the building which all poets can't manage. However there have been attempts at an irregular sonnet rhyme sequence. Keats tried his hand at one a century ago and I vaguely believe (but that may be only an illusion or Maya) that modern poets have played loose fantastic tricks of their own invention; but I don't have much first-hand knowledge of modern (contemporary) poetry. Anyhow I have myself written a series of sonnets with the most heterodox rhyme arrangements, so I couldn't very well go for you when you did the same. One who has committed many murders can't very well rate another for having done a few. All the same this sequence is rather — a Miltonic octet with a Shakespearean close would be more possible. I think I have done something of the kind with not too bad an effect, but I have no time to consult my poetry file and am not sure. In the sonnet too it might be well for you to do the regular thing first, soberly and well, and afterwards when you are sure of your steps, frisk and dance.

22. 2. 1936

NURSERY RHYMES AND POPULAR SONGS

The question you have put, as you put it, can admit of only one answer. I cannot agree that nursery rhymes or folk songs are entitled to take an important place or any place at all in the history of the prosody of the English language or that one should start the study of English metre by a careful examination of the rhythm of "Humpty Dumpty", "Mary, Mary, quite contrary" or the tale of the old woman who lived in a shoe. There are many queer theories abroad nowadays in all the arts, but I doubt whether any English or French critic or prosodist would go so far as to dub "Who killed Cock Robin?" the true movement of Engligh rhythm, putting aside Chaucer, Spenser, Pope or Shelley as

too cultivated and accomplished or too much under foreign influence or to seek for his models in popular songs or the products of the *café chantant* in preference to Hugo or Musset or Verlaine.

But perhaps something else is meant — is it that one gets the crude indispensable elements of metre better from primitive, just-shaped or unshaped stuff than from more perfect work in which these are overlaid by artistic developments and subtle devices; an embryo or a skeleton is more instructive for the study of men than the developed flesh-and-blood structure? That may have a certain truth in some lines of scientific research, but it cannot stand in studying the technique of an art. At that rate one could be asked to go for the basic principles of musical sound to the jazz or even to the hurdy-gurdy and for the indispensable rules of line and colour to the pavement-artist or to the sign-board painter. Or perhaps the suggestion is that here one gets the primary unsophisticated rhythms native to the language and free from the artificial movements of mere literature. Still, I can hardly fancy that the true native spirit or bent of English metre is to be sought or can be discovered in

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;

and is lost in

Rarely, rarely, comest thou,
Spirit of Delight!

Popular verse catches the child ear or the common ear much more easily than the music of developed poetry because it relies on a crude jingle or infantile lilt — not because it enshrines in its movements the true native spirit of the chant. I hold it to be a fallacy to think that the real spirit and native movement of a language can be caught only in crude and primitive forms and that it is disguised in the more perfect work in which it has developed its own possibilities to their full pitch, variety and scope. It is as if one maintained that the true note and fundamental nature of the evolving soul were to be sought in the earthworm or

the scarabaeus and not in the developed human being — or in the divinised man or Jivanmukta.

As for foreign influences, most of the elements of English prosody, rhyme, foot-scansion, line-lengths, stanza-forms and many others have come in from outside and have altered out of all recognition the original mould, but the spirit of the language found itself as much in these developments as in the first free alliterative verse — as much and more. The spirit of a language ought to be strong enough to assimilate any amount of imported elements or changes of structure and measure.

23. 2. 1933

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SONG AND A POEM

No, a song is not a kind of poem — or, at least, need not be. There are some very good songs which are not poems at all. In Europe, song-writers as such or the writers of the librettos of the great operas are not classed among poets. In Asia the attempt to combine song-quality with poetic value has been more common; in ancient Greece also lyric poetry was often composed with a view to being set to music. But still poetry and song-writing, though they can be combined, are two different arts, because the aim and the principle of their building is not the same.

The difference is not that poetry has to be understood and music or singing has to be felt (*anubhūti*); that one has to reach the soul through the precise written sense and the other through the suggestion of sound and its appeal to some inner chord within us. If you only understand the intellectual content of a poem, its words and ideas, you have not really appreciated the poem at all, and a poem which contains only that and nothing else, is not true poetry. A true poem contains something more which has to be felt just as you feel music and that is its more important and essential part. Poetry has a rhythm, just as music has, though of a different kind, and it is the rhythm that helps this something else to come out through the medium of the words. The words by themselves do not carry it or cannot bring it out altogether, and this is shown by the fact that the same words written in a

different order and without rhythm or without the proper rhythm would not at all move or impress you in the same way. This something else is an inner content or suggestion, a soul-feeling or soul-experience, a life-feeling or life-experience, a mental emotion, vision or experience (not merely an idea), and it is only when you can catch this and reproduce some vibration of the experience — if not the experience itself — in you that you have got what the poem can give you, not otherwise.

The real difference between a poem and a song is that a song is written with a view to be set to musical rhythm and a poem is written with the ear listening for the needed poetic rhythm or word-music. These two rhythms are quite different. That is why a poem cannot be set to music unless it has either been written with an eye to both kinds of rhythm or else happens to have (without especially intending it) a movement which makes it easy or at least possible to set it to music. This happens often with lyrical poetry, less often with other kinds. There is also this usual character of a song that it is satisfied to be very simple in its content, just bringing out an idea or feeling, and leaving it to the music to develop its unspoken values. Still this reticence is not always observed; the word claims for itself sometimes a larger importance.

4. 7. 1931

SONNET AND SATIRE

In a sonnet, thought should be set to thought, line added to line in a sort of architectural sequence, or else there should be a progression like the pressing of waves to the shore, with the finality of arrival swift in a closing couplet or deliberate as in the Miltonic form.

As to your other proposition, I am not sure that satiric verse and the metaphysical lyrical can rightly be put together. Naturally, a great poetic genius could or might do it with success; but genius can do anything. Satire is more often than not a kind of half-poetry, because its inspiration comes primarily from the critical mind and a not very high part of it, not from the creative

vision or moved intensity of poetic feeling. Creative vision or the moved intensity can come in to lift this motive but, except rarely, it does not lift it very high.

It is Dryden and Juvenal who have oftenest made something like genuine poetry out of satire, the first because he often changes satire into a vision of character and the play of psychological forces, the other because he writes not from a sense of the incongruous but from an emotion, from a strong poetic "indignation" against the things he sees around him. Aristophanès is a comic creator — like Shakespeare when he turns in that direction — the satire is only a strong line in his creation; that is a different kind of inspiration, not the ordinary satire. Pope attempted something creative in his *Rape of the Lock*, but the success, if brilliant, is thin because the deeper creative founts and the kindlier sources of vision are not there.

COMMENTS ON A DRAMA

1

I have just finished hearing the Second Act of your drama on Sri Chaitanya; there is much fine poetry in it and the dramatic interest of the dialogue and of the presentation of character seems to me considerable. We have not had time yet to read the last Act; we shall do that tomorrow and then I can write about your drama with more finality. As for the historical question, I do not consider that any objections which might be raised from that standpoint would have much value. Poetry, drama, fiction also are not bound to be historically accurate; they cannot indeed develop themselves successfully unless they deal freely with any historical material they may choose to include or take for their subject. One can be faithful to history if one likes but even then one has to expand and deal creatively with characters and events, otherwise the work will come to nothing or little. In many of his dramas Shakespeare takes names from history or local tradition, but uses them as he chooses; he places his characters in known countries and surroundings but their

stories are either his own inventions or the idea only is borrowed from facts and the rest is his own making: or else he indulges in pure fantasy and cares nothing even for geographical accuracy or historical possibility. It is true that sometimes he follows closely the authorities he had at his disposal, such as Holinshed or another and in plays like *Julius Caesar* he sticks to the main events and keeps many of the details, but not so as to fetter the play of his imagination. So I don't think you need worry at all about either historians or biographers, even if *Chaitanya Charitamrita* could be regarded as a biography. That is all, I think, for the present. I shall write again after hearing the Third Act of your drama.

21. 1. 1950

2

We have finished reading your *Chaitanya.* The Third Act which is the most remarkable of the three confirms the impression already made by the other two of a very fine and successful play outstanding in its dramatic interest and its thought substance. The Third Act is original in its design and structure, especially its idea, admirably conceived and worked out, of a whole scene of action with many persons and much movement shown in the vision of a single character sitting alone in her room; it was difficult to work out but it has fitted in extremely well. It has also at the same time a remarkable combination of the three unities of the Greek drama into which this distant scene, though not too distant, manages to dovetail very well, — the unity of one place, sometimes one spot in the Greek play or a small restricted area, one time, one developing action completed in that one time and spot, an action rigorously developed and unified in its interest. Indeed, the play as a whole has this unity of action in a high degree.

Advocates of the old style drama might object to the great length of the discussions as detrimental to compactness and vividness of dramatic interest and dramatic action and they might object too that the action (though this does not apply to the Jagai Madhai episode) is more subjective and psychological

than the external objective succession of happenings or interchanges represented on a stage would seem to demand; this was the objection to Shaw's most characteristic and important play. But where the dramatic interest is itself of a subjective and psychological character involving more elaboration of thought and speech than of rapid or intensive happening and activities, this kind of objection is obviously invalid; what matters is how the subjective interest, the play or development of ideas, or if high ideals are involved that call to the soul how their appeal is presented and made effective. Here it is great spiritual ideals and their action on the mind and lives of human beings that are put before us and all that matters is how they are presented and made living in their appeal. Here there is, I think, full success and that entirely justifies the method of the drama.

For the rest I have only heard once rapidly read the play in three acts and it is not possible with that short reading to pass judgment on details of a purely literary character, so on that I can only give my personal impression. A drama has to accommodate itself to different levels and intensities of expression proper to the circumstances and different characters, moods and events: but here too, I think, the handling is quite successful. I believe the verdict must be, from every point of view, an admirable *Chaitanya*.

23. 1. 1950

Section Four

TRANSLATION OF POETRY

TWO WAYS OF TRANSLATING POETRY

There is no question of defective poetry or lines. There are two ways of rendering a poem from one language into another — one is to keep strictly to the manner and turn of the original, the other to take its spirit, sense and imagery and reproduce them freely so as to suit the new language. A's poem is exceedingly succinct, simply-direct and compact in word, form, rhythm, yet full of suggestion — it would perhaps not be possible to do the same thing in Bengali; it is necessary to use an ampler form, and this is what you have done. Your translation is very beautiful; only, side by side with the original, one looks like a delicate miniature, the other like a rich enlargement. If you compare his

Where is it calling
The eyes of night

with the corresponding lines in your poem, you can see the difference. I did not mean to suggest that it was necessary to change anything.

11. 7. 1937

FREEDOM IN TRANSLATION

A translator is not necessarily bound to the exact word and letter of the original he chooses; he can make his own poem out of it if he likes; and that is what is very often done. This is all the more legitimate since we find that literal translations more completely betray than those that are reasonably free — turning life into death and poetic power into poverty and flatness. It is not many who can carry over the spirit of a poem, the characteristic power of its expression and the turn of its rhythmical movement from one language to another, especially when the tongues in question are so alien in temperament to each other as English and Bengali. When that can be done, there is the perfect translation.

LITERALNESS IN TRANSLATION

The proper rule about literalness in translation, I suppose, is that one should keep as close as possible to the original provided the result does not read like a translation but like an original poem in Bengali, and, as far as possible, as if it were the original poem originally written in Bengali.

I admit that I have not practised what I preached, — whenever I translated I was careless of the hurt feelings of the original text and transmogrified it without mercy into whatever my fancy chose. But that is a high and mighty criminality which one ought not to imitate. Latterly I have tried to be more moral in my ways, I don't know with what success. But anyhow it is a case of "Do what I preach and avoid what I practise."

10. 10. 1934

IMPORTANCE OF TURN OF LANGUAGE IN TRANSLATION

I do not think it is the ideas that make the distinction between European and Indian tongues — it is the turn of the language. By taking over the English turn of language into Bengali one may very well fail to produce the effect of the original because this turn will seem outlandish in the new tongue; but one can always, by giving a right turn of language more easily acceptable to the Bengali mind and ear, make the idea as natural and effective as in the original; or even if the idea is strange to the Bengali mind one can by the turn of language acclimatise it, make it acceptable. The original thought in the passage you are translating may be reduced to something like this: "Here is all this beautiful world, the stars, the forest, the birds — I have not yet lived long enough to know them all or for them to know me so that there shall be friendship and familiarity between us and now I am thus untimely called away to die". That is a perfectly human feeling, quite as possible, more easily possible, to an Indian than to a European (witness Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*) and can very well be acceptable. But the turn given it in English is abrupt and bold though quite forcible and going straight home — in Bengali it

may sound strange and not go home. If so, you have to find a turn in Bengali for the idea which will be as forcible and direct; not here only but everywhere this should be the rule. Naturally, one should not go too far away from the original and say something quite different in substance but, subject to this limitation, any necessary freedom is quite admissible.

October, 1934

DIFFICULTIES OF CATCHING SUBTLETIES IN TRANSLATION

It is not that I find the translations here satisfactory in the full sense of the word, but they are better than I expected. There is none of them, not even the best, which I would pronounce to be quite the thing. But this "quite the thing" is so rare a *trouvaille*, it is as illusive as the capture of Eternity in the hours. As for catching the subtleties, the difficulty lies in one supreme faculty of the English language which none other I know possesses, the ease with which it finds the packed allusive turn, the suggestive unexpressed, the door opening on things ineffable. Bengali, like French, is very clear and luminous and living and expressive, but to such clear languages the expression of the inexpressible is not so easy — one has to go out of one's way to find it. Witness Mallarmé's wrestlings with the French language to find the symbolic expression — the right turn of speech for what is behind the veil. I think that even in these languages the power to find it with less effort must come; but meanwhile there is the difference.

TRANSLATION OF PROSE INTO POETRY

I think it is quite legitimate to translate poetic prose into poetry; I have done it myself when I translated *The Hero and the Nymph* on the ground that the beauty of Kalidasa's prose is best rendered by poetry in English, or at least that I found myself best able to render it in that way. Your critic's rule seems to me rather too positive; like all rules it may stand in principle in a majority of

cases, but in the minority (which is the best part, for the less is often greater than the more) it need not stand at all. Pushed too far, it would mean that Homer and Virgil can be translated only in hexameters. Again what of the reverse cases — the many fine prose translations of poets so much better and more akin to the spirit of the original than any poetic version of them yet made? One need not go farther than Tagore's English version of his *Gitanjali.* If poetry can be translated so admirably (and therefore legitimately) into prose, why should not prose be translated legitimately (and admirably) into poetry? After all, rules are made more for the convenience of critics than as a binding law for creators.

REMARKS ON A BENGALI TRANSLATION OF AN ENGLISH POEM

The poem you have chosen is not easily translatable. There is in it a union or rather fusion of high severity of speech with exaltation and both with a pervading intense sweetness which it is almost impossible to transfer bodily without loss into another language. There is no word in excess, none that could have been added or changed without spoiling the expression, every word just the right revelatory one — no colour, no ornamentation, but a sort of suppressed burning glow, no similes, but images which have been fused inseparably into the substance of the thought and feeling — the thought itself perfectly developed, not idea added to idea at the will of the fancy but perfectly interrelated and linked together like the limbs of an organic body. This is high poetic style in its perfection and nothing of all that is translatable.

11. 7. 1931

REMARKS ON BENGALI TRANSLATIONS OF "SIX POEMS"[1]

Your translation of *Shiva* is a very beautiful poem, combining strength and elegance in the Virgilian manner. I have put one or two questions relating to the correctness of certain passages as a

[1] By Sri Aurobindo, see *Collected Poems* (Centenary Edition, 1972).

translation, but except for the care for exactitude it has not much importance.

A's translation pleased me on another ground — he has rendered with great fidelity and, as it seemed to me, with considerable directness, precision and force the thought and spiritual substance of the poem — he has rendered, of course in more mental terms than mine, exactly what I wanted to say. What might be called the 'mysticity' of the poem, the expression of spiritual vision in half-occult, half-revealing symbols is not successfully caught, but that is a thing which may very well be untranslatable; it depends on an imponderable element which can hardly help escaping or evaporating in the process of transportation from one language to another. What he has done seems to me very well done. Questions of diction or elegance are another matter.

There remains N's two translations of *Jivanmukta.* I do not find the *mātrāvṛtta* one altogether satisfactory, but the other is a very good poem. But as a translation! Well, there are some errors of the sense which do not help, e.g., *mahimā* for splendour; splendour is light. Silence, Light, Power, Ananda, these are the four pillars of the Jivanmukta consciousness. So too the all-seeing, flame-covered eye gets transmogrified into something else; but the worst is the divine stillness surrounding the world which is not at all what I either said or meant. The lines:

Revealed it wakens when God's stillness
Heavens the ocean of moveless Nature,

express an exact spiritual experience with a visible symbol which is not a mere ornamental metaphor but corresponds to exact and concrete spiritual experience, an immense oceanic expanse of Nature-consciousness (not the world) in oneself covered with the heavens of the Divine Stillness and itself rendered calm and motionless by that over-vaulting influence. Nothing of that appears in the translation; it is a vague mental statement with an ornamental metaphor.

I do not stress all that to find fault, but because it points to a difficulty which seems to me insuperable. This *Jivanmukta*

is not merely a poem, but a transcript of a spiritual condition, one of the highest in the inner Overmind experience. To express it at all is not easy. If one writes only ideas about what it is or should be, there is failure. There must be something concrete, the form, the essential spiritual emotion of the state. The words chosen must be the right words in their proper place and each part of the statement in its place in an inevitable whole. Verbiage, flourishes there must be none. But how can all that be turned over into another language without upsetting the apple-cart? I don't see how it can be easily avoided. For instance in the fourth stanza, "Possesses", "sealing", "grasp" are words of great importance for the sense. The feeling of possession by the Ananda rapture, the pressure of the ecstatic force sealing the love so that there can never again be division between the lover and the All-Beloved, the sense of the grasp of the All-Beautiful are things more than physically concrete to the experience ("grasp" is especially used because it is a violent, abrupt, physical word — it cannot be replaced by "In the hands" or "In the hold") and all that must have an adequate equivalent in the translation. But reading N's Bengali line I no longer know where I am, unless perhaps in a world of Vedantic abstractions where I never intended to go. So again what has N's translation of my line to do with the tremendous and beautiful experience of being ravished, thoughtless and wordless, into the "breast" of the Eternal who is the All-Beautiful, All-Beloved?

That is what I meant when I wrote yesterday about the impossibility — and also what I apprehended when I qualified my assent to the proposal for translation with a condition.

3. 6. 1934

REMARKS ON A BENGALI TRANSLATION OF A POEM OF SHELLEY

Your translation of Shelley's poem is vulnerable in the head and the tail. In the head, because it seems to me that your words are open to the construction that human love is a rich and precious thing which the poet in question unfortunately does

not possess and it is only because of this deplorable poverty that he offers the psychic devotion, less warm and rich and desirable, but still in its own way rare and valuable! I exaggerate perhaps, but, as your lines are open to a meaning of this kind, it tends to convey the very reverse of Shelley's intended significance. For in English "What men call love" is strongly depreciatory and can only mean something inferior, something that is poor and not rich, not truly love. Shelley says in substance: "Human vital love is a poor inferior thing, a counterfeit of true love, which I cannot offer to you. But there is a greater thing, a true psychic love, all worship and devotion, which men do not readily value, being led away by the vital glamour, but which the Heavens do not reject though it is offered from something so far below them, so maimed and ignorant and sorrow-vexed as the human consciousness which is to the divine consciousness as the moth is to the star, as the night is to the day. And will you not accept this from me, you, who in your nature are kin to the Heavens, you, who seem to me to have something of the divine nature, to be something bright and happy and pure far above the sphere of our sorrow?" Of course all that is not said but only suggested, but it is obviously the spirit of the poem, — and it is this spirit in it that made me write to A the other day that it would be perhaps impossible to find in English literature a more perfect example of psychic inspiration than these eight lines you have translated.... As to the tail, I doubt whether your last line brings out the sense of "something afar from the sphere of our sorrow". If I make these criticisms at all, it is because you have accustomed me to find in you a power of rendering the spirit and sense of your original while turning it into fine poetry in its new tongue which I would not expect or exact from any other translator.

11.7.1931

DIFFICULTY OF TRANSLATING URDU SONGS INTO ENGLISH —PREFERENCE OF KRISHNA TO RAMA

Your translations are very good, but much more poetic than the originals: some would consider that a fault, but I do not. The

Urdu songs are very much in a manner and style that might be called the "hieratic primitive", like a picture all in intense line, but only two or three essential lines at a time; the colour is the hue of a single and very simple strong spiritual idea or experience. It is hardly possible to carry that over into modern poetry; the result would probably be, instead of the bare sincerity of the original, some kind of ostensible artificial artlessness that would not be at all the same thing.

I have no objection to your substituting Krishna for Rama, and if Kabir makes any, which is not likely, you have only to say to him softly, "*Rām Shyām judā mat karo bhāi*", and he will be silenced at once.

The bottom reason for your preference of Krishna to Rama is not sectarian but psychological. The Northerner prefers Rama because the Northerner is the mental, moral and social man in his type, and Rama is a congenial Avatar for that type; the Bengali, emotional and intuitive, finds all that very dry and plumps for Krishna. I suspect that is the whole mystery of the choice. Apart from these temperamental preferences and turning to essentials, one might say that Rama is the Divine accepting and glorifying a mould of the human mental, while Krishna seems rather to break the human moulds in order to create others from the higher planes; for he comes down direct from the Overmind and hammers with its forces on the mind and vital and heart of man to change and liberate and divinise them. At least that is one way of looking at their difference.

THE ENGLISH BIBLE

The English Bible is a translation, but it ranks among the finest pieces of literature in the world.

27. 2. 1936

Section Five

MODERN POETRY

CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH POETRY

1

I admit I have not read as much of "modern" (contemporary) poetry as I should have — but the little I have is mostly of the same fundamental quality. It is very carefully written and versified, often *recherché* in thought and expression; it lacks only two things, the inspired phrase and inevitable word and the rhythm that keeps a poem for ever alive. Speech carefully studied and made as perfect as it can be without reaching to inspiration, verse as good as verse can be without rising to inspired rhythm — there seem to be an extraordinary number of poets writing like this in England now.... It is not the irregular verses or rhymes that matter, one can make perfection out of irregularity — it is that they write their poetry from the cultured striving mind, not from the elemental soul-power within. Not a principle to accept or a method to imitate!

June, 1931

2

It is probably modern (contemporary) English poetry of which S is thinking. Here I am no expert; but I understand that the turn there is to suppress emotion, rhetoric, colouring, sentiment and arrive at something very direct, expressive, recording either the thing exactly as it is or some intimate essential truth of the thing without wrapping it up in ideas and sentiments, superfluous images and epithets. It does not look as if all contemporary English poetry was like that, it is only one strong trend; but such as it is, it has not as yet produced anything very decisive, great or successful. Much of it seems to be mere flat objectivity or, what is worse, an exaggerated emphatic objectivity; emotion seems often to be replaced by an intensified vital-physical sensation of the object. You will perhaps understand what I mean if you read the poem quoted on pages 316-17 of the *Parichaya* — "red pieces of day, hills made of blue and green paper, Satanic and blasé, a black goat lookingly wanders" — images expressing

vividly an impression made on the nerves through the sight of the described objects. Admittedly it is — at least when pushed to such a degree — a new way of looking at things in poetry, but not essentially superior to the impressions created on the heart and the mental imagination by the objects. All the same, there is behind, but still not successfully achieved, the possibility of a real advance, an attempt to get away from ornate mental constructions about things to the expression of the intimate truth of the things themselves as directly seen by a deeper sight within us. Only it seems to me a mistake to theorise that only by this kind of technique and in this particular way can what is aimed at be done.

3

Somebody said of modernist poetry that it could be understood only by the writer himself and appreciated by a few friends who pretended to understand it. That is because the ideas, images, symbols do not follow the line of the intellect, its logic or its intuitive connections, but are pushed out on the mind from some obscure subliminal depth or mist-hung shallow; they have connections of their own which are not those of the surface intelligence. One has to read them not with the intellect but with the solar plexus, try not to understand but feel the meaning. The surrealist poetry is the extreme of this kind — you remember our surrealist B's question: "Why do you want poetry to have a meaning?" Of course you can put an intellectual explanation on the thing, but then you destroy its poetical appeal. Very great poetry can be written in that way from the subliminal depths, e.g. Mallarmé, but it needs a supreme power of expression, like Blake's or Mallarmé's, to make it truly powerful and convincing, and there must be sincerity of experience and significant rhythm.

2. 8. 1943

4

The remark[1] of Livingstone Lowes is no doubt correct. Even

[1] About modern English poetry of the early part of this century Livingstone Lowes,

now and even where it is the external, everyday, obvious that is being taken as theme, we see often enough that what the mind is trying to find is some recondite, precious or quintessential aspect of the everyday and obvious — something in it exceptional or esoteric. But while in the East, the way to do it is known, the West does not seem yet to have found it. Instead of going inside, getting intimate with what is behind, and writing of the outside also from that inside experience, they are still trying to stare through the surface into the inner depths with some X-ray of mental imagination or "intuition" and the result is not the quintessence itself but a shadow-picture of the quintessence. That is perhaps why there is so much feeling of effort, artifice, "even perverse embodiment" in much of this poetry — and no very definitive success as yet: But, I suppose, the way itself, the endeavour to leave the obvious surfaces and get deeper is the only road left for poetry, otherwise it can but repeat itself in the old modes with slight alterations till exhaustion brings decadence. On the road that is being now followed there is also evident danger of decadence, through an excess of mere technique and artifice or through a straining towards the merely out-of-the-way or the perverse. But there seems to be no other door of progress than to make the endeavour.

10. 10. 1932

MODERN ART AND POETRY

Not only are there no boundaries left in some arts (like poetry of the ultra-modern schools or painting) but no foundations and no Art either. I am referring to the modernist painters and to

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writing in 1918, remarks in his *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*: "That which does allure it in the East is an amazing tininess and finesse — the delicacy, that is to say, and the deftness, and the crystalline quality of the verse of China and Japan.... The strange, the remote, in its larger, more broadly human aspect — all this has been gradually losing its hold upon poetry. Instead, when we fly from the obsession of the familiar, it is growingly apt to be the more recondite, or precious, or quintessential, or even perverse embodiments of the strange or far — to 'the special exquisite perfume' of Oriental art; to the exceptional and the esoteric, in a word, rather than to the perennial and universal." He quotes as a specimen of Imagist verse:

We bring the hyacinth-violets, sweet, bare, chill to the touch.

the extraordinary verbal jazz which is nowadays often put forward as poetry.

Modern Art opines that beauty is functional! that is, whatever serves its function or serves a true purpose is artistic and beautiful — for instance, if a clerk produces a neat copy of an official letter without mistakes, the clerk and his copy are both of them works of art and beautiful!

March, 1935

LATEST TREND IN ENGLISH POETRY

1

The latest craze in England is either for intellectual quintessence or sensations of life, while any emotional and ideal element in poetry is considered as a deadly sin. But beautiful poetry remains beautiful poetry even if it is not in the current style. And after all, Yeats and A.E. are still there in spite of this new fashion of the last one or two decades.

2

There is room for sex poetry if it is felt as truth and rendered either with beauty or power, but this crude braggadocio of the flesh is not telling nor attractive. The diabolism and cult of the bizarre in the nineties had a certain meaning, — it was at least a revolt against false conventions and an attempt to escape from the furbished obviousness of much that had gone before. But now it has itself become the obvious and conventional — not it exactly in its old form but the things it attempted to release and these are now trying to escape from their own obviousness by excess, the grotesque, the perverse.

1932

IMPRESS OF THE ADVERSE VITAL WORLD ON MODERN LITERATURE AND ART

It[1] is evidently inspired from the vital world — from a certain

[1] *Limber Horses*, a poem in *The New Statesman and the Nation* in perhaps 1932.

part of it which seems to be breaking out in much of today's literature and art. All that comes from this source is full of a strange kind of force, but out of focus, mis-shaped in thought or vision or feeling, sometimes in the form too, ominous and perverse. For that matter, the adverse vital world is very much with us now, — the War was the sign of its desent on the earth and After-war bears its impress. But from another point of view that is not a cause for alarm or discouragement — for it has always been predicted from occult sources that such a descent would be the precursor of the Divine Manifestation.

SURREALIST POETRY

1

I really can't tell you what surrealism is, because it is something — at least the word is — quite new and I have neither read the reliable theorists of the school nor much of their poetry. What I picked up on the way was through reviews and quotations, the upshot being that it is a poetry based on the dream-consciousness, but I don't know if this is correct or merely an English critic's idea of it. The inclusion of Baudelaire and Valéry seems to indicate something wider than that. But the word is of quite recent origin and nobody spoke formerly of Baudelaire as a surrealist or even of Mallarmé. Mallarmé was supposed to be the founder of a new trend of poetry, impressionist and symbolist, followed in varying degrees and not by any means in the same way by Verlaine and Rimbaud, both of them poets of great fame. Verlaine is certainly a great poet and people now say Rimbaud also, but I have never come across his poetry except in extracts. This strain has developed in Valéry and other noted writers of today. It seems that all these are now claimed as part of or the origin of the surrealist movement. But I cannot say what are the exact boundaries or who comes in where. In any case, surrealism is part of an increasing attempt of the European mind to escape from the surface consciousness (in poetry as well as in painting and in thought) and grope after a deeper truth of

things which is not on the surface. The dream-consciousness as it is called — meaning not merely what we see in dreams, but the inner consciousness in which we get into contact with deeper worlds which underlie, influence and to some extent explain much in our lives, what the psychologists call the subliminal or the subconscient (the latter a very ambiguous phrase) — offers the first road of escape and the surrealists seem to be trying to force it. My impression is that there is much fumbling and that more often it is certain obscure and not always very safe layers that are tapped. That accounts for the note of diabolism that comes in in Baudelaire, in Rimbaud also, I believe, and in certain ugly elements in English surrealist poetry and painting. But this is only an impression.

N's poetry (what he writes now) is from the dream-consciousness, no doubt about that. My labelling him as surrealist is partly — though not altogether — a joke. How far it applies depends on what the real aim and theory of the surrealist school may be. Obscurity and unintelligibility are not the essence of any poetry and — except for unconscious or semi-conscious humorists like the Dadaists — cannot be its aim or principle. True dream-poetry (let us call it so for the nonce) has and must always have a meaning and a coherence. But it may very well be obscure or seem meaningless to those who take their stand on the surface or "waking" mind and accept only its links and logic. Dream-poetry is usually full of images, visions, symbols that seek to strike at things too deep for the ordinary means of expression. N does not deliberately make his poems obscure; he writes what comes through from the source he has tapped and does not interfere with its flow by his own mental volition. In many modernist poets there may be labour and a deliberate posturing, but it is not so in his case. I interpret his poems because he wants me to do it, but I have always told him that an intellectual rendering narrows the meaning — it has to be seen and felt, not thought out. Thinking it out may give a satisfaction and an appearance of mental logicality, but the deeper sense and sequence can only be apprehended by an inner sense. I myself do not try to find out the meaning of his poems, I try to feel what they mean in vision and experience and then render into mental terms. This is a

special kind of poetry and has to be dealt with according to its kind and nature. There is a sequence, a logic, a design in them, but not one that can satisfy the more rigid law of the logical intelligence.

About Housman's theory: it is not merely an appeal to emotion that he posits as the test of pure poetry; he deliberately says that pure poetry does not bother about intellectual meaning at all, it is to the intellect nonsense. He says that the interpretations of Blake's famous poems rather spoil them — they appeal better without being dissected in that way. His theory is questionable, but that is what it comes to; he is wrong in using the word "nonsense" and perhaps in speaking of pure and impure poetry. All the same, to Blake and to writers of the dream-consciousness, his rejection of the intellectual standard is quite applicable.

12. 2. 1937

2

About your points regarding surrealism:

1. If the surrealist dream-experiences are flat, pointless or ugly, it must be because they penetrate only as far as the "subconscious" physical and "subconscious" vital dream layers which are the strata nearest to the surface. Dream-consciousness is a vast world in which there are a multitude of provinces and kingdoms, but ordinary dreamers for the most part penetrate consciously only to these first layers which belong to what may properly be called the subconscious belt. When they pass into deeper sleep regions, their recording surface dream-mind becomes unconscious and no longer gives any transcript of what is seen and experienced there; or else in coming back these experiences of the deeper strata fade away and are quite forgotten before one reaches the waking state. But when there is a stronger dream capacity, or the dream-state becomes more conscious, then one is aware of these deeper experiences and can bring back a transcript which is sometimes a clear record, sometimes a hieroglyph, but in either case possessed of a considerable interest and significance.

2. It is only the subconscious belt that is chaotic in its

dream sequences; for its transcriptions are fantastic and often mixed, combining a jumble of different elements: some play with impressions from the past, some translate outward touches pressing on the sleep-mind; most are fragments from successive dream experiences that are not really part of one connected experience — as if a gramophone record were to be made up of snatches of different songs all jumbled together. The vital dreams even in the subconscious range are often coherent in themselves and only seem incoherent to the waking intelligence because the logic and law of their sequences is different from the logic and law which the physical reason imposes on the incoherences of physical life. But if one gets the guiding clue and if one has some dream-experience and dream-insight, then it is possible to seize the links of the sequences and make out the significance, often very profound or very striking, both of the detail and of the whole. Deeper in, we come to perfectly coherent dreams recording the experience of the inner vital and inner mental planes; there are also true psychic dreams — the latter usually are of a great beauty. Some of these mental or vital plane dream-experiences, however, are symbolic, very many in fact, and can only be understood if one is familiar with or gets the clue to the symbols.

3. It depends on the nature of the dream. If they are of the right kind, they need no aid of imagination to be converted into poetry. If they are significant, imagination in the sense of a free use of mental invention might injure their truth and meaning — unless of course the imagination is of the nature of an inspired vision coming from the same plane and filling out or reconstructing the recorded experience so as to bring out the Truth held in it more fully than the dream transcript could do; for a dream record is usually compressed and often hastily selective.

4. The word "psyche" is used by most people to mean anything belonging to the inner mind, vital or physical, though the true psyche is different from these things. Poetry does come from these sources or even from the superconscient sometimes; but it does not come usually through the form of dreams; it comes either through word-vision or through conscious vision and imagery whether in a fully waking or an inward-drawn state: the latter may go so far as to be a state of Samadhi —

svapna samādhi. In all these cases it is vision rather than dream that is the imaging power. Dreams also can be made a material for poetry; but everyone who dreams or has visions or has a flow of images cannot by that fact be a poet. To say that a predisposition and discipline are needed to bring them to light in the form of written words is merely a way of saying that it is not enough to be a dreamer, one must have the poetic faculty and some training — unless the surrealists mean by this statement something else than what the words naturally signify. What is possible, however, is that by going into the inner (what is usually called the subliminal) consciousness — this is not really subconscious but a veiled or occult consciousness — or getting somehow into contact with it, one not originally a poet can awake to poetic inspiration and power. No poetry can be written without access to some source of inspiration. Mere recording of dreams or images or even visions could never be sufficient, unless it is a poetic inspiration that records them with the right use of words and rhythm bringing out their poetic substance. On the other hand, I am bound to admit that among the records of dream-experiences even from people unpractised in writing, I have met with a good many that read like a brilliant and colourful poetry which does hit — satisfying Housman's test — the solar plexus. So much I can concede to the surrealist theory; but if they say on that basis that all can with a little training turn themselves into poets — well, one needs a little more proof before one can accept so wide a statement.

13. 2. 1937

3

How do you say the vital dreams have no link or reason? They have their own coherence, only the physical mind cannot always get at the clue by following which the coherence would unroll itself. For that matter the sequences of physical existence are coherent to us only because we are accustomed to it and our reason has made up a meaning out of it. But subject it to the view of a different consciousness and it becomes an incoherent phantasmagoria. That is how the Mayavadins or Schopenhauer

would speak of it, the former say deliberately that dream-sequences and life-sequences stand on the same footing, only they have another structure. Each is real and consequent to itself, though neither, they would say, is real or consequent in very truth.

17. 1. 1937

Section Six

INDO-ENGLISH POETRY — CURRENT USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

ACHIEVEMENT OF INDO-ENGLISH POETRY — LITERARY DECADENCE IN EUROPE

1

The idea that Indians cannot succeed in English poetry is very much in the air just now but it cannot be taken as absolutely valid. Toru Dutt and Romesh of the same ilk prove nothing; Toru Dutt was an accomplished verse-builder with a delicate talent and some outbreaks of genius and she wrote things that were attractive and sometimes something that had a strong energy of language and a rhythmic force. Romesh was a smart imitator of English poetry of the second or third rank. What he wrote, if written by an Englishman, might not have had even a temporary success. Sarojini is different. Her work has a real beauty, but it has for the most part only one highly lyrical note and a vein of riches that has been soon exhausted. Some of her lyrical work is likely, I think, to survive among the lasting things in English literature and by these, even if they are fine rather than great, she may take her rank among the immortals. I know no other Indian poets who have published in English anything that is really alive and strong and original.[1] The test will be when something is done that is of real power and scope and gets its due chance. Tagore's *Gitanjali* is not in verse, but the place it has taken has some significance. For the obstacles from the other side are that the English mind is apt to look on poetry by an Indian as a curiosity, something exotic (whether it really is or not, the suggestion will be there), and to stress the distance at which the English temperament stands from the Indian temperament. But Tagore's *Gitanjali* is most un-English, yet it overcame this obstacle. For the poetry of spiritual experience, even if it has true poetic value, the difficulty might lie in the remoteness of the subject. But nowadays this difficulty is lessening with the increasing interest in the spiritual and the mystic. It is an age in which Donne, once condemned as a talented but fantastic weaver

[1] This was written some years ago (in 1935) and does not apply to more recent work in English by Indian poets.

of extraordinary conceits, is being hailed as a great poet, and Blake lifted to a high eminence; even small poets with the mystic turn are being pulled out of their obscurity and held up to the light. At present many are turning to India for its sources of spirituality, but the eye has been directed only towards Yoga and philosophy, not to the poetical expression of it. When the full day comes, however, it may well be that this too will be discovered, and then an Indian who is at once a mystic and a true poet and able to write in English as if in his mother-tongue (that is essential) would have his full chance. Many barriers are breaking; moreover, both in French and English there are instances of foreigners who have taken their place as prose-writers or poets.

24. 1. 1935

P.S. About decadence: a language becomes decadent when the race decays, when life and soul go out and only the dry intellect and the tired senses remain. Europe is in imminent peril of decadence and all its literatures are attacked by this malady, though it is only beginning and energy is still there which may bring renewal. But the English language has still several strings to its bow and is not confined to an aged worn-out England. Moreover, there are two tendencies active in the modern mind, the over-intellectualised, over-sensualised decadent that makes for death, and the spiritual which may bring rebirth. At present the decadent tendency may be stronger, but the other is also there.

2

It is not true in all cases that one can't write first-class things in a learned language. Both in French and English people to whom the language was not native have done remarkable work, although that is rare. What about Jawaharlal's autobiography? Many English critics think it first-class in its own kind; of course he was educated at an English public school, but I suppose he was not born to the language. Some of Toru Dutt's poems, Sarojini's, Harin's have been highly placed by good English critics,

and I don't think we need be more queasy than Englishmen themselves. Of course there were special circumstances, but in your case also there are special circumstances; I don't find that you handle the English language like a foreigner. If first-class excludes everything inferior to Shakespeare and Milton, that is another matter. I think, as time goes on, people will become more and more polyglot and these mental barriers will begin to disappear.

1. 10. 1943

3

Many Indians write better English than many educated Englishmen.

27. 2. 1936

FUTURE OF INDO-ENGLISH POETRY

1

What you say may be correct (that our oriental luxury in poetry makes it unappealing to Westerners), but on the other hand it is possible that the mind of the future will be more international than it is now. In that case the expression of various temperaments in English poetry will have a chance.

If our aim is not success and personal fame but to arrive at the expression of spiritual truth and experience of all kinds in poetry, the English tongue is the most widespread and is capable of profound turns of mystic expression which make it admirably fitted for the purpose; if it could be used for the highest spiritual expression, that is worth trying.

2

As for the question itself, I put forward four reasons why the experiment could be made. (1) The expression of spirituality in the English tongue is needed and no one can give the real stuff

like Easterners and especially Indians. (2) We are entering an age when the stiff barriers of insular and national mentality are breaking down (Hitler notwithstanding), the nations are being drawn into a common universality with whatever differences, and in the new age there is no reason why the English should not admit the expression of other minds than the English in their tongue. (3) For ordinary minds it may be difficult to get over the barrier of a foreign tongue but extraordinary minds, Conrad etc., can do it. (4) In this case the experiment is to see whether what extraordinary minds can do cannot be done by Yoga.

27. 2. 1936

PITFALLS OF INDO-ENGLISH BLANK VERSE

I have often seen that Indians who write in English, immediately they try blank verse, begin to follow the Victorian model and especially a sort of pseudo-Tennysonian movement or structure which makes their work in this kind weak, flat and ineffective. The language inevitably suffers by the same fault, for with a weak verse-cadence it is impossible to find a strong or effective turn of language. But Victorian blank verse at its best is not strong or great, and at a more common level it is languid or crude or characterless. Except for a few poems, like Tennyson's early *Morte d'Arthur*, *Ulysses* and one or two others or Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustam*, there is nothing of a very high order. Tennyson is a perilous model and can have a weakening and corrupting influence and the *Princess* and *Idylls of the King* which seem to have set the tone for Indo-English blank verse are perhaps the worst choice possible for such a role. There is plenty of clever craftsmanship but it is mostly false and artificial and without true strength or inspired movement or poetic force — the right kind of blank verse for a Victorian drawing-room poetry, that is all that can be said for it. As for language and substance his influence tends to bring a thin artificial decorative prettiness or picturesqueness varied by an elaborate false simplicity and an attempt at a kind of brilliant, sometimes lusciously brilliant sentimental or sententious commonplace. The higher

quality in his best work is not easily assimilable; the worst is catching but undesirable as a model.

Blank verse is the most difficult of all English metres; it has to be very skilfully and strongly done to make up for the absence of rhyme, and if not very well done, it is better not done at all. In the ancient languages rhyme was not needed, for they were written in quantitative metres which gave them the necessary support, but modern languages in their metrical forms need the help of rhyme. It is only a very masterly hand that can make blank verse an equally or even a more effective poetic movement. You have to vary your metre by a skilful play of pauses or by an always changing distribution of caesura and of stresses and supple combinations of long and short vowels and by much weaving of vowel and consonant variation and assonance; or else, if you use a more regular form you have to give a great power and relief to the verse as did Marlowe at his best. If you do none of these things, if you write with effaced stresses, without relief and force or, if you do not succeed in producing harmonious variation in your rhythm, your blank verse becomes a monotonous vapid wash and no amount of mere thought-colour or image-colour can save it.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING ENGLISH POETRY

1

If you want to write English poetry which can stand, I would suggest three rules for you:

1. Avoid rhetorical turns and artifices and the rhetorical tone generally. An English poet can use these things at will because he has the intrinsic sense of his language and can keep the right proportion and measure. An Indian using them kills his poetry and produces a scholastic exercise.

2. Write modern English. Avoid frequent inversions or turns of language that belong to the past poetic styles. Modern English poetry uses a straightforward order and a natural style, not different in vocabulary, syntax, etc., from that of prose. An

inversion can be used sometimes, but it must be done deliberately and for a distinct and particular effect.

3. For poetic effect rely wholly on the power of your substance, the magic of rhythm and the sincerity of your expression — if you can add subtlety so much the better, but not at the cost of sincerity and straightforwardness. Do not construct your poetry with the brain-mind, the mere intellect — that is not the source of true inspiration: write always from the inner heart of emotion and vision.

2

The poetry of your friend is rather irritating, because it is always just missing what it ought to achieve; one feels a considerable poetic possibility which does not produce work of some permanence because it is not scrupulous enough or has not a true technique. The reasons for the failure can be felt, but are not easy to analyse. Among them there is evidently the misfortune of having passed strongly under the influence of poets who smell of the schoolroom and the bookworm's closet. Such awful things as "unsoughten", "a-journeying," "a-knocking," "strayèd gift" and the constant abuse of the auxiliary verb "to do" would be enough to damn even the best poem. If he would rigorously modernise his language, one obstacle to real poetic success would perhaps disappear, — provided he does not, on the contrary, colloquialise it too much — e.g. "my dear", etc. But the other grave defect is that he is constantly composing out of his brain, while one feels that a pressure from a deeper source is there and might break through, if only he would let it. Of course, it is a foreign language he is writing and very few can do their poetic best in a learned medium; but still the defect is there.

22. 6. 1931

MENTAL THEORIES AND POETIC FREEDOM

Why erect mental theories and suit your poetry to them? I would suggest to you not to be bound by any but to write as best suits

your own inspiration and poetic genius. Each poet should write in the way suited to his own inspiration and substance; it is a habit of the human mind fond of erecting rules and rigidities to put one way forward as a general law for all. If you insist on being rigidly simple and direct as a mental rule, you might spoil something of the subtlety of the expression you now have, even if the delicacy of the substance remained with you. Obscurity, artifice, rhetoric have to be avoided, but for the rest follow the inner movement.

I do not remember the precise words I used in laying down the rule to which you refer, I think I advised sincerity and straightforwardness as opposed to rhetoric and artifice. In any case it was far from my intention to impose any strict rule of bare simplicity and directness as a general law of poetic style. I was speaking of "Twentieth century English poetry" and of what was necessary for A, an Indian writing in the English tongue. English poetry in former times used inversions freely and had a law of its own — at that time natural and right, but the same thing nowadays sounds artificial and false. English has now acquired a richness and flexibility and power of many-sided suggestion which makes it unnecessary for poetry to depart from the ordinary style and form of the language. But there are other languages in which this is not yet true. Bengali is in its youth, in full process of growth and has many things not yet done, many powers and values it has still to acquire. It is necessary that its poets should keep a full and entire freedom to turn in whatever way the genius leads, to find new forms and movements; if they like to adhere to the ordinary form of the language to which prose has to keep, they should be free to do so; but also they should be free to depart from it, if it is by doing so that they can best liberate their souls in speech. At present it is this that most matters.

REQUIREMENTS FOR WRITING GOOD ENGLISH

1

This book, returned herewith, is not in my opinion suitable for

the purpose. The author wanted to make it look like a translation of a romance in Sanskrit and he has therefore made the spirit and even partly the form of the language more Indian than English. It is not therefore useful for getting into the spirit of the English language. Indians have naturally in writing English a tendency to be too coloured, sometimes flowery, sometimes rhetorical and a book like this would increase the tendency. One ought to have in writing English a style which is at its base capable of going to the point, saying with a simple and energetic straightforwardness what one means to say, so that one can add grace of language without disturbing this basis. Arnold is a very good model for this purpose, Emerson less, but his book will also do.

It is surely better to write your own thoughts. The exercise of writing in your own words what another has said or written is a good exercise or test for accuracy, clear understanding of ideas, an observant intelligence but your object is, I suppose, to be able to understand English and express yourself in good English.

16. 5. 1932

2

Avoid over-writing; let all your sentences be the vehicle of something worth saying and say it with a vivid precision neither defective nor excessive. Don't let either thought or speech trail or drag or circumvolute. Don't let the language be more abundant than the sense. Don't indulge in mere clever ingenuities without a living truth behind them.

14. 6. 1935

LICENCES IN THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

1

This Latinisation and the inversion of syntactical connections are familiar licences in English poetry — of course, it is incorrect,

but a deliberate incorrectness, a violence purposely done to the language in order to produce a poetic effect. The English language, unlike the French and some others, likes, as Stephen Phillips used to say, to have liberties taken with it. But, of course, before one can take these liberties, one must be a master of the language — and, in this case, of the Latin also.

1931

2

But neither feeling nor logic can stand against usage. A language is like an absolute queen; you have to obey her laws, reasonable or unreasonable, and not only her laws, but her caprices — so long as they last — unless you are one of her acknowledged favourites and then you can make hay of her laws and (sometimes) defy even her caprices provided you are quite sure of the favour. In this case, Tagore perhaps feels the absoluteness of some usage with regard to these particular words? But one can always break through law and usage and even pass over the judgment of an "arbiter of elegances" — at one's own risk.

26. 1. 1932

CURRENT USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

1

I am in general agreement with your answer to M's strictures on certain points in your style and your use of the English language. His objections have usually some ground, but are not unquestionably valid; they would be so only if the English language were a fixed and unprogressive and invariable medium demanding a scrupulous correctness and purity and chaste exactness like the French; but this language is constantly changing and escaping from boundaries and previously fixed rules and its character and style, you might almost say, is whatever the writer likes to make it. Stephen Phillips once said of it in a libertine image that the English language is like a woman who will not love you un-

less you take liberties with her. As for the changeableness, it is obvious in recent violences of alteration, now fixed and recognised, such as the pronunciation of words like "nation" and "ration" which now sound as "gnashun" and "rashun"; one's soul and one's ear revolt, at least mine do, against degrading the noble word "nation" into the clipped indignity of the plebian and ignoble "gnashun", but there is no help for it. As for "aspire for", it may be less correct than "aspire to" or "aspire after", but it is psychologically called for and it seems to me to be much more appropriate than "aspire at" which I would never think of using. The use of prepositions is one of the most debatable things, or at least one of the most frequently debated in the language. The Mother told me of her listening in Japan to interminable quarrels between Cousins and the American Hirsch on debatable points in the language but especially on this battlefield and never once could they agree. It is true that one was an Irish poet from Belfast and the other an American scholar and scientist, so perhaps neither could be taken as an unquestionable authority on the English tongue; but among Englishmen themselves I have known of such constant disputes. Cousins had remarkably independent ideas in these matters; he always insisted that "infinite" must be pronounced "infighnight" on the ground that "finite" was so pronounced and the negative could not presume to differ so unconscionably from the positive. That was after all as good a reason as that alleged for changing the pronunciation of "nation" and "ration" on the ground that as the "a" in "national" and "rational" is short, it is illogical to use a different quantity in the substantive. "To contact" is a phrase that has established itself and it is futile to try to keep America at arm's length any longer; "global" also has established itself and it is too useful and indeed indispensable to reject; there is no other word that can express exactly the same shade of meaning. I heard it first from Arjava who described the language of *Arya* as expressing a global thinking and I at once caught it up as the right and only word for certain things, for instance, the thinking in masses which is a frequent characteristic of the Overmind. As for the use of current French and Latin phrases, it may be condemned as objectionable on the same ground as the

use of *clichés* and stock phrases in literary style, but they often hit the target more forcibly than any English equivalent and have a more lively effect on the mind of the reader. That may not justify a too frequent use of them, but in moderation it is at least a good excuse for it. I think the expression "bears around it a halo" has been or can be used and it is at least not worn out like the ordinary "wears a halo". One would more usually apply the expression "devoid of method" to an action or procedure than to a person, but the latter turn seems to me admissible. I do not think I need say anything in particular about other objections, they are questions of style and on that there can be different opinions; but you are right in altering the obviously mixed metaphor "in full cry", though I do not think any of your four substitutes have anything of its liveliness and force. Colloquial expressions have, if rightly used, the advantage of giving point, flavour, alertness and I think in your use of them they do that; they can also lower and damage the style, but that danger is mostly when there is a set character of uniform dignity or elevation. The chief character of your style is rather a constant life and vividness and supple and ample abounding energy of thought and language which can soar or run or sweep along at will but does not simply walk or creep or saunter and in such a style forcible colloquialisms can do good service.

2. 4. 1947

2

[1]I have gone carefully through the proof of the first chapters of *The Deliverance*, but find most of these unexplained red marks totally unintelligible; sometimes I can make a guess, but most often not even that. What, for instance, is the objection to the use of "its" and "it" for a river?

There seems to be an objection to any metaphors or figures such as "the scales of public opinion" or a river rejecting some-

[1] These are Sri Aurobindo's notes on the objections raised by an Indian professor of English to certain words, phrases and metaphors used in the English translation of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya's Bengali novel *Nishkriti*, done by a Sadhak. The Sadhak had shown the proofs of the translation to the professor who had marked on them his objections in red ink.

one from its borders. This seems to me astonishing; at any rate the figures are there in the original and one cannot suppress them in a translation or alter arbitrarily the author's substance.

Objections are made also against quite good and appropriate English words such as "beggared" and "quadrupled" or against perfectly correct phrases like "All that was now a history of the past" or "reaching" a figure or "dropping" some money or "he sat at home in his room" in the sense of remaining inactive. One can say, for instance, "He sat in his palace listening to the footsteps of approaching Doom". So too there appears to be some objection to the phrase "neither X nor another", a common English turn; to "started (in the sense of beginning an action or movement) a relentless insistence and importunity". (One can say for instance, "He started an obstinate resistance which never flagged nor ceased".) Vivid epithets, e.g., "rapid visits" or familiar and lively phrases such as "she was back again", are found to be improper and objectionable. "Cares of her household" gets a red mark, though one speaks of "household cares", "cares of state", cares of all kinds. A fever (one must not refer to it as "it") is allowed to throw a person down, but not to let him rise from his bed. Incomprehensible?

All these startling red ink surprises are packed together in the short space of the first chapter. But in the second we meet with still bigger surprises. One is not allowed to "make time" for anything, a most common phrase, or to "leave" a responsibility to someone. A meal must not be "vegetarian" though a diet can be, and though one speaks in English of "a frugal vegetarian dinner". One is not allowed to have a school task to do or to "prepare" a task; but unhappily that is done in England at least and in English.

"Today" is objected to because it is applied to past time; but it is put here as part of the tone of vivid remembered actuality, the past described as if still present before the mind, which is constant in the original. Similarly, a little later on, "the early dusk had fallen a couple of hours ago"; in strict narrative time it should be "before" and not "ago", but though the author writes in the past tense, he is always suggesting a past which is passing immediately before our eyes. I do not see how else the

translator is to keep this suggestion. One could use more correctly the historic present: "It is winter and the dusk has fallen a couple of hours ago"; but that would be to falsify the original.

All right of passage is refused to a humorous use of the phrase "give voice", nor can one "retort" instead of merely replying. There is perhaps a syntactical objection to the use of "desperate" at the beginning of the sentence, but the objection is itself incorrect. One says "Pale and haggard, he rose from his bed". One is not allowed to speak humorously of a "portion" instead of a "part" of a big bed so as to emphasise its bigness and the dividing of it into occupied regions by the "gang". A heart is not allowed to "pound away", still less to pound "dismally". The objector seems to damn everything vividly descriptive, everything new in turn, phrase or image, everything in fact not said before by everyone else. A man lying down is not allowed to "start up", though the dictionary meaning of the word is there, "to rise up quickly or suddenly", e.g. "he started up from his bed" or "from his chair". What again is meant by the objection to such recognised locutions as "to take away the (bad) taste" or "much she cares", and why should there not be an "implacable pressure" or why is one forbidden to "get out money" from a box? These red marks are terribly mysterious.

The criticism of the sentence "How could you etc." and the use of "today" is intelligible and to a certain extent tenable. I have tried to explain in the proof itself why the ordinary tense-sequence can be disregarded here. In the latter case it is not so much a question of grammar as of the use of the word "today" for a past time. If it can be so used in order to express more vividly the actual thought in the mind of a person at the time the unusual tense-sequence follows as a matter of course. I have, however, yielded the point for the sake of Sarat Chatterji's reputation which, we are told, is imperilled by our audacities of language.

Chapter III. The objector begins with a queer missing of the obvious sense in the use of "my" and "us". He goes on to challenge the possibility of "entering into" explanations, discussions etc. though it is commonly done, e.g. "He entered into a long discussion" or "You needn't enter into tedious explana-

tions; a few words will be enough."

Chapter IV continues the inexplicable chain and "implacable" series of red objections. I have written "a discussion was in process", which is a quite permissible phrase, but alter it to "progress" just to soften the redness of the red mark. But why cannot Atul "hold forth" as an orator does and what is the matter with the "cut" of a coat, a phrase sacred to every tailor? People in England do, after all, "blurt out" things every day and they "laugh in the face" of others, though of course it may be considered rude; but "to laugh in the face" is not considered bad grammar or bad English. To give "*the* order" is wrong in the opinion of the objector; but since the purchase of particular things like coats or suits has just been talked about, it is quite correct to say "*the* order" instead of "an order".

One can't "speak out", apparently, (or perhaps "speak up" either); one can only just speak: nor can one "see to the making of coats for a family". Also it is wrong to ask "what is wrong". It is wrong, it seems, to say "All in the room"; so an Englishman is mistaken when he says "Tell all at home that I am not coming"! So too you can't speak "once more" or "seek for"[1] anything! The use of the plural of "devotion", common in English[2], is red marked as an error!

Chapter V. One can't "labour" to get a result, or "cover up" anything in the sense of "hiding" or even try to do it; one can't put somebody up[3] to do something, though in English it is constantly done. There is an objection to such perfectly natural figures as "could not summon up any reply" or "the sharp edge of your tongue" or "smouldering secretly within herself". The objector seems indeed to cherish a deadly grudge against figures and images; he is opposed also to colloquial expressions (e.g. "get" out money, "give it here") even in dialogue. He objects to

[1] "For" and "after" *can* be used with "seek". One can say "He sought for an excuse but found none"; one would not usually say "He sought an excuse". So too you can say "He has long been seeking for spiritual light but in vain."

[2] E.g. "She was still at her devotions".

[3] Cf., in kindred but slightly different senses, "He has not acted on his own instance, I know by whom he has been put up to do this"; "A straw candidate put up for the occasion by a small secret clique"; "This is a put up job; there is nothing sincere or spontaneous in the whole affair".

my putting straight into English the Bengali figure of "falling from the sky". There is an almost identical phrase in French with exactly the same sense, "to fall from on high" or "to fall from the clouds"[1]: so I do not see why it should not be done, since it ought to be at once intelligible to an English reader. I note also that words cannot "jump" to the tongue, but why not? they manage to do it every day. Poor Shaila cannot "need" a cup.[2] Then what is wrong with the sentence "Do you think everybody is your sister" i.e. the speaker herself? It is simply a vivid way of saying "Do you think everybody will be as patient with you as myself", or "Do you think you can speak to everybody as you do to me".

I have written at length because the publisher and perhaps others seem to have been upset by the vicious red jabs of this high authority. In most cases they seem to me to have no meaning whatever. If they have, we should be informed to some extent at least of their why and wherefore.

There are...a few doubtful points in half a dozen sentences, points on which Englishmen themselves differ or might differ. I am ready to go through the whole book if the proofs are sent here. But I cannot revise or alter phrases, locutions or figures which, so far as I know English, are either current or natural or permissible, — unless I am told why these are thought to be incorrect or improper.

I cannot altogether understand Professor M's criticism. What does he mean by irregular language? If he refers to the style and means that it is bad, unchaste, too full of familiar or colloquial terms, not sufficiently dignified, bookish, conventional in phrase, not according to precedent, he is entitled to his view, of course. If he and the objector represent the Indian English-reading public, then D must consider the matter. For in that case, it is clear the book will not be understood by that public, may be banged and bashed by the reviewers, or may for kindred reasons be a failure. The suggestion that Sarat Chandra's high reputa-

[1] "*tomber d'en haut*", "*tomber des nuages*".

[2] One can say, "she needs help and sympathy in her trouble", or "you need rest and a change of air", or "for this I need scissors and paste, get them". Then why not "I need the cup"?

tion will be tarnished and lowered by D's deplorable style and my bad English and horrible grammar, not from any fault of his own, is very alarming. In that case D ought to have the book corrected by some University professor who knows what to write and what not to write and its style chastened, made correct, common and unnoticeable. I don't think A will do. He is too brilliant and might make the hair of the correct and timid reader rise on his head in horror; besides A does not know Bengali.

The question also arises whether an English reader (an English Englishman, not made in India) would equally fail to appreciate the book; he might find it too Bengali in character and substance and — who knows? — agree that the style of the translation is unorthodox and "irregular". But here we are helpless — we cannot make the experiment, for the war is on and England is far away and paper scarce there as here.

5. 8. 1944

Section Seven

APPRECIATION OF POETRY AND ART

SUBJECTIVE ELEMENT IN CRITICISM OF POETRY AND ART

All criticism of poetry is bound to have a strong subjective element in it and that is the source of the violent differences we find in the appreciation of any given author by equally "eminent" critics. All is relative here, Art and Beauty also, and our view of things and our appreciation of them depends on the consciousness which views and appreciates. Some critics recognise this and go in frankly for a purely subjective criticism — "this is why I like this and disapprove of that, I give my own values". Most labour to fit their personal likes and dislikes to some standard of criticism which they conceive to be objective; this need of objectivity, of the support of an impersonal truth independent of our personality or anybody else's, is the main source of theories, canons, standards of art. But the theories, canons, standards themselves vary and are set up in one age only to be broken in another. Is there then no beauty of art independent of our varying mentalities? Is beauty a creation of our minds, a construction of our ideas and our senses, not at all existent in itself? In that case Beauty is non-existent in Nature, it is put upon Nature by our minds through mental imposition, *adhyāropa*. But this contradicts the fact that it is in response to an object and not independently of it that the idea of beautiful or not beautiful originally rises within us. Beauty does exist in what we see, but there are two aspects of it, essential beauty and the forms it takes. "Eternal beauty wandering on her way" does that wandering by a multitudinous variation of forms appealing to a multitudinous variation of consciousness. There comes in the difficulty. Each individual consciousness tries to seize the eternal beauty expressed in a form (here a particular poem or work of art), but is either assisted by the form or repelled by it, wholly attracted or wholly repelled, or partially attracted and partially repelled. There may be errors in the poet's or artist's transcription of beauty which mar the reception, but even these have different effects on different people. But the more radical divergences arise from the variation in the constitution of the mind and its difference of response. Moreover, there are minds, the majority indeed, who do not respond to "artistic" beauty at

all — something inartistic appeals much more to what sense of beauty they have — or else they are not seeking beauty, but only vital pleasure.

A critic cannot escape altogether from these limitations. He can try to make himself catholic and objective and find the merit or special character of all he reads or sees in poetry and art, even when they do not evoke his strongest sympathy or deepest response. I have little temperamental sympathy for much of the work of Pope and Dryden, but I can see their extraordinary perfection or force in their own field, the masterly conciseness, energy, point, metallic precision into which they cut their thought or their verse, and I can see too how that can with a little infusion of another quality be the basis of a really great poetic style, as Dryden himself has shown in his best work. But there my appreciation stops; I cannot rise to the heights of admiration of those who put them on a level with or on a higher level than Wordsworth, Keats or Shelley — I cannot escape from the feeling that their work, even though more consistently perfect within their limits and in their own manner (at least Pope's), was less great in poetic quality. These divergences rise from a conception of beauty and a feeling for beauty which belongs to the temperament. So too Housman's exaltation of Blake results directly from his feeling and peculiar conception of poetic beauty as an appeal to an inner sensation, an appeal marred and a beauty deflowered by bringing in a sharp coating or content of intellectual thought. But that I shall not discuss now. All this, however, does not mean that criticism is without any true use. The critic can help to open the mind to the kinds of beauty he himself sees and not only to discover but to appreciate at their full value certain elements that make them beautiful or give them what is most characteristic or unique in their peculiar beauty. Housman, for instance, may help many minds to see in Blake something which they did not see before. They may not agree with him in his comparison of Blake and Shakespeare, but they can follow him to a certain extent and seize better that element in poetic beauty which he overstresses but makes at the same time more vividly visible.

5. 10. 1934

CONTEMPORARY JUDGMENT OF POETRY

If you send your poems to five different poets, you are likely to get five absolutely disparate and discordant estimates of them. A poet likes only the poetry that appeals to his own temperament or taste, the rest he condemns or ignores. (My own case is different, because I am not primarily a poet and have made in criticism a practice of appreciating everything that can be appreciated, as a catholic critic would.) Contemporary poetry, besides, seldom gets its right judgment from contemporary critics.

Nothing can be more futile than for a poet to write in expectation of contemporary fame or praise, however agreeable that may be, if it comes; but it is not of any definitive value, for very poor poets have enjoyed a great contemporary fame and very great poets have been neglected in their time, their merit known only to a few and gathering very slowly a greater volume of appreciation around it. A poet has to go on his way, trying to gather hints from what people say for or against when their criticisms are things he can profit by, but not otherwise moved (if he can manage it) — seeking mainly to sharpen his own sense of self-criticism by the help of others. Difference of estimate need not surprise him at all.

2. 2. 1932

POETIC AND ARTISTIC VALUE AND POPULAR APPEAL

1

I do not know why your correspondent puts so much value on general understanding and acceptance. Really it is only the few that can be trusted to discern the true value of things in poetry and art and if the "general" run accept, it is usually because acceptance is sooner or later imposed or induced in their minds by the authority of the few and afterwards by the verdict of Time. There are exceptions, of course, of a wide spontaneous acceptance because something that is really good happens to suit a taste or a demand in the general mind of the moment. Poetic and artistic value does not necessarily command mass under-

standing and acceptance.

2

What does he mean? that you can't write mathematics in verse? I suppose not, it was not meant to be. You can't start off

> *Oh, two by three plus four plus seven!*
> *To add things is to be in heaven.*

But all the same, if one thinks it worth while to take the trouble, one can express the mathematician's delight in discovery, or the grammarian's in grammatising or the engineer's in planning a bridge or a house. What about Browning's *Grammarian's Funeral*? The reason why these subjects do not easily get into poetry is because they do not lend themselves to poetic handling, their substance being intellectual and abstract and their language also, not as the substance and language of poetry must be, emotional and intuitive. It is not because they appeal only to a few people and not to the general run of humanity. A good dinner appeals not to a few people but to the general run of humanity, but it would all the same be a little difficult to write an epic or a lyric on the greatness of cooking and fine dishes or the joys of the palate and the belly. Spiritual subjects on the other hand can lend themselves to poetic handling because they can be expressed in the language of high emotion and radiant intuition. How many people will appreciate it is a question which is irrelevant to the merit of the poetry. More people have appreciated sincerely Macaulay's *Lays* or Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads* than ever really appreciated *Timon of Athens* or *Paradise Regained* — but that does not determine the relative value or appropriateness of these things as poetry. Artistic or poetic value cannot be reckoned by the plaudits or the reactions of the greatest number.

2. 11. 1936

3

It is quite true that all art and poetry is largely dependent on

the vital for its activity and if there is no force of vitality in the poetry then it cannot be strong or great. But it does not follow that the vital element in poetry will appeal to everybody or a great number of people; it depends on the kind of vital movement that is there. The forceful but inferior sort of vital energy that you find in Kipling's ballads appeals to a large mass of people; the vital element in Milton which is very powerful affects only a few in comparison, the rest take him on trust because he is a great classic but have not the true intense enjoyment of him as of Kipling. Yet Milton's greatness will endure — that cannot be said certainly of Kipling's ballads. The problem therefore remains where it was. Spiritual poetry also needs the vital force for expression; mere spiritual philosophy without the uplifting poetic force in its expression (which needs the vital energy for its action) cannot appeal to anybody. But all the same in spiritual poetry the vital element adopts a turn which may not go home to many, unless it takes a popular religious form which has a general appeal. There I do not follow quite X's position — does he contend that one ought to suit one's poetry to the mentality of others so that it may have a general appeal, not keeping to its natural purpose of expressing what is felt and seen by the poet according to the truth of the inspiration within him? Surely that cannot be recommended; but if it is not done, the possibility of reaching (at first, of course) only a few remains uneliminated. It is not that a poet deliberately sets out to be appreciated by a few only; he sets out to be himself in his poetry and the rest follows. But consider a poet like Mallarmé. In writing his strange enigmatic profound style which turned the whole structure of French upside down he cannot have expected or cared to be read and appreciated even by that part of the general public which is interested in and appreciative of poetry. Yet there is no one who had more influence on modern French poets — he helped to create Verlaine, Valéry and a number of others who rank among the great ones in French literature and he himself too now ranks very high though he must still, I should think, be read only by a comparatively small though select audience; yet he has practically turned the current of French poetry. So there is something to be said for writing for oneself even if that implies writing only

for the few and not for the many.

As for the actor, that is quite a different art, meant for the public, depending on its breath of applause, ineffective if its public is not moved or captured. A poet publishes, but he can take his chance; if he does not succeed in commanding widespread attention, he can still continue to write; there is something in him which maintains its energy and will to create. If he seeks acknowledged greatness and success — though that is a secondary matter to the force that makes him write — he can still sustain himself on the hope of a future greatness with posterity; there are plenty of illustrious examples to console him.

5. 11. 1936

4

Well, but did they not say the same thing about Mallarmé? And what of Blake? Contemporary opinion is a poor judge of what shall live or not live. The fact remains that the impressionist movement in poetry initiated by Mallarmé has proved to be the most powerful stream in France and its influence is not confined to that country. The whole thing is that it is a mistake to erect a mental theory and try to force into its narrow mould the infinite variety of the processes of Nature. Shakespeare may have so much vital force as to recommend himself to a large audience not so much for his poetry at first as for his dramatic vividness and power; it must be remembered that it was the German romantics two centuries later who brought about the apotheosis of Shakespeare — before that he had a much more limited circle of admirers. Other great poets have started with a more scanty recognition. Others have had a great popularity in their lifetime and sunk afterwards to a much lower level of fame. What is important is to preserve the right of the poet to write for himself, that is to say, for the Spirit that moves him, not to demand from him that he should write down to the level of the general or satisfy even the established taste and standard of the critics or connoisseurs of his time. For that would mean the end or decay of poetry — it would perish of its own debasement. A poet must be free to use his wings even if they carry him above the compre-

hension of the public of the day or of the general run of critics or lead him into lonely places. This is all that matters.

Tolstoy's logic is out of place. Nobody says that the value of the poet must be measured by the scantiness of his audience any more than it can be measured by the extent of his contemporary popularity. So there is no room for his *reductio ad absurdum.* What is contended is that it cannot be measured by either standard. It must be measured by the power of his vision, of his speech, of his feeling, by his rendering of the world within or the world without or of any world to which he has access. It may be the outer world that he portrays like Homer and Chaucer or a vivid life-world like Shakespeare or an inmost world of experience like Blake or other mystic poets. The recognition of that power will come first from the few who recognise good poetry when they see it and from those who can enter into his world; afterwards it can spread to the larger number who can recognise good poetry when it is shown to them; finally, the still larger public may come in who learn to appreciate by a slow education, not by instinct and nature. There was a sound principle in the opinion always held in former times that it is time alone that can test the enduring power of a poet's work, for contemporary opinion is not reliable.

There remains the case of the poets great or small or null who immediately command a general hearing. They have an element in them which catches at once the mind of the time: they are saying things which have a general appeal in a way that everybody can understand, in a language and rhythm that all can appreciate. As you say, there must be a vital element in the poetry of such a writer which gets him his public. The question is, has he anything else and, again what is the value of this vital element? If he has nothing else or not much of any high value, his aureole will not endure. If he has something but not of the best and highest, he will sink in the eyes of posterity, but not set out of sight. If he has in him something of the very greatest and best, his fame will grow and grow as time goes on — some of the elements that caught him his contemporary public may fade and lose their value, but the rest will shine with an increasing brightness. But even the vital and popular elements in the work

may have different values — Shakespeare's vitality has the same appeal now as then; Tennyson's has got very much depreciated; Longfellow's is now recognised for the easily current copper coin that it always was. You must remember that when I speak of the vital force in a poet as something necessary, I am not speaking of something that need be low or fitted only to catch the general mind, not fit to appeal to a higher judgment, but something that can be very valuable from the highest point of view. When Milton writes

Fall'n Cherub, to be weak is miserable,

or describes the grandeur of the fallen archangel, there is a vital force there that is of the highest quality, — so is that of Shakespeare; so is that of many pieces of Blake. This vital energy makes the soul stir within you. Nothing can be more high and sublime than the vital energy in Arjuna's description of the Virat Purusha in the Gita.

6. 11. 1936

5

I remain convinced that fame is a fluke. Even a settled literary fame seems to be a very fluctuating affair. Who gave a thought to Blake or Donne in former times — when I was in England, for instance? But now they bid fair to be reckoned among the great poets. I see that Byron is in the depths, the quotations for Pope and Dryden are rising, it was very different in those days.

5. 2. 1932

6

What is not understood or appreciated by one select circle may be understood or appreciated by another select circle or in the future like Blake's poetry. Nobody appreciated Blake in his own time. Now he ranks as a great poet, more poetic than Shakespeare, says Housman. Tagore wrote he could not appreciate X's poetry because it is too "Yogic" for him. Is Tagore unselect, one of the public at large?

I don't agree at all with not publishing because you won't be understood. At that rate many great poets would have remained unpublished. What about the unintelligible Mallarmé who had such a great influence on later French poetry?

24. 7. 1936

ABIDING INTUITION OF POETIC AND ARTISTIC GREATNESS

Yes, of course there is an intuition of greatness by which the great poet or artist is distinguished from those who are less great and these again from the not-great-at-all. But you are asking too much when you expect this intuition to work with a mechanical instantaneousness and universality so that all shall have the same opinion and give the same values. The greatness of Shakespeare, of Dante, of others of the same rank is unquestioned and unquestionable and the recognition of it has always been there in their own time and afterwards. Virgil and Horace stood out in their own day in the first rank among the poets and that verdict has never been reversed since. The area of a poet's fame may vary; it may have been seen first by a few, then by many, then by all. At first there may be adverse critics and assailants, but these negative voices die away. Questionings may rise from time to time — e.g. as to whether Lucretius was not a greater poet than Virgil — but these are usually from individuals and the general verdict abides always. Even lesser poets retain their rank in spite of fluctuations of their fame. You speak of the discrediting of some and the rehabilitation of the discredited. That happened to Pope and Dryden. Keats and his contemporaries broke their canons and trampled over their corpses to reach romantic freedom; now there is a rehabilitation. But all this is something of an illusion — for mark that even at the worst Pope and Dryden retained a place among the great names of English literature. No controversy, no depreciation could take that away from them. This proves my contention that there is an abiding intuition of poetic and artistic greatness.

The attempts at comparison of poets like Blake and Shakespeare or Dante and Shakespeare by critics like Housman and

Eliot? It seems to me that these are irrelevant and otiose. Both Dante and Shakespeare stand at the summit of poetic fame, but each with so different a way of genius that comparison is unprofitable. Shakespeare has powers that Dante cannot rival; Dante has heights which Shakespeare could not reach; but in essence they stand as mighty equals. As for Blake and Shakespeare, that opinion is more a personal fantasy than anything else. Purity and greatness are not the same thing; Blake's may be pure poetry in Housman's sense and Shakespeare's not except in a few passages; but nobody can contend that Blake's genius had the width and volume and richness of Shakespeare's. It can be said that Blake as a mystic poet achieved things beyond Shakespeare's measure — for Shakespeare had not the mystic's vision; but as a poet of the play of life Shakespeare is everywhere and Blake nowhere. These are tricks of language and idiosyncrasies of preference. One has to put each thing in its place without confusing issues and then one can see that Housman's praise of Blake may be justified but any exaltation of him by comparison with Shakespeare is not in accordance with the abiding intuition of these things which remains undisturbed by any individual verdict.

The errors of great poets in judging their contemporaries are personal freaks — they are failures in intuition due to the mind's temporary movements getting in the way of the intuition. The errors of Goethe and Bankim were only an over-estimation of a genius or a talent that was new and therefore attractive at the time. Richardson's *Pamela* was after all the beginning of modern fiction. As I have said, the general intuition does not work at once and with a mechanical accuracy. Over-estimation of a contemporary is frequent, under-estimation also. But, taken on the whole, the real poet commands at first or fairly soon the verdict of the few whose eyes are open — and often the attacks of those whose eyes are shut — and the few grow in numbers till the general intuition affirms their verdict. There may be exceptions, for there is hardly a rule without exceptions, but this is, I think, generally true.

As for the verdict of Englishmen upon a French poet or *vice versa*, that is due to a difficulty in entering into the finer spirit

and subtleties of a foreign language. It is difficult for a Frenchman to get a proper appreciation of Keats or Shelley or for an Englishman to judge Racine, for this reason. But a Frenchman like Maurois who knows English as an Englishman knows it, can get the full estimation of a poet like Shelley well enough. These variations must be allowed for; the human mind is not a perfect instrument, its best intuitions are veiled by irrelevant mental formations; but in these matters the truth asserts itself and stands fairly firm and clear in essence through all changes of mental weather.

6. 10. 1934

COMPARISON OF THE ARTS

1

I do not know what to say on the subject you propose to me — the superiority of music to poetry — for my appreciation of music is bodiless and inexpressible, while about poetry I can write at ease with an expert knowledge. But is it necessary to fix a scale of greatness between two fine arts when each has its own greatness and can touch in its own way the extremes of aesthetic Ananda? Music, no doubt, goes nearest to the infinite and to the essence of things because it relies wholly on the ethereal vehicle, *śabda*, (architecture by the by can do something of the same kind at the other extreme even in its imprisonment in mass); but painting and sculpture have their revenge by liberating visible form into ecstasy, while poetry though it cannot do with sound what music does, yet can make a many-stringed harmony, a sound revelation winging the creation by the word and setting afloat vivid suggestions of form and colour, — that gives it in a very subtle kind the power of all the arts. Who shall decide between such claims or be a judge between these godheads?

2

I fear I must disappoint you. I am *not* going to pass the Gods

through a competitive examination and assign a highest place to one and lower places to others. What an idea! Each has his or her own province on the summits and what is the necessity of putting them in rivalry with the others? It is a sort of Judgment of Paris you want to impose on me? Well, but what became of Paris and Troy? You want me to give the crown or apple to Music and enrage the Goddesses of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Embroidery, all the Nine Muses?

Your test of precedence — universal appeal — is all wrong. I don't know that it is true, in the first place. Some kind of sound called music appeals to everybody, but has really great music a universal appeal? And, speaking of arts, more people go to the theatre or read fiction than go to the opera or a concert. What becomes then of the superior universality of music, even in the cheapest sense of universality? Rudyard Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads* exercise a more universal appeal than was ever reached by Milton or Keats — we will say nothing of writers like Blake or Francis Thompson; a band on the pier at a seaside resort will please more people than a great piece of music with the orchestration conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham. In a world of gods it might be true that the highest makes the most universal appeal, but here in a world of beasts and men...it is usually the inferior things that have the more general if not quite universal appeal. On the other hand the opposite system you suggest (the tables turned upside down — the least universal and most difficult appeal makes the greatest art) would also have its dangers. At that rate we should have to concede that the cubist and abstract painters had reached the highest art possible, only rivalled by the up-to-date modernist poets of whom it has been said that their works are not at all either read or understood by the public, are read and understood only by the poet himself and are read without being understood by his personal friends and admirers.

When you speak of direct appeal, you are perhaps touching something true. Technique does not come in — for although to have a complete and expert judgment or appreciation you must know the technique not only in music and painting where it is more difficult, but in poetry and architecture also, it is some-

thing else and not that kind of judgment of which you are speaking. It is perhaps true that music goes direct to the intuition and feeling with the least necessity for the using of the thinking mind with its strongly limiting conceptions as a self-imposed middleman, while painting and sculpture do need it and poetry still more. At that rate music would come first, architecture next, then sculpture and painting, poetry last. I am aware that Housman posits nonsense as the essence of pure poetry and considers its appeal to be quite direct — not to the soul but to somewhere about the stomach. But then there is hardly any pure poetry in this world and the little there is is still *mélangé* with at least a homeopathic dose of intellectual meaning. But again if I admit this thesis of excellence by directness, I shall be getting myself into dangerous waters. For modern painting has become either cubist or abstract and it claims to have got rid of mental representation and established in art the very method of music; it paints not the object, but the truth behind the object — by the use of pure line and colour and geometrical form which is the basis of all forms or else by figures which are not representations but significances. For instance a modern painter wishing to make a portrait of you will paint at the top a clock surrounded by three triangles, below them a chaos of rhomboids and at the bottom two table castors to represent your feet and he will put in underneath this powerful design, "Portrait of N". Perhaps your soul will leap up in answer to its direct appeal and recognise at once the truth behind the object, behind your vanished physical self, — you will greet your psychic being or your Atman or at least your inner physical or vital being. Perhaps also you won't. Poetry also seems to be striving towards the same end by the same means — the getting away from mind into the depths of life or, as the profane might put it, arriving at truth and beauty through ugliness and unintelligibility. From that you will perhaps deduce that the attempt of painting and poetry to do what music alone can do easily and directly without these acrobatics is futile because it is contrary to their nature — which proves your thesis that music is the highest art because most direct in its appeal to the soul and the feeling. Maybe — or maybe not; as the Jains put it, *syād vā na syād vā.*

I have written so much, you will see, in order to say nothing — or at least to avoid your attempt at putting me in an embarrassing dilemma.

3

... Or shall we put it in this way "Each of the great arts has its own appeal and its own way of appeal and each in its own way is supreme above all others"? That ought to do.

6. 1. 1936

DANCE

Dance alone with rhythm and significance can express something of the occult or of the Divine as much as writing or poetry or art — why should it not and why should there be anything in it condemnable?

17. 7. 1933

POETRY AND NOVEL

No need to put poetry against novel and make a case between them. Both can be given admission to the spiritual Parnassus — but not all poetry and all novels. All depends on the consciousness from which the thing is done. If it is done from the psychic or the spiritual consciousness and bears the stamp of its source, that is sufficient. Of course there are certain things that cannot be done from there, but neither poetry nor fiction is in that case. They can be lifted to a higher level and made the expression of the psychic or spiritual mind and vision. When that is said, all is said. I hope my brevity has been of the right kind — and not left the question mystically obscure.

9. 6. 1936

MUSICAL EXCELLENCE AND GENERAL CULTURE

I have not seen the remarks in question. I don't suppose all-

round general culture has much to do with excelling in music. Music is a gift independent of any such thing and it can hardly be said that, given a musical gift in two people, the one with an all-round culture would go farther than the other in musical excellence. That would not be true in any of the arts. But something else was meant, perhaps, — that there is a certain turn or element in the excellence which an all-round culture makes possible? It is only in that sense that it could be true. Shakespeare's poetry, for instance, is that of a man with a vivid and many-sided response to life; it gives the impression of a multifarious knowledge of things but it was a knowledge picked up from life as he went: Milton's gets a certain colour from his studies and learning; in neither case is the genius or the excellence of the poetry due to culture, but there is a certain turn or colouring in Milton which would have not been there otherwise and which is not there in Shakespeare. It does not give any superiority in poetic excellence to one over the other.

12.11.1936

COMMENT ON CROCE'S THEORY OF AESTHETICS[1]

I have not read Croce but it seems to me that Durant must have taken something of their depth out of them in his presentation.

[1] This comment is apropos of the following passages from a statement of Benedetto Croce's philosophy of aesthetics presented by Will Durant in *The Story of Philosophy* (Earnest Benn, London, 1948), pp. 406-407:

" 'Knowledge has two forms: it is either *intuitive* knowledge or *logical* knowledge; knowledge obtained through the imagination or knowledge obtained through the intellect; knowledge of the individual or knowledge of the universal; of individual things or of the relations between them; it is the production either of images or of concepts.' (B. Croce, *Æsthetic*, 1902, p. 1.) The origin of art, therefore, lies in the power of forming images. 'Art is ruled uniquely by the imagination. Images are its only wealth. It does not classify objects, it does not pronounce them real or imaginary, does not qualify them, does not define them; it feels and presents them — nothing more.' (In Carr, *The Philosophy of Benedetto Croce*, 1917, p. 35.) Because imagination precedes thought, and is necessary to it, the artistic, or image-forming, activity of the mind is prior to the logical, concept-forming, activity. Man is an artist as soon as he imagines, and long before he reasons.

"The great artists understood the matter so. 'One paints not with the hands but with the brain,' said Michelangelo; and Leonardo wrote: 'The minds of men of lofty genius are most active in invention when they are doing the least external work.' Everybody knows the story told of Da Vinci, that when he was painting the 'Last Supper', he sorely displeased the Abbot

At any rate, I cannot accept the proposition that there are only two forms of knowledge, imaginative and intellectual, — still less if these two are made to coincide with the division between knowledge of the individual and that of the universal and again with image-production and concepts. Art can be conceptual as well as imaginative — it may embody ideas and not merely produce images. I do not see the relevancy of the Da Vinci story — one can sit motionless to summon up concepts as well as images or a concept and image together. Moreover, what is this intuition which is perfect sight and adequate imagination, that is production of an image, — is it empty of all "idea", of all conception? Evidently not, — for immediately it is said that the miracle of art lies in the conception of an idea. What then becomes of the division between the production of images and the production of concepts; and how can it be said that Art is ruled only by the image-producing power and images are its only wealth? All this seems to be very contradictory and confusing. You cannot cut up the human mind in that way — the attempt is that of the analysing intellect which is always putting things as trenchantly divided and opposite. If it had been said that in Art the synthetic action of the idea is more prominent than the analytic idea which we find most prominent in logic and science and philosophical reasoning, then one could understand the statement. The integrating or direct integral conception and the image-making faculty are the two leading powers of Art with

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who had ordered the work, by sitting motionless for days before an untouched canvas; and revenged himself for the importunate Abbot's persistent query — When would he begin to work? — by using the gentleman as an unconscious model for the figure of Judas.

[a]The essence of the æsthetic activity lies in this motionless effort of the artist to conceive the perfect image that shall express the subject he has in mind; it lies in a form of intuition that involves no mystic insight, but perfect sight, complete perception, and adequate imagination. The miracle of art lies not in the externalization but in the conception of the idea; externalization is a matter of mechanical technique and manual skill.

'When we have mastered the internal word, when we have vividly and clearly conceived a figure or a statue, when we have found a musical theme, expression is born and is complete, nothing more is needed. If, then, we open our mouth, and speak or sing,...what we do is to say aloud what we have already said within, to sing aloud what we have already sung within. If our hands strike the keyboard of the pianoforte, if we take up pencil or chisel, such actions are willed' (they belong to the practical, not to the æsthetic, activity), 'and what we are then doing is executing in great movements what we have already executed briefly and rapidly within.' (B. Croce, *Æsthetic*, 1902, p. 50.)"

intuition as the driving force behind it — that too would be a statement that is intelligible.

Still more strange is the statement that the externalisation is outside the miracle of art and is not needed; beauty, he says, is adequate expression, but how can there be expression, an expressive image without externalisation? The inner image may be the thing to be expressed, it may itself be expressive of some truth but unless it is externalised how can the spectator contemplating beauty contemplate it at all or get into unity of vision with the artist who creates it? The difference between Shakespeare and ourselves lies only in the power of inwardly forming an image, not in the power of externalising it? But there are many people who have the power of a rich inner imaging of things, but are quite unable to put them down on paper or utter them in speech or transfer them to canvas or into clay or bronze or stone. They are then as great creative artists as Shakespeare or Michael Angelo? I should have thought that Shakespeare's power of the word and Michael Angelo's of translating his image into visible form is at least an indispensable part of the art of expression, creation or image-making. I cannot conceive of a Shakespeare or Michael Angelo without that power — the one would be a mute inglorious Shakespeare and the other a rather helpless and ineffective Angelo.

19. 12. 1936

P.S. This is of course a comment on the statement as presented — I would have to read Croce myself in order to form a conception of what is behind his philosophy of Aesthetics.

Section Eight

BEAUTY AND ART

BEAUTY

1

Beauty is the special divine Manifestation in the physical as Truth is in the mind, Love in the heart, Power in the vital. Supramental beauty is the highest divine beauty manifesting in Matter.

19. 2. 1934

2

Beauty is the way in which the physical expresses the Divine — but the principle and law of Beauty is something inward and spiritual and expresses itself through the form.

23. 8. 1933

SUPRAMENTAL ACTION AND BEAUTY

Yes — supermind action is direct, spontaneous and automatic like that of inframental Nature — the difference is that it is perfectly conscious. As there is no disagreement or strife within itself, it produces a perfect harmony and beauty.

19. 9. 1933

BEAUTY AND ANANDA

1

Beauty is Ananda taking form — but the form need not be a physical shape. One speaks of a beautiful thought, a beautiful act, a beautiful soul. What we speak of as beauty is Ananda in manifestation; beyond manifestation beauty loses itself in Ananda or, you may say, beauty and Ananda become indistinguishably one.

14. 3. 1933

2

Beauty is not the same as Delight, but like love it is an expression, a form of Ananda, created by Ananda and composed of Ananda; it conveys to the mind that delight of which it is made. Aesthetically the delight takes the appearance of Rasa and the enjoyment of this Rasa is the mind's and the vital's reaction to the perception of beauty. The spiritual realisation has a sight, a perception, a feeling which is not that of the mind and vital, it passes beyond the aesthetic limit, sees the universal beauty, sees behind the object what the eye cannot see, feels what the emotion of the heart cannot feel and passes beyond Rasa and Bhoga to pure Ananda, — a thing more deep, intense, rapturous than any mental or vital or any physical Rasa reaction can be. It sees the One everywhere, the original bliss of existence everywhere, and all these can create an inexpressible Ananda of beauty, the beauty of the One, the beauty of the Divine, the beauty of the Beloved, the beauty of the eternal Existence in things. It can see also the beauty of forms and objects, but with a seeing other than the mind's, other than that of a limited physical vision, — what was not beautiful to the eye becomes beautiful, what was beautiful to the eye wears now a greater, marvellous and ineffable beauty. The spiritual realisation can bring the vision and the rapture of the All-Beautiful everywhere.

26. 10. 1935

3

The word "expression" means only something that is manifested by the Ananda and of which Ananda is the essence. Love and Beauty are powers of Ananda as Light and Knowledge are of Consciousness. Force is inherent in Consciousness and may be called part of the Divine Essence. Ananda is always there even when Sachchidananda takes on an impersonal aspect or appears as the sole essential Existence; but Love needs a Lover and Beloved, Beauty needs a manifestation to show itself. So in the same way Consciousness is always there, but Knowledge needs a manifestation to be active, there must be a Knower and a

Known. That is why the distinction is made between Ananda which is of the essence and Beauty which is a power of expression of Ananda in manifestation. These are of course philosophical distinctions necessary for the mind to think about the world and the Divine.

4. 11. 1935

4

That [the connection between Beauty, Rasa and Ananda] can hardly be realised except by experience of Ananda. Ananda is not ordinary mental or vital delight in things. Rasa is the mind's understanding of beauty and pleasure in it accompanied usually by the vital's enjoyment of it (Bhoga). Mental pleasure or vital enjoyment are not Ananda, but only derivations from the concealed universal Ananda of the Spirit in things.

7. 11. 1935

RIGHT CONSCIOUSNESS FOR ENJOYMENT OF BEAUTY

1

That is the right consciousness, not to desire or to be attached to the possession of anything for oneself, but to take the universal beauty etc. for a spiritual selfless Ananda.

6. 11. 1933

2

There is nothing harmful in the thing [aspiration for beauty] itself. On the contrary to awake to the universal beauty and refinement of the Mahalakshmi force is good. It is not an expression of greed or lust — only into these things a perversion can always come if one allows it, as into the Mahakali experience there may come rajasic anger and violence, so here there may come vital passion for possession and enjoyment. One must look at the beauty as the artist does without desire of possession or vital enjoyment of the lower kind.

8. 10. 1933

3

The enjoyment you speak of is vital-physical, while beauty has to be enjoyed with the aesthetic sense — either human or divinised.

6. 4. 1933

EXPERIENCE OF BEAUTY

All things are creations of the Universal Consciousness, Beauty also. The "experience" of the individual is his response or his awakening to the beauty which the Universal Consciousness has placed in things; that beauty is not created by the individual consciousness. The philosophy of these lines[1] is not at all clear. It says that the experience of beauty is a living truth added to beauty, a truth of which beauty is unaware. But if beauty is only the experience itself, then the experience constitutes beauty, it does not add anything to beauty; for such addition would only be possible if beauty already existed in itself apart from the experience. What is meant by saying that beauty is unaware of the experience which creates it? The passage makes sense only if we suppose it to mean that beauty is a reality already existing apart from the experience but unconscious of itself, and the consciousness of experience is therefore a living truth added to the unconscious reality, something which brings into it consciousness and life.

6. 1. 1937

TWO KINDS OF BEAUTY

There are two kinds of beauty. There is that universal beauty

[1] Beauty is not an attitude of sense
Nor an inherent something everywhere,
But keen reality of experience
Of which even beauty is all unaware,
Adding to it a living truth; intense
And ever living, that were else, not there.

which is seen by the inner eye, heard by the inner ear, etc. — but the individual consciousness responds to some forms, not to others, according to its own mental, vital and physical reactions. There is also the aesthetic beauty which depends on a particular standard of harmony, but different race or individual consciousnesses form different standards of aesthetic harmony.

18. 10. 1935

UNIVERSAL BEAUTY AND ANANDA

1

There is a certain consciousness in which all things become full of beauty and Ananda, — even what is painful and ugly becomes an outward play, and becomes suffused with the beauty and Ananda behind. It is specially the Overmind consciousness of things — although it can be felt from time to time on the other planes also. A great equality and the view of the Divine everywhere is necessary for this to come fully.

10. 3. 1934

2

As you say, there is a truth behind Tagore's statement. There is such a thing as a universal Ananda and a universal beauty and the vision of it comes from an intensity of sight which sees what is hidden and more than the form — it is a sort of *viśvarasa* such as the Universal Spirit may have had in creating things. To this intensity of sight a thing that is ugly becomes beautiful by its fitness for expressing the significance, the Guna, the Rasa which it was meant to embody. But I doubt how far one can make an aesthetic canon upon this foundation. It is so far true that an artist can out of a thing that is ugly, repellent, distorted create a form of aesthetic power, intensity, revelatory force. The murder of Duncan is certainly not an act of beauty, but Shakespeare can use it to make a great artistic masterpiece. But we cannot go so far as to say that the intensity of an ugly

thing makes it beautiful. It is the principle of a certain kind of modern caricature to make a face intensely ugly so as to bring out some side of the character more intensely by a hideous exaggeration of lines. In doing that it may be successful, but the intensity of the ugliness it creates does not make the caricature a thing of beauty; it serves its purpose, that is all. So too ugliness in painting must remain ugly, even if it gets out of itself a sense of vital force or expressiveness which makes it preferable in the eyes of some to real beauty. All that hits you in the midriff violently and gives you a sense of intense living is not necessarily a work of art or a thing of beauty. I am answering of course on the lines of your letter. I do not know what Tagore had precisely in view in thus defining beauty.

3. 11. 1936

SOURCES OF BEAUTY IN THE BODY

1

It is something vital in some cases, something psychic in others that gives a beauty which appears in the body that is not beauty of shape, colour or texture.

18. 10. 1935

2

If it is vital in its origin, it need not come from beauty of mind or character; it is something in the life-force which may go with a good character, but also with a bad one.

18. 10. 1935

MODESTY AND PHYSICAL BEAUTY

Modesty is not part of physical beauty, that is a mental-vital element. As for physical beauty different races have different conceptions. Indians and Europeans like curves, Chinese detest them in a woman.

18. 10. 1935

PORTRAIT PAINTING

1

The failure to bring out the personality is not at all due to any defect in the technique. With any technique the personality can be brought out. But to get it one must come out from one's own personality, one's ego with its characteristic and limited look on things, and identify oneself with the person of the sitter, — that is how one seizes it and can naturally bring it out in the painting.

14. 12. 1936

2

For that [bringing out the personality of the sitter] each one must find his own technique. Only for you what you must find is a way to express the psychic instead of the vital. At present it is the vital you bring out. The psychic is the eternal character, the vital brings out only transient movements.

15. 7. 1935

ART AND NATURE

1

Art cannot give what Nature gives; it gives something more.

20. 6. 1934

2

A painter can certainly bring home the aspects of the sea and the beauty of Nature, but he does it as an artist, in the way of Art. He does it by representation and suggestion, not by mere reproduction of the subject. The question of Art or Nature being more beautiful therefore does not arise.

16. 3. 1936

3

There is no incompatibility between the inspiration from within and the dependence on Nature. The essence of the inspiration always comes from within but the forms of expression are based on Nature though developed and modified by the selective or interpretative sight of the artist.

6. 9. 1933

A GOOD RULE FOR APPRECIATION

It is usually a good rule for other inward things beside the appreciation of the beauty of Nature — to keep it for oneself or else to share it only with those who have the same sense or the same experience.

15. 3. 1934

TO A YOUNG ARTIST

That is a great error of the human vital — to want compliments for their own sake and to be depressed by their absence and imagine that it means there is no capacity. In this world one starts with ignorance and imperfection in whatever one does — one has to find out one's mistakes and to learn, one has to commit errors and find out by correcting them the right way to do things. Nobody in the world has ever escaped from this law. So what one has to expect from others is not compliments all the time, but praise of what is right or well done and criticism of errors and mistakes. The more one can bear criticism and see one's mistakes, the more likely one is to arrive at the fullness of one's capacity. Especially when one is very young — before the age of maturity — one cannot easily do perfect work. What is called the juvenile work of poets and painters — work done in their early years — is always imperfect, it is a promise and has qualities but the real perfection and full use of their powers comes afterwards. They themselves know that very well, but they go

on writing or painting because they know also that by doing so they will develop their powers.

As for comparison with others, one ought not to do that. Each one has his own lesson to learn, his own work to do and he must concern himself with that, not with the superior or inferior progress of others in comparison with himself. If he is behind today, he can be in full capacity hereafter and it is for that future perfection of his powers that he must labour. You are young and have everything yet to learn — your capacities are yet only in bud, you must wait and work for them to be in full bloom — and you must not mind if it takes months and years even to arrive at something satisfying and perfect. It will come in its proper time, and the work you do now is always a step towards it.

But learn to welcome criticism and the pointing out of imperfections — the more you do so, the more rapidly you will advance.

1933



Section Nine

POETIC CREATION AND YOGA — UTILITY OF LITERATURE, ETC. IN SADHANA

READING AND POETIC CREATION AND YOGA

A literary man is one who loves literature and literary activities for their own separate sake. A Yogi who writes is not a literary man for he writes only what the inner Will and Word wants him to express. He is a channel and instrument of something greater than his own literary personality. Of course the literary man and the intellectual love reading — books are their mind's food. But writing is another matter. There are plenty of people who never write a word in the literary way but are enormous readers. One reads for ideas, for knowledge, for the stimulation of the mind by all that the world has thought or is thinking. I never read in order to create. As the Yoga increased, I read very little — for when all the ideas in the world come crowding in from within or from above, there is not much need for gathering mental food from outside sources; at most a utility for keeping oneself informed of what is happening in the world, — but not as material for building up one's vision of the world and Truth and things. One becomes an independent mind in communion with the cosmic Thinker.

Poetry, even perhaps all perfect expression of whatever kind, comes by inspiration, not by reading. Reading helps only to acquire for the instrument the full possession of a language or to get the technique of literary expression. Afterwards one develops one's own use of the language, one's own style, one's own technique. It is a decade or two that I have stopped all but the most casual reading but my power of poetic and perfect expression has increased tenfold. What I wrote with some difficulty, often with great difficulty, I now write with ease. I am supposed to be a philosopher, but I never studied philosophy — everything I wrote came from Yogic experience, knowledge and inspiration. So too my greater power over poetry and perfect expression was acquired in these last days not by reading and seeing how other people wrote, but from the heightening of my consciousness and the greater inspiration that came from the heightening.

Reading and painstaking labour are good for the literary man but even for him they are not the cause of his good

writing, only an aid to it. The cause is within himself. As to "natural", I don't know. Sometimes when the talent is inborn, and ready for expression, they can call it natural. Sometimes it awakes from within afterwards from a till then hidden nature.

11. 9. 1934

POETRY AND SADHANA

1

It is obvious that poetry cannot be a substitute for Sadhana; it can be an accompaniment only. If there is a feeling (of devotion, surrender etc.), it can express and confirm it; if there is an experience, it can express and strengthen the force of experience. As reading of books like the Upanishads or Gita or singing of devotional songs can help, especially at one stage or another, so this can help also. Also it opens a passage between the external consciousness and the inner mind or vital. But if one stops at that, then nothing much is gained. Sadhana must be the main thing and Sadhana means the purification of the nature, the consecration of the being, the opening of the psychic and the inner mind and vital, the contact and presence of the Divine, the realisation of the Divine in all things, surrender, devotion, the widening of the consciousness into the cosmic Consciousness, the Self one in all, the psychic and the spiritual transformation of the nature. If these things are neglected and only poetry and mental development and social contact occupy all the time, then that is not Sadhana. Also the poetry must be written in the true spirit, not for fame or self-satisfaction, but as a means of contact with the Divine through inspiration or of the expression of one's own inner being as it was written formerly by those who left behind them so much devotional and spiritual poetry in India; it does not help if it is written only in the spirit of the Western artist or *littérateur*. Even works or meditation cannot succeed unless they are done in the right spirit of consecration and spiritual aspiration gathering up the whole being and dominating all else. It is lack of this gathering up of the whole life and nature and

turning it towards the one aim, which is the defect in so many here that lowers the atmosphere and stands in the way of what is being done by myself and the Mother.

19. 5. 1938

2

To be a literary man is not a spiritual aim, but to use literature as a means of spiritual expression is another matter. Even to make expression a vehicle of a superior power helps to open the consciousness. The harmonising rests on that principle.

3

Every artist almost (there can be rare exceptions) has got something of the "public" man in him in his vital-physical parts, which makes him crave for the stimulus of an audience, social applause, satisfied vanity, appreciation, fame. That must go absolutely, if you want to be a Yogi, — your art must be a service not of your own ego, not of anyone or anything else but solely of the Divine.

4

There should be no "desire" to be a "great" writer. If there is a genuine inspiration or coming of power to write then it can be done, but to use it as a means of service for the Divine is the proper spirit.

14. 5. 1934

5

It is your aim to write from the Divine and for the Divine — you should then try to make all equally a pure transcription from the inner source and where the inspiration fails return upon your work so as to make the whole worthy of its origin and its object. All work done for the Divine, from poetry and art and music to carpentry or baking or sweeping a room, should be made perfect

even in its smallest external detail as well as in the spirit in which it is done; for only then is it an altogether fit offering.

11.11.1931

POETIC ACTIVITY AND YOGA

1

I have always told you that you ought not to stop your poetry and similar activities. It is a mistake to do so out of asceticism or *tapasyā*. One can stop these things when they drop of themselves because one is full of experience and so interested in one's inner life that one has no energy to spare for the rest. Even then, there is no rule for giving up, for there is no reason why poetry, etc., should not be a part of Sadhana. The love of applause, of fame, the ego-feeling have to be given up, but that can be done without giving up the activity itself.

What you write is perfectly true, that all human greatness and fame and achievement are nothing before the greatness of the Infinite and the Eternal. There are two possible deductions from that: first that all human action has to be renounced and one should go into a cave; the other is that one should grow out of ego so that the activities of the nature may become one day consciously an action of the Infinite and Eternal. I myself never gave up poetry or other creative human activities out of *tapasyā*; they fell into a subordinate position because the inner life became stronger and stronger slowly: nor did I really drop them, only I had so heavy a work laid upon me that I could not find time to go on. But it took me years and years to get the ego out of them or the vital absorption, but I never heard anybody say nor did it ever occur to me that that was a proof that I was not born for Yoga. You say I had made the mistake of my life in pronouncing you to be a "born Yogi"? I had not. I very explicitly based my remark on the personality that showed itself in your earlier experiences in a very vivid way which no one accustomed to the things of the Yoga or having any knowledge about them could fail to recognise. But I did not mean that there was nothing in

you which was foreign to a "born Yogi". Everyone has many personalities in him and many of them are not Yogic at all in their propensities. But if one has the will to Yoga, the "born Yogi" prevails as soon as he gets a chance of manifesting himself through the crust of the mind and vital nature. Only, very often that takes time. One must be prepared to give the time.

SILENCE AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY

It would be a mistake to silence the poetic flow on principle; the creative habit is a tonic to the vital and keeps it in good condition and the practice of Sadhana needs a strong and widening vital for its support. There is no real incompatibility between the creative power and silence; for the real silence is something inward and it does not or at least need not cease when a strong activity or expression rises to the surface.

CREATION BY THE WORD

The word is a sound expression of the idea. In the supra-physical plane when an idea has to be realised, one can by repeating the word-expression of it, produce vibrations which prepare the mind for the realisation of the idea. That is the principle of the Mantras and of Japa. One repeats the name of the Divine and the vibrations created in the consciousness prepare the realisation of the Divine. It is the same idea that is expressed in the Bible: "God said, Let there be Light, and there was Light". It is creation by the Word.

6. 5. 1933

INNER SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND THE GROWTH OF POETIC POWER

1

I do not think you need be anxious about the poetry; the power

is sure to re-express itself as soon as you are ready for a progress. It has probably stopped working temporarily because the pressure is now for the inner self-creation more than for the outer expression — I am speaking, of course, of your case in particular. The expression in poetry and other forms must be, for the Yogi, a flowing out from a growing self within and not merely a mental creation or an aesthetic pleasure. Like that the inner self grows and the poetic power will grow with it.

9. 12. 1931

2

It is not the question, for this is not a question of personal capacity but of the development of the receptivity and for that the sole thing necessary is an entire or at least a dominant will to receive. What you call your mind and your soul are only a small surface part of you, not your whole being. Personal capacity belongs to the temporary surface personality which you have put forward in this life and which is mutable, is already changing and can change much farther — e.g. the poems you are writing are certainly beyond what was your original capacity — they belong to a range of experience to the Word of which you have opened by a development beyond your old mental self — a farther development beyond not only your old mental self but also your old vital self is needed to get the concrete realisation of that range of experience.

What is standing in the way is something that is still attached to the limitations of the old personality and hesitates to take the plunge because by doing so it may lose these cherished limitations. It stands back in apprehension from the plunge because it is afraid of being taken out of its depths — but unless one is taken out of the very shallow depth of this small part of the self, how can one get into the Infinite at all? Furthermore, there is no real danger in finding oneself in the Infinite, it is a place of greater safety and greater riches, not less; but this something in you does not like the prospect because it has to merge itself into a larger self-existence. You asked the Mother to press on you the lighting of the fire within, and she has been doing so, but

this is standing back with the feeling, "Oh Lord! what will become of me if this flame gets lit." You must get rid of this clinging to the past self and life; then you can have a fire which will not be feeble. You have not fallen between two stools — you are hesitating between two consciousnesses, the old and the new, the small and the great; that is all.

As for the poetry, well — you have developed up to a point at which your work is of a very rare and unique quality in no way inferior to that of the others of whom you speak, — the difficulty of controlling production is nothing, for all feel that except X and Y who have no misgivings about their creative power. Yours rises probably from the fact that in order to have free command of the highest planes of poetry, you have to rise into them and not only open to the Word from them — it is therefore the same difficulty in another form. Otherwise if you had the old self-satisfaction of which you draw so glowing a picture, you would have found your present poetry marvellous and gone on writing it — only oscillating between the different planes achieved and content to do so. This is not a proof of incapacity but of the will to greater things. Only that will must not be in the mind only but take full hold of the vital also and must be a will that what you write of should be a part not only of thought but of life. Which comes back to what I have written above — get free from the obscure hesitation to open and let the fire do its work.

One must either do that if one wants a rapid change or go quietly and wait for the slower working from behind the veil to reduce and break the obstacle.

10. 8. 1937

INNER CHANGE AND ARTISTIC SELF-EXPRESSION

It is absurd to say that you have narrowed or deteriorated because one no longer sings erotic songs. One is not narrowed if one loses taste for jazz and can hear with a rich pleasure only the great masters or music of a high or exquisite quality. It is not deterioration when one rises from a lower to a higher plane of thinking, feeling or artistic self-expression. Can one say of the

man who has grown out of childishness and no longer plays with nursery toys that he has narrowed and deteriorated by the change?

27. 8. 1933

SPIRITUAL VALUE OF POETRY

1

It won't do to put excessive and sweeping constructions on what I write, otherwise it is easy to misunderstand its real significance. I said there was no reason why poetry of a spiritual character (not any poetry like Verlaine's or Swinburne's or Baudelaire's) should bring no realisation at all. This did not mean that poetry is a major means of realisation of the Divine. I did not say that it would lead us to the Divine or that anyone had achieved the Divine through poetry or that poetry by itself can lead us straight into the sanctuary. Obviously, if such exaggerations are put into my words, they become absurd and untenable.

My statement is perfectly clear and there is nothing in it against reason or common sense. The Word has power — even the ordinary written word has a power. If it is an inspired word it has still more power. What kind of power or power for what depends on the nature of the inspiration and the theme and the part of the being it touches. If it is the Word itself, — as in certain utterances of the great Scriptures, Veda, Upanishads, Gita, it may well have a power to awaken a spiritual and uplifting impulse, even certain kinds of realisation. To say that it cannot contradicts spiritual experience.

The Vedic poets regarded their poetry as Mantras, they were the vehicles of their own realisations and could become vehicles of realisation for others. Naturally, these mostly would be illuminations, not the settled and permanent realisation that is the goal of Yoga — but they could be steps on the way or at least lights on the way. I have had in former times many illuminations, even initial realisations while meditating on verses of the Upanishads or the Gita. Anything that carries the Word, the Light

in it, spoken or written, can light this fire within, open a sky, as it were, bring the effective vision of which the Word is the body. You yourself know that some of your poems deeply moved people who had the tendency towards spiritual things. Many have got openings into realisation while reading passages of the *Arya* — which are not poetry, have not the power of spiritual poetry — but it shows all the more that the word is not without power even for the things of the spirit. In all ages spiritual seekers have expressed their aspirations or their experiences in poetry or inspired language and it has helped them and others. Therefore there is nothing absurd in my assigning to such poetry a spiritual or psychic value and effectiveness of a psychic or spiritual character.

2

If poetic progress meant a progress in the whole range of Yoga, X would be a great Yogi by this time. The opening in poetry or any other part helps to prepare the general opening when it is done under the pressure of Yoga, but it is at first something special, like the opening of the subtle vision or subtle senses. It is the opening of a special capacity in the inner being.

8. 8. 1936

UTILITY OF LITERATURE, ETC. IN YOGA

1

Literature like anything else can be made an instrumentation for the Divine Life. It can be made of some spiritual importance if it is taken up with that aim and, even so, it cannot have that importance for everybody. In ordinary life no particular pursuit or study can be imposed as necessary for everybody; it cannot be positively necessary for everybody to have a mastery of English literature or to be a reader of poetry or a scientist or acquainted with all the sciences (or encyclopaedia of knowledge). What is important is to have an instrument of knowledge that will apply

itself accurately, calmly, perfectly to all that it has to handle.

2

Literature, poetry, science and other studies can be a preparation of the consciousness for life. When one does Yoga they can become part of the Sadhana only if done for the Divine or taken up by the divine Force, but then one should not want to be a poet for the sake of being a poet only, or for fame, applause, etc.

April, 1935

3

This poetry, even if it does not lead to any realisation, — though there is no reason why it should not, since it is not mundane, — is yet a link with the inner being and expresses its ideal. That is its value for the Sadhana.

28. 12. 1934

4

The use of your writing is to keep you in touch with the inner source of inspiration and intuition so as to wear thin the crude *external* crust in the consciousness and encourage the growth of the inner being.

24. 7. 1938

5

No present value spiritually — it [writing work] may have a mental value. It is the same with the work — it has a value of moral training, discipline, obedience, acceptance of work for the Mother. The spiritual value and result come afterwards when the consciousness in the vital opens upward. So with the mental work. It is a preparation. If you cannot yet do it with the true spiritual consciousness, it, the work as well as the mental occupation, must be done with the right mental or vital will in it.

14. 5. 1934

LITERATURE AND CHANGE OF NATURE

Good heavens! where did you get this idea that literature can transform people? Literary people are often the most impossible on the face of the earth.... Outer human nature can only change either by an intense psychic development or a strong and all-pervading influence from above. It is the inner being that has to change first — a change which is not always visible outside. That has nothing to do with the development of the faculties which is another side of the personality. That is another question altogether. But such Sadhana means a slow laborious work of self-change in most cases, so why not sing on the way?

DEVELOPMENT OF MIND AND SADHANA

The development of the mind is a useful preliminary for the Sadhak; it can also be pursued along with the Sadhana on condition that it is not given too big a place and does not interfere with the one important thing, the Sadhana itself.

1933

READING AND REAL KNOWLEDGE

Yes, the real knowledge comes of itself from within by the touch of the Divine. Reading can be only a momentary help to prepare the mind. But the real knowledge does not come by reading. Some preparation for the inner knowledge may be helpful — but the mind should not be too superficially active or seek to know only for curiosity's sake.

NOVEL-READING IN SADHANA

1

Reading novels is always distracting if you are deep in Sadhana. It is better to avoid it now.

1933

2

If novels touch the lower vital or raise it, they ought not to be read by the Sadhak. One can read them only if one can look at them from the literary point of view as a picture of human life and nature which one can observe, as the Yogi looks at life itself, without being involved in it or having any reaction.

28. 3. 1936

Section Ten

POETS — MYSTICS — INTELLECTUALS

THE POET, THE YOGI AND THE RISHI

1

It is quite natural for the poets to vaunt their *métier* as the highest reach of human capacity and themselves as the top of creation, it is also natural for the intellectuals to run down the Yogi or the Rishi who claims to reach a higher consciousness than that which they conceive to be the summit of human achievement. The poet lives still in the mind and is not yet a spiritual seer, but he represents to the human intellect the highest point of mental seership where the imagination tries to figure and embody in words its intuition of things, though that stands far below the vision of things that can be grasped only by spiritual experience. It is for that that the poet is exalted as the real seer and prophet. There is too, helping the idea, the error of the modern or European mentality which so easily confuses the mentalised vital or life being with the soul and the idealising mind with spirituality. The poet imaging mental or physical beauty is for the outer mind something more spiritual than the seer or the God-lover experiencing the eternal peace or the ineffable ecstasy. Yet the Rishi or Yogi can drink of a deeper draught of Beauty and Delight than the imagination of the poet at its highest can conceive. The Divine is Delight and it is not only the unseen Beauty that he can see but the visible and the tangible also has for him a face of the All-beautiful which the mind cannot discover.

10. 11. 1934

2

Poetic intuition and illumination is not the same thing as Rishi's intuition and illumination.

11. 2. 1936

3

A Rishi is one who *sees* or discovers an inner truth and puts it into self-effective language — the *mantra.* Either new truth or old truth made new by expression and realisation.

He [R. M.] has expressed certain eternal truths by process of Yoga — I don't think it is by Rishi-like intuition or illumination nor has he the *mantra.*

A Rishi may be a Yogi, but also he may not; a Yogi too may be a Rishi, but also he may not. Just as a philosopher may or may not be a poet, and a poet may or may not be a philosopher.

11. 2. 1936

THE POET AND THE PROPHET

Evidently the poet's value lies in his poetic and not in his prophetic power. If he is a prophet also, the intrinsic worth of his prophecy lies in its own value, his poetic merit does not add to that, only it gives to its expression a power that perhaps it would not have otherwise.

GENIUS AND YOGA

I never heard of anyone getting genius by effort. One can increase one's talent by training and labour, but genius is a gift of Nature. By Sadhana it is different, one can do it; but that is not the fruit of effort, but either of an inflow or by an opening or liberation of some impersonal power or manifestation of unmanifested power. No rule can be made of such things; it depends on persons and circumstances how far the manifestation of genius by Yoga will go or what shape it will take or to what degree or height it will rise.

28. 7. 1938

POETIC GENIUS AND YOGA

1

For poetry one must have a special inspiration or genius. With literary capacity one can write good verse only.

Genius usually means an inborn power which develops of itself. Talent and capacity are not genius, they can be acquired.

But that is the ordinary rule, by Yoga one can manifest what is concealed in the being.

22. 9. 1934

2

No poet feels his poetry as a "normal phenomenon" — he feels it as an inspiration — of course anybody could "make" poetry by learning the rules of prosody and a little practice. In fact many people write verse, but the poets are few. Who are the ordinary poets? There is no such thing as an ordinary poet.

30. 5. 1937

3

A born poet is usually a genius, poetry with any power or beauty in it implies genius.

Richness of image is not the whole of poetry. There are many born poets who avoid too much richness of image. There are certain fields of consciousness which express themselves naturally through image most — there are others that do it more through idea and feeling.

13. 2. 1936

4

Poetic genius — without which there cannot be any originality — is born, but it takes time to come out; the first work even of great poets is often not original. That is in ordinary life. In Yoga poetic originality can come by an opening from within, even if it was not there before in such a way as to be available in this life.

22. 3. 1934

5

You must remember that you are not a "born" poet — you are trying to bring out something from the Unmanifest inside you. You can't demand that that should be an easy job. It may come

out suddenly and without apparent reason like the Ananda — but you can't demand it.

8. 6. 1934

6

What you say about the spontaneous development of the capacity in the metre after a silent and inactive incubation of over two years is quite true. But it is not amazing; it often happens and is perfectly natural to those who know the laws of the being by observation and experience. In the same way one suddenly finds oneself knowing more of a language or a subject after returning to it subsequent to a short interim without study, problems which had been abandoned as unsolvable solving themselves spontaneously and easily after sleep or when they are taken up again; knowledge or ideas coming up from within without reading or learning or hearing from others. Sudden efflorescences of capacity, intuitions, wellings up of all sorts of things point to the same inner power or inner working. It is what we mean when we speak of the word, knowledge or activity coming out of the silence, of a working behind the veil of which the outer mind is unconscious but which one day bears its results, of the inner manifesting itself in the outer. It makes at once true and practical what sounds only a theory to the uninitiated, — the strong distinction made by us between the inner being and the outer consciousness. It is how also unexpected Yogic capacity reveals itself, sometimes no doubt as a result of long and apparently fruitless effort, sometimes as a spontaneous out-flowering of what was concealed there all the time or else as a response to a call which had been made but at the time and for long seemed to be without an answer.

22. 2. 1935

CLASSIFICATION OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST POETS

1

I suppose all the names you mention can be included among the

world's supreme singers; or if you like you can put them all in three rows — e.g.:
First row — Homer, Shakespeare, Valmiki.
Second row — Dante, Kalidasa, Aeschylus, Virgil, Milton.
Third row — Goethe.
And there you are! To speak less flippantly, the first three have at once supreme imaginative originality, supreme poetic gift, widest scope and supreme creative genius. Each is a sort of poetic demiurge who has created a world of his own. Dante's triple world beyond is more constructed by the poetic seeing mind than by this kind of elemental demiurgic power — otherwise he would rank by their side; the same with Kalidasa. Aeschylus is a seer and creator but on a much smaller scale. Virgil and Milton have a less spontaneous breath of creative genius; one or two typal figures excepted, they live rather by what they have said than by what they have made.

31. 3. 1932

2

I am not prepared to classify all the poets in the universe — it was the front bench or benches you asked for. By "others" I meant poets like Lucretius, Euripides, Calderon, Corneille, Hugo. Euripides (*Medea*, *Bacchae* and other plays) is a greater poet than Racine whom you want to put in the first rank. If you want only the very greatest, none of these can enter — only Vyasa and Sophocles. Vyasa could very well claim a place beside Valmiki, Sophocles beside Aeschylus. The rest, if you like, you can send to the third row, but it is something of a promotion about which one can feel some qualms. Spenser too, if you like; it is difficult to draw a line.

Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth have not been brought into consideration although their best work is as fine poetry as any written, but they have written nothing on a larger scale which would place them among the greatest creators. If Keats had finished *Hyperion* (without spoiling it), if Shelley had lived, or if Wordsworth had not petered out like a motor car with insufficient petrol, it might be different, but we have to take

things as they are. As it is, all began magnificently, but none of them finished, and what work they did, except a few lyrics, sonnets, short pieces and narratives, is often flawed and unequal. If they had to be admitted, what about at least fifty others in Europe and Asia?

The critical opinions you quote[1] are, many of them, flagrantly prejudiced and personal. The only thing that results from Aldous Huxley's opinion, shared by many but with less courage, is that Spenser's melodiousness cloyed upon Aldous Huxley and that perhaps points to a serious defect somewhere in Spenser's art or in his genius but this does not cancel the poetic value of Spenser. Swinburne and Arnold are equally unbalanced on either side of their see-saw about Hugo. He might be described as a great but imperfect genius, who just missed the very first rank because his word sometimes exceeded his weight, because his height was at the best considerable, even magnificent, but his depth insufficient and especially because he was often too oratorical to be quite sincere. The remarks of Voltaire and Mark Pattison go into the same basket.

2.4.1932

GOETHE AND SHAKESPEARE; HOMER, VYASA AND VALMIKI

Yes, Goethe goes much deeper than Shakespeare; he had an incomparably greater intellect than the English poet and sounded problems of life and thought Shakespeare had no means of approaching even. But he was certainly not a greater poet; I do not

[1] A had asked: "Saintsbury as good as declares that poetry is Shelley and Shelley poetry — Spenser alone, to his mind, can contest the right to that equation. (Shakespeare, of course, is admittedly *hors concours*.) Aldous Huxley abominates Spenser; the fellow has got nothing to say and says it with a consummately cloying melodiousness! Swinburne, as is well known, could never think of Victor Hugo without bursting into half a dozen alliterative superlatives, while Matthew Arnold it was, I believe, who pitied Hugo for imagining that poetry consisted in using 'divinité, 'éternité', 'infinité', as lavishly as possible. And then there is Keats, whose *Hyperion* compelled even the sneering Byron to forget his usual condescending attitude towards 'Johnny' and confess that nothing grander had been seen since Aeschylus. Racine, too, cannot be left out — can he? Voltaire adored him, Voltaire who called Shakespeare a drunken barbarian. Finally, what of Wordsworth, whose Immortality Ode was hailed by Mark Pattison as the *ne plus ultra* of English poetry since the days of *Lycidas*?

"Kindly shed the light of infallible *viveka* on this chaos of jostling opinions."

find myself very ready to admit either that he was Shakespeare's equal. He wrote out of a high poetic intelligence, but his style and movement nowhere came near the poetic power, the magic, the sovereign expression and profound or subtle rhythms of Shakespeare. Shakespeare was a supreme poet and one might almost say, nothing else; Goethe was by far the greater man and the greater brain, but he was a poet by choice, his mind's choice among its many high and effulgent possibilities, rather than by the very necessity of his being. He wrote his poetry as he did everything else with a great skill and an inspired subtlety of language, and effective genius but it was only part of his genius and not the whole. There is too a touch mostly wanting — the touch of an absolute, an intensely inspired or revealing inevitability; few quite supreme poets have that in abundance, in others it comes by occasional jets or flashes.

When I said there were no greater poets than Homer and Shakespeare, I was thinking of their essential force and beauty — not of the scope of their work as a whole; for there are poets greater in their range. The Mahabharata is from that point of view a far greater creation than the Iliad, the Ramayana than the Odyssey, and spread, either and both of them, their strength and their achievement over a larger field than the whole dramatic world of Shakespeare; both are built on an almost cosmic vastness of plan and take all human life (the Mahabharata all human thought as well) in their scope and touch too on things which the Greek and Elizabethan poets could not even glimpse. But as poets — as masters of rhythm and language and the expression of poetic beauty — Vyasa and Valmiki though not inferior, are not greater than either the English or the Greek poet. We leave aside for the moment the question whether the Mahabharata was not the creation of the mind of a people rather than of a single poet, for that doubt has been raised also with regard to Homer.

VIRGIL'S POETRY

I don't at all agree that Virgil's verse fills one with the sense of the Unknown Country — he is not in the least a mystic poet, he was

too Latin and Roman for that. Majestic sadness, word-magic and vision need not have anything to do with the psychic; the first can come from the Higher Mind and the noble parts of the Vital, *the others from almost* anywhere. I do not mean to say there was no psychic touch at all anywhere in Virgil. And what is this Unknown Country? There are plenty of Unknown Countries (other than the psychic world) to which many poets give us some kind of access or sense of their existence behind, much more than Virgil. But if when you say verse you mean his rhythm, his surge of word-music, that does no doubt come from somewhere else, much more than the thoughts or the words that are carried on the surge.

31.3.1932

DANTE AND MILTON

I don't think either can be called a mystic poet — Milton not at all. A religious fervour or a metaphysical background belongs to the mind and vital, not to a mystic consciousness. Dante writes from the poetic intelligence with a strong intuitive drive behind it.

18.10.1936

IMPORTANCE OF THE POWER OF POETIC EXPRESSION

All depends on the power of expression of the poet. A poet like Shakespeare or Shelley or Wordsworth though without spiritual experience may in an inspired moment become the medium of an expression of spiritual Truth which is beyond him and the expression, as it is not that of his own mind, may be very powerful and living, not merely aesthetically agreeable. On the other hand a poet with spiritual experience may be hampered by his medium or by his transcribing brain or by an insufficient mastery of language and rhythm and give an expression which may mean much to him but not convey the power and breath of it to others. The English poets of the 17th century often used a too intellectual mode of expression for their poetry to be a means of living communication to others, except in rare moments of an unusual

vision and inspiration; it is these that give their work its value.

8. 7. 1935

WORDSWORTH'S REALISATION

I am rather astonished at your finding Wordsworth's realisation, however mental and incomplete, to be abstract and vague or dictated by emotional effervescence. Wordsworth's was hardly an emotional or effervescent character. As for an abstract realisation, it sounds like a round square; I have never had one myself and find it difficult to believe in it. But certainly a realisation in its beginning can be vague and nebulous or it can be less or more vivid. Still, Wordsworth did not make that impression on me and to him it certainly seemed as something positive, wonderfully luminous, direct, powerful and determinative. He stayed there and went no farther, did not get to the source, because more was hardly possible in his time and surroundings, at least to a man of his moral and intellectual temper. In a more deep and spiritual sense a concrete realisation is that which makes the thing realised more real, dynamic, intimately present to the consciousness than any physical thing can be. Such a concrete spiritual realisation whether of the personal Divine or of the impersonal Brahman or of the Self does not, except in rare cases, come at or anywhere near the beginning of a Sadhana, in the first years or for many years: one has to go deep to get it and deeper to keep it. But a vivid and very personal sense of a spirit or infinite in Nature can very well come in a flash and remain strongly behind a man's outlook on the universe.

WORDSWORTH AND KEATS

One can't make rigid rules like that. Wordsworth is as simple and direct as possible, (not always though), Keats aims at word magic. One can't say Wordsworth is a greater poet than Keats. Whatever style is poetically successful, is advisable.

21. 12. 1935

SHELLEY'S "SKYLARK" — IMPERFECTIONS OF GREAT POETS — ESSENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SHELLEY'S POETRY

I objected to your criticisms and cutting up of Shelley's *Skylark*, because the whole of it seems to me to proceed from a wrong starting-point altogether. You seem to start with the assumption that the poem ought to be an intellectual whole with coherent parts, a logical structure. Your contention is that the main idea, consistent in other stanzas, is of a spiritual something, an incorporeal joy, and the stanzas you condemn as not consistent with the idea and tone of the rest come from an inferior less spiritual inspiration and lower the level of the poem. Accordingly, you propose to cut out these excrescences and insert some manipulations which would make the amended whole the perfect poem the *Skylark* should be.

I do not deny that from that standpoint your deductions are logical. The poem arranged as you want it, without these too earthly verses, would be a single ethereal impalpable shining tissue. It would be more subtly ethereal (not more spiritual), far from the earth, winging between the rainbow and the lightnings and ignorant of anything less brilliant and unearthly. Only it would be Shelley with something of himself left out, the *Skylark* incomplete with part of its fullness of tone vanished and a big hole in the middle — a beautiful poem, but no longer so worthy of its place among the few supreme English lyrics. That at least is what I feel. One thing more — even if these stanzas are an imperfection, I do not think it wise to meddle with them either by elimination or re-doing. To interfere with the imperfections of the great poets of the past is a hazardous business — their imperfections as well as their perfections are part of themselves. Imagine a drama of Shakespeare with all the blots scratched out and all the scoriae done over and smoothed to a perfect polish! It would be Shakespeare no longer. And this is Shelley whose strange and sweet and luminous magic of lyrical rhythm and language, when he is at his best and here he is at his best, in the impugned stanzas as well as in the others, is his own secret and no other shall ever recover it. To meddle here is substantially to mar. Things as great or greater in another kind may

be done, but not with this unique and inevitable note. To omit, to change words or lines, to modify rhythms seems to me inadmissible.[1]

I do not altogether appreciate your references to Mrs. Shelley and the firefly and your cynical and sarcastic picture of the "high-born maiden" as she appears to you — all that has nothing to do with Shelley's poetic conception which is alone relevant to the matter. I could draw a realistic picture of the poet "singing hymns unbidden" and unwanted and asking occasionally as he wrote whether dinner was ready — with hopes, but also with fears that he might not get it, his butcher's bill being unpaid for a long time. Or I might cavil scientifically about the nature of sunset and sunrise and rainbow drops and ask what was the use of all this romantic flummery when there are real things to write about. Or I might quote the critic — I don't remember who he was — who said that Shelley certainly did not believe that the skylark was a spirit and not a bird and so the whole conception of the poem is false, insincere, ethereal humbug and therefore not true poetry because poetry must be sincere. Such points of view are irrelevant. Shelley is not concerned with the real life of the high-born maiden or the poet any more than with the ornithology of the skylark or with other material things. His glow-worm is something more than a material glow-worm. He is concerned with the soul love-laden, with the dreams of the poet, with the soul of beauty behind the glow-worm's light and the colour and fragrance of the rose. It is that he is feeling and it is linked in his vision with the essential something he has felt behind the song of the skylark. And because he so felt it he was not only entitled but bound to make place for it in his inspired lyrical theme.

I may observe in passing that the ethereal and impalpable are not more spiritual than the tangible and the concrete — they may seem more easily subtle and ideal to the idealising and abstracting mind, but that is a different affair. One can feel the spiritual through the embodied and concrete as well as through its opposite. But Shelley was not a spiritual poet and the *Skylark*

[1] The result is bound to be like Landor's rewriting of Milton — very good Landor but very bad Milton.

is not a spiritual lyric. Shelley looked, it is true, always towards the light, towards a beauty, a truth behind the appearance of things, but he never got through the idealising mind to the spiritual experience. What he did get was something of the purest emotional or aesthetic feeling or purest subtle mind-touch of an essence behind the appearance, an essence of ideal light, truth or beauty. It is that he expresses with a strange aerial magic or a curious supersensuously sensuous intensity in his finest lyrics. It is that we must seek in the *Skylark* and, if we find it, we have no right to claim anything else. It is there all through and in abundance — it is its perfection that creates the sustained perfection of the poem. There is not and there ought not to be an intellectual sequence, a linked argument, a logical structure. It is a sequence of feeling and of ideal perceptions with an occult logic of their own that sustains the lyric and makes it a faultless whole. In this sequence the verses you condemn have an indefeasible right of place. Shelley was not only a poet of other worlds, of *Epipsychidion* and of *The Witch of Atlas*; he was passionately interested in bringing the light, beauty and truth of the ideal super-world from which he came into the earth life — he tried to find it there wherever he could, he tried to infuse it wherever he missed it. The mental, the vital, the physical cannot be left out of the whole he saw in order to yield place only to the ethereal and impalpable. As he heard the skylark and felt the subtle essence of light and beauty in its song, he felt too the call of the same essence of light and beauty elsewhere and it is the things behind which he felt it that he compares to the hymn of the skylark — the essence of ideal light and beauty behind things mental, the poet and his hymns, behind things vital, the soul of romantic love, behind things physical, the light of the glow-worm, the passionate intensity of the perfume of the rose. I cannot see an ordinary glow-worm in the lines of Shelley's stanza — it is a light from beyond finding expression in that glimmer and illumining the dell of dew and the secrecy of flowers and grass that is there. This illumination of the earthly mind, vital, physical with his super-world light is a main part of Shelley; excise that and the whole of Shelley is not there, there is only the ineffectual angel beating his wings in the void; excise it from the *Skylark*

and the true whole of the *Skylark* is no longer there.

8. 11. 1934

DRAMATIC GENIUS OF ROMANTIC POETS

I don't believe Keats had any dramatic genius in him. None of these [romantic] poets had. Shelley's *Cenci* is a remarkable feat of dramatic construction and poetic imagination but it has no organic life like the work of the Elizabethans or the Greeks or like such dramas as the *Cid* or Racine's tragedies.

7. 2. 1935

BLAKE

1

Blake stands out among the mystic poets of Europe. His occasional obscurity, — he is more often in his best poems lucid and crystal clear, — is due to his writing of things that are not familiar to the physical mind and writing them with fidelity instead of accommodating them to the latter.... In reading such writing the inner being has to feel first, then only the mind can catch what is behind.

2

I did not mean that he never altered — I don't know about that. I meant he did not let his mind disfigure what came by trying to make it intellectual. He transcribed what he saw and heard.

BLAKE AND MALLARME

Blake is Europe's greatest mystic poet and Mallarmé 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.

MALLARME

1

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.

2

[Re unintelligibility of Mallarmé's works:] 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?

3

His 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.... Not only that — his will to arrive at a true and deep, instead of a superficial and intellectual language. I gave two reasons for Mallarmé'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.

4

It[1] is one of the finest sonnets I have ever read. Magnificent line,

[1] *Le Cygne* by Mallarmé.

by the way, "*Le transparent glacier des vols 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 know what you mean by emotion. If you mean the surface vital joy and grief of outer life, these poems of Mallarmé 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.[1] 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 Mallarmé 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 Mallarmé.

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.

[1] *Le Cygne* and *Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poë* by Mallarmé.

* Poems by Sri Aurobindo. See *Collected Poems* (Centenary Edition, 1972).

5

If these two[1] magnificent sonnets...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 Mallarmé was the creator of symbolism.

YEATS AND A.E.

Yes, simplicity is always a sound basis for poetic style. Even if one has to be complex, subtle or ornate by necessity of the inspiration, the basic habit of simplicity gives a greater note of genuineness and power to it.

I do not think I have been unduly enthusiastic over Yeats, but one must recognise his great artistry in language and verse in which he is far superior to A.E. — just as A.E. as a man and a seer was far superior to Yeats. Yeats never got beyond a beautiful mid-world of the vital *antarikṣa,* he has not penetrated beyond to spiritual-mental heights as A.E. did. But all the same, when one speaks of poetry, it is the poetical element to which one must give the most importance. What Yeats expressed, he expressed with great poetical beauty, perfection and power and he has, besides, a creative imagination. A.E. had an unequal profundity of vision and power and range in the spiritual and psychic field. A.E.'s thought and way of seeing and saying things is much more sympathetic to me than Yeats' who only touches a brilliant floating skirt-edge of the truth of things — but I cannot allow that to influence me when I have to judge of the poetic side of their respective achievements.... The depths of A.E. are greater than those of Yeats, assuredly. His suggestiveness must therefore be profounder. In this poem[2] which you have translated very beautifully, his power of expression, always penetrating, simple and direct, is at its best and his best can be miraculously perfect.

[1] *Le Cygne* and *Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poë* by Mallarmé.

[2] *Sibyl* by A.E.

Of course when you are writing poems or composing you are in contact with your inner being, that is why you feel so different then. The whole art of Yoga is to get that contact and to get from it into the inner being itself, for so one can enter directly into and remain in all that is great and luminous and beautiful. Then one can try to establish them in this troublesome and defective outer shell of oneself and in the outer world also.

August, 1934

YEATS AND THE OCCULT

1

It is certainly a very beautiful passage[1] and has obviously a mystic significance; but I don't know whether we can put into it such

[1] *Dectora*: No. Take this sword
And cut the rope, for I go on with Forgael....

The sword is in the rope —
The rope's in two — it falls into the sea,
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,
You are broken, you are broken. The world drifts away,
And I am left alone with my beloved,
Who cannot put me from his sight for ever.
We are alone for ever, and I laugh,
Forgael, because you cannot put me from you.
The mist has covered the heavens, and you and I
Shall be alone for ever. We two — this crown —
I half remember. It has been in my dreams.
Bend lower, O king, that I may crown you with it.
O flower of the branch, O bird among the leaves,
O silver fish that my two hands have taken
Out of the running stream, O morning star,
Trembling in the blue heavens like a white fawn
Upon the misty border of the wood,
Bend lower, that I may cover you with my hair,
For we will gaze upon this world no longer.

Forgael (*gathering Dectora's hair about him*):
Beloved, having dragged the net about us,
And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal;
And that old harp awakens of itself
To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,
That have had dreams for father, live in us.

— Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters.*

precise meaning as you suggest. Yeats' contact, unlike A. E.'s, is not so much with the sheer spiritual Truth as with the hidden intermediate regions, from the faery worlds to certain worlds of larger mind and life. What he has seen there, he is able to clothe rather than embody in strangely beautiful and suggestive forms, dreams and symbols. I have read some of his poems which touch these behind-worlds with as much actuality as an ordinary poet would achieve in dealing with physical life, — this is not surprising in a Celtic poet, for the race has the key to the occult worlds or some of them at least, — but this strange force of suggestive mystic life is not accompanied by a mental precision which would enable us to say, it is this or that his figures symbolise. If we could say it, it might take away something of that glowing air in which his symbols stand out with such a strange unphysical reality. The perception, feeling, sight of Yeats in this kind of poetry are remarkable, but his mental conception often veils itself in a shimmering light — it has then shining vistas but no strong contours.

1.9.1932

2

The perfection here of Yeats' poetic expression of things occult is due to this that at no point has the mere intellectual or thinking mind interfered — it is a piece of pure vision, a direct sense, almost sensation of the occult, a light not of earth flowing through without anything to stop it or to change it into a product of the terrestrial mind. When one writes from pure occult vision there is this perfection and direct sense though it may be of different kinds, for the occult world of one is not that of another. But when there is the intervention of the intellectual mind in a poem this intervention may produce good lines of another power, but will not coincide in tone with what is before them or after — there is an alternation of the subtler occult and the heavier intellectual notes and the purity of vision becomes blurred by the intrusion of the earth-mind into a seeing which is beyond our earth-nature.

But these observations are valid only if the object is, as in Yeats' lines, to bring out a veridical and flawless transcript of

the vision and atmosphere of faeryland. If the object is rather to create symbol-links between the seen and the unseen and convey the significance of the mediating figures, there is no obligation to avoid the aid of the intellectualising note. Only, a harmony and fusion has to be effected between the two elements, the light and beauty of the beyond and the less remote power and interpretative force of the intellectual thought-links. Yeats does that too, very often, but he does it by bathing his thought also in the faery light; in the lines quoted[1] however, he does not do that, but leaves the images of the other world shimmering in their own native hue of mystery. There is not the same beauty and intense atmosphere when a poem is made up of alternating notes. The finest lines of these poems are those in which the other-light breaks out most fully — but there are others also which are very fine too in their quality and execution.

D. H. LAWRENCE

1

I have not read anything of Lawrence, but I have recently seen indications about him from many quarters; the impression given was that of a man of gifts who failed for want of vital balance like so many others. The prose you have turned into verse — very well, as usual — has certainly quality, though there is not enough to form a definite judgment. A seeker who missed the issue, I should imagine — misled by the vitalistic stress to which the mind of today is a very harassed captive.

2

Lawrence had the psychic push inside towards the Unknown and Beyond at the same time as a push towards the vital life which came in its way. He was trying to find his way between the two and mixed them up together till at the end he got his mental liberation from the tangle though not yet any clear

[1] From *The Stolen Child* and *The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland.*

knowledge of the way — for that, I suppose, he will have to be born nearer the East or in any case in surroundings which will enable him to get at the Light.

9. 7. 1936

D. H. LAWRENCE AND MODERN POETRY

1

I suppose Lawrence was a Yogi who had missed his way and come into a European body to work out his difficulties. "To lapse back into darkness and unknowing" sounds like the Christian mystic's passage into the "night of God", but I think Lawrence thought of a new efflorescence from the subconscient while the mystic's "night of God" was a stage between ordinary consciousness and the Superconscient Light.

The passage you have quoted certainly shows that Lawrence had an idea of the new spiritual birth. What he has written there could be a very accurate indication of the process of the change, the putting away of the old mind, vital, physical consciousness and the emergence of a new consciousness from the now invisible Within, not an illusory periphery like the present mental, vital, physical ignorance but a truth-becoming from the true being within us. He speaks of the transition as a darkness created by the rejection of the outer mental light, a darkness intervening before the true light from the Invisible can come. Certain Christian mystics have said the same thing and the Upanishad also speaks of the luminous Being beyond the darkness. But in India the rejection of the mental light, the vital stir, the physical hard narrow concreteness leads more often not to a darkness but to a wide emptiness and silence which begins afterwards to fill with the light of a deeper, greater, truer consciousness, a consciousness full of peace, harmony, joy and freedom. I think Lawrence was held back from realising because he was seeking for the new birth in the subconscient vital and taking that for the Invisible Within — he mistook Life for Spirit, whereas Life can only be an expression of the Spirit. That too perhaps was the

reason for his preoccupation with a vain and baffled sexuality.

His appreciation of the Ajanta paintings must have been due to the same drive that made him seek for a new poetry as well as a new truth from within. He wanted to get rid of the outward forms that for him hide the Invisible and arrive at something that would express with bare simplicity and directness some reality within. It is what made people begin to prefer the primitives to the developed art of the Renaissance. That is why he depreciates Botticelli as not giving the real thing, but only an outward grace and beauty which he considers vulgar in comparison with the less formal art of old that was satisfied with bringing out the pure emotion from within and nothing else. It is the same thing which makes him want a 'stark bare rocky directness for modern poetry.

To continue about Lawrence's poetry from where I stopped. The idea is to get rid of all over-expression, of language for the sake of language, or form for the sake of form, even of indulgence of poetic emotion for the sake of the emotion, because all that veils the thing in itself, dresses it up, prevents it from coming out in the seizing nudity of its truth, the power of its intrinsic appeal. There is a sort of mysticism here that wants to express the inexpressible, the concealed, the invisible. Reduce expression to its barest bareness and you get nearer the inexpressible; suppress as much of the form as may be and you get nearer that behind, which is invisible. It is the same impulse that pervaded recent endeavours in Art. Form hides, not expresses the reality; let us suppress the concealing form and express the reality by its appropriate geometrical figures — and you have cubism. Or since that is too much, suppress exactitude of form and replace it by more significant forms that indicate rather than conceal the truth — so you have "abstract" paintings. Or, what is within reveals itself in dreams, not in waking phenomena, let us have in poetry or painting the figures, visions, sequences, designs of Dream — and you have surrealist art and poetry. The idea of Lawrence is akin: let us get rid of rhyme, metre, artifices which please us for their own sake and draw us away from the thing in itself, the real behind the form. So suppressing these things let us have something bare, rocky, primally expressive. There is

nothing to find fault with in the theory provided it does lead to a new creation which expresses the inner truth in things better and more vividly and directly than with its rhyme and metre the old poetry, now condemned as artificial and rhetorical, succeeded in expressing it. But the results do not come up to expectation. Take the four lines of Lawrence[1]: in what do they differ from the old poetry except in having a less sure rhythmical movement, a less seizing perfection of language? It is a fine image and Keats or Thompson would have made out of it something unforgettable. But after reading these lines one has a difficulty in recalling any clear outline of image, any seizing expression, any rhythmic cadence that goes on reverberating within and preserves the vision forever. What the modernist metreless verse does is to catch up the movements of prose and try to fit them into varying lengths and variously arranged lengths of verse. Sometimes something which has its own beauty or power is done — though nothing better or even equal to the best that was done before, but for the most there is either an easy or a strained ineffectiveness. No footsteps hitting the earth? Footsteps on earth can be a walk, can be prose; the beats of poetry can, on the contrary, be a beat of wings. As for the bird image, well, there is more lapsing than flying in this movement. But where is the bareness, the rocky directness — where is the something more real than any play of outer form can give? The attempt at colour, image, expression is just the same as in the old poetry — whatever is new and deep comes from Lawrence's peculiar vision, but could have been more powerfully expressed in a closer-knit language and metre.

Of course, it does not follow that new and free forms are not to be attempted or that they cannot succeed at all. But if they succeed it will be by bringing the fundamental quality, power, movement of the old poetry — which is the eternal quality of all poetry — into new metrical or rhythmical discoveries and new secrets of poetic expression. It cannot be done by reducing these

[1] Just a few of the roses gathered by the Isar
Are fallen, and their blood-red petals on the cloth
Float like boats on a river, waiting
For a fairy wind to wake them from their sloth.

to skeletonic bareness or suppressing them by subdual and dilution in a vain attempt to unite the free looseness of prose with the gathered and intent paces of poetry.

29. 6. 1936

2

What I have written about modern poetry is too slight and passing and general a comment, such as one can hazard in a private letter; but for a criticism that has to see the light of day something more ample and sufficient would be necessary. Lawrence's poetry, whatever one may think of his theory or technique, has too much importance and significance to be lightly handled and the modernism of contemporary poetry is a *fait accompli*. One can refuse to recognise or legitimatise the *fait accompli*, whether in Abyssinia or in the realms of literature, but it is too solid to be met with a mere condemnation in principle.

Apropos, the other day I opened Lawrence's *Pansies* once more at random and found this:

I can't stand Willy Wet-leg
Can't stand him at any price.
He's resigned and when you hit him
He lets you hit him twice.

Well, well, this is the bare, rocky, direct poetry? God help us! This is the sort of thing to which theories lead even a man of genius.

D. H. LAWRENCE — HUMAN EGO-CENTRICITY — ATTITUDE TOWARDS HUMAN DEFECTS

I must read Huxley's preface[1] and glance at some letters before venturing on any comments — like the reviewers who frisk about, a page here and a page there, and then write an ample or

[1] To the book, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, edited by Aldous Huxley.

devastating review. Anyhow it seems to me Lawrence must have been a difficult man to live with, even for him it must have been difficult to live with himself. His photograph confirms that view. But a man at war with himself can write excellent poetry — if he is a poet; often better poetry than another, just as Shakespeare wrote his best tragedies when he was in a state of chaotic upheaval; at least so his interpreters say. But one needs a higher and more calm and poised inspiration to write poems of harmony and divine balance than any Lawrence ever had. I stick to my idea of the evil influence of theories on a man of genius. If he had been contented to write things of beauty instead of bare rockies and dry deserts, he might have done splendidly and ranked among the great poets.

All great personalities have a strong ego of one kind or another — for that matter it does not need to be a big personality to be ego-centred; ego-centricity is the very nature of life in the Ignorance, — even the sattwic man, the philanthropist, the altruist live for and round their ego. Society imposes an effort to restrain and when one cannot restrain at least to disguise it; morality enjoins on us to control, enlarge, refine or sublimate it so that it shall be able to exceed itself or use itself in the service of things bigger than its own primary egoism. But none of these things enables one to escape from it. It is only by finding something deep within or above ourselves and making *laya* (dissolution) of the ego in that that it is possible. It is what Lawrence saw and it was his effort to do it that made him "other" than those who associated with him — but he could not find out the way. It was a strange mistake to seek it in sexuality; it was also a great mistake to seek it at the wrong end of the nature.

What you say about the discovery of the defects of human nature is no doubt true. Human nature is full of defects and cannot be otherwise, but there are other elements and possibilities in it which, although never quite unmixed, have to be seen to get a whole view. But the discovery of the truth about human beings need not lead to cynicism; it may lead to a calm aloofness and irony which has nothing disappointed or bitter in it; or it may lead to a large psychic charity which recognises the truth but makes all allowances and is ready to love and to help in spite of

all. In the spiritual consciousness one is blind to nothing, but sees also that which is within behind these coverings, the divine element not yet released, and is neither deceived nor repelled and discouraged. That inner greater thing that was in Lawrence and which he sought for is in everybody: he may not have found it and his defects may have prevented its release, but it is there.

I do not know about the lovableness; what you say is partly true, but lovableness may exist in spite of ego and all kinds of defects and people may feel it.

4. 7. 1936

COLERIDGE'S "ANCIENT MARINER"

May I say a word about the four lines of Coleridge which you criticise? —

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

The sentimentalism of the "dear God" is obviously extra childlike and may sound childish even. If it had been written by Coleridge as his own contribution to thought or his personal feeling described in its native language it would have ranked him very low. But Coleridge was a great metaphysician or at any rate an acute and wide-winged thinker, not a sentimental prattling poet of the third order. Mark that the idea in the lines is not essentially poor; otherwise expressed it could rank among great thoughts and stand as the basis of a philosophy and ethics founded on *bhakti*. There are one or two lines of the Gita which are based on a similar thought, though from the Vedantic, not the dualist point of view. But throughout the *Ancient Mariner* Coleridge is looking at things from the point of view and the state of mind of the most simple and childlike personality possible, the Ancient Mariner who feels and thinks only with the barest ideas and the most elementary and primitive emotions.

The lines he writes here record the feeling which such a mind and heart would draw from what he had gone through. Are they not then perfectly in place and just in the right tone for such a purpose? You may say that it lowers the tone of the poem. I don't know — the tone of the poem is deliberately intended to be that of an unsophisticated ballad simplicity and ballad mentality — it is not the ideas but the extraordinary beauty of rhythm and vividness of vision and fidelity to a certain mystic childlike key that makes it such a wonderful and perfect poem. This is of course only a point of view; but it came to me several times as an answer that could be made to your criticism, so I put it on paper.

BROWNING

My opinion of Browning has been expressed, I think, in *The Future Poetry*. I had a fervent passion for him when I was from seventeen to eighteen, after a previous *penchant* for Tennyson; but like most calf-love both these fancies were of short duration. While I had it, I must have gone through most of his writings (*Fifine at the Fair* and some others excepted) some half a dozen times at least. There is much stuff of thought in him, seldom of great depth but sometimes unexpected and subtle, a vast range not so much of character as of dramatic human moods, and a considerable power and vigour of rough verse and rugged language. But there is very little of the pure light of poetry in him or of sheer poetic beauty or charm and magic; he gets the highest or finest inspiration only in a line or two here and there. His expression is often not only rough and hasty but inadequate; in his later work he becomes tiresome. He is not one of the greatest poets, but he is a great creator.

5. 12. 1931

BAUDELAIRE

Baudelaire was never vulgar — he was too refined and perfect

an artist to be that. He chose the evil of life as his frequent subject and tried to extract poetic beauty out of it, as a painter may deal with a subject that to the ordinary eye may be ugly or repellent and extract artistic beauty from it. But that is not the only stuff of his poetry.

22. 7. 1936

GEORGE SANTAYANA

[1]It has a considerable beauty of thought and language in it. It is a great pity that it is so derivative in form as to sound like an echo. With so much mastery of language and ease of rhythm it should have been possible to find a form of his own and an original style. The poetic power and vision are there and he has done as much with it as could be done with a borrowed technique. If he had found his own, he might have ranked high as a poet.

MICHAEL MADHUSUDAN

I had once the regret that the line of possibility opened out by Michael Madhusudan was not carried any further in Bengali poetry; but after all it may turn out that nothing has been lost by the apparent interruption. Magnificent as are the power and

[1] These remarks are apropos of the following poem by George Santayana:

There we live o'er, amid angelic powers,
Our lives without remorse, as if not ours,
And others' lives with love, as if our own;
For we behold, from these eternal towers,
The deathless beauty of all winged hours.
And have our being in their truth alone.
...and I knew
The wings of sacred Eros as he flew
And left me to the love of things not seen.
'Tis a sad love, like an eternal prayer,
And knows no keen delight, no faint surcease.
Yet from the seasons hath the earth increase,
And heaven shines as if the gods were there.
Had Dian passed there could no deeper peace
Embalm the purple stretches of the air.

swing of his language and rhythm, there was a default of richness and thought-matter, and a development in which subtlety, fineness and richness of thought and feeling could learn to find a consummate expression was very much needed. More mastery of colour, form and design was a necessity as well as more depth and wealth in the thought-substance — and this has now been achieved and, if added to the *ojas*, can fulfil what Madhusudan left only half done.

GREAT PROSE-WRITERS

I stand rather aghast at your summons to stand and deliver the names of the ten or twelve best prose styles in the world's literature. I had no names in mind and I used the incautious phrase only to indicate the high place I thought Bankim held among the great masters of language. To rank the poets on different grades of the Hill of poetry is a pastime which may be a little frivolous and unnecessary, but possible, if not altogether permissible. I would not venture to try the same game with the prose-writers who are multitudinous and do not present the same marked and unmistakable differences of level and power. The prose field is a field, it is not a mountain. It has eminences, but its high tops are not so high, the drops not so low as in poetical literature.

Then again there are great writers in prose and great prose-writers and the two are by no means the same thing. Dickens and Balzac are great novelists, but their style or their frequent absence of style had better not be described; Scott attempts a style, but it is neither blameless nor is it his distinguishing merit. Other novelists have an adequate style and a good one but their prose is not quoted as a model and they are remembered not for that but as creators. You speak of Meredith, and if Meredith had always written with as pure a mastery as he did in *Richard Feverel* he might have figured as a pre-eminent master of language, but the creator and the thinker played many tricks on the stylist in the bulk of his work. I was writing of prose styles and what was in my mind was those achievements in which language reached its acme of perfection in one manner or another so that

whatever the writer touched became a thing of beauty — no matter what its substance — or a perfect form and memorable. Bankim seemed to me to have achieved that in his own way as Plato in his or Cicero or Tacitus in theirs or in French literature, Voltaire, Flaubert or Anatole France. I could name many more, especially in French which is the greatest store-house of fine prose among the world's languages — there is no other to match it. Matthew Arnold once wrote a line that runs something like this:

France great in all great arts, in none supreme,

to which someone very aptly replied, "And what then of the art of prose-writing? Is it not a great art and what other country can approach France there? All prose of other languages seems beside its perfection, lucidity, measure almost clumsy."

There are many remarkable prose-writers in English, but that essential or fundamental perfection which is almost like a second nature to the French writers is not so common. The great prose-writers in English seem to seize you by the personality they express in their styles rather than by its perfection as an instrument — it is true at least of the earliest and I think too of the later writers. Lamb whom you mention is a signal example of a writer who erected his personality into a style and lives by that achievement — Pater and Wilde are other examples.

As for Bengali, we have had Bankim and have still Tagore and Sarat Chatterji. That is sufficient achievement for a single century.

I have not answered your question — but I have explained my phrase and I think that is all you can expect from me.

SARAT CHANDRA CHATTERJI

Novels deal with the vital life of men, so necessarily they bring that atmosphere. Sarat Chandra is a highly emotional writer with a great power of presenting the feelings and movements of the human vital.

13. 3. 1936

PLATO

Even in a good translation[1] the poetry ought to come out to some extent. Plato was a great writer as well as a philosopher — no more perfect prose has been written by any man — in some of his books his prose carries in it the qualities of poetry and his thought has poetic vision. That is what I meant when I said it was poetry.

3. 1. 1937

PLOTINUS

Yes, Plotinus was not a mere philosopher — his philosophy was founded on Yogic experience and realisation.

11. 10. 1933

AUGUSTUS CAESAR AND LEONARDO DA VINCI

Augustus Caesar organised the life of the Roman Empire and it was this that made the framework of the first transmission of the Graeco-Roman civilisation to Europe — he came for that work and the writings of Virgil and Horace and others helped greatly towards the success of his mission. After the interlude of the Middle Ages, this civilisation was reborn in a new mould in what is called the Renaissance, not in its life-aspects but in its intellectual aspects. It was therefore a supreme intellectual, Leonardo da Vinci, who took up again the work and summarised in himself the seeds of modern Europe.

29. 7. 1937

INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY OF MYSTICS[2]

There have been any number of spiritual men and mystics who

[1] Of Plato's *Banquet*.

[2] These remarks are apropos of a statement of a famous scientist that mystics and

have had a great and fine intellectual capacity or were endowed with a great administrative and organising ability implying a keen knowledge of men and much expenditure of brain-power. With a little looking up of the records of the past I think one could collect some hundreds of names which would not include of course the still greater number not recorded in history or the transmitted memory of the past.

THE MYSTIC AND THE INTELLECTUAL — BERNARD SHAW

1

A mystic is currently supposed to be one who has mystic experience, and a mystic philosopher is one who has such experience and has formed a view of life in harmony with his experience. Merely to have metaphysical notions about the Infinite and Godhead and underlying or overshadowing forces does not make a man a mystic. One would never think of applying such a term to Spinoza, Kant or Hegel: even Plato does not fit into the term, though Pythagoras has a good claim to it. Hegel and other transcendental or idealistic philosophers were great intellects, not mystics. Shaw is a keen and forceful intellect (I cannot call him a great thinker[1]) but his ideas about the Life-Force certainly do not make him a mystic. And do you really call that a constructive vision of life — a vague notion about a Life-Force pushing towards an evolutionary manifestation and a brilliant *jeu d'esprit* about long life and people born out of eggs and certain extraordinary operations of mind and body in these semi-immortals who seem to have been very much at a loss what to do with their immortality? I do not deny that there are keen and brilliant ideas and views everywhere (that is Shaw's wealthy stock-in-trade), even an occasional profound perception; but that does not make

spiritual men the world over have in general been always men of very average intelligence, a handful of rare instances excepted.

[1] An admirable many-sided intelligence and an acute critic discussing penetratingly or discoursing acutely or constructively on many problems or presenting with force or point many aspects of life, he is not a creator or disseminator of the great illuminating ideas that leave their mark on the centuries.

a man either a mystic or a philosopher or a great thought-creator. Shaw has a sufficiently high place in his own kind — why try to make him out more than he is? Shakespeare is a great poet and dramatist, but to try to make him out a great philosopher also would not increase but rather imperil his high repute.

2

I do not admit that Shaw has a reasoned theory about basic realities; the only realities he or his characters have argued about are the things of the surface; even his Life-Force is only a thing of the surface or, at the most, just under the surface.

I am not thrilled by the speech;[1] it is a creation of the intellect, eloquent and on the surface.

16. 5. 1932

ESTIMATE OF BERNARD SHAW

I do not think Harris' attack on Shaw as you describe it can be taken very seriously any more than can Wells' jest about his pronunciation of English being the sole astonishing thing about him. Wells, Chesterton, Shaw and others joust at each other like the *kabiwālās* of old Calcutta, though with more refined weapons, and you cannot take their humorous sparrings as considered appreciations; if you do, you turn exquisite jests into solemn nonsense. Mark that their method in these sparrings, the turn of phrase, the style of their wit is borrowed from Shaw himself with personal modifications; for this kind of humour, light as air and sharp as a razor-blade, epigrammatic, paradoxical, often flavoured with burlesque seriousness and urbane hyperbole, good-humoured and cutting at once, is not English in origin; it was brought in by two Irishmen, Shaw and Wilde. Harris' stroke about the Rodin bust and Wells' sally are entirely in the Shavian turn and manner, they are showing their cleverness by spiking their Guru in swordsmanship with his own rapier. Harris' attack on Shaw's literary reputation may have been

[1] Caesar's speech about the Sphinx in Shaw's play, *Caesar and Cleopatra.*

serious, there was a sombre and violent brutality about him which made it possible; but his main motive was to prolong his own notoriety by a clever and vigorous assault on the mammoth of the hour. Shaw himself supplied materials for his critic, knowing well what he would write, and edited[1] this damaging assault on his own fame, a typical Irish act at once of chivalry, shrewd calculation of effect and whimsical humour. I should not think Harris had much understanding of Shaw the man as apart from the writer; the Anglo-Saxon is not usually capable of understanding either Irish character or Irish humour, it is so different from his own. And Shaw is Irish through and through; there is nothing English about him except the language he writes and even that he has changed into the Irish ease, flow, edge and clarity — though not bringing into it, as Wilde did, Irish poetry and colour.

Shaw's seriousness and his humour, real seriousness and mock seriousness, run into each other in a baffling inextricable *mélange*, thoroughly Irish in its character, — for it is the native Irish turn to speak lightly when in dead earnest and to utter the most extravagant jests with a profound air of seriousness, — and it so puzzled the British public that they could not for a long time make up their mind how to take him. At first they took him for a Jester dancing with cap and bells, then for a new kind of mocking Hebrew Prophet or Puritan reformer! Needless to say, both judgments were entirely out of focus. The Irishman is, on one side of him, the vital side, a *passioné*, imaginative and romantic, intensely emotional, violently impulsive, easily inspired to poetry or rhetoric, moved by indignation and suffering to a mixture of aggressive militancy, wistful dreaming and sardonic extravagant humour; on the other side, he is keen in intellect, positive, downright, hating all loose foggy sentimentalism and solemn pretence and prone, in order to avoid the appearance of them in himself, to cover himself with a jest at every step; it is at once his mask and his defence. At bottom he has the possibility in him of a modern Curtius leaping into the yawning pit for a cause, a Utopist or a Don Quixote, — according to occasions,

[1] F. Harris' biography of Shaw, edited and published by Shaw himself after Harris' death.

a fighter for dreams, an idealistic pugilist, a knight-errant, a pugnacious rebel or a brilliant sharp-minded realist or a reckless but often shrewd and successful adventurer. Shaw has all that in him, but with it a cool intellectual clearness, also Irish, which dominates it all and tones it down, subdues it into measure and balance, gives an even harmonising colour. There is as a result a brilliant tempered edge of flame, lambent, lighting up what it attacks and destroys, and destroying it by the light it throws upon it, not fiercely but trenchantly — though with a trenchant playfulness — aggressive and corrosive. An ostentation of humour and parade covers up the attack and puts the opponent off his defence. That is why the English mind never understood Shaw and yet allowed itself to be captured by him, and its old established ideas, "moral" positions, impenetrable armour of commercialised Puritanism and self-righteous Victorian assurance to be ravaged and burned out of existence by Shaw and his allies. Anyone who knew Victorian England and sees the difference now cannot but be struck by it, and Shaw's part in it, at least in preparing and making it possible, is undeniable. That is why I call him devastating, not in any ostentatiously catastrophic sense, for there is a quietly trenchant type of devastatingness, because he has helped to lay low all these things with his scythe of sarcastic mockery and lightly, humorously penetrating seriousness — effective, as you call it, but too deadly in its effects to be called merely effective.

That is Shaw as I have seen him and I don't believe there is anything seriously wrong in my estimate. I don't think we can complain of his seriousness about Pacifism, Socialism and the rest of it; it was simply the form in which he put his dream, the dream he needed to fight for, needed by his Irish nature. Shaw's bugbear was unreason and disorder, his dream was a humanity delivered from vital illusions and deceptions, organising the life-force in obedience to reason, casting out waste and folly as much as possible. It is not likely to happen in the way he hoped; reason has its own illusions and, though he strove against imprisonment in his own rationalistic ideals, trying to escape from them by the issue of his mocking critical humour, he could not help being their prisoner. As for his pose of self-praise,

no doubt he valued himself, — the public fighter like the man of action needs to do so in order to act or to fight. Most, though not all, try to veil it under an affectation of modesty; Shaw, on the contrary, took the course of raising it to a humorous pitch of burlesque and extravagance. It was at once part of his strategy in commanding attention and a means of mocking at himself — I was not speaking of analytical self-mockery, but of the whimsical Irish kind — so as to keep himself straight and at the same time mocking his audience. It is a peculiarly Irish kind of humour to say extravagant things with a calm convinced tone as if announcing a perfectly serious proposition — the Irish exaggeration of the humour called by the French *pince-sans-rire*; his hyperboles of self-praise actually reek with this humorous savour. If his extravagant comparison of himself with Shakespeare had to be taken in dull earnest without any smile in it, he would be either a witless ass or a giant of humourless arrogance, — and Bernard Shaw could be neither.

As to his position in literature, I have given my opinion; but more precisely, I imagine he will take some place but not a very large place, once the drums have ceased beating and the fighting is over. He has given too much to the battles of the hour perhaps to claim a large share of the future. I suppose some of his plays will survive for their wit and humour and cleverness more than for any higher dramatic quality, like those of three other Irishmen: Goldsmith, Sheridan, Wilde. His prefaces may be saved by their style and force, but it is not sure. At any rate, as a personality he is not likely to be forgotten, even if his writings fade. To compare him with Anatole France is futile — they were minds too different and moving in too different domains for comparison to be possible.

WELLS — CHESTERTON — SHAW

I refuse to accept the men you name, with the exception of Russell, as serious thinkers. Wells is a super-journalist, super-pamphleteer and story-teller. I imagine that within a generation of his death his speculations will cease to be read or remembered;

his stories may endure longer. Chesterton is a brilliant essayist who has written verse too of an appreciable brilliance and managed some good stories. Unlike Wells he has some gift of style and he has caught the trick of wit and constant paradox which gives a fictitious semblance of enhanced value to his ideas. These are men of a high and wide contemporary fame but we are not sure how long their work will last, though we may venture to predict some durability for a good part of Chesterton's poetry and Wells' short stories. Shaw has a better chance of lasting, but there is no certain certitude, because he has no pre-eminent height or greatness in his constructive powers. He has constructed nothing supreme, but he has criticised most things. In page after page he shows the dissolvent critical mind and it is a dissolvent of great power; beyond that he has popularised the ideas of Fabian socialism and other constructive viewpoints caught up by him from the surrounding atmosphere, but with temperamental qualifications and variations, for the inordinately critical character of his mind prevents him from entirely agreeing with anybody. Criticism is also a great power and there are some mainly critical minds that have become immortals, Voltaire for instance; Shaw on his own level may survive — only, his thinking is more of a personal type and not classic and typical of a fundamental current of the human intellect like Voltaire's. His personality may help him as Johnson was helped by his personality to live.

Shaw is not really a dramatist; I don't think he ever wrote anything in the manner of the true drama; *Candida* is perhaps the nearest he came to one. He is a first-class play-writer, — a brilliant conversationalist in stage dialogue and a manufacturer of speaking intellectualised puppets made to develop and represent by their talk and carefully wire-pulled movements his ideas about men, life and things. He gives his characters minds of various quality and they are expressing their minds all the time; sometimes he paints on them some striking vital colour, but with a few exceptions they are not living beings like those of the great or even of the lesser dramatists. There are, however, exceptions, such as the three characters in *Candida*, and as a supremely clever playwright with a strong intellectual force and some genius he

may very well survive. He has a very striking and cogent and incisive style admirably fitted for its work, and he sometimes tries his hand at eloquence, but "heights of passionate eloquence" is a very unreal phrase. I never found that in Shaw anywhere; whatever mental ardours he may have, his mind as a whole is too cool, balanced, incisive to let itself go in that manner.

SHAW AS A CREATIVE MIND

I find in Shavianism a delightful note and am thankful to Shaw for being so refreshingly different from other men that to read even an ordinary interview with him in a newspaper is an intellectual pleasure. As for his being one of the most original personalities of the age, there can be no doubt of that. All that I deny to him is a great creative mind — but his critical force, especially in certain fields, and his discrimination of values in life are very great and in those fields he can in a sense be called creative and have remarkable scope and *envergure.* He has certainly created a singularly effective and living form for his criticism of life. It is not strictly drama, but it is something original and strong and altogether of its own kind — so, up to that limit, I qualify my statement that Shaw was not pre-eminent as a creator.

The tide may turn against him after being so strongly for him under compulsion from his own power and will, but nothing can alter the fact that he was one of the keenest and most powerful minds of the age with an originality in his way of looking at things which no one else in his time could equal. He is too penetrating and sincere a mind to be a stiff partisan or tied to some intellectual dogma or other. When he sees something which qualifies the "ism" — even that on whose side he is standing, he says so; that need not weaken the ideal behind, — on the contrary it is likely to make it more plastic and practicable.

BERTRAND RUSSELL

1

About Russell — I have never disputed his abilities or his cha-

racter; I am concerned only with his opinions and there too only with those opinions which touch upon my own province — that of spiritual Truth. In all religions, the most narrow and stupid even, and in all non-religions also there are great minds, great men, fine characters. I know little about Russell, but I never dreamed of disputing the greatness of Lenin, for instance, merely because he was an atheist — nobody would, unless he were an imbecile. But the greatness of Lenin does not debar me from refusing assent to the credal dogmas of Bolshevism, and the beauty of character of an atheist does not prove that spirituality is a lie of the imagination and that there is no Divine. I might add that if you can find the utterances of famous Yogis childish when they talk about marriage or on other mental matters, I cannot be blamed for finding the ideas of Russell about spiritual experience, of which he knows nothing, very much wanting in light and substance. You have not named the Yogis in question, and till you do, I am afraid I shall cherish a suspicion about either the height or the breadth of their spiritual experience.

2

I have already said that I have no objection to anybody admiring Russell or Dickinson or any other atheist for that matter. Genius or fine qualities are always admirable in whomsoever they are found; all that has nothing to do with the turn of a man's opinions or the truth or untruth of atheism or of spiritual experience. As for Russell's booklet *Why I am not a Christian*, which you sent me, I seized a few moments to run through it. It is just as I had expected it to be. I have no doubt that Russell is a competent philosophic thinker, but this might have been written by an ordinary propagandist tract-writer. The arguments of the ordinary Christian apologists to prove the existence of God are futile drivel and Russell answering them has descended to their level. He was appealing to the mass-mind I suppose, but that is enough to deprive the book of any real thought-value. And yet the questions raised are interesting enough if treated with true philosophic insight or from the standpoint of true spiritual experience. It is queer that the European mind, capable enough

in other directions, should sink to such utter puerility when it begins to deal with religion or spiritual experience.

COMMENT ON A STATEMENT OF B. RUSSELL[1]

I have not forgotten Russell but I have neglected him, first, for want of time; second, because for the moment I have mislaid your letter; third, because of lack of understanding on my part. What is the meaning of "taking interest in external things for their own sakes"? And what is an introvert? Both these problems baffle me.

The word "introvert" has come into existence only recently and sounds like a companion of "pervert". Literally, it means one who is turned inwards. The Upanishad speaks of the doors of the senses that are turned outwards absorbing man in external things ("for their own sakes", I suppose?) and of the rare man among a million who turns his vision inwards and sees the self. Is that man an introvert? And is Russell's ideal man "interested in externals for their own sakes" — a Ramaswami the chef or Joseph the chauffeur, for instance — *homo externalis Russellius*, an extrovert? Or is an introvert one who has an inner life stronger than his external one, — the poet, the musician, the artist? Was Beethoven in his deafness bringing out music from within him an introvert? Or does it mean one who measures external things by an inner standard and is interested in them not "for their own sakes" but for their value to the soul's self-development, its psychic, religious, ethical or other self-expression? Are Tolstoy and Gandhi examples of introverts? Or in another field — Goethe? Or does it mean one who cares for external things only as they touch his own mind or else concern his own ego? But that I suppose would include 999,999 men out of every million.

What are external things? Russell is a mathematician. Are mathematical formulae external things even though they exist here only in the World-mind and the mind of Man? If not, is Russell, as mathematician, an introvert? Again, Yajnavalkya

[1] "We are all prone to the malady of the introvert, who, with the manifold spectacle of the world spread out before him, turns away and gazes upon the emptiness within." B. Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1930), p. 160.

says that one loves the wife not for the sake of the wife, but for the self's sake, and so with other objects of interest or desire — whether the self be the inner self or the ego. In Yoga it is the valuing of external things in the terms of the desire of the ego that is discouraged — their only value is their value in the manifestation of the Divine. Who desires external things "for their own sakes" and not for some value to the conscious being? Even Cheloo, the day-labourer, is not interested in a two-anna piece for its own sake, but for some vital satisfaction it can bring him; even with the hoarding miser it is the same — it is his vital being's passion for possession that he satisfies and that is something not external but internal, part of his inner make-up, the unseen personality that moves inside behind the veil of the body.

What then is meant by Russell's "for their own sakes"? If you enlighten me on these points, I may still make an effort to comment on his *mahāvākya.*

More important is his wonderful phrase about the "emptiness within"; on that at least I hope to make a comment one day or another.

LOWES DICKINSON

The pre-war and the post-war Dickinson are indeed a contrast. This appreciation of human life is not without the force of a half-truth, but it is just the other half that he misses when he sweeps idealism out of the field. Man's utopias may be the projection of his hopes and desires, but he has to go on building them on pain of death, decline or collapse. As for the gospel of pleasure, it has been tried before and always failed — Life and Nature after a time weary of it and reject it, as if after a surfeit of cheap sweets. Man has to rush from his pursuit of pleasure, with all its accompaniment of petrifying shallowness, cynicism, hardness, frayed nerves, *ennui*, dissatisfaction and fatigue, to a new idealism or else sink towards a dull or catastrophic decadence. Even if the Absolute Good were a high spiritual or ideal chimera, the pursuit of it is rooted in the very make of humanity and it is one of the

main sources of the perennial life of the race. And that it is so would seem to indicate that it is not a chimera — something still beyond man, no doubt, but into which or towards which he is called by Nature to grow.

ROMAIN ROLLAND

I have not read *Jean Christophe*, but Rolland is an idealist who takes interest in spiritual mysticism — not himself a man of spiritual experience. It is quite natural that such a man's writing should produce an effect on an intellectual man more easily than a religious or spiritual work. X was not religious-minded, so a religious work would not move him because it would be too far from his own way of thinking and turn of seeing. A spiritual book would not reach him, for he would not understand or feel the spiritual experience or knowledge contained in it, they being quite foreign to his then consciousness. On the other hand, a book by an intellectual idealist with an intellectual turn towards spirituality would suit his own temperament and could hook and draw his thoughts that way.

26. 10. 1935

ANATOLE FRANCE[1]

Anatole France is always amusing whether he is ironising about God and Christianity or about that rational animal man or Humanity (with a big H) and the follies of his reason and his conduct. But I presume you never heard of God's explanation of his non-interference to Anatole France when they met in some

[1] This is apropos of a quotation from Anatole France which D had sent to Sri Aurobindo, saying, "Brotteaux, one of the unabashed scoffers in Anatole France's *Les Dieux ont soif*, throws this hearty fling at God in the face of Father Longuemare, the pious Priest....

'Either God would prevent evil if he could, but could not, or he could but would not, or he neither could nor would, or he both would and could. If he would but could not, he is impotent, if he could but would not, he is perverse, if he neither could nor would he is at once impotent and perverse; if he both could and would why on earth doesn't he do it, Father?'

"I send this to you as I immensely enjoyed the joke and am sure you would too, hoping you would have something to fend it off with."

Heaven of Irony, I suppose, — it can't have been in the heaven of Karl Marx, in spite of France's conversion before his death. God is reported to have strolled up to him and said: "I say, Anatole, you know that was a good joke of yours; but there was a good cause too for my non-interference. Reason came along and told me: 'Look here, why do you pretend to exist? You know you don't exist and never existed or, if you do, you have made such a mess of your creation that we can't tolerate you any longer. Once we have got you out of the way all will be right upon earth, tip-top, A-1: my daughter Science and I have arranged that between us. Man will raise his noble brow, the head of creation, dignified, free, equal, fraternal, democratic, depending upon nothing but himself, with nothing greater than himself anywhere in existence. There will be no God, no gods, no churches, no priestcraft, no religion, no kings, no oppression, no poverty, no war or discord anywhere. Industry will fill the earth with abundance, commerce will spread her golden reconciling wings everywhere. Universal education will stamp out ignorance and leave no room for folly or unreason in any human brain; man will become cultured, disciplined, rational, scientific, well-informed, arriving always at the right conclusion upon full and sufficient data. The voice of the scientist and the expert will be loud in the land and guide mankind to the earthly paradise. A perfected society; health universalised by a developed medical science and a sound hygiene; everything rationalised; science evolved, infallible, omnipotent, omniscient; the riddle of existence solved; the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the world; evolution, of which man, magnificent man, is the last term, completed in the noble white race, a humanitarian kindness and uplifting for our backward brown, yellow and black brothers; peace, peace, peace, reason, order, unity everywhere.' There was a lot more like that, Anatole, and I was so much impressed by the beauty of the picture and its convenience, for I would have nothing to do or to supervise, that I at once retired from business, — for, you know that I was always of a retiring disposition and inclined to keep myself behind the veil or in the background at the best of times. But what is this I hear? — it does not seem to me from reports that Reason even with the help of

Science has kept her promise. And if not, why not? Is it because she would not or because she could not? or is it because she both would not and could not, or because she would and could, but somehow did not? And I say, Anatole, these children of theirs, the State, Industrialism, Capitalism, Communism and the rest have a queer look — they seem very much like Titanic monsters. Armed, too, with all the powers of Intellect and all the weapons and organisation of Science! And it does look as if mankind were no freer under them than under the Kings and the Churches. What has happened — or is it possible that Reason is *not* supreme and infallible, even that she has made a greater mess of it than I could have done myself?" Here the report of the conversation ends; I give it for what it is worth, for I am not acquainted with this God and have to take him on trust from Anatole France.

1. 8. 1932

VICTOR HUGO

1

People have different tastes — some regard Hugo as a childish writer, a rhetorician without depth — others regard him as a great poet and novelist. One has to give one's own judgment and leave others to hold theirs.

26. 4. 1937

2

It [*Les Misérables*] is not one of the masterpieces of "art", but I regard it as the work of a powerful genius and certainly one of the great novels. It is certainly not philosophically or psychologically deep, but it is exceedingly vivid and powerful.

25. 4. 1937

3

That is again a matter of opinion. There is the position that plot

and character-presentation are sufficient and for the rest a large or great theme — one of the well-recognised human situations or a picture of life largely dealt with — and no more is necessary. Most famous English novels of the past are like that. There is another position that subtle psychology, deep and true presentation (not merely imaginative or idealistic) of the profounder problems or secrets of life and nature are needed. Hugo's characters and situations are thought by many to be melodramatic or superficial and untrue. His novels, like his dramas, are "romantic" and the present trend is against the romantic treatment of life as superficial, childishly over-coloured and false. The disparagement of what was formerly considered great is common on that ground. "Faugh!" expresses the feeling.

27. 4. 1937

ALEXANDER DUMAS' HISTORY

Dumas' "history" is all slap and dash adventure — amusing rather than solidly interesting. But it is all the history known to many people in France — just as many in England gather their history from Shakespeare's plays.

2. 12. 1934

WILLIAM JAMES' "PSYCHOLOGY"

James' book[1] is certainly a very interesting one. I read it a long time ago and do not remember it very well except that it was very interesting and not at all an ordinary book in its kind, but full of valuable suggestions.

1. 7. 1933

CONTEMPORARY DETECTIVE STORIES

The detective stories of today are much better than those of the

[1] *Psychology* by William James.

Sherlock Holmes time. This kind of writing has been taken up by men with imagination and literary talent who would not have touched it before.

1. 10. 1935

BEETHOVEN'S MUSIC

There can be no doubt that Beethoven's music was often from another world; so it is quite possible for it to give the key to an inwardly sensitive hearer or to one who is seeking or ready for the connection to be made. But I think it is very few who get beyond being aesthetically moved by a sense of greater things; to lay the hand on the key and use it is rare.

BHATKHANDE

Yes, I have read your article on Bhatkhande. Very interesting: the character came home to me as a sublimation of a type I was very familiar with when in Baroda. Very amusing his encounters with the Pundits — especially the Socratic way of self-depreciation heightened almost to the Japanese pitch. His photograph you sent me shows a keen and powerful face full of genius and character.

February, 1937

THE END

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THE FUTURE POETRY was first published as a series of essays in the *Arya* from 1917 to 1920. Sri Aurobindo thought of revising it before giving it the form of a book. He wished to add even a few chapters, especially dealing with the Metaphysicals and the Modern Poets. He was not able to do more than write a few paragraphs supplementary to matter already treated. Although these have been incorporated in their proper places the book first brought out in 1953 remains for practical purposes a reprint of the original essays.

LETTERS ON POETRY, LITERATURE AND ART has been added here as a separate part of the volume for the purposes of the Centenary Edition. These letters, originally written to disciples, were first published in book-form in 1949 as LETTERS OF SRI AUROBINDO, Third Series, by the Sri Aurobindo Circle, Bombay. The present edition has been revised and considerably enlarged by the inclusion of a large number of additional letters.