

**ART AND MORALITY**  
**AND**  
**OTHER ESSAYS**

**F. C. DAVAR**

# ART AND MORALITY

AND

OTHER ESSAYS

Dhananjayrao Gadgil Library



GIPE-PUNE-010358

**FIROZE COWASJI DAVAR, M.A., LL.B.**

**Assistant Lecturer in English**

**Gujarat College, Ahmedabad.**

---

*WITH A FOREWORD*

*By*

**PROF. A. R. WADIA, B.A. (CANTAB) BAR-AT-LAW.**

**Professor of Philosophy, University of Mysore :**

**Officiating Director of Public Instruction**

**in Mysore 1930-31.**

---

**BOMBAY**

**D. B. TARAPOREVALA SONS & Co.**

**"Treasure-House of Books".**

**210, HORNBY ROAD: FORT.**

---

**Rs. 5-0-0**

---

**1935**

*ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.*

**First Edition.**

Printed by Devidas Chhaganlal Parikh at the  
Diamond Jubilee Printing Press, Ahmedabad  
and

Published by Jal Hirji D. B. Taraporevala for  
D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co.,  
"Taj Building", 210 Hornby Road, Fort,  
Bombay.

To  
the sacred memory of  
my revered Father  
and  
to the boundless affection and benignity of  
my venerable Mother,  
still, happily, the guiding-star and  
main inspiration of my life,  
this volume is  
most respectfully  
dedicated.

## PREFACE.

---

We live in an age of interrogation, and before a word of explanation is offered as to what this work is about, it may be questioned why one should be written at all to further encumber this thoroughly book-weary planet. Gibbon thanked his stars at the destruction of the Alexandrian library, while Sir A. Quiller-Couch draws a sigh of relief that scholars should have been spared the infliction of going through all this heap, when knowledge is already multiplying at bewildering speed in modern times. Even Sir C. V. Raman the other day in his Convocation Address at the University of Bombay with a similar grim sense of humour put up a prayer that a few more of our libraries may share the fate of their great predecessor of Alexandria. So increasingly difficult has it become for our reading to keep pace with the rapid composition of books, that at odd moments we cannot help indulging the hope that the world of letters may, for its intellectual sins, be soon submerged by a terrific cataclysm; but, sure enough, even then some literary Jamshid or Manu, some Noah or Deucalion-Pyrrha will still survive to re-populate our bursting book-stalls with ever-growing volumes "thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks in Vallombrosa."

Malthus was the first to raise an outcry against the evils of over-population of the human species, but this question has now been shifted from the domain of economics to that of science. Whether this evil is really as alarming as it is made out to be, it is certain that murder and suicide, war and incendiarism will appeal

only to the humourists or the unregenerates as the most effective remedy. The danger of over-population is serious in the sense that it leads to starvation, but the case is otherwise with the literary world. To read or not to read depends on the choice of the individual, unless he belongs to that much-maligned order of creation known as the teacher, who has necessarily to keep himself abreast of the intellectual progress of the day, on the top of what he has gathered from the fields of antiquity.

In fact it is monstrous to kill a child when born and unnatural even to suppress the procreative instinct when it runs in well-regulated channels. So too it is vandalism to destroy literature, except when this thankless task is taken up by recognised critics who only are qualified to practise literary infanticide by consigning a book to the limbo of lost existences. It is equally against nature to stifle the literary instinct, for when once it is astir it must seek relief through expression, though the Damocles' sword of oblivion be ever suspended on the writer's head. Some may write for money, with the bayonet of necessity at their backs, for quill-driving is surely a legitimate, though not perhaps a very promising, source of income. "Only a fool," as Dr. Johnson arbitrarily laid it down, "writes for anything but money." Some however write to flatter, others to chastise mankind. Some are so disinterested as to put pen on paper solely with the object of advancing the cause of knowledge; while many fall victims to that last infirmity of noble mind that leads them to scorn delights and live laborious days with a view to embody their ideas in the form of a book.

But under certain conditions there is nothing more natural for a person than to bring out a literary work. What else can a teacher do but invest his fleeting thoughts in a more enduring form, and thereby give to airy nothing the local habitation and the name of a book? It may be unusual for a teacher to score a triple century at cricket or gain a thumping victory on the football field. In great and representative matches "the flannelled fool at the wicket or the muddied oaf at the goal" is seldom a teacher, for with games he is not—at any rate not directly or primarily—concerned. But when a teacher is in constant contact with some of the greatest minds of the world during the best years of his life, he need offer no apology if now and then he is seized with the desire of recording his impressions in print. It is not for him to judge whether his book will render a service to lovers of literature; but it is certain he is thereby rendering a service to himself. The surest way to learn is to teach, said De Quincey; and it may be added that the most effective way for the teacher to test his own knowledge is to commit it to writing. The reason is that writing enables a man to clarify his own ideas and tells him exactly how wide or circumscribed is the range of his knowledge. Here too the teacher or lecturer gains a peculiar advantage over others, for he must make certain things clear to himself before he addresses his students, and satisfy himself about the validity of his arguments before he is out to convince a public audience. Hence it is easier for a teacher than for any one else, sooner or later, to perpetrate the crime of authorship and burden our libraries with a litter of books.

This would serve to explain the genesis of the pages that follow. This book consists of essays on widely different subjects, ranging from Dante and Goethe to Shri Krishna and Firdausi. There is no underlying idea in all of them save this, that though each essay is more or less independent of the other, every one of them is directly or indirectly concerned with literature. Only two of them deal with English literature proper; the majority are connected with the literature of the West, a few with Eastern culture, and the rest are of general literary interest. It must here be admitted that the present writer cannot claim more than an amateurish interest in his studies on Shri Krishna and the Gita, for these subjects lie fairly beyond his province, though certainly not beyond the range of his love and devotion. All the essays, without exception, have appeared in Journals and Memorial Volumes, or have been delivered as lectures under the auspices of various Societies, though they are here presented in a much more amplified form. Horace in the "Ars Poetica" urges the young Piso to keep his composition from the public for nine years, in the hope that the youth may by that time see the wisdom of suppressing the crude results of his juvenile effusions. The present writer has followed the spirit of this advice as best he could and refrained for several years from embodying some of his contributions in the form of a book; but instead of accepting in its entirety the gloomy Horatian admonition he thinks that valour may now be safely considered the better part of discretion, and that an attempt, however unsuccessful, is worth more than sheer passivity, however prudent.



The author is particularly obliged to the editor of the "Sânj Vartamân" for kindly permitting him to reproduce here the majority of these essays that appeared in the special Pateti Numbers of the paper from year to year. He also begs to express his grateful acknowledgments to the Secretaries of the Seventh Indian Oriental Conference held in Baroda in 1933, the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, the Dr. J. J. Modi Memorial Volume Committee, the Principal Anandshankar B. Dhruva Commemoration Volume Committee, as well as to the editors of the Bombay University Journal, the "Prasthân" and the "Kalyân" for a similar favour. But there is one debt in particular which cannot be discharged so formally. It is hard indeed for the writer to adequately express his gratitude to Prof. A. R. Wadia of the Mysore University for having taken the trouble to go through his entire typescripts and for associating his distinguished name with the author's by contributing a generously appreciative Foreword to this work. These few lines from a person of Prof. Wadia's eminence in the sphere of literature and philosophy would certainly go far to enhance the merits, if any, of this production.

AHMEDABAD. }  
 Khanpur Road }  
 10th June 1935. }

**F. C. Davar**

## Foreword.

---

I am not sure that Mr. Firoze C. Davar's ART AND MORALITY AND OTHER ESSAYS needs any Foreword from me, but I have acceded to his request as coming from a fellow-worker with almost identical interests. I was already familiar with some of the essays that appear in this volume, but even they had hardly prepared me for the rich feast that I had the privilege of enjoying when he sent me his typescripts. Mr. Davar has a style one may expect of a teacher of English in the premier college of Gujarat, but the varied contents of his essays also show a catholic mind that has ransacked the four corners of the world to glean a rich harvest of poetic thought. I have been equally struck by the moral earnestness of his outlook and his sense of beauty.

The essays fall roughly into three divisions: those dealing with some great poets, those dealing with some literary topics and those dealing with topics of cultural interest. The first class comprises essays on Dante, Goethe, Ibsen and Firdausi. The selection of these poets is interesting, as each of them represents a great epoch and a creation of a new culture. Far from being content with merely presenting a study of these great geniuses, each by himself, he brings to bear on each of them a wealth of comparative literature which adds to the charm of his treatment. He is evidently familiar with the best in three literatures: English, Persian and Gujarati, and commands

a first hand knowledge of the great classics in these languages, and his comparisons culled from a varied storehouse show a breadth of interest and acuteness of illustration that cannot fail to arouse the admiration of the reader. The essay on Dante for example brings out his familiarity with Saraswatichandra of Tripathi, with the work of Sir Mahomed Iqbal, and the achievements of Freud in the sphere of Psychology.

It is interesting to observe that his literary attachments have not in any way dwarfed his moral interest, and this is to be specially seen in his essay on Art and Morality as well as in his treatment of Goethe and Firdausi. The earthly loves of many poets have enriched the world with many beautiful gems, but this does not prevent our author from castigating the great ones for their moral lapses. Firdausi's greatness does not blind him to the sin of avarice he detects in the poet, though personally I feel that Firdausi does not deserve this castigation. Similarly in dealing with Shri Krishna's character he does not stoop to whitewash the episode of the Gopis, but rather takes up a scholarly attitude and seeks to prove on historical grounds that the myth of the Gopis is a later accretion which does not touch the historical greatness of Krishna as a teacher and as a statesman. Mere agreement with conventional judgments is certainly not a trait of Mr. Davar and so one appreciates his independence of thought and honesty of purpose even when they do not fall in with one's own views.

His treatment of general topics always shows a fine perspective and a balance of judgment, almost Greek in

character. The essay on the Romance of the Elgin Marbles is the only one that deals with the topic of art as distinguished from literature and points to his varied interests.

Some of the essays have already seen the light of day e. g. in the Bombay University Journal. Those who enjoyed them will welcome their republication in more permanent form. Others, though written some years ago, are now published for the first time and I am sure they will be enjoyed as much by others as they have been by me. It has been a common reproach cast against Indian graduates that their interests are circumscribed. In the case of Mr. Davar such a reproach would be impertinent, and if his book attracts the attention it deserves it would go to show that the complaint is not so deserved as it has been assumed to be. It is a pleasure to wish the book a safe journey, and the author may certainly count on the consciousness of a work done well and done worthily.

The University,  
Mysore, }  
16th December 1934. }

A. R. Wadia.

# Contents.

		Page.
I	Art and Morality ... ..	1
II	The Methods and Materials of Ancient Literature ... ..	58
III	Some Interesting Forms of Divination ...	82
IV	The Vision of Dante ... ..	121
V	The Romance of the Elgin Marbles ...	162
VI	The Greatness of Goethe ... ..	172
VII	Is Metre Indispensable to Poetry ? ...	218
VIII	Literary Imposture ... ..	253
IX	Ibsen and the Sanctity of Marriage ...	280
X	The Gleam of Idealism ... ..	302
XI	"He comes, he comes, he ever comes"	318
XII	The Test of Shri Krishna's Character ...	344
XIII	The Gospel of the Gita ... ..	380
XIV	Episodes Kindred to that of Rustam and Sohrab in Epic Literature ... ..	406
XV	The Historical Epic with particular reference to the Shahnameh ... ..	427
XVI	The Life of Firdausi ... ..	471

“ Gharaz naqsheest ke az mâ yâd mânad,  
Ke ‘âlam râ nami binam baqâi;  
Magar sâhibdili ruzi ba rahmat  
Kunad dar haqq e darwishân du‘âi. ”

( Sa‘di ).

It is my object to embody my memory in this scrawl, for permanence I see nowhere in the world. It is possible that some pious soul may one day go through it, and in his mercy invoke a blessing on this humble man—the author.

## Art and Morality.



The kingdom of art lies within us as that of Nature lies without. The latter is available to one and all gifted with eyes to see, ears to hear and brains to understand: but nothing short of divine grace is required for the one desirous to enter the heaven of art. Science interprets external Nature and caters to our materialistic requirements; art more often than not closes the outer eye but opens the inner vision and satisfies the hunger of the spirit. Nature is that which we see but do not create; art is that which never exists till created by man. Art is alive to the glory, the immensity, the intricacy and the beauty of Nature, goes into raptures over it and records its joy in poem or picture, sound or stone. Hence it is said art is Nature born again of the spirit. The artist is primarily concerned with the heart, not the head. To know what the moon is we turn to science: to feel the charm of moonlight one has to close the "barren leaves" of the book of science and open the heart to the joyous influence that emanates from our softer satellite. Art dwells in the world of beauty and joy, to imbibe and communicate which is the artist's mission. Art restores to man his lost childhood, and the artistic impulse makes him run from flower to flower, pursue the butterflies, leap up on beholding the rainbow, and shed tears for he cannot reach the moon in the

heavens. Science and philosophy, which are concerned with the laws and the rational explanation of the Universe, were born later. Art which is merely a record of our emotions coming into contact with the joy, the beauty, the terror or the glory of Nature is the earliest form of human culture known to us. Art is seen even among animals and according to Darwin and Herbert Spencer springs from sexual desire, the former tracing music to the call of the male to the female. Even the feathery creation displays a fondness for art and beauty as seen in the American "bower-birds" who decorate their nests with leaves and shells. According to J. Collier, certain birds prefer richly-coloured mates to those of less gaudy plumage. Savages of the palæolithic age are known to have spared time from hunting and warfare to carve their knife-handles, draw rude sketches in their caves or decorate their own bodies with paint.

The art instinct therefore has been eternally planted in the heart of man. If life be a comedy, art is bound to exist to elicit all the joy that is apparent in so happy a world; if life be a tragedy, art has all the greater reason to exist, for it will pluck from the mass of grief the soul of joy and soothe thereby the tears of the afflicted, as it is known to have comforted the melancholy spirit of Schopenhauer. It is impossible to crush this artistic instinct in man. Buddha and Swami Vardhaman Mahavir considered life as vanity of vanities, the body as an obstacle, our desires a sin, and true bliss as consisting only in annihilation of the self and all its attachments. Strange to say, despite this pessimism, the greatest of Indian architects were found among the



Buddhists and the Jainas. If life was so illusory, why did these people think it worth while to ornament their "vihâras" or "stupas", their magnificent rock-built temples and their gorgeous caves carved in the womb of the mountains? The Mediæval Christian Church also taught that the world was a radical evil and beauty a fatal snare, and yet before the death-knell of Mediævalism was rung the finest of painters and sculptors of whom we read in Vasari's "Lives" had already risen in Italy. Islam is thoroughly averse to idol-worship and therefore tolerates no sculpture of the human form, and the orthodox extend this condemnation even to pictures: yet in spite of this religious prejudice several great painters have flourished among the Muslims. In short though a person may be as pessimistic as Buddha or as gloomy as Schopenhauer, it is still simply natural for him to respond to the beauty in life and nature, and this human response to the beautiful is art.

Art cannot be acquired by effort, for we are born with a faculty to enjoy beauty, though education may direct us aright in our choice. The appeal of beauty is irresistible and there is no escape from it. We either create beauty or enjoy it in others: we either compose a poem ourselves or are prepared to appreciate the poetic faculty in other people. As Matthew Arnold says in his "Discourses in America", better be ignorant of science than be dead to the appeal of art: better not know the diameter of the moon or that water consists of two parts of hydrogen with one of oxygen, rather than remain unimpressed at the sight of a glorious moonlit night or the majestic roar of the ocean. A man

so far deficient in emotion, imagination and a sense of the beautiful will surely deserve to be called "an animal without horns and tail"—a title bestowed by the Sanskrit apophthegmatist Bhartrihari on those devoid of any love for the arts.

Dwelling in a utopia of his own and constantly breathing the atmosphere of beauty and joy, the artist gradually secludes himself from the public and their concerns. The difference grows thicker every day as he continually judges by emotion, they by understanding; he always indulging in imagination, they testing a thing by the criterion of reason. Realism is enough to the many: the artist observes real life and meditates on it, dreams about it, colours it with his emotion, idealizes it with his imagination and reveals the vision of what life ought to be according to him in the form of a work of art, which, if truly great, will infect (the word is Tolstoi's) people of all countries and times. The artist must be a dreamer, and as Charles Lamb says, we dream when we are asleep: the poet dreams when he is awake.

Horace was perhaps the first to point out that the artist is concerned with the dulce (beautiful), not with the utile (useful). Without entering into a discussion of the Fine and the Useful Arts, we may say that the appeal of beauty is as instantaneous as it is overwhelming and is not dependent on the ulterior utility of that beautiful object. Hence in realising the beauty of a thing we are for the time being forgetful of its usefulness, and if we pause to think of its use we are in danger

of missing its beauty. As Herbert Spencer observes in his "Essay on the Useful and the Beautiful", the useful becomes beautiful when it is no longer of any use: for instance, a ruined castle becomes useless for habitation, but only then does it become a picturesque subject for artists and people frequent it for picnics. Art has very little to do with use, practice or business. A gorgeously decorated plate loaded with tempting fruit will be appreciated by an artist, not by a hungry man who will fall to and begin business at once with the fruit. As Miss Jane Harrison observes in her valuable work "Ancient Art and Ritual", to see and feel a thing as a work of art we must become for the time being unpractical: we should turn mere spectators and banish all the fears and worries incident to the object. To take an extreme instance, quoted by this writer, when we see a friend drowning, the artist in us will still like to admire the rippling of the waves and the radiance of the moonlight; but the man in us will conquer that "not useful" artistic impulse and rush off to his help or call out for succour. Art is good enough in its place, but it has its limits and has to bow to the superior claims of morality as we propose to show later on. In the opinion of M. Bergson also the artist is always drait, aloof, absentminded, intent only on his meditation. It is because the artist has nothing to do with the practical and the useful but dwells in a visionary world of his own that he is considered a philosopher by some and a fool by many; and whatever be the radical distinction between philosophers and fools, they are alike in their disregard for what is immediately useful or serviceable to their own interests.

We have often observed that the artist's prime concern is with beauty; but what is beauty? Does it consist of external form only or of the substance as well? Does it please the senses or is its appeal of a far more comprehensive nature? On a solution of this question would depend the relation which art bears to truth and morality. Plato held that Truth could be conceived in a variety of ways: when conceived by the mind, it is called knowledge; by the soul, it is virtue; by the State, it is justice; by the feelings, it is beauty. Thus the background of beauty is not falsehood or wickedness or deceit but Truth as the artist sees it from the view point of his emotions and imagination. On the contrary others believe that beauty lies not in matter but in design, not in the spirit but in the form or forming power. Why bother, say they, whether Phryn e of Athens was a het era or a respectable woman? Were not her beauty, grace and fascination enough to seduce a saint and overawe her judges, who, though about to condemn her on the charge of profaning the Eleusinian mysteries, immediately acquitted her as soon as she removed her veil in the Court? Is it not enough that the charm of her person provided the inspiration to mighty sculptors like Praxiteles and painters like Apelles? The answer is given in the negative and that by Greek culture itself. To say that Phryn e was beautiful is true, but it is a half-truth. Phryn e was only physically charming; her morals were those of a courtesan. Greek culture takes beauty to consist in the *whole*, not in the part; in matter and spirit as well as in manner and form. When the true worth of a literary masterpiece was to be tested, the Greeks looked to the

wholeness, the totality, the unity of the work, not to its external form, its purple patches or its florid descriptions. Perhaps there are few nations in the world who so instinctively felt that the True, the Good and the Beautiful are identical, as did the Greeks, among whom the significant word "Kalon" meant beautiful, not merely physically but morally as well.

If expression or form were all in all, we would be justified, for instance, in rejecting Dickens for his slovenly expression, Coleridge for his cumbersome style, and Carlyle for his fantastic Germanised diction that has made even his warmest admirers groan and growl. Beauty must therefore be not merely of form but of substance as well. In fact beauty is perfection itself apprehended through the imperfect senses of the artist; beauty is the Absolute realizing itself in the relative, or as Hegel puts it, it is the apparition to sense and in sense of the Idea. For purposes of classification and distinction, it is perfectly justifiable to define truth as consisting in the essence of a thing, and beauty in the pleasure-giving qualities of it. To know the truth we turn to the words of Socrates : to appreciate physical beauty we shall have to go elsewhere than to the great Athenian. Yet to the lover of Reality Truth is so pleasing as to be identical with Beauty, and Beauty is so exalting as to be equivalent with Truth. To the Knower, Beauty cannot be bad, Goodness cannot be false, Truth cannot be ugly. It is because we cannot see the whole at once that we have thus to divide Truth and Beauty, the identity of which, as Keats observes, is all we know on earth and all we need to know. To the Knower, these two are the same:

the ordinary man, however, will have to reach the region of idealism or Plato's archetypal world before he grasps their essential unity. It is from these heights of idealism that Tennyson has proclaimed the oneness of Knowledge, Goodness and Beauty in the following noble lines :—

“ That Beauty, Good and Knowledge are three sisters,  
That doat upon each other, friends to man,  
Living together under the same roof  
And never can be sundered without tears ”.

But art, it must be said, has a sensual as well as a spiritual side, and can be taken both in its degraded or exalted aspects. On the one hand, there is an art of telling lies, of picking pockets, and according to De Quincey, of cutting throats also. Life itself is an art for it pursues joy and happiness, though it has now been degraded into a business by competition and enlightened self-interest. On the other hand the greatest Beauty is the Vision Beatific of Dante; the greatest “*ānand*” (joy) that of Satchitānand ( the Hindu Trinity of Existence, Knowledge and Bliss that dwell in God as His essential virtues ), available only to the devotee or the artist in his highest and most inspired moments. Thus art or beauty as revealed in art having this twofold aspect, materialistic and spiritual, an exact description of these terms must do justice to both these sides. Hence beauty is described by Principal J. C. Shairp as the golden mean between the merely physical and the highly moral, reconciling the conflicting demands of both claimants by its world-compelling influence. In a different sense Prof. Bradley arrived at a similar conclusion. In his Oxford

Lecture on "The Sublime" he placed Beauty in the middle with Sublimity and Grandeur on the one side and Gracefulness and Prettiness on the other. Beauty is neither light nor darkness but the charming twilight glow that dwells in the borderland between the reason and the imagination, between sense and spirit.

But beauty has an intoxicating and sometimes an enervating effect on the mind, and hence must be under proper control, lest the artist may degenerate into the epicure and finally into the sensualist. Excessive devotion to beauty may lead to the misinterpretation of truth, as too rigid an adherence to morality makes art didactic and dull. To the true artist beauty comes uncalled for; he has no need to endeavour to create it. If he feels powerfully and sees raptly, his expression is bound to be beautiful without any effort made in that direction. The Muses cannot be compelled and no laws are ever made for poets who are themselves the "unacknowledged legislators of the world". It is amusing, however, to read the advice given to poets who seek inspiration by Baumgarten (quoted in the "Æsthetic" by Benedetto Croce), who asked them (1) to ride the horse (2) drink wine in moderation and (3) gaze at beautiful women but remain chaste! This peculiar prescription was perhaps meant to stir the artist and set aflame his emotions, imagination and inspiration. Fortunately he asked them not to slide into unchastity, for there have been critics who, finding that Burns and Byron wrote some of their best love-poems on their actual amours, have seriously advised artists to cultivate love-making, legitimate or otherwise, as part of their profession! According to them, conse-

quently, art is so momentous a thing that religion, morality, laws and decorum have all to be sacrificed for the sake of poems and pictures, songs and statues ! This shows the dangers to which art may be susceptible if it is not restrained by certain necessary moral safeguards.

Let us now consider the question whether art is didactic and whether it is the highest virtue of an artist to be a preacher. The main appeal of art is not to the intellect but to the feelings and yet through them it is possible to exalt and refine us unconsciously. The function of art is not to preach directly but indirectly by elevating our life to a higher consciousness through the emotions. It is through its instruction that science delights us : it is through the joy that it conveys that art exalts us. The lesson of art is veiled in its joy till it sometimes becomes symbolical and even obscure. According to De Quincey art teaches us as seas and mountains do—by deep impulses and hieroglyphic suggestions. The artist who is out to preach betrays his own art and probably fails as a preacher as well. Shakespeare did not write problem plays in the sense in which Mr. Galsworthy wrote them. The former was so impersonal that he seems to do justice to all his characters, virtuous as well as vicious, that came into his hands. Yet Shakespeare is so perfect an artist that he enlists our sympathies from the very beginning for the virtuous sufferers, while our hatred is reserved for the iniquitous characters. The novelist also need not bring about a *deus ex machina*, or a forced distribution of rewards and punishments towards the end of his work through poetic justice ; but he can suggest the true moral tone by the very treatment



that he gives to his characters. It is in this indirect way that all art can convey morals. Mr. Gummere, however, oversteps the limit when he says that didactic poetry is no poetry, for it is putting Pegasus to the plough, since, says he, in poetry the mind should be led softly and not forced into channels of bitter truths. Prof. Courthope, however, observes with perfect moderation that didactic poetry is poetry though of a very inferior order, just as a cart-horse is a horse after all though not to be compared to the race-horse. Art must communicate with the heart first which may then send messages to the head: thus it is indirectly that art caters to instruction and morality. Art is conducive to morality as indirectly as cricket to the teaching of Shakespeare. A strenuous outdoor game in the evening tones up the system of the student and enables him to turn to his studies with redoubled freshness and vigour. So too the relation between art and morality is not direct but collateral, and the reader of a great artistic work finds himself vaguely exalted in a way which he is himself unable to explain.

Dr. Johnson however believed that poetry must be as a rule didactic, and he praised only those poems which had a moral lesson to convey. For this reason he made the mistake of preferring Goldsmith's "Traveler" to his "Deserted Village." But Ruskin, greater than Johnson as a thinker and author, was to fall into the same error in the 19th century. The cause of art was never served by the Puritans whether of the Elizabethan, Jacobean or Victorian times. Ruskin puritanically maintained with all the tenacity of his noble but wilful nature that art was didactic, that it was not the play of

the soul but should be taken and understood seriously or not at all. He surveyed the field of art as well as of economics and a score of other regions always from the vantage-ground of religion and morality, and though we cannot help acknowledging the greatness of the man, it must also be admitted that he often made a pretty mess of things, which renders it difficult for his readers to follow him throughout. He defined beauty as a divine gift, arising from the sense of reverence, gratitude and joyfulness that spring from the recognition of the handiwork of God in the objects of Nature. Plato banished arts because they were conducive to immorality and falsehood; Ruskin welcomed them because they served only a divine purpose. It is hard to say which of these two great men was more mistaken. In spite of public ridicule Ruskin went on reading sermons in his *Stones of Venice* and realizing seven great virtues in his *Lamps of Architecture*. To him a work of art was not beautiful because it was well composed or painted, but because it conveyed a moral truth.

Ruskin, however, would have been perfectly within his limits had he said that the arts are not an independent and arbitrary phenomenon but an efflorescence of the civilization reached by the society which gives them birth. But the good man did not pause here. Against the evidence of history and perhaps against his own better reason he maintained that good people alone create good art, and that the excellence of a work is to be judged according to the goodness of the artist made manifest therein. Then from the individual he jumped to the whole epoch and generalized that corrupt ages could

never give rise to great art, which always proceeded from morally clean periods. Frederic Harrison in his *Life of Ruskin* has thoroughly refuted this argument giving various instances to show that impure ages have given birth to great art. He has shown that the famous Venetian painters Titian and Tintoretto flourished in very corrupt and sensual times, that the Greek temple of Parthenon was contemporaneous not with Marathon and Æschylus but with Aristophanes and the Sophists; that the Church of St. Sophia at Constantinople was raised by the Emperor Justinian I, the husband of the infamous actress and courtesan Theodora, while St. Paul's Church in London was built in the licentious age of Charles II and his brother! Nay, it must be remembered that art is often a purifier, and a wicked man sometimes turns to art to purify himself and give vent to his nobler impulses. The imagination which is at work in the artist frequently supplies the shortcomings of society; so if the artistic works of the dissolute Renaissance period in Italy display the virtues of calmness and purity, it must not be thought that these virtues were actually found in that age, but rather that the artists created them to make up for what was seriously lacking in their times. In thus going to undesirable extremes in his advocacy of the union of art with morality, Ruskin impaired his own cause, strengthened the hands of his opponents and rendered a distinct disservice to the arts.

Let us now consider the case of the opposition—of those who maintain that art has not the least connection with religion, morality or philosophy but is an independent world by itself. This theory of "art for art's

sake" originated in France whence it came over to England and was developed by James M'Neille Whistler, Oscar Wilde and other contributors to the "Yellow Book." Whistler was the father of this movement and sprang into notoriety by the action he brought against Ruskin. He and his companions believed that a poet cannot be a philosopher or moralist or teacher or critic: his glory was to be an artist and artist only, successfully presenting his vision of life, however untruthful or immoral that vision may be. They held that the artist's mission was to adhere to his ideal, which was independent of everything and the exclusive property of the artist himself. According to Whistler the artist was a dreamer apart, a deviser of the beautiful, having no connection with the public nor the public with him. He held that the relation between the artist and the public was an accidental one, and the less of that the better for the artist and his art. According to this theory, the artist wrote not for the people but for himself; the people had nothing to do with the ideal of the artist who alone was competent to apprehend it, accompanied by a few admirers who stood on his own level. Hence the artist is bound by no morality, no duty, no responsibilities to society, for he is above everything—the undisputed monarch of his own visionary region. Viewed from this standpoint art has nothing moral or even human in it but is wholly built up of passing sense impressions. Thus when Ruskin rejected all art which had no moral to convey, his great antagonist Whistler pulled the pendulum in just the opposite direction and believed in the complete independence of the artist. According to the upholders of the theory of art for art's

sake, the function of morality is to teach, that of art to explain the vision which the artist entertains of life. "Take it or leave it as you choose", says he; "this is life as I see it".

Again, the object of poetry, say these people, is to give disinterested pleasure; that is, the pleasure in poetry does not arise from any great thoughts or moral lessons, but the pleasure is in and for its own sake. Thus a poem or a picture, despite its obscenity or prurient significance, can very well please us if composed or painted with thorough mastery and skill, for it is the form or treatment alone that matters, and the pleasure arising from it is independent of everything else. When the layman goes to a picture gallery and sees a charming work of art he asks whose picture this is. But an artist never puts this question pertaining to the matter, for he is busy about the art, the technique, the form, perspective and such other details of the picture. We have already discussed that cricket is helpful to a student in his studies. Believers in art for art's sake object that cricket is not played for gaining health only, but it is possible to take interest in the game purely for its own sake, without any ulterior object of health, which may or may not be incidentally fulfilled. How can you ever become an expert cricketer or chess-player if you do not devote yourself heart and soul "disinterestedly" to those games but think of gaining health or sharpening your mind all the while? How can you be a great scholar unless you pursue knowledge for the sake of knowledge dissociated from every other motive? And how can the artist do justice to his art until he is wholly absorbed

in his subject, trying to set forth the vision he has conceived as faithfully as he can? To think of other motives, however lofty or noble, would mean an interference which partly destroys the vision, and the artist who does so must be said to have betrayed his art. This theory of "disinterestedness" certainly contains an amount of truth, but its limitations will be set forth by us at the proper place. For the present we continue the arguments in favour of art for art's sake.

In the opinion of Oscar Wilde art is strictly non-moral and there is no such thing as a moral or immoral book for books are either well written or badly written. In art as in science, says Sir Henry Newbolt, there is neither decorous nor indecorous; there is only relevant or irrelevant. These writers either enjoy art or endure it as they enjoy a flower or a rainbow or endure the results of a volcano-eruption or an earthquake. They are helpless by the side of their own art and refuse to trouble themselves whether it is beneficent or destructive in its influence, for, as observed previously, they never take the audience into consideration. Hence, according to Whistler's well-known theory, "art happens" as a natural phenomenon takes place, and the artist is as powerless near his art as is man by the side of a natural occurrence. We shall have much to say in refutation of this theory later on. O. Wilde took a perverse pleasure in treading on Ruskin's corns by propounding certain epigrams which are as false as they are ingenious. Some of them are:—"All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature and elevating them into ideals," and "Life imitates Art far more than

Art imitates Life." Prof. A. C. Bradley has ably stated the case of the upholders of the art for art's sake theory. He says if poetry is that only which has an elevating effect on us as religion has, then thousands of hymns in English literature, which are extremely poor stuff, would have to be ranked in the first class. If poetry is always and only moral, Sappho's passionate but beautiful odes will have to be rejected. If art were invariably didactic then Armstrong's very mediocre poem—"The Art of Preserving Health"—will have to be called great poetry. If the wholesomeness of the subject were only to count, a miserable but patriotic poem by Settle would be preferred to a powerful poem on fulsome flattery by Dryden. Hence, they say, in art the subject, religion, morality, philosophy etc., do not matter; what matters is only form and treatment and to that alone should our attention be turned.

Let us now take three poets—'Omar Khayyâm, Herrick and Shelley—noted for their free thinking or unconventional views on life. 'Omar Khayyâm described life from the viewpoint of a hedonist. God he considered as a capricious tyrant and cared not a jot for the retribution of heaven and hell. He knew that man is powerless against the inexorable decrees of Fate and therefore proclaims from the housetops that we should drown our sorrows in wine. So too Herrick, the finest of the 17th century Caroline lyrists, completely abandoned himself to the charms of love and wine; there is no reference to morality in his poems and yet his gay, seductive thoughts and the freshness and elegance of his expression captivated the hearts of his readers as

they lounged about in his delightful "Hesperides." Shelley too was a wholly non-moral poet and an avowed atheist to boot, though he soared to pantheistic heights in his later poems. In vain does Principal J. C. Shairp remind us that Shelley has no conscience, that his philosophy is poisonous, that his poetry is meant for youths only, and that his verse is as beautiful and as unsubstantial as a mirage. Say what you like about him—call him a faithless pagan, a profligate woman-hunter, a vain visionary, an arrogant revolutionary or whatever you will—in sheer poetic inspiration he stands right at the top of Parnassus, in spite of his loose morals and vicious philosophy. Such cases leave us on the horns of a dilemma. Can there be excellent art devoid of morals or even associated with rank immorality? If so, we shall have to give up our point: or should such eminent writers as Herrick and Shelley be wholly discarded as not poets at all? If so, our unappreciative boorishness would entitle us to be called "animals minus the horns and tail."

After setting forth as fully as possible the case for art for art's sake, let us see what could now be said on the other side. We admit that art can exist without morality, nay, even in flagrant violation of moral precepts: still though such a work be called art, it is never great art. Anacreon and Herrick may be fascinating and delightful reading; they are still not the types of great art. Shakespeare's "Rape of Lucrece" and "Titus Andronicus," (if the latter be his work) may be satisfactory in every way but because of their offensive subjects great art they are not. Such works stand on



the threshold of the temple of art but never enter into the sanctum sanctorum, for it is inscribed on the portals of the place :—"Blessed are the pure in heart for they only shall enter this temple." But what about the lyric which is the outpouring of a poetic spirit in moments of highest inspiration? It is strictly non-moral, being a spontaneous burst of the well-spring of the poet's heart. It is pure poetic energy, the poet being entirely occupied with himself. Our answer is, not that morality should be forced into, so subjective a poem but that the general atmosphere of a lyric should be clean and untainted; or at least there should be nothing in a lyric which may cater to the degraded appetites of man. If these conditions are not fulfilled the lyric may remain a delightful literary work, but is excluded from the category of great art. It is the business of the critic to judge the tastes of the people and ascertain whether they are debased or elevated. When children in their ignorance chew dust or stones, they are admonished by their elders whose duty it is to place the right sort of food at their disposal. If artists are so far forgetful of their duty to society as to create anything wholesome or unwholesome that comes uppermost, the critics will step in and prevent the poison from percolating to the masses by taking severe notice of it. The critics may admit the fascination of such art wherever it is found, but they have to cultivate and refine the childish tastes of the public, and they know the dangers of introducing charming but immoral works in society.

To take a work on the whole is to take both matter and manner, spirit and form into consideration and

from this point of view an immoral work will never be considered beautiful, however enchanting be the form in which it is embodied. It is impossible to dress up sin and impurity in artistic colours, for sin is neither genuine art nor beauty. Any such attempt to wash the negro white is foredoomed to failure; the crow is soon detected when decked in peacock feathers. By the contact of art with sinfulness it is the former that suffers, for when noble and ignoble elements clash together it is the former that are degraded. When dirt is to be removed by water, the former may or may not be washed away by force of the latter; but the indisputable fact is that water will certainly be fouled thereby. So too when art and sin are brought together, the question does not arise whether sin is rendered artistic or not, for no right-minded man ever cares about it; but every honest person will deplore the defilement of art by the unholy contact with sin.

To show how the touch of impurity or sinfulness lowers the value of art, let us take the case of humour, which arises when ideas are presented in a peculiarly incongruous, fantastic or ludicrous fashion. It may be admitted that laughter is incompatible with emotion or sympathy for the object, for if we sympathize with the folly of our victim, laughter would vanish. Yet laughter has its limits, certain kinds being considered genuine, while others which arise out of sheer cruelty and malice prepnese are condemned as a very degraded aspect of the same. When a fashionable young dandy struts about in all the vanity of assumed dignity and in doing so measures the ground over a banana-skin but gets up

uninjured, it is difficult to control one's laughter. But who except children or cruel persons would ever laugh when a blind old man stumbles and breaks his neck, or when a stammerer struggles in vain to make his speech articulate? When a person thus falls or stammers, the situation becomes so incongruous that it should theoretically create laughter : yet when laughter dares to usurp the place of tears and is the outcome of sheer cruelty or inhumanity, it becomes immediately degraded. Hence the humour of the Restoration dramatists, however smart or brilliant, is condemned as low and debased because it often arises out of immoral situations and at the expense of a wronged husband. So too a work of art may be fascinating, but as soon as sin and immorality creep into it, it is immediately corrupted, and its external beauty will not help to redeem it from the low position to which it is itself reduced.

Plato held that a change in music was often succeeded by a change in society. Similarly degraded art will only be a forerunner of degradation in society—a danger to which the advocates of art for art's sake have often turned their telescope, but like Nelson turned it invariably on their blind eye. How art influences society can be seen from the two following instances. In Gay's "Beggar's Opera" the character of the highwayman hero Captain Macheath was so attractively drawn that several youths of England are said to have been misled by the play and become robbers, ending their lives on the gallows. Strangely enough, history repeated itself in Germany where Schiller's play "The Robbers" similarly seduced some German youths to their destruction.

These instances are cited in literary histories, but it is not so easy to keep a record of the thousands of young minds which have been vitiated, for instance, by the perusal of G. W. M. Reynolds' or E. Zola's novels. Youths put forward the excuse that these writers command a brilliant style and hence the cause of their attraction: but external beauty is not the whole of beauty: form or style is not the alpha and omega of art. We have to thank the art for art's sake theorists for this undue importance attached to form and manner; but in great literature matter is wedded to manner, and noble ideas to a suitably elegant presentation thereof. To praise a work of art for the sake of its form only or to read an obscene author because he wrote in a brilliant style is as absurd as to swallow a poison-pill just because it was coated with sugar.

It may be said that art for art's sake is true so far as it turns the mind of the artist to his own work and compels him to take a single-minded and whole-hearted interest therein. We have observed that knowledge has to be acquired for its own sake in order that the seeker may become an eminent scholar. Yet these theories are attended by their own peculiar dangers. A person who hoards his knowledge to himself and never gives others the benefits thereof through books or lectures may be considered a walking encyclopædia but not a useful citizen of the state: and an artist to whom the whole world with its various joys and sorrows, duties and responsibilities, remains a closed book so that he may exclusively remain devoted to his work, may turn out a brilliant artist but his work will be soulless, beautiful

but sterile, and lacking in the "human-heartedness" which can only come by increasing contact with life. The importance of every object is judged by the purpose it fulfils in life. Clothes are not valued because of their beauty but of their fitness for the human body: if they are too long or short, they are rejected in spite of their beauty. Thus we value clothes not in and for themselves but because they serve a higher purpose—of dressing up the body. Nor is the body given so that we may be enslaved to it or in order that it may be nourished, beautified and decorated more than necessary, but in order to prove a suitable vehicle of the soul in the latter's exertions to realise its identity with its Maker. How then can art be meant for art's sake only, just to tickle people by its flights of fancy, its purple patches, its fragile beauty as light and frail as the beautiful gossamer that floats in the air but fades away in a moment? Let the artist just raise his head and realize the relation of his art with life instead of remaining absorbed in the work for its sake only; let his art be created for the sake of life, of humanity, of love, of God, of anything higher than art, and he will soon find what power and energy will stream into his work, making it perhaps less beautiful but more vital, exalted and enduring. As Sir Henry Taylor has observed:—

"Art recommends not counterparts or copies  
But from our life a nobler life would shape."

One of the greatest upholders of the theory of art for art's sake, who subsequently modified his statements so as almost to invalidate his own doctrines, was Walter

Pater, an eminent Victorian critic, who, like his own creation Marius the Epicurean, was endowed with a curiously fastidious and sensuous æsthetic spirit. Throughout his well-known Essay on Style, which sums up his artistic creed, he maintained that the artist is he who records not fact but his sense of fact, and that his art is good in proportion to the truth of his presentment of that sense. He thus attached great importance to the artist's "sense of fact" or vision of real life and to the successful expression of the vision, whether it be true or false. Being under the influence of Flaubert he was always anxious to use the *mot propre*, which habit, said Max Beerbohm, made his sentences appear as if laid out in glittering shrouds. In short Pater was a purist and was so keen after expression that in his opinion mind revealed itself in design, structure and the careful selection of words to convey the sense. This made it appear that Pater was all in all for manner and form, but almost towards the end of the essay we find him maintaining that though art is a delineation of the artist's vision of life, and though it is good according to the success achieved by the artist in presenting his vision, still great art is only possible when there is a hidden eminence or nobility in the subject. Throughout his essay all that mattered to him was how the artist expressed himself: towards the close we are astonished to see him reluctantly admitting that after all what the artist had to say was also of importance. This emphasis on truth and matter in questions of form and style shows clearly how close is the relation of art with the subject and how the former is elevated by the dignity of a great

theme, which can never be devoid of moral force. Pater who was thus a tower of strength to the critics advocating art for art's sake ultimately saw the propriety of abandoning a theory which could not stand its own ground.

One of the greatest of modern critics of art is the Italian, Signor Benedetto Croce, whose "Æsthetic," as translated by Mr. Douglas Ainslee, provides very profitable reading. Croce began in a way far more startling than Pater. According to his theory, art is but intuition, which is independent of all traces of intellectualism. Every true intuition, said he, is also expression: that which does not objectify itself in expression is not intuition but only sensation. But this expression is purely mental for, says he, art consists in the creation of a form wholly within the mind. Thus, according to Croce, the drama of the æsthetic process is represented not on the external stage but, so to say, under the hat of the artist himself. Croce is careless even about the subject for according to him excellence lies not in matter but in the artist's vision of it. Croce departs from other critics when he says that the world of the artist is wholly independent from all other worlds, from the people, even from his own admirers; only the artist himself can enter into it. According to him the true artistic work is the internal picture, the whole process being mental, not outwardly expressed. However there may (not must) come a final stage when the artist externalizes his intuitions in the form of a poem or picture, and if he expresses them successfully the result is beauty which Croce defines as "successful expression." This externalization, says the Italian critic, is not at all

an artistic faculty which latter began and terminated in the mind only, independent of the world, of life, of religion and of every other thing conceivable.

It would be a digression to refute here these views of Croce; but at this stage he suddenly opens his eyes and finds himself a human being, a citizen, a learned man, an author, a moulder of men's minds, and his philosophy now takes a different turn. He says even now that a critic is not empowered to judge a work of art which according to his theory is purely an internal, mental process; but he holds that as soon as the artist's intuitions are externalized on paper or canvas, the artistic faculty ends and the artist trespasses into a different world, where religion, morality, law, science, utility and other considerations prevail. As soon as the artist enters this practical world by composing a poem or painting a picture etc., he must be governed not by the rules of art (according to which he was thoroughly independent and autonomous) but by those of society, which at this stage must come into operation. Hence according to Croce even the censor is justified in proscribing a seditious work as is a critic in condemning literature which caters to our vulgar and debased appetites. Croce considers the artist free so long as the inner artistic faculty is indulged in and his opium dream continues, but as soon as the vision is externalized, day breaks in, the dream vanishes, and critics and censors lay their rude hands on the artistic work to decide whether it is fit, as it is, to be admitted into society. Croce's theory is great in the sense that it upholds the freedom of the artist as well as the claims



of society, which is based on law and morality and every other consideration essential to its stability.

Indeed it is surprising to see how the believers in the complete independence of art ignore the duties and responsibilities of an artist as a man and a citizen. When a man becomes an artist, does he no longer possess a religion? Does he cease to be a father, son or brother; a citizen, patriot or even a law-abiding human being alive to his duties to others? In every other capacity he may be quite a decent well-behaved person: but as soon as he tastes the Lethean waters of art, does he immediately become so oblivious to all religion, morality and law as to be perfectly independent of such considerations? This is too tall a claim made for the artist, and if conceded, few votaries of art would have the self-control not to reduce themselves to sheer æsthetic libertinage. If a complete incarnation of God lays himself open to punishment if he behaves in a way repugnant to the established social moral order, who is this artist that he should thus be permitted to get himself intoxicated and then ride rough-shod over all that we consider essential to our moral, social and spiritual welfare? If this be the liberty or the license to be vouchsafed to the artist, let us say at once that the world can do without art, though never without truth, morality and religion.

The theory of disinterestedness in art is very plausible and not wholly wrong. By pursuing an art disinterestedly, independent of other alien considerations, one stands a chance of becoming an expert in it and the

art itself can be fairly well developed. True; but supposing this sort of art is essentially unwholesome, obnoxious and detrimental to society as a whole; what does the artist gain by acquiring mastery over it and how is the world going to profit by the development of such art? It should follow that the greater the "disinterested" devotion to such corrupt art, the greater is its degradation. We are prepared to admit that Shelley was a truly inspired person if ever inspiration is to be found anywhere, that he sometimes sweeps us off our feet even against our better convictions and that he is second to none in his lyrical raptures and idealistic flights. But supposing this lavishly-endowed favourite of the Muses were to adapt his magnificent gifts to ignoble purposes as he often did: would we not be justified in considering him a splendid poet though not a great one; a person of fine frenzy but after all "a beautiful and ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain?" The poetry in "Epipsychidion" is doubtless charming, but where is the father who has ever asked his daughter to lay its principles to heart? Art, let it be repeated, is not merely manner but matter as well, and no literary work, in spite of its dazzling beauty of expression, can ever be admitted in the list of great art if it fails to move the noblest impulses in society.

Another poet of the same type was A. C. Swinburne, a "pseudo-Shelley," as Matthew Arnold once named him in his letters. He was a sincere devotee of art for art's sake, in love with poetry as such, unassociated by moral considerations. He was so absorbed in lyrical ecstasy that he was content to remain a singer, not a

seer. Swinburne even believed in the strange theory that no supremely great poet could be a great thinker, and that if a poet be a thinker, his philosophy would add nothing to the value of his poetry. But then one wonders what the poet proposes to convey to us if not his imaginative thought. Is he not supposed to give us anything more substantial than the "foam of Pegasus?" And what would be the value of a poet like Swinburne devoid of all thought-power but endowed with a rare, perhaps unrivalled, capacity of thrilling his readers with his musical raptures? Our experience of great poetry makes us rather concur with the wise words of Prof. David Masson in his "British Novelists and their Styles," that an artist is great in proportion as he is a thinker. The permanence of poetry depends primarily on its human appeal, and few of the prosodically perfect lines of Swinburne adhere to the memory just because their author was wanting in the power of thought as well as in the warm contact with life. Hence it is that Swinburne's poetry is called an empty music-box or a "fuzz of words" as Browning appropriately named it. He lived in an atmosphere of words, not thoughts; manner, not matter, was his sole concern. Such a poet, even though the darling of the Muses as he appears to be from his inebriating lines, is never great, for as S. T. Coleridge says in his "Biographia Literaria":—"No man was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher."

The claims of art, like the charms of Phryné, overwhelm us by their beauty; but the demands of society are predominant for on them is based the welfare of

millions and the maintenance of moral law and order. When an extremely clever thief is arrested and when he reveals in the Court the story of his tricks and contrivances—how often he hoodwinked the detectives and gave the police the slip—the judge is bound to admire the man for his ingenuity, however perverted. But the judge does not stop with admiration nor acquit the accused in return for his skilfulness; but after this appreciation of wasted adroitness he thinks of the danger to society if this rogue were to be let off, and consequently convicts the accused and passes sentence on him. So too a shrewd critic appreciates, is bound to appreciate, a beautiful but debased work of art, but considering the claims of society, law, order and morality, he immediately assigns it a place far lower than what its mere external beauty would have entitled it to.

A favourite argument with the upholders of the theory of art for art's sake is that morality changes constantly from age to age, and that therefore it is not advisable for the poet to turn his attention from art, where beauty and joy are perennial, to ethics, which will be found to fluctuate with different countries and times. But these critics forget that in spite of this change the permanent stuff of morality abides in all nations, and that there is always some ethical standard by which the moral character of society is judged in every age. This standard may slightly vary from that of the next age, but there is no cultured nation that can do without one. It is difficult to standardize law and morality once for all, since they often change with the change in our circumstances: yet these two great features of human

culture are eternal. Even our æsthetic notions of joy and beauty will be seen to fluctuate, and yet art is immortal. The individual constantly changes physically and intellectually from the cradle to the grave, but still remains the same, for he can never get rid of the idea "I am." Mr. G. K. Chesterton in his "Heretics" observes in this connection with his usual brilliance that if the morality of one age differs from that of the next, why call them both moralities? The very fact that the word morality is used in both cases would serve to show that it is ever durable, though its standards vary from time to time. To quote Mr. Chesterton's exact words:—"It is as if a man said 'Camels in various places are totally diverse; some have six legs, some have none, some have scales, some have feathers, some have horns, some have wings, some are green, some are triangular. There is no point which they have in common.' The ordinary man of sense would reply, 'Then what makes you call them all camels? What do you mean by a camel? How do you know a camel when you see one?'" Here the flash of Mr. Chesterton's wit serves the purpose of the logical hammer, and sets in clear light the point we are endeavouring to prove—that even when our notions of good and evil undergo a slight change, the substance of morality is permanent, just as, even when the Noachian camels differ from those of the 20th century, camels they all are indisputably. To see the change in ethical standards but turn a blind eye to the underlying stuff of morality seems to be only a convenient pretext put forward by the theorists of art for art's sake in order to banish all moral considerations from their work.

Since the ethical code is found to fluctuate from age to age, it is open to great thinkers to suggest novel paths of morality to society, and this in fact has been done by all great writers of ideal commonwealths from Plato down to Mr. H. G. Wells. We are not against novelty but against degradation, the persistently sinister attempts of ignoble minds to vulgarize and brutalize the masses and render them impervious to higher ideals. The late Mr. Frederic Harrison in his "Memories and Thoughts" takes a rather conservative view of the subject. He is of opinion that when an artist introduces a new practice, he does it at his own peril, for his novelty may perhaps offend. Morality, in his opinion, is not the creation of the artist but a product of society. According to Mr. Harrison, convention is the prosody of art, and while the ignorant must be taught to accept convention, the artist must learn to respect it. Perhaps this narrows down the legitimate province of the poet too much by confining him within the limits of the conventional. The poet is rather a seer and a revealer, and we need not complain if he were to expound a new order of society or sing the glories of a golden age. What we demand is that he should realize his responsibilities to the public and not endeavour to lower its tone as well as that of his art by setting aflame the base passions and appetites always latent in humanity.

Mr. Whistler, the first to trot forth the theory of art for art's sake, was anxious to inform us, as previously mentioned, that an artist had no readers or spectators, he himself being his own audience. This has been shown by Mr. Clutton-Brock in his article on

Art" in "Recent Developments in European Thought" edited by Mr. F. S. Marvin, to be a palpable absurdity, for a work of art can only be so because it is addressed to some one and is not a private activity of the artist. The form of a work of art is conditioned by its appeal to those for whom it is meant. Thus the very form of the drama presupposes the existence of a theatre and an audience. Man is by nature a social animal, and art, however personal it be, has after all its social bearings. Lyric poetry alone may perhaps be said to be so very personal as to presuppose no audience, though when it is written, it is too much to assume that the author never cared what his readers would think of it. It was only to distinguish between poetry and oratory that John Stuart Mill in his essay on "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties" declared that poetry never thought of an audience whereas oratory thought of nothing else but that. Those who maintain the theory of art for art's sake wish to shake off the salutary bonds of society and make their art wholly independent, and for this reason they begin with the proposition that the artist has no audience.

Another favourite crotchet of Whistler was that "art happens." He thereby wished to signify the utter helplessness of the artist by the side of his creative instinct which was, says he, as powerful and inevitable as a phenomenon of nature. The artistic vision may be good or bad, pure or tainted; the artist was unable to check it or even to control its influence. As it is externalized, people may take it for what it is worth. So it follows that a person may exercise self-control everywhere; in art alone he is to give full vent to his feelings and

create anything he chooses, and society is to receive it on its knees as a revelation from above! So Boccaccio in his unreadable "Decameron" only "happened" to write what he wrote, as if some supernatural power caught hold of his hand and made him move his pen; and the sordid stuff of the Restoration dramatists was also a "happening" which was quite beyond the power of those writers to control. This should serve as a direct incentive to writers to display the basest sentiments they are capable of. A murderer may as well plead in the Court that his crime "happened," and if a degraded artist is held to be above criticism, there is no reason why a criminal should not be acquitted on the same plea. But in fact no one who is alive to a sense of duty and true citizenship would ever think of this unmanly doctrine which threatens to deprive him so completely of his will and self-control. W. Morris, a great believer in the influence of art on society, ridiculed this theory and said, art happens no more than good government happens.

But even from the æsthetic standpoint the theory is untenable. It is only beauty that happens; art always is created. Beauty may appear spontaneously in a person or flower; art is a conscious and deliberate creation exhibiting the artist's vision of that beautiful person or flower in marble or colour. Beauty is an immediate efflorescence of charm contained in an object; art consists of careful selection and is never a sudden happening. The fragrance of several yards of ground is sucked up by a flower which thus comprises the quintessence of the land extracted by the slow process of selection going



on in Nature. Then the bee flits from flower to flower assiduously absorbing all their sweetness in the form of honey; and thus the essence of several miles of ground is found hoarded up in the bee-hives. So too of all the orders of creation man is the most evolved and exalted, and from Nature he extracts all the joy and the beauty which are stored up by him in his works of art. As Sir Sidney Colvin observes in his article on "Fine Arts" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, one of the essential characteristics of art is premeditation. Nature acts by impulse, art by forethought and studied initiative of its own. Hence "art happens" is not only a theory detrimental to society, but is in fact no theory at all, because if art were to happen, it would sink back into Nature and lose the name and qualities of art altogether.

The theory of art for art's sake is in fact the spirit of Romanticism running amuck. The Classicists had long tyrannized over poets and fettered poetry to ancient academical rules once invented by Aristotle or Horace, but which had become absurdly out of date under changing times and conditions. A few types only of "poetical subjects" were prescribed, and those themes had to be tricked out in a peculiarly cumbrous and artificial garb. A fetish was made of common sense and correctness, while imagination was supposed to be the evil genius of poets, betraying them into weird and unearthly regions. Then ecstasy was regarded as a crime; originality was frowned upon as a sure sign of uppishness, and inspiration ridiculed as the dream of a madman. The aim of Classicism was to impart to literature a certain discipline, a sense of form and proportion.

and a notion of all that is elegant and appropriate in art. But in thus dwelling on the body, the Classicists completely ignored the soul of literature, and poetry in particular began to grovel on the ground when it ought to have risen in the realms of air. With the Prefaces to the "Lyrical Ballads" Wordsworth in 1793 blew the Romantic clarion, and the immortal English poets of the Revolutionary period nobly rallied round the standard of Liberalism in literature. They showed, more by example than by precept, that poetry was born of the imagination and the passions, that beauty and pleasure constituted its goal, and that the poetic thrill was not to be judged by foot-rules and tape-lines, for it was the product of inspiration—a gift which even the gods might envy. Then ingenuities, verbal conceits and various other artificialities were in their turn denounced; rules and regulations were scattered to the winds, and the flood of Romanticism rushed tumultuously through the fields of English literature, making a clean sweep of all checks and restraints in its impetuous career.

Classicism and Romanticism have been rightly compared by a modern critic to the systole and diastole of the human organism; and excellence lies in the exquisite balance and subtly-regulated adjustment between these two seemingly antagonistic but in reality vitally essential forces of literature. But whenever a movement is started, it is only too human to proceed to extremes, and this was seen in the case of the Romanticists. Once all salutary restraints are disregarded, there is nothing to check the infiltration into literature of individual eccentricity, whimsicality and caprice, which

Matthew Arnold considered the eternal enemies of art. Now every sciolist posed as a scholar, every rhymster as a poet. The oddest irregularities of fancy were taken as flights of imagination; rank nonsense paraded its fatuity as genius, and shameless obscenities passed muster as the emanations of the "inner light." Hence the time was not far distant when England was to be faced by the inevitable but unwelcome theory of art for art's sake, which divorced literature from all moral considerations, propounded the complete independence of art, and realized artistic beauty not in the subject but only in the presentation thereof. It consequently behoves us to remember that this theory does not present Romanticism at its highest and best but at its most mischievous extreme; it is disease, not health; it is the dementia, not the sanity of art.

Matthew Arnold defines poetry as the most delightful and perfect form of utterance that human words can reach. The culmination of human language is poetry as that of human sounds is music. It must be admitted by all that the acme of our culture is reached not only in our triumph over external Nature but over ourselves and our appetites through the realization of religion and truth and the adoption of a lofty moral standard. Does it not stand to reason that the perfect form of utterance that we reach in poetry should naturally harmonize with the highest that we have conceived so far in our cultural evolution? One can understand prose being associated with humdrum ideas, unrefined jokes and unseemly sentiments; but it is highly inconsistent to argue that a great artist can rise to the heights of poetry and yet

simultaneously move on a commonplace level or grovel in the depths of degradation. Why debase poetry by disuniting it from lofty sentiments, which come so naturally to it, and associating it with meaner and undignified companions?

Again, no truly great poem will ever be found to set its face against morality. As Mr. H. W. Garrod observes in his "Poetry and Criticism of Life," whatever the theme, the ideas of the imagination in poetry tend to fall with an ethical ring: only soar on imagination and you express virtue: whether you like it or not, that happens. This will be seen to be substantially true. When imagination is at its loftiest flight, all egoistic considerations gradually drop off and the higher faculties come into play, raising the poem, sometimes against the will of the poet, into a salutary and serene atmosphere. This is the reason why Shelley's loftiest flights sometimes end in glorious pantheism: this serves to explain why a low-minded but truly poetic person like Byron once felt himself constrained to confess:—"The highest of all poetry is the ethical, as the highest of all objects must be moral truth." As Emerson observes the perfect is always serious; it is only the imperfect that looks incongruous and therefore comic. So too S. T. Coleridge maintains that true beauty arises out of unity, and that it is the wholeness of a thing that yields both truth and beauty. It follows therefore that the closer the poet approaches the summit of perfection through his imagination, the more is he unrestrained by vulgar considerations and the nearer he draws to seriousness, truth and even to beauty. Nay, when imagination rises to the full

height of its great capacity, it reaches a level which is frequented by reason itself, for as the highest beauty melts into truth, so is the loftiest flight of imagination identical with reason. As Wordsworth says:—

“ This spiritual love acts not nor exists  
Without imagination which in truth,  
Is but another name for absolute power  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind  
And reason in her most exalted mood. ”

Once the imagination of a great poet is powerfully astir, it can no more put up with an unbecoming subject than an inspired musician would with a miserable hurdy-gurdy. If the subject in poetry be improper, great imagination will bestow upon it a sanity and moral fitness by its magic, elevating touch. If the subject be trivial and commonplace, imagination will outsoar its narrow limits. If, however, the subject is hopelessly vicious, no great poet will choose to waste his imagination upon it, as no one would think of spending his millions on a palace to be built in the immediate neighbourhood of a volcano or in the midst of insanitary surroundings. Profound imagination will either renounce or sanctify a poetic subject: but wise is the man who thinks of the appropriateness of his theme from the beginning rather than trust the efficacy of his imaginative faculty at a later stage. It was not for nothing that Matthew Arnold emphasized the importance of the “ great subject ” in poetry. Ever since the theory of art for art’s sake has been introduced in England in the latter half of the 19th century, sublimity, says Mr. G. K. Chesterton, has gone out of fashion. The reason is not difficult to understand.

Sublimity, said Longinus, is the echo of the sublime soul and is always accompanied by a magnificence of mind. This mental exaltation is not arrived at in poetry without a great stretch of imagination; and little scope is given to the imagination by those modern authors who, tainted by the art for art's sake theory, bestow their best attention to form rather than to the subject in their poems.

Let us now examine another important aspect of art. It has often been held that art is the play of the soul. The physical system is invigorated after a game of tennis or cricket; the soul too is similarly refreshed when it indulges in the play of art. Art is born of leisure and is the result of our spare energy. Art, says J. A. Symonds in his "Essays Speculative and Suggestive" is not the school or the cathedral but the playground, the paradise of humanity. This theory has been beautifully worked out by Schiller in his "Letters on the *Æsthetic Education of Man*." He observes that the senses are in eternal antagonism to morality and both are hard to reconcile, for if we indulge in the one we do so at the risk of forsaking the other. There are certain things that we do because we must; these are our necessities; there are other things that we do because we ought: they are our duties and moral responsibilities. But there are several things which we do just because we like, and these enter into the domain of our play. It is true these functions are different and hard to bring together; but it is also evident how cruel and sordid life would be but for our duties and moral responsibilities, and how man would become brutal in the satisfaction

of his ever-increasing necessities, if he were not governed by moral considerations. But though the functions of our morals and senses usually conflict, there is, says Schiller, a neutral kingdom where the two can be brought together without any conflict, and that is the Kingdom of Play or the Kingdom of the Beautiful. Even Schiller thus believes that morality and art can both co-operate and that it is possible to convey indirectly to the unconscious reader the fragrance of the former, while the artist is apparently absorbed in his own work.

It may seem that the theory of 'art is play' is a weapon in the hands of those who believe in the independence of art, but that is not so. Play has its responsibilities no less pronounced than serious work. Dishonesty is not permitted in business; nor even in play. Who is ever allowed to wield his hockey-stick in any way he chooses? Who ever has tolerated a throw-ball in cricket or foul play at cards? If art is play, it is not to be thought that the artist should behave in any reckless way he chooses and abandon all moral considerations, for without them neither play nor work nor life itself can ever be considered possible. We are even prepared to go further and concede to those who believe in the identity of art and play that art in this sense can even be non-moral: it would be enough, however, if, like the lyric mentioned above, it does not offend our moral sense by a gross contravention of religious or moral dictates. In illustration of the theory—art is play—let us cite and further develop the instance given by the poet Tagore. There is a young girl out at play, setting afloat on the river one little lamp after the other. In a

short time one lamp is extinguished by the motion of the waters or the blowing of the breeze, and immediately another is ignited and set off on the river. The girl's object is to create beauty, and it is certainly beautiful to watch lamps floating on the river. This activity aiming at the beautiful is bound to end in pleasure, for Beauty and Joy, the former being an objectified form of the latter, are, as we know, the twin goals of art. It is useless to reproach the girl for wasting her time, for art itself is born of leisure and is the creation of spare energy. It is futile to say that the girl is wasting her money for her father may be a multi-millionaire to whom any amount spent in such a childish pursuit may not matter at all. A man of common sense may however interfere and say:—"But what's the earthly use of this activity?" Even this question is inappropriate for, as we have seen, art is concerned not with the "useful" but with the "beautiful". But what about morality and the nobler impulses of life? The answer is that in so slight an activity morality need not enter: it is enough that the activity is perfectly innocent and not immoral. But if this girl instead of playing on the river were to play with her lighted lamps near the hay-ricks of her neighbour, her activities would become alarming. Her art ceases to be play as soon as it threatens to be immoral and destructive, as a game of cards cannot be played if one pair of partners is determined to swindle and cheat the other. Thus when art is considered as play morality may perhaps remain in the background though it should never be transgressed.

We have seen that when art is associated with



mean and ignoble objects, it immediately degrades itself; not only that, but it digs its own grave and in a short time practically ceases to exist. We do not deny grace in a serpent, but is not this quality thrown away almost into extinction when embodied in a venomous form which nobody would like to touch, alive or dead? Milk is milk even when poured in a sink, but what is the value to us any longer of that substance which is thus wasted; or how is it possible for us to distinguish the valuable from the worthless when both lie mixed in an inextricable mass? Critics are agreed that the masterpiece of Byron is not "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" but "Don Juan" wherein the poet has truly damned himself to everlasting fame. We know that the devils of hell were at one time angels who fell from grace because they revolted against God. So too an illustrious poet like Byron who thus abuses his unquestioned divine gifts is actually furthering the cause of Satan in this world and thereby enrolling himself in the infernal militia. The terrible waste of genius that we find in "Don Juan" is enough to make the angels weep. How can we enjoy the genius and reject the filth from such a work, especially when the book itself in the first place is scarcely to be found in a gentleman's library? The only result is that vitiated genius will accompany the filth to its foreordained destination of oblivion, leaving a trail of regret throughout the ages.

That art which deliberately sets its face against religion and morality resembles the Biblical hero Samson Agonistes—powerful but blind, or is comparable to the Ophelia of Shakespeare—fair but demented. It is signi-

ficant that both Samson and Ophelia end their days by conscious or unconscious self-murder; and the same fate awaits the art that flourishes in and for itself, not for humanity. When an artist is absorbed in his own work for its own sake, dissociating himself from life and its multifarious concerns, he cultivates an obnoxious selfishness which proves detrimental to his own art in the long run. When he insulates his art from all moral considerations, he is likely to develop a spirit hostile to religion or morality, which will soon degrade himself and his work. Over-indulgence in art for its own sake is a sort of hedonism which flushes up the artist and plunges him into a voluptuous dream in which he may enjoy his artistic creation, but remains dead to the world outside. Thus art for art's sake means the selfishness, the sinfulness, the sensuality and finally the suicide of art, emasculating it wilfully of that vitality which enables it to exist and cast its seeds for further growth.

Believers in art for art's sake, like our brilliant Gujarati author Mr. Kanaiyalal M. Munshi, observe that in literature and art what matters is only the æsthetic element and nothing else. They hold that religion, truth and morality are very good in themselves and in their own spheres but that the worship of these gods would seem inappropriate in the temple of art, where joy and beauty alone are invoked. Religion, they say, is meant only for the emancipation of the soul; Truth is to be pursued from a purely scientific point of view; Morality is established for the maintenance and welfare of society; but Art for the enjoyment through our feelings of the vision of beauty. As Mr. Munshi says, those who

believe that art exists for the propagation of religion and truth should be called "poison-damsels", for they are guilty of strangling art to death! True; the goal of art is not to preach truths of religion and morality, but so to present life in its various aspects as to convey joy and beauty to the reader, and through them to purify him vaguely and indirectly, so that the reader has no impression except of pleasure, whereas the artist, without launching out perceptibly into any didactic path, succeeds as much as a preacher in wholesomely influencing the mind of the reader.

But why fight shy of religion, truth and morality? Is there no joy or beauty in them? Is there no charm or glory in things which have served as the bedrock of human character ever since society came into existence? The preacher may be conscious of the philosophical and rational and therefore dry aspects of these great virtues; but the artist must ever remain alive to the joy that lies in the core of these eternal verities. If these gentlemen see red in religion, truth and morality as handled by artists, would they desire them to elicit beauty from atheism, falsehood and immorality? Surely, we hope, they never mean that. Then again it may be admitted that religion, truth, morality and art have each a different mission of its own to discharge, but in actual life are they all found separately locked up in watertight compartments or do they exist in harmonious co-operation? As I write this essay, I cannot rely on any one organ only of my body, for the brain must understand, the eye must see and the hand must move in obedience to my will towards the fulfilment of the

object. The limbs may individually have a separate function to discharge, but unless they put themselves *en rapport*, no work could ever be done. Life itself is such a harmony and the artist who is absorbed in his art for its own sake to the wilful exclusion of the noblest elements of life behaves like a benighted owl who cannot or will not enjoy the glory of the sunshine. The only effect of thus insulating art from the numerous activities of life would be to confine it into a sort of exclusive cult for a chosen few, not to make it a powerful force in the welfare of humanity.

Morality, said a wise man, is nine-tenths of life, and all the really great artists have been always careful to bring their art into intimate contact with life and therefore with morality, for that is the key to the permanence of their art. If the head be severed from the body on the ground that the functions of each are separate, we kill the whole man, and the corpse will then be useful only for post mortem examination. Only allow the head to remain where Nature has placed it and the result is a living, breathing man, whom God is said to have made after His own image and who is the inheritor of His fair creation. Only allow the head to stand where it is, and the resultant man may turn out by God's will a Plato or a Dante. By separating art from the moral force that should permeate it we destroy both. The flower of great art has its roots deep down in moral truths: by cutting the roots we endanger the life of the plant: the flowers will appear pretty but frail, and this over-delicacy, caused by sapping the moral force from the vigorous roots of the plant, will shortly prove the

bane of art. Nature abhors a vacuum and as soon as an artist empties his art of life and the moral truths on which life is based, he indirectly prepares the way for the Devil to get in, for a purposeless, frivolous art, meant for nothing but the creation of sensuous joy and beauty, to the utter exclusion of all noble impulses, will soon turn into the Devil's workshop. Thus as Prof. Dowden has rightly observed, art dissociated from reason and conscience becomes a distilled poison.

But old Father Time is the best judge, and knows full well how to differentiate between the true and the false, the substance from the shadow. If a great artist wishes to embalm and treasure up his memory in the form of a literary monument that may last for all time, he must see to it that he bases his structure on the solid ground of morality or his work will not survive his own existence. The artist without morality may be compared to the fool in the Bible who with great ease built his house on the sands of the river and was soon buried underneath its debris by a storm: but the wise man who was careful to build his abode with toil and trouble on the impregnable rock of morality long survived in enjoyment of his possessions, in spite of the disastrous floods that spread desolation in the low-lying surroundings. Tennyson in his "Akbar's Dream", describing the futility of prayers not followed by suitable good deeds, observes:—

" but the prayers  
That have no successor in deed, are faint,  
Are pale in Allah's eyes, fair mothers they  
Dying in childbirth of dead sons."

So too the artist that does not indirectly stimulate the moral consciousness is himself like a "poison-damsel", bringing forth a fair but still-born child and herself perishing in the attempt. Ahalyá, the innocent victim of a cruel destiny, was cursed and converted into stone by her irate husband, the Rishi Gautama; and a stone she remained for ages till Shri Rámachandra tripped over it, and by the divine touch that inanimate object sprang into life once more. Art devoid of all moral appeal resembles a stone; perhaps a block of marble, fair and smooth but cold and lifeless. It requires the touch of morality to inspire it with strength and vitality; it needs the pious faith of Pygmalion to breathe a soul into the senseless statue, or the heavenly fire of Prometheus to quicken it with the warmth and vigour of life.

The Hindus are pantheists and consider all that is a manifestation of the Divinity. To them every object, including art, is sacred, and art without morality would be in their opinion the strangest of anomalies. Nay, the Hindus would rather think of erring on the other extreme and holding with Ruskin that only an artist of pure character could produce great art, though this theory, as we have shown previously, is untenable. The Hindus have always followed a high ideal even though it be to the prejudice of their technique. The nobility of the ideal always remains before the mind's eye of the artist and naturally exalts him as he thirsts to realize it in his vision. According to Dr. A. Coomar Swami in his "Essays in National Idealism," the Hindu artist performs his ablutions and religious ceremonies, sits for a long time in close meditation, almost setting aside his

own personality, and it is only then that he is vouchsafed the vision of his ideal. To the Hindu, therefore, art is a religious function to be carried out with due veneration and in a spirit of high seriousness. Tagore says in his "Cycle of Spring"—We poets liberate mankind from their attachments:—and indeed artists for the time being snap the bonds of our finite desires and emancipate the mind, enabling it to revel at will in the region of ideal visions and seek delight in the society of infinite truths. The "Mahābhārata" is an "itihāsa" or a compilation of old traditional annals, but sometimes, as by the late Mr. G. M. Tripathi in his "Saraswati-chandra" Part III, it is taken as an allegory. When thus conceived the five Pandava brothers symbolize five virtues—Yudhishtira standing for truth, Bhima physical strength, Arjuna energy, Sahadeva foresight and Nakula art. Sahadeva and Nakula were twins and it is significant that art comes last while the embodiment of religion and truth stands first. All the other brothers, including art, are at the beck and call of truth and do his bidding, but never in that vast work has art been known to order about his elder brother or prove irresponsible or behave in a way repugnant to truth without being admonished and brought to his senses by the latter. Hence according to the "Mahābhārata" truth is the crown of art as well as of the other virtues, and the authority of the "Mahābhārata" voices the opinion of India.

Even in the West, ancient poets were philosophers preaching not directly but "by the profundity, purity and comprehensiveness of their insight into life." Aristotle's "Poetics" has for centuries proved to be the cockpit of

contention for European critics, and pitched battles have been fought over the meanings of some of its words. According to Prof. Butcher's translation, it would appear as if Aristotle tried to separate the function of æsthetics from that of morals, and fix the goal of poetry in mere pleasurable emotion. But Mr. J. C. Collins in his "Studies in Poetry and Criticism" proves Prof. Butcher's translation to be defective, and says that the end of poetry, according to Aristotle, was not merely pleasure but "proper pleasure", which can never be devoid of moral satisfaction. Aristophanes had such a high conception of poetry as to maintain that while children have schoolmasters to teach them, the preceptors of grown up people are the poets. It is also significant that Horace should have found a greater master in the poet Homer than in the philosopher Chrysippus, while Milton discovered a profounder teacher of truths in the author of the "Fairie Queene" than in the theologians Scotus or Aquinas. Even in the 19th century Browning held that the great poet, who according to him is the subjective poet, gives not what man sees but what God sees, the archetypal Ideas, the seeds of creation lying burning on the Divine Hand—it is towards these that he struggles; while the following famous words of Matthew Arnold show the essential connection between art and all that we consider greatest in life:—"The strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry." We shall cite only one more poet to show that though ordinary art may cater to our sense of physical beauty, still great art, through its dignity of subject and moral strength, is always meant to raise us into a region far



higher than the realistic sphere of our every day life. Longfellow says in his poem "The Singers":—

"God sent His singers upon earth  
 With songs of sadness and of mirth;  
 That they might touch the hearts of men,  
 And bring them back to Heaven again."

Thus the great minds of the West no less than those of the East are believers in the theory that art has a vital connection with life, morality and truth. It is time we should now be roused from our æsthetic slumbers and shake off the deceptive illusion of art for art's sake, which has debased our art by separating it from all higher impulses of life and thus in turn has exerted an unwholesome influence on society. It would be conducive to the moral welfare of the world if we were to return to the only true conception of poetry and make it the medium not of sentimental flights but of the deepest and noblest truths realised in the poet's ideal world.

We have seen in our discussion of the question "art is play" how far absence of morality can be permitted in art; let us now see what is the maximum of morality that can enter into the artistic activity. We have also noticed that art is a purificatory process and that even a wicked man in his artistic creations often refines himself and is inclined to suppress his impious-impulses and bring his nobler self into operation. Every artist idealizes, for the object which he sees in the outside world does not satisfy him. He dwells imaginatively on it and wishes to see it not in its earthly form but in

its archetypal perfection, not as it is in life but as it ought to be in eternity. When he thus pitches his ideal so high and yearns after perfection, he unconsciously enters the religious or spiritual region, even though in actual life he may not be a person of devout temperament. Our senses only comprehend outward Nature and physical beauty, but art consists not of form alone but of the spirit as well and therefore hankers after real Beauty, to which the senses aspire in vain. This real Beauty, this quintessence and spirit of the thing which lies beyond the veil of externality, is not available to the physical organ of vision but flashes upon "the inward eye which is the bliss of solitude." This inward eye is what we call "bhakti" or devotion, possessed by great sages who penetrate with it the heart of a substance, as well as by mighty artists who realize thereby an object in its essential and real Beauty. (This "bhakti" or devotion is similar to "theology" when taken in the special sense given to the word by the Rev. Stopford A. Brooke in his "Theology in English Poets".) Thus great art is "bhakti", and there is no essential difference between the great artist and a true devotee.

A story taken from Indian folklore will set this argument in a clearer light. Once an exceptionally gifted poet during his travels came to the court of a king and praised him in songs which were composed so ably and recited so brilliantly that the courtiers were lost in admiration. He was asked by the king to come the next day and again on the third: the subject of his songs was the same—eulogy of the king, but this was done with such remarkable inspiration and extraordinary skill that

the audience hailed him with acclamation. The king now called upon the minister, who was noted for his wisdom, to reward the poet adequately, whereupon the minister ordered that the poet should be beaten with shoes seven times on his face and turned out ignominiously. The courtiers, as they saw the order being carried out, sat dumbfounded at the "reward" received by the poet after three days' trouble, and the injustice of the minister became the talk of the town. The poet left the court in high dudgeon, and purchasing a dagger concealed himself in the minister's house with a view to murder him at night. When the minister came home in the evening he found his wife so offended at his conduct, which had already come to her ears, that she refused to talk with him or look after his comforts, till he had explained his strange attitude. The minister thereupon said:—"Never in all my life have I come across so great and inspired a poet whose art was the outcome not only of a heavenly-inspired genius but of a perfect technique as well. Had I heard him only for the first day, I would have bestowed on him a splendid reward, but when I found that for three days in succession the poet had nothing to sing about except eloquent panegyrics on an earthly potentate, I was convinced that he had turned his magnificent endowments to ignoble purposes. Such divine gifts could better be devoted to divine, religious or highly moral subjects and not to the attainment of worldly and materialistic ends. In order to teach him this lesson, I was reluctantly compelled to have him disgraced before the court." The poet who had heard this explanation now issued from his concealment and

fell at the feet of the minister. He confessed the crime he was about to commit, and admitting the truth of his remarks promised to devote his poetic genius to singing the glory of God and His goodness in the future.

It is hoped that the drift of this story is not misunderstood. We do not say that God should be the only theme of the poet and nothing else, for we have gone to the length of saying that art can even be non-moral. But in discussing the question of the identity of art with play we tried to show how far art can exist even without morality provided it does not offend our moral sense; we here attempt to show what height great art can reach when religion or morality is the avowed burden of the poet's song. If great art and "bhakti" are essentially similar in their function of attaining to the real Beauty or essence of the thing, what then could be more exalted for the former than the goodness and greatness of the Almighty, the justification of His dealings with His creation, the obedience to His orders and the resignation to His will? The views expressed on great art by Mr. Lafcadio Hearn in his "Interpretations of Literature" are well worth quoting in this connection. The highest form of beauty, says Mr. Hearn, is moral beauty, and hence the highest form of art is that which expresses this moral beauty. True art, like true love, prompts us to selflessness, makes us feel generous and willing to sacrifice ourselves; but, says Mr. Hearn, if a piece of art does not make us feel kindly and more generous and morally better, then, no matter how clever it be, it is not the highest form of art.

Thus we see that the grossest and most immoral means of conveying outward beauty may be art, though of the most degraded type. Superior to it is the art which is quite non-moral but which does not taint the moral atmosphere. Still better is the art which though aiming at joy and beauty succeeds in unconsciously refining and elevating the spiritual consciousness of the reader. But the greatest art is that in which the artist becomes a devotee seeing nothing but the Whole, the True, the Beautiful, and perfectly conscious of their identity. He tries to realize the great Vedic teaching—"Raso vai saha"—God is Beauty. He attempts to embody in his art the famous maxim of Kant—the Beautiful is the symbol of the Moral. Never for a moment does he betray the "dharma" (duty) of the artist which lies in the attainment and communication of joy and beauty, for he has now come to realize that real Beauty and Joy are never different from Truth to which the philosopher aspires, or from Goodness which is the goal of the moralist.

We have defined art primarily as the human response to the beautiful, but we may here note towards the conclusion that art unconsciously creates love also, for wherever there is beauty there is love. As Burke says in his "Essay on the Sublime and the Beautiful," beauty is that quality that inspires immediate love. Beauty never waits for its appreciation on the judgment of understanding or reason, but affects us immediately as the touch of fire or ice instantaneously burns or freezes. Frederick von Schlegel has observed that every genuine work of art should have three elements: (1) richness of

nature (2) symmetry of art and (3) purity of love. What a great future does the artist command? What potent forces for good are Beauty, Joy and Love? How morally rich the artist who has these virtues at his disposal to disseminate throughout the world? The ugly load of sinfulness so oppresses this earth that she is groaning for genuine Beauty: hatred and bloodshed have become so rampant that she is thirsting for the nectar of Love, as if she never tasted it in all her existence. The artist whose very duty it is to convey Beauty and Love to all can, if he so chooses, satisfy these yearnings of the world. As Browning says in his art-poem "The Guardian-Angel:"—

"Oh world, as God has made it! all is beauty,  
And knowing this is love, and love is duty."

To absorb the beauty that is inherent in the world, to realize the identity of all true beauty with love, and to convey this rich combination of love and beauty to the world, is the function of the great artist. The world is now aiming at universal brotherhood, politically as through the League of Nations; scientifically through various ingenious devices that have annihilated time and distance and brought the farthest countries near together like neighbours; and spiritually by a study of comparative religions and formation of various societies to bring into more intimate contact the minds of the East and the West. Will the artist, without forsaking his own "dharma", contribute his mite to this great movement or follow the frog in the well policy of art for art's sake and be lost in the dreams of a voluptuous

æstheticism? Will not the artist see the wisdom of elevating himself, his art and his readers by conveying through his joy-inspiring works the love and beauty he has gathered from life, thus infusing sweetness and light into society? "The world is my family," says a Sanskrit maxim, and persons with an international outlook may well fix it as their goal. The sublime messages of our prophets on universal love and world-brotherhood are yet before us awaiting their fulfilment by an indifferent generation. The great artist must proceed on his way in complete faith, hope and charity, and never think of laying down his chisel, brush or pen till he has filled the world with beauty, with joy and with love. The following noble lines, being the last of Dr. Robert Bridges' "Hymn of Nature," though addressed to mankind in general, may serve as an excellent guiding principle and inspiration to the great artists of the world to whom they may here be dedicated:—

"Thy work with beauty crown, thy life with love;  
 Thy mind with truth uplift to God above:  
 For whom all is, from whom was all begun,  
 In whom all Beauty, Truth and Love are one."

## The Methods and Materials of Ancient Literature.



The greatest of God's blessings are those which are constantly and momentarily enjoyed, yet of the existence of which we are the least conscious. Such a blessing is the gift of speech which enables man to live in society and communicate his ideas and requirements to his fellows. Every impression endeavours to seek its expression, and man would burst if he had not the means of conveying to others the results of his experiences. According to the Chhândogya Upanishad—"The essence of all beings is the earth, the essence of earth is water, the essence of water is plants, the essence of plants is man, the essence of man is speech, the essence of speech is the Rig Veda, the essence of the Rig Veda is the Sâm Veda, and the essence of the Sâm Veda is the Udgith or the Aum." It is scarcely an exaggeration to say—"the essence of man is speech"—for let men only lose their speech all over the world for a year or even for a month and all our boasted civilization, our culture, science and in short all the progress that we have made through the centuries will suddenly dissolve into oblivion and leave not a rack behind. God does not need a rain of fire, a terrific cataclysm, a disastrous earthquake or a bloody Armageddon to end the world; let Him only withdraw the gift of speech and man will reel back unto the brute and human glory will be a thing of the past. Some such experiment according to the Old Testament



had been tried on a very limited scale when God cursed the builders of the Tower of Babel not with the extinction but the confusion of tongues, which led to the abandonment of the enterprise, as it would lead to the abandonment of our civilization, if God were pleased to create a universal confusion or extinction of speech.

There is always a great outcry against infant mortality in every country, and perhaps one reason may be sought in the fact that the poor helpless babe has no language but a cry. If it could only convey to others what it wants or suffers from instead of leaving it to the speculation of its bewildered parents, its needs could better be looked after, and there would immediately be an appreciable reduction in infant mortality. It is speech that differentiates us from animals who cannot communicate their needs through language but through significant sounds which display their emotions and make us feel, for instance, whether the bird or animal is angry or sad, hungry or cheerful. From animals and infants the next step would lead us to savages, the infants of civilization, whose language is largely made up of onomatopœic sounds and is scarcely different from the "language" of animals. The word for anger in the savage lexicon would be something like gr-r-r, for laughter khi-khi-khi, for lamentation ho-ho. The origin of language is imitation or mimicry of cries of passion, alarm, grief etc. According to Mr. H. G. Wells in his "Outlines of History," the first language consisted only of interjections and nouns, grammatical forms and expression of abstract ideas emerging about 8000 years ago. These are the modest or even ridiculous beginnings

which were to end in course of time and for the present in the Great Oxford Dictionary. So great is speech and so profound its importance that it has been invested in all countries with a religious significance. To the Parsis no written or verbal formula is so holy as the Ahunavar, the Word of God, which corresponds to the Vâgdevtâ or the Shabda-Brahman of the Hindus. The Greek philosophers have dressed the same conception in a rather different garb when they dwelt on the Logos, which literally means word, and which in their sense of Reason resembles the Vedic Rit, the Buddhist Dhamma and the Jewish Memra. The learned Jews of Alexandria then took up the conception, and St. John, who was soundly influenced by their teachings, made a new departure when he identified the Logos with Christ in the memorable words:—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth. (John I 1,14.)

For years together the art of writing remained unknown and that which was worth studying had to be committed to memory. Thus the earliest literature before the invention of the alphabet was mnemonic, the finest instance of which would be the hymns of the Rig Veda. Max Muller considers it a miracle that this great work should have remained in the condition of floating literature, being handed down to posterity largely through verbal transmission. The earliest form of literature is the "popular" or "traditional" ballad, which must also be consigned to the same category. Such ballads were never reduced to writing; they were

danced and recited, not written and read, for to do so would be to destroy their glory and charm. Our primitive ancestors must have subsequently thought the load on their memories to be unbearable and hence found it necessary to preserve a record of their sayings and doings. This necessity was the mother of invention, and the art of writing came into existence. According to Mr. F. J. C. Hearnshaw in his "First Book of World History", alphabets were not discovered all at once, but "writing" consisted at first in making a picture of the thing to be represented e. g. a cow; then only a symbol of a cow was used e. g. a pair of horns. The Chinese still have symbol alphabets or signs and pictures which convey ideas. They have no alphabet proper but about 20000 syllabic characters, and hence to study the Chinese language is to impose a tremendous burden of signs and pictures on the mind. As Macaulay said, it is easier to be a profound scholar like William Jones than to acquire just a tolerable knowledge of the Chinese language.

One of the greatest and most beneficent inventions was that of the alphabet in different countries of the world. So remarkable appeared to our ancient fore-fathers the feat of jotting down one's ideas on a tablet for another to read, that they at first took it to be witchcraft, but on becoming conscious of its advantages, they considered it to be nothing short of a boon bestowed by Providence. Carlyle relates the story of a Spanish adventurer who, reaching a savage dominion where the art of writing was unknown, threw the poor illiterate king into a paroxysm of wonder by communicating his thoughts through a letter to one of his companions,

asking him to perform a certain action about which the king had been previously informed. The earliest discoverers of the alphabet have been actually crowned with divine honours. Such was the case with the one-eyed Odin, worshipped as the chief god by the Scandinavians for having brought to them the light of civilization including the alphabet. So too the fish-god Oannes was worshipped by the ancient Chaldeans and the ibis-headed Thoth by the primitive Egyptians for instructing these nations in various arts and sciences among which was included an indispensable knowledge of the alphabet. One of the earliest historical instances of European alphabets is the "Runes" which literally means secret or mystery. This was significant because the art of writing was then held in superstitious awe and was monopolized by the priests. It was believed that black magic could be practised through the runes as evidenced in the following anecdote given by Mr. Henry Bradley in his "History of the Goths" about the origin of the Huns for whom the Goths had a wholesome contempt. It is said that the Gothic King Filimer expelled from his camp several learned women who knew the runes and were therefore charged with being sorceresses. These women came to the deserts, and from the unholy alliances of these "witches" with the demons of the wilderness sprang the "loathsome" Huns. Those were evidently not the days when female education or rather education at all was to be appreciated.

Let us now consider the introduction of writing in some of the important countries of the world. The Phœnicians were an interesting little nation of olden times

and the intermediaries of ancient civilization. It is generally believed that they were the first to adopt an alphabet, but this erroneous view is rectified by Dr. A.H. Sayce who in his "Ancient Empires of the East" assigns the credit of the invention to the Egyptians during their Middle Empire or in the earlier years of the suzerainty of the Hyksos rulers. The Phœnicians, who were an eminently receptive people, borrowed the Egyptian alphabet, deprived it of its encumbrances and adapted it to suit all practical purposes. Greek tradition asserts that it was from Phœnicia that Cadmus brought to his country a knowledge of the alphabet, which soon became the mother of the alphabets of the Western world. The person who introduced various arts and sciences in Iran was the King Jamshid, and the Arabic author Ibn-an-Nadim (quoted by Sir H. Rawlinson) ascribes the invention of Persian writing to the same great monarch. But as readers of the "Shah Nameh" are well aware, Firdausi gives the credit of introducing this art in Persia to the predecessor of Jamshid—Tehmurath Divband, the demon-conqueror. This king, according to the great Persian epic, was about to slay his demon captives, when they offered to teach him a valuable art if they were set at liberty. On their request being granted they taught Tehmurath the art of writing; but the very fact that this art was to be studied from demons or barbarians is itself significant of the scant respect in which it was held at one time by several countries.

According to Cunningham, India independently developed her own alphabet which was evolved from the picture writings. But this view has been thoroughly

refuted by the great scholar T. W. Rhys Davids in his "Buddhist India." Mr. Rhys Davids says that it was at a very late date, after a good deal of religious and philosophical literature had been already evolved that writing was introduced in India in the 7th century B. C. Indian letters were derived not from the alphabet of the Semites but from the source to which the Semites themselves were indebted; viz. from the pre-Semitic form of writing used in the Euphrates valley, especially at Babylon, which had itself borrowed them from the ancient Akkadians. India got her letters not through her Brahmin priests but through her Dravidian merchants who had trade relations with Babylon. The Brahmin priests immediately monopolized the art of writing and made short written notes to assist their memory; but it is deplorable to state that instead of developing this useful invention they chose to continue the verbal method, because they were afraid that written sacred texts might be read by the Shudras, which according to their narrow-minded notions would be the most heinous of crimes. Hence the bigotry of the Brahmins and their insane animosity for a section of their own co-religionists prevented them from making full use of such a blessing as the art of writing.

On the ruins of Nineveh, Babylon and Persipolis is to be found a script written in peculiar cuneiform or arrow-headed letters, being the oldest written characters extant. The reason why such characters came into existence was that it was very difficult to inscribe curved lines on stone or clay, while the impress of a stylus could easily assume a wedge-like arrow-headed shape.

The ancient Egyptian priests evolved a wonderful mode of symbolic picturewriting called hieroglyphics which are said to consist of three classes of characters. The first class leads us to the abstract idea by a representation of the concrete object; e. g. a tiger would mean ferocity, a serpent would stand for vindictiveness. The second class gives us symbols signifying certain ideas; e. g. a flower may stand for peace, a sword for war. The third class consists of symbols representing certain sounds or letters of the alphabet; e. g. a horse may stand for a, an owl for b, and so on. Thus it is by a series of figurative, ideographic and phonetic pictures and signs that words and sentences can be developed in the hieroglyphic language, resembling closely the present-day picture-puzzles in our papers, which tax the ingenuity of our youths. The common word "read" is the same as "rede" (to interpret) and is derived from the Anglo-Saxon "redan" to guess or decipher. It is from this root that we get the word "riddle" and all this is very significant and enables us to understand that reading in ancient times was not the modern ordinary process of making out what is abundantly clear from a written page, but a far more ingenious one—of interpreting or conjecturing what possibly could be the significance of a particular hieroglyphic or runic text. It was by a happy accident, narrated by John Macy in his "Story of the World's Literature," that the world came across the key to the hieroglyphic puzzle. In 1799 a Frenchman in the great Napoleon's army in Egypt discovered a block of stone, now famous as the Rosetta stone, on which a royal Egyptian ukase was written in

three languages—Greek, Egyptian and Hieroglyphic. By a knowledge of Greek the other two languages were deciphered by J. F. Champollion, or otherwise the hieroglyphics would have remained a secret to the present day.

We are grown so familiar with books that we find it difficult to realize that mountains in ancient times served the purpose of a volume, and walls and pillars, tiles and bricks represented its pages. In the absence of paper and print ancient kings were compelled to record their achievements on mountains, and such inscriptions are to be found and studied even at the present day. There are numerous instances of such rock-records, the most famous among them being those of Nebuchadrezzar, Darius Hystaspes and Ashoka. Nebuchadrezzar was one of the greatest kings of ancient times and has left behind him many inscriptions in which he glories in his wonderful canals, bridges and reservoirs, his great wall and his magnificent temple of Bel Merduk, and to crown all, his Hanging Gardens of Babylon, regarded as one of the nine wonders of the world. Darius was one of the most powerful of Asiatic potentates, and in his inscriptions on Mt. Behistun he humbly attributed the glory of his extensive conquests to the grace of Ahura Mazda. The brilliant young scholar Grotefend was the first to decipher these records, but the real sterling work in this connection was done by the redoubtable Rawlinson at peril of his life, and the finishing touch was recently laid by Prof. Jackson, who reviews the whole history in his "Persia Past and Present." Ashoka was one of the greatest of Indian kings and was to Buddhism what Gushtasp was to Zoroastrianism and Constantine to



Christianity. In his numerous edicts engraved on rocks and pillars, this "beloved of the gods" lays down ethical principles and records with the enthusiastic fervour of a fresh convert how he sent forth missionaries to the farthest limits of the then known world for the propagation of his newly-adopted faith. J. Princep was the first to decipher these edicts, and the same work was further carried on by the late Indian scholar Pandit Bhagvanlal Indrajī. The familiar word "write" perhaps brings to the mind of a moderner a self-filling, pressureless fountain-pen floating over superfine cream-laid paper. But the word is derived from the Anglo-Saxon "writan" to inscribe or engrave with a sharp instrument, and this is just true to reality, for the ancients were concerned with hammer and chisel working their hard way through the adamantine womb of mountains rather than with our pen, ink and paper, the latter object having, as we shall see later on, entirely revolutionized the art of writing.

The ancient library consisted not of books but of mountains and mausolea, temples and towers on which records were inscribed. Inscriptions were also made on tablets and tiles, bricks and cylinders, as witnessed in some of the most renowned Babylonian libraries—of Erech and Larsa, of Ur and Agade. Sometimes matter was inscribed on several sticks or pieces of ivory, which were then bound together and became a sort of book. The famous Roman laws of the Twelve Tables were recorded on stone tablets. Sometimes marble or wooden tablets were rendered as thin as possible and many such tablets were artificially bound together to assume the

form of a book. According to M. Joachim Menant, there were more than 10000 tablets in the library of Nineveh founded by the great Assyrian king Asshurbanipal. Sometimes matter was inscribed over cylinders, through which a string was passed, and the whole served the purpose of a book. It was necessary that the handwriting should be as small as possible so that less space might be occupied, and sometimes it was so minute as to be illegible without a magnifying glass; and as Z. A. Ragozin observes in her "History of Chaldea" even glass lenses were actually found among the ruins, and they must have been deliberately placed there to serve as microscopes. Some of the excavated tablets were unbaked and crumbled to dust under the finders' fingers. It was proposed to bake such of them as could bear handling at all, and by a successful experiment numerous such "documents" were preserved. Sometimes heptagonal or octagonal tablets were used, each side of which was written over. These tablets had this advantage over mountains and temples in the fact that they were movable. Thus the ancient palace was not only a dwelling place but a book, the pages of which were represented by doors and windows, gates and pillars.

Before the invention of paper, copper, gold and silver plates were used for preserving records about hereditary rights such as lands and estates, and there are numerous instances of persons who, when they received any favour from the king, were also presented with a copper or silver plate, sanctioning the grant of such favour. The Hittite tribes appear to have made a liberal use of silver as a writing material, and money

was coined for the first time by the Lydian kings. The Romans used to cover a tablet with wax and write their records thereon. They used a pointed instrument called stylus (from which we have the familiar word "style"), the other end of which being flat was used to erase any inaccurate statement. This is comparable to the method, which must well be within living memory, adopted in our own province a few generations ago by our poor little grand-fathers, who derived their first knowledge of the alphabet by writing letters with a reed on a tablet of wood covered with dust. This has given rise to a Gujarati idiom, and an illiterate person is said not to have "thrown dust on his tablet" at all. From stone and wood, the next step in civilization took us to the skins of goats and sheep, and even of fishes, and snakes. According to the Arab historian Mas'udi, the scriptures of Zarathushtra were written on 12,000 cow-hides and preserved in the royal libraries of Persia. The Jews and the Greeks, though never the Hindus, are reported to have recorded their works on skins. Socrates being once asked why he did not compose books, replied:—"I do not transfer knowledge from the living hearts of men to the dead hides of sheep." In course of time cloth began to be used extensively. As J. Richardson observes in his "Dissertation on the Eastern Nations," the pre-Islamic Arabs were in the habit of inscribing their most famous poems on silk in characters of gold and suspending them in their temple with great pomp and solemnity. Seven great poets have thus had the good fortune of seeing their work immortalized, the poems being called "Mo'allaqât" (suspended).

It may here be noted that Clement Huart in his "History of Arabic Literature" argues that the poems were not actually suspended in the Ka'ba but were called Mo'allaqât because they shone as brilliantly on the Arabic Parnassus as a chandelier in a capacious hall.

To insure the durability of a record skins were sometimes dressed up and rendered suitable for writing. The result was a parchment, the word literally meaning paper of Pergamus, the famous ancient city of Asia Minor, where parchments were first used extensively about 200 B. C. The king of Pergamus built a fine library, the envy of the Alexandrians, and arranged to have books written on a stuff called "Parchment Pergamene," but when Antony conquered Pergamus, he bestowed the famous library on his beloved Cleopatra, and it was incorporated with what remained of the library of Alexandria. We owe also to the scribes of Pergamus the art of writing on both sides of the leather, which soon led to the discovery of the palimpsest, which was a sort of parchment from which writing could be erased to make room for a fresh record, though the handwriting of the former was often faintly visible. When even a couple of centuries before Christ it was not possible to make a record on a parchment without erasing the former one, how extravagantly absurd would it be to expect that ancient literature should survive to modern times? Supposing in ancient Chaldean days the people wished to record a book of the dimensions of the Bible; how many mountains and edifices would be required for the purpose, and what time, trouble and expense would be incurred by the persons who would dare to undertake this super-

Herculean enterprise? Even then how could the pages of such a "book" be numbered: how would it have been possible to knock about from post to pillar and city to city to read the written matter; how could the references and cross-references be recorded on the margin? If the ancients had ventured to prepare a work like the thin-paper edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, they might have had to set apart the buildings of several cities and the mountains of several provinces for the purpose. One can lift up several volumes of the *Encyclopædia* in both hands, but how could the ancient "volumes," represented by mountains and buildings, be considered movable, except by a Shri Krishna, who raised on his finger the mountain of Govardhan, or better still by a Hanuman, who, failing to find the required medicinal herbs in the Himalayan ranges, tore up the Aushadhiprasth mountain by the roots, and hurtled impetuously through the air with the huge load in his hands till he reached the battlefield in Lanka?

But the materials of several records are frailer even than those we have discussed above. In the 7th century A. D. the Arabs in the *Khilâfat* of Abu Bakr and 'Othmân undertook the edition and recension of the *Qoran*. They found that the sacred text was written on a variety of materials, the queerest among them being the shoulder-blades of sheep on which the *Qoranic* verses were written, the whole being preserved in a large box. It is easy to see how difficult and exacting it must have been to preserve a genuine record of the sacred work from such frail resources as these. There are fantastic instances in which men have been converted into

books by messages being recorded in the palms of their hands, or wills inscribed with a sort of unfading ink on their backs. The History of Greece has preserved for us a wonderful instance of such a record made on a man's head. Histiaeus, tyrant of Miletus, who was detained at Susa by king Darius Hystaspes, is said to have instigated his son-in-law Aristogoras to raise the standard of revolt in Ionia. Histiaeus employed a slave, shaved his head, branded his message thereupon and for several days allowed the hair to grow. The slave was then dispatched to Aristogoras with instructions to shave his head, so that the secret record may become visible.

Trees have played a very important part in the history of the art of writing. The ancient Saxons used to write on wooden plates of the beech tree, which were called *boc*, from which we derive our familiar word "book". The Germans of olden days also inscribed their runes on beech tree tablets; and similar was the case with the Romans, whose word for book is "liber" (which literally means the inner bark of plants), being the same as the French "livre", the Italian and Spanish "libro" and the English "library". The Greek word for the fibre of the Egyptian papyrus is "biblos" from which we have the word "biblicon" or a book, which word in its turn has given us the familiar word "Bible". The English word "schedule" is derived from the Latin *scida*, which again means a strip of papyrus bark. So intimate is the relation between trees and books that we talk of the "leaves" or pages of a book as of the leaves of a tree. Even the Sanskrit or Gujarati word

पत्र ("patra") means primarily the leaf of a tree and then takes its usual significance of an epistle. The scriptures of the Buddhists have been actually recorded on palm leaves, and such religious manuscripts, cut into thin slices, polished and bound with strings, are still preserved in the libraries of Tibet and Adyar. The natives of South India put their palmyra trees to a variety of uses, utilizing its wood, fruit, root, sap, fibres and all. The big palmate leaves of the tree are used for thatching huts, and what is to our purpose, for recording thereupon whatever they have got to preserve with a fine pointed steel pen. The talipot is a beautiful palm tree with very large fan-shaped leaves used by the natives of Ceylon and Malabar as umbrellas or as fans in ceremonial processions, or, when cut into slices, as a convenient material for writing.

One of the greatest inventions ever made was that of paper, which facilitated immensely the art of writing and went a great way in bringing about a dissemination of knowledge in the world. Letters and records have still been preserved in India, written upon carpets which were then folded up; but neither stone, wood, leather or cloth could be used with such ease and convenience as paper, whose invention is consequently to be regarded as a very important landmark in the evolution of the art of writing. It is asserted on doubtful authority that paper was first invented by the Chinese, from whom the Arabs learnt the art and taught it to Europe. The word "paper" is derived from papyrus, a tall rush-like reed growing in the Nile swamps. The Egyptians cut the stem of the plant into thin slices which were gumm-

ed together and pressed, thus presenting a suitable material for writing. Ptolemy I (Ptolemy Soter) and his son Ptolemy II (Ptolemy Philadelphus) were great bibliophiles and patrons of art and learning and gathered volumes for the immortal Alexandrian library. The Egyptian Ptolemys protected and patronized the art of converting papyrus into writing materials; but the papyrus supply in Egypt was limited and could not meet the demands from various corners of the world. The Ptolemys guarded this treasure so jealously that when they came to know that king Eumenes of Pergamus was thinking of having a great rival library in his city, they forbade the exportation of papyrus to that king's dominions. But the ball had now been set rolling, and people of various countries set their minds to the manufacture of paper, though it is difficult to say which country was the first to invent it and in what particular age. Even then paper was not produced in abundance and only kings and nobles and renowned book-hunters, patronized by monarchs, could afford to have small libraries of their own. Down to the times of Henry VIII books and papers were so scarce that a copy of the Bible as translated by W. Tyndale and by M. Coverdale was chained up by the king's orders so that no one could take it away. In the times of Queen Elizabeth the demand for writing materials increased so much that paper began to be prepared from pulped linen and cotton rags and later on from grass, waste jute and wood, the wood being dissolved by sulphur, reduced to pulp and rolled in continuous sheets. The Americans utilize their native timber in their great paper-mills, which drive a roaring trade and supply writing materials to many countries in the world.



Now was made the most momentous invention of which the world holds record—the invention of printing—which has made the literary world what it is today. Printing is responsible for the success of the Renaissance, the victory of the Reformation, the glories of science, and in short for the triumph and feasibility of many an institution which would have languished in the darkness of oblivion if this great art had not dragged it to the light of day. Printing has diffused knowledge on a far wider scale than that achieved by any other process prior to it; it is printing that has given an unparalleled impetus to thought and its adequate dissemination. Before this wonderful invention men may have entertained great ideas, but most of these intellectual flowers must have been born to blush unseen because there were no suitable means to gather and diffuse their fragrance. None can say how enormous must have been such a loss to the world till printing appeared as the protector and saviour of the intellectual world. The American poet J. G. Whittier in his poem on "The Library" has briefly but ably summed up the main features in the evolution of the methods of writing hitherto discussed by us in the following lines:—

'Let there be light!' God spake of old,  
 And over chaos dark and cold,  
 And through the dead and formless frame  
 Of nature, life and order came.

Faint was the light at first that shone .  
 On giant fern and mastodon,  
 On half-formed plant and beast of prey,  
 And man as rude and wild as they.

Age after age, like waves, o'erran  
 The earth, uplifting brute and man :  
 And mind, at length, in symbols dark  
 Its meanings traced on stone and bark.

On leaf of palm, on sedge-wrought roll,  
 On plastic clay and leathern scroll,  
 Man wrote his thoughts; the ages passed,  
 And lo! the Press was found at last!

Printing was first invented about 1436 by a German named John Gutenberg, who being in indigent circumstances, took the help of a wealthy goldsmith called John Fust and of Peter Schoffer, a professional copyist. Fust forked out the secret from Gutenberg, kept him in poverty and finally seized his printing apparatus. Then Fust himself began to print copies of the Bible. In those days the possession of a single copy of the Bible was regarded as a novelty and consequently the people were bewildered when they found several copies of the work with the goldsmith Fust. They had not the brains to understand his explanation, but concluding that he must be in league with the devil, persecuted and shadowed him from city to city. The world has always rewarded her best friends and benefactors by the block or the stake, by poison or the sword. But here at any rate the ungrateful rogue was served right, and Europe was even over-severe to his memory by associating his name with the famous Mediæval legend of Dr. Faustus and his pact with the Devil, which has had the honour of attracting the genius of Marlowe and Calderon, Goethe and P. J. Bailey. Though printing is a potent instrument

leading to freedom of thought, growth of rationalism and advancement of toleration in the world, still for a pretty long time it was associated with devilry and the authorities tried their best to crush it. Even when printing was acknowledged to be a boon, the powers that be considered themselves entitled to suppress any printed matter which was prejudicial to their own interests though beneficial to humanity at large. Thus Pope Alexander VI in 1501 issued his Bull against unlicensed printing, and according to Prof. J. B. Bury in his "History of the Freedom of Thought", nowhere did the Press become really free till the 19th century.

So scarce were books in ancient times that students all over Europe flocked to the few great Universities e. g. to the one at Cordova in Spain, or were anxious to sit at the feet of renowned scholars like Peter Abelard at Paris. But printing has made books so cheap and handy that modern youths no longer care seriously for colleges and academies, and the whirligig of time has now compelled tutors to hunt after their students. In ancient times priests, both Eastern and Western, with unblushing effrontery monopolized all knowledge which they sometimes interpreted to their own advantage and to the detriment of their enemies. They claimed that certain things were too secret and sacred to be communicated to anyone; they demanded that the world should be at their feet and they should be the sole dispensers of knowledge. But the art of printing has broken the pride of the Brahmin, the vanity of the Monk and the Magi. Now that the Rig Veda is printed, even a Shudra or a Chândāla can read it and even chant the Gâyatri

without his being in any danger of Brahminic persecution. Printing has humbled the proud, and shattered the selfish claims of those who, instead of disseminating knowledge, kept it a secret with the object of being looked up to by those who were desirous of having it. The art of printing is the death-knell of dogmatism in various walks of life, and few are now prepared to pin their faith in dogmas which they can hardly reconcile with their reason. Before the invention of this all-important art, the greatest and most sacred works suffered from interpolation at the hands of selfish and unscrupulous compilers, but the danger has now been greatly minimized by printing. To this art scarcely anything remains inaccessible, while nothing remains private, secret or exclusive when once it appears on the printed page. This art has almost justified the arrogant boast of modern civilization that a schoolboy of the present day knows much more than Pythagoras could ever have dreamt of. By the diffusion of knowledge through printing we are able to know the world and its peoples, and this great art has decidedly brought us within hail of the goal prescribed by all religions—the goal of love and universal brotherhood. The slogan of liberty, fraternity and equality could hardly have been heard before the invention of printing, which has revolutionized all institutions—social, political, religious—and in short has democratized the world.

Of course there are a few comparatively minor disadvantages to counter-balance this great blessing. Our forefathers had prodigious memories and because of the paucity of books and papers and absence of printing,

things had necessarily to be committed to memory, the load on which was consequently terrific. Two instances gathered from Prof. Browne's "Literary History of Persia" Volume II may here be cited as extreme cases of the matter under consideration. The renowned scholar and physician Bu 'Ali Sina (Avicenna) had a very precious library which was unfortunately destroyed by fire. Tradition says that he had committed the whole library to memory and then deliberately consigned it to the flames, so that he may remain the sole depository of knowledge which he had extracted therefrom. An equally astounding feat was performed by the famous Al-Ghazzâli, the "Hujjat-ul-Islam", the greatest of Muslim theologians. He was once during his travels robbed of all his possessions, when with tearful eyes he implored the robbers to return him not a part of his property but his lecture-notes, which would be worthless to them though invaluable to him. A robber, flinging the book at him, remarked contemptuously:-"What is the worth of your knowledge which could so easily be robbed?". Al-Ghazzâli took the hint and on his return home is said to have committed his library to memory, so that he may be in no danger of being deprived of it by force or flame. But at present books are so abundant and reference volumes so easily accessible that such library-consumers are no longer in evidence; and even in the country where the whole of the Rig Veda was at one time remembered by heart people will be found to be ill inclined to tax their memories further than may be deemed necessary. When Nature bestows a thing with the one hand, she invariably deprives us of a corresponding advantage

with the other. Photography proves detrimental to the art of painting; type-writing has destroyed calligraphy and is directly responsible for our ugly-looking scrawls and hideous official signatures; bicycles and trams, motors and trains have only ended in making us lazy stragglers, dependent not on our feet but on artificial means of locomotion. So too printing must be directly charged with the deterioration that has taken place in our powers of memory. Ever since the invention of printing, "popular" ballads have lost their natural beauty and significance, for to read and write this delightful form of literature is to destroy its innate charm altogether. In olden days the "Sutras" were composed in Sanskrit literature by means of which by committing to memory a couple of very pregnant and significant lines one could easily remember several pages, the essence of which was skilfully distilled in that couplet. These Sutras were a clever means to aid the student in his work and enable him to lighten the load on his memory. But when printing has rendered it unnecessary to remember many things, Sutra literature must naturally remain an interesting relic of the past. But these shortcomings must weigh but a feather in the scale when compared to the infinite advantages of printing, which has indeed given Minerva "lighter wings to fly" from pole to pole of this wonderful world.

It is advisable to end with printing for though the art of writing has been developed by various other inventions like type-writing, cyclostyling, shorthand etc., yet these are but indirect and minor aids of which no particular or detailed notice need here be taken. None

can say what form the Proteus of writing will assume in the future. Who knows but science may evolve a novel method of transmitting and disseminating ideas which may entirely do away with pen and ink, paper and print, and in times to come printing itself might seem a ludicrous old remnant of an unenlightened age, much as hammer and chisel, tiles and bricks appear to us now. But we are far from assuming the prophetic rôle of Mr. H. G. Wells, nor is it here proposed to indulge in a Baconian "New Atlantis"; and the future of writing at this stage may better be relegated to the divine direction of the goddess Saraswati—she of the white vestures and immaculate as the snow—who sways from her lotus-seat the destinies of knowledge as sagely and sweetly as she tunes the ravishing chords of her soul-absorbing lute.



## \*Some Interesting Forms of Divination.



Divination is the name applied to the endeavour to discover the clue to occult or future things by preternatural methods. Whenever a person is sorely puzzled and is unable through all endeavours which are humanly possible to seek the right solution, he will naturally turn to God and practise some form of divination, consoling himself with the belief that God Himself would express His will through the process. To all intents and purposes reason is a very reliable guide in our daily walk of life, in the purely materialistic aspects of which we also derive considerable help from science. There is however a time when both reason and science fail to come to our rescue, when we are ultimately forced to resort to divination. When a person falls ill, a physician is consulted; passengers in a ship overtaken by a violent tempest will naturally turn their eyes to the pilot; but when both physician and pilot in their utter helplessness turn their own eyes to God, people feel themselves justified in giving divination a trial in the last hope of their being put upon the right track. Again religion often enjoins us to identify our will with God's; but what is God's will, and where and how to find it? Every man in the street is not capable of realizing Him in the flowing of the waves

---

\*This Essay was contributed as a Paper to the Anthropological Section of the Seventh Indian Oriental Conference held in Baroda in December 1933.



or the blowing of the winds, nor in the depths of meditation and self-introspection. In the absence of all other methods people would naturally turn to divination which is therefore practised not only by selfish persons desiring to compass their own ends but also by saints anxious to determine the will of the Lord. Uncultured people have even endeavoured to furnish a sort of rational basis for their divination. A person sneezed when about to start on an important undertaking, and the work fell through; another was to proceed on a journey when a cat happened to cross his path and he came to grief; the third who had a responsible work in hand failed only because a snake appeared on his way; the fourth was an idler and a ne'er-do-weel but he rose to eminence just because a bird with bright plumage once hovered round his head. People might have noticed these incidents as having taken place not casually but repeatedly; hence nothing could be more natural for them than to universalize their garnered experiences and hold that certain occurrences must end in happiness and others in woe.

Take it as we may, the universal practice of divination is itself sufficient argument to show that people do derive some sort of satisfaction, however illusory it may at times be, by its use. A person worried by a certain problem will find his mind considerably relieved by a significant dream which he fondly believes was specially sent from the horn-gate of the mansion of Morpheus to help him out of his troubles. Astrology is another method through which people are foretold the good or evil influences of the stars on their affairs, and since to be

forewarned is to be forearmed, they feel they will pass through the darkness of the future with the help of this dusky lamp, which would save them from the hidden bogs and shallows of life. Certain persons, the load of whose sensual flesh is lightened by the practice of spiritual exercises, fasts and meditation, are often endowed with double sight and can see visions and interpret the dreams of others. But dreams and astrology are matters of too frequent occurrence in life to deserve a special treatment in this essay.

Demonology is another form of divination popular among the wicked and the illiterate. We have seen that human beings in their embarrassments seek the help of religion, science or philosophy, and that those who cannot maintain themselves on this altitude almost inevitably fall into pseudo-scientific methods like astrology, oracles and dream-interpretations: but those who are absolutely unscrupulous about the means they adopt, will not hesitate to have recourse to demonology and magic, for these things very often shade into one another, and "thin partitions do their bounds divide". Necromancy or the evoking and consulting of ghosts, and witchcraft or the communication with evil spirits with a view to practise divination are as old as superstition itself and prevail all the world over. A ghost is sometimes supposed to appear of his own accord to communicate a secret which weighs upon his heart, as in the case of the restless spirit of Hamlet's father; but spirits could also be raised by the magicians, particularly of Egypt, to serve their own purposes. The witch of Endor who "divined unto Saul by the familiar spirit" as referred to

in Samuel XXVIII 7 and 8, the witches in "Macbeth" who "keep the word of promise to our ear and break it to our hope," and the kelpie who warns the Master of Ravenswood of his death in the quicksands in Scott's "Bride of Lammermoor" are some of the classical instances of messages regarding the future being received through these weird creatures. Our systems of clairvoyance, spiritualism and table-rapping are but modern and semi-scientific versions of the old craving to know the future through intercourse with the spirits of the departed. Another well known method of getting at the truth is through the practice of the ordeal. In ancient times when the law of evidence and civil and criminal procedure was but dimly understood, people had recourse to the dangerous practice of ordeals and the complainant and the accused were asked to fight it out among themselves. It did not much matter according to their primitive ethical notions that the just man was weak while the wrongdoer was able-bodied, for ordeals as well as the barbarous custom of duelling were both based on the principle so beautifully described by Shakespeare:—

"What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted?  
Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just;  
And he but naked, though locked up in steel,  
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted."

Persons with some pretensions to sanctity were asked to prove their claims e. g. by passing through fire as in the case of Siavash in the Shahnameh and Sudhanvá in the Mahabharata. If for one reason or the other the result was calamitous, the adventurer suffered a double loss, for his reputation perished with his earthly existence.

But magic and ordeals would make up a vast subject by themselves and are moreover too familiar to us to merit a detailed examination, for our object here is to dwell principally on certain forms of divination in which voices, books, cups, mirrors and stones were consulted to serve as guides to the puzzled inquirer. Divination may be said to be generally of two kinds. The first kind is experienced when the person concerned is purely passive and never seeks to consult a possessed person or authoritative book; and the second when he consciously and deliberately practises divination to ascertain what he considers to be the will of God. For instance, some books may be carelessly left open without any motive or design, and a passer-by may happen to catch a sentence therefrom which may transform his life. St. Augustine in his "Confessions" records a well-known instance of such unconscious divination. This great Christian saint had once led a wild and debauched life, and was thinking of turning over a new leaf in his career when from a neighbouring house he heard the voice of a child at play: "Take and read, take and read." Augustine instinctively seized the Bible, and opening it he was thrilled to the core when he read:—"Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in riot and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof". (Romans XIII 13, 14.) Here was the necessary chastisement and admonition, and Augustine, who had always turned a deaf ear to the advice of his saintly mother Monica, was not slow in profiting by the divination.

On such occasions the man is anxious to come over to the right path but is unable to exercise the necessary self-control over his senses which have assumed a thorough ascendancy over him. However, the ground is prepared and the descent of the spark only is awaited from above. 'Ali bin 'Uthmân al-Jullâbi al-Hujwiri in his "Kashf al-Mahjub", the oldest Persian treatise on Sufism, records an instance of Abu 'Ali al-Fuzayl bin Ayâz, a chivalrous and discriminating highwayman, who had indulged in most of the weaknesses that human flesh is heir to, but was off and on trying to redeem his ignoble existence by prayer and repentance. Once a merchant set out on his travels with no other escort than a Qoran-reader who was mounted on a camel and desired to chant the holy book aloud day and night. When they reached the place where Fuzayl was lying in ambush, the reader chanced to recite the following verse:—"Hath not the time come, for those who believe, to humble their hearts at the warning of God and at the truth which he hath sent down? (Qoran LVII 15). Fuzayl received these words like a hammer on his heart. "Yes," said he, "The time has come at last." He prepared a list of all whom he had robbed and satisfied their claims upon him, and then by a life of exemplary piety and virtue he became an earnest seeker of the Truth and left behind him the reputation of an eminent Sufi. Mr. Claude Field in his "Mystics and Saints of Islam" gives however a slightly different version of the same story. How God in His infinite mercy is anxious to win His children on the path of righteousness can be seen again from the instance of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore (father of the

great Bengali poet), whose "Autobiography", says Miss Evelyn Underhill, is held in as great esteem in the East as the "Confessions" of St. Augustine and the "Journal" of George Fox are in the West. As Debendranath was once passing along the Himalayas, a piece of paper flew at his feet. He read thereon the opening verse of the Isha Upanishad which meant:—"The entire world with all that it contains is permeated by the divine essence; its enjoyment lies in its renunciation; covet not thou another's goods." On reading this, Debendranath, already a man of remarkable self-sacrifice and exalted life, made the resolve to devote himself exclusively to the service of God. As was observed of him by his friend Anand Mohan Bose, Debendranath, who could have easily become a Maharaja, chose rather to be a Maha-rishi.

Instances of saintly persons who thus received their 'calls' by unconscious divination may be multiplied by the score, but we should now pass on to the process by which divination is practised consciously and deliberately. The Jewish form of divination called the "Bath-col" or "daughter of a voice", otherwise known as the echo-augury, is practised by a perplexed person, anxious to have his doubts laid at rest, when he suddenly hears from a stranger words not meant for himself but which he can easily apply to his own case and derive solace therefrom. Here the original sound is as it were the mother, while the secondary sound heard by the inquirer as conveying a secret meaning to himself alone may be taken as the daughter. In such a case the augury taken is deliberate, for when an appeal is made to Bath-col, the first words heard after the appeal were considered oracu-

lar, and the peculiar circumstances of the hearer made it easy for him to interpret the words so as to solve his difficulties. An illustration of the Bath-col from the Talmud is quoted by De Quincey in Volume III of his collected works. Rabbi Jochannan and Rabbi Simeon Ben Lachish were anxious to know the whereabouts of a friend named Rabbi Samuel, who was 600 miles away from them. While talking about their friend they appealed to Bath-col and passing a school they heard a child reading the first verse of the 25th chapter of the first Book of Samuel:—"And Samuel died." They received these words with due resignation, and the next horseman from the East came only to confirm the augury thus obtained.

Very often the words heard in oracles and from possessed persons are so vague and obscure in their meaning that they could be interpreted either way. But the subject of oracles has been thoroughly exploited and need not detain us here any longer. Yet we may cite the instance of Alexander the Great, himself a disbeliever in divination, but who in deference to the wishes of his generals went to consult the Delphic oracle before starting on his world-conquest. He, however, found the inspired priestess in no very agreeable mood, for she would neither sit on the tripod nor declare the will of God in any other way. The impetuous Macedonian was so annoyed at this that he profanely caught her by the arm and compelled her to sit on the tripod on which it was essential she should sit before giving out the oracle. Helpless against the strength of Alexander, the priestess spoke out:—"Oh son, thou art irresistible." Alexander

took this as it were as a Bath-col, and with the same decisive turn of mind that he subsequently displayed while cutting the Gordian knot in Phrygia, he bade the priestess adieu for he required no further oracle; and we know too well that Alexander is the best illustration, better even than Julius Cæsar, of 'veni, vidi, vici' that history can supply.

Inspired and possessed persons are the best qualified to give out such revelations; and even children because of their extreme innocence and unsophisticated mentality can sometimes utter things which are construed as of equal importance with oracles. Wordsworth believed that the child was nearer God than the grown up man is; to him it was a matter of religious belief and no mere poetic fancy that Heaven lies about us in our infancy, and that shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy. For a similar reason a high value is sometimes attached to the words of idiots and especially madcaps, mental derangement being considered a qualification that would make such persons oblivious to the concerns of this world but very much alive to preternatural communications. A clever man by his very cleverness is incapacitated from serving as an oracle for fear he may colour or modify the inspiration by ideas of his own. Sometimes auguries are taken from the flight of birds, which could be shot down by any hunter. "How could this bird predict our fate when it could not know its own?" This is the objection which people would naturally like to raise. But the objection is groundless, because the bird by its flight unconsciously gives us an occasion to practise divination, while all



along it is blissfully ignorant of what is transpiring in the human kingdom. Again fate may be foreseen, not forestalled, and even the wisest astrologers (not to speak of unknowing birds) are unable to prevent their own calamities or those of their dear ones, even though they had previous knowledge of their occurrence. Divination may strengthen and nerve us for the destined calamity, which no human power has yet been discovered to avert. Only to bear, says the poet Campbell, is to conquer our fate.

Let us now turn to several works which, owing to their undisputed power and charm, or because of the mysterious and religious halo always associated with them, have generally been consulted to obtain auguries. Virgil's "Æneid" may be considered one of the most popular books in the world, and the name of Virgil, literally and idiomatically, was a name to conjure with in the Middle Ages. His style is said to have unrivalled sweetness that called forth a host of imitators, who have never been able even to approach that inimitable diction wherein "all the charm of all the Muses often flowers in a lonely word." His "Æneid" is also respected as being the apotheosis of the Roman Empire; his 8th Eclogue contains mysterious charms which were subsequently used for magic purposes. Book VI of the "Æneid", containing the hero's journey to the other world, is supposed to contain the Eleusinian mysteries and is always invested with a sacred grandeur. Even the Christian world went in raptures over Virgil for the child referred to in his *Pollio Pastoral* was once wrongly believed to foreshadow the coming of Christ. Even Dante,

the orthodox poet of Catholicism, accepted the heathen Virgil as his guide through Hell and Purgatory.

The Middle Ages refused to stop short at this stage, but now transformed Virgil the poet into Virgilius Magus, the mighty magician. De Quincey in Volume XIV of his collected works observes that the seventh son of a seventh son is traditionally supposed to be a magician. So too a person whose maternal grandfather was a sorcerer is endowed by tradition with supernatural gifts. Now Virgil's maternal grandfather was not a magician at all but only bore the name of 'Magus', which was used in after years by the ignorant people as an appellative meaning a magician. That is the reason why, says De Quincey, Virgil, the maternal grandson of the supposed magician, was considered by a doubly false supposition to be gifted with magical powers. The Rev. W. Lucas Collins in his *Life of Virgil* has mentioned numerous anecdotes which were woven round the poet's name in the Middle Ages. He is supposed to have made a fount of perpetual fire, salt springs of medicinal virtue, the brazen statue of a horse by which all horses of the city were cured of their ills, and a wonderful tower containing symbolic figures of all the subject nations, each with a bell in its hand, which rang out whenever war or revolt broke out in that province, so that Rome might know at once in what direction to march her legions. From the story of Virgilius given by Mr. H. Morley in his "Early Prose Romances" we know how Virgil came by this supernatural lore. It is said that the Evil One once came out of a hole and promised Virgil complete mastery over magic if he only became his follower. Virgil agreed and

after learning all he could expressed his astonishment as to how the Evil One could have issued from such a small hole. The Devil, who in spite of all his knowledge is of course an ass, went down into the hole to show how clever he was, when the Devil's disciple took good care to see that his master never got out again. History relates that Virgil died on his bed, but the Mediæval people disapproved of such a tame, conventional end to their hero, and got up a fine tradition according to which Virgil asked his servant to cut him up in pieces, put him in a caldron and speak a mysterious word when he would get up from the vessel whole and sound. But before the servant could play Medea's part successfully, the king of the place happened to arrive there to inquire about Virgil, and learning from the man that the master was cut up, plunged his sword in wrath in the poor merial's body before a word of explanation could be offered, thus preventing Virgil himself from coming to life.

Here was the man, thought the Middle Ages, whose masterpiece may well be supposed to serve them for purposes of divination. In those days when the light of faith was not bedimmed by the torch of science, the "Æneid" was opened by the enthusiastic inquirer with an almost religious veneration, and the first few lines which caught the eye were taken as an oracle. When the Emperor Severus showed an inclination for art rather than military renown, he took an oracle from the "Æneid" and read:—

"Others with softer hand may mould the brass,  
Or wake to warmer life the marble mass;  
Plead at the bar with more prevailing force,  
Or trace more justly heaven's revolving course.

Roman! be thine the sovereign arts of sway,  
 To rule, and make the subject world obey,  
 Give peace its laws, respect the prostrate foe,  
 Abase the lofty and exalt the low. "

This oracular response helped to show Severus that the greatness of a Roman lay not in his being an artist but a conqueror and legislator. Gordianus who reigned only for a few days consulted the "Æneid" and took out the well known passage in Book VI where Anchises shows his son Æneas, as in Banquo's glass, the kings who were to rule Rome in future. One of the figures was the young Marcellus, the hope and pride of Rome, the son of Octavia, the sister of Augustus, and the promising youth who died in his 20th year. Gordianus alighted on the passage where the poet deplores the end of Marcellus, and Anchises is made to speak:—

" Ah son, compel me not to speak  
 The sorrows of our race!  
 That youth the Fates but just display  
 To earth, nor let him longer stay. "

According to another account both these auguries are connected with the name of Severus only who, in accordance with the two oracles, had acquired the military glory of an ideal Roman Emperor as well as the virtues of the young Marcellus.

In later times when interest in the "Æneid" as a work of mystery was on the decline, the sortilege was still practised though only as a fashionable pastime. It is said that in 1642 Charles I during his visit to the Bodleian Library at Oxford was shown a splendid edi-

tion of Virgil. Lord Falkland who had accompanied the King asked him playfully to try the "Sortes." The lines at which the doomed King of England opened the volume are to be found in the "Æneid" Book IV, and are as follows:—

"Scourged by a savage enemy,  
An exile from his son's embrace,  
So let him sue for aid and see,  
His people slain before his face:  
Or when to humbling peace at length,  
He stoops, be his or life or land,  
But let him fall in manhood's strength  
And welter tombless on the sand."

Lord Falkland, trying to laugh away the King's fears, himself tried his fortune but alighted on the gloomy passage in Book XI where Evander laments the untimely end of his brave son Pallas, slain by Turnus, in the following lines:—

"I knew the young blood's maddening play,  
The charm of battle's first essay;  
Oh valour blighted in the flower!  
Oh first mad drops of war's full shower!"

Only a few months afterwards Charles mourned over the death of his noble friend who fell in the battle of Newbury in 1643 aged 34.

One more instance of the "Sortes Virgiliæ" may be quoted to show how divination helps to shape the future career of a person. In 1524 Rabelais at the age of 41 was fretting himself to death in the monotonous gloom of the convent-walls surrounded by monks with

whose ignorance and superstition he was now perfectly disgusted. He and a fellow-monk Pierre Amy were meditating escape when they thought of giving Virgil a trial, and opening the volume they read:—

“Heu! fuge crudeles terras, fuge littus avarum:”

“Alas; fly from these cruel lands and from the shores of avaricious people.” This chimed in exactly with their own resolve; they left the convent for good, and Rabelais showed in after years in his terrible satire how his soul was all but crushed in the uncongenial and withering atmosphere of the cloister. In his great work Rabelais makes Pantagruel cite a number of cases in which the “Sortes Virgilianæ” prognosticated the future remarkably; but he also showed the dangers of this form of divination when lines obtained from Virgil were interpreted by Panurge in one way and by Pantagruel in just the reverse sense. Panurge has then recourse to divination by dreams with the same result—there was no unanimity about the meaning of the dream. He then consults a Sibyl, a deaf and dumb man, a dying old poet and many others till he finally reaches the Oracle of the “Holy Bottle.” Rabelais has here taken the opportunity not only of displaying the vast and varied hoards of his knowledge, but of exposing the perils and ridiculing the practice of divination, which was freely indulged in in his times, even though he himself, like St. Augustine, had profited by a sortilege as mentioned previously.

Only two instances among many others may be cited to show that after all it is not easy to distinguish divi-

nation from superstition. When Charles I was coronated, the stock of purple velvet required for the royal robes suddenly fell short, and all London could not furnish the necessary material. The king had consequently to be robed in white velvet which was the colour in which victims were arrayed ! So too when James II was to ascend the throne, the crown was found too little for his head and it remained tottering as if likely to fall off ! We who can be wise after the event may consider these facts highly significant though nobody attached any serious importance to them during the occurrence. These facts also serve to remind us how perilously close is divination to the borderland of superstition, which ever remains unilluminated by a ray of reason.

So great a work as the Holy Bible, the record of the culture of ages and the thesaurus of the spiritual enlightenment of Jew and Christian, may naturally be supposed to be the favourite resort of oracle-hunters. And so it was and is, though strange to say both the Old and New Testaments have disapproved of the practice of divination. According to Deuteronomy XVIII 10:- "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch". Here divination is swept into condemnation together with ordeals, astrology, magic and witchcraft. We have already seen how ordeals and astrology are themselves forms of divination, while magic and witchcraft are meant for unprincipled persons who have no scruples of conscience in doing evil to others, if only they themselves are benefited by the process.

The futility of reposing one's faith in diviners and divination was frequently pointed out by the inspired prophets as seen in Isaiah XLIV 25; Jeremiah XXVII 9 and XXIX 8; Ezekiel XIII 9, XXI 25 and XXII 28; Micah III 6, 7, 11; and Zechariah X 2. St. Paul seems to condemn divination when he says in Galatians III 1:—"Oh foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you ?". Even St. Augustine does not favour divination though his own life was revolutionized by a *Sortes Biblicæ* as mentioned previously.

Unfortunately divination is always supposed by the practiser to convey to him the will of the Almighty. It is therefore open to every thief or cut-throat thus to consult the 'divine will' before he starts on his nefarious pursuit, and in case he draws a favourable augury, the scoundrel may ease his conscience (if he has one) by laying the whole blame on God. Hence it is that religious heads have generally discouraged the practice of divination but emphasized the necessity of fortitude, self-reliance and the exercise of virtue. But selfishness is proverbially deaf, and the whispers of religious injunctions have always been drowned in the brassy clamour of our self-interest, and so long as man remains the victim of unfulfilled desire, divination, however doubtful its claims from the standpoint of reason or religion, will always enjoy a prosperous career. Many scriptures of the world have been put to such use. Buddha condemned all divination, which is nevertheless practised by his followers particularly at the time of birth, marri-



age, illness or proximity of death. Nearly every Buddhist is equipped with a "pocket divination volume" called "Mo-pe" containing all sorts of affirmative, negative and ambiguous replies, through which auguries could be ascertained. According to Mr. T. Barns in his article contributed to the "Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics," the Christians in spite of religious prohibitions still practise the "Sortes per Brevia", which consists in casting certain papers and taking lots from them, and the "Sortes Apostolorum" or drawing auguries from a collection of pious sayings drawn up for the purpose. De Quincey quotes an instance of Dr. Dodderidge which is partly a Sortes Biblicæ and partly a Bath-col like the instance of St. Augustine. Dr. Dodderidge, an eighteenth century clergyman, had received an invitation to Northampton but was prevented by circumstances from going to that place. Sorely perplexed by the problem he offered prayers and besought God to solve his difficulties. As he passed through a room after his prayers, he heard a child reading to his mother the Biblical text:—"And as thy days, so shall thy strength be." The doctor got what he wanted and relying on the providential guidance he went to Northampton where he passed in comfort and prosperity the three remaining decades of his life.

A superstitious use was made of the Bible in Mediæval ages in order to discover thieves and other offenders. One such mode is well-known by the name of the Oracle of the Sieve and Shears. The method followed was to thrust the points of a pair of shears in the rim of a sieve, the shears being supported by two persons

with the tips of their fingers. A verse of the Bible was then recited and the names of suspected persons were called over. When the name of the real offender was mentioned, the sieve was believed to take a sudden turn. Another method, also used for the detection of criminals, and known as the "Key and the Bible," consisted in placing a key on the open pages of that Book at the words:—"Whither thou goest, I will go." (Ruth I 16.) A person standing with his fingers so arranged as to form a cross then recites passages from the Bible. Another man calls out the names of the suspects, and when the real culprit is mentioned, the key is said to dance about on the Bible. Apparently these methods would impose too great a strain on the credulity of the devoutest Christian of modern times.

But the best instance of *Sortes Biblicæ* in English poetic literature is to be found in Tennyson's "Enoch Arden". Enoch and Annie are a loving couple, but the hardy sailor leaves his wife to proceed on a journey from which for an inordinately long time he is unable to return. Poor Annie with her children sinks into poverty and in her mental bewilderment practises the *Sortes Biblicæ*. The poet thus describes the situation:—

"Then desperately seized the holy Book,  
Suddenly set it wide to find a sign,  
 Suddenly put her finger on the text,  
 'Under the palm tree.' That was nothing to her;  
 No meaning there: she closed the Book and slept;  
 When lo! her Enoch sitting on a height,  
 Under a palm-tree, over him the Sun."

The dream and the oracle were all perfectly true, for Enoch had been shipwrecked on a solitary island overgrown with palm-trees. But Annie misinterprets the sign, thinking her husband dead, sitting in heaven under a palm-tree with the Sun of Righteousness shining upon him, singing "hosanna in the highest." It was this misinterpretation that was directly responsible for the disastrous consequences which followed. This again shows how dreams and oracles, even when communicating the will of God, are in danger of being misunderstood generally in the light of prejudices and preconceived notions, and how thereby they pave the way to ruin.

The Muslims follow the "Sortes Qoranicæ" and certain copies of the Qoran contain directions for divination to be practised from this work. Mr. Lane in his "Modern Egyptians" (quoted by Mr. T. P. Hughes in his 'Dictionary of Islam') has several interesting observations to make on the subject. Before drawing an augury from the sacred work of Islam, the inquirer has thrice to repeat the opening chapter, the 112th chapter and the 58th verse of the 6th chapter; he then opens the Book at random and seeks the solution of his question from the 7th line of the right hand page. Instead of reading the 7th line, some people choose to count the number of the letters 'Khe' and 'Sheen' which may occur throughout that page. The letter 'khe' represents 'khair' or good, while 'sheen' stands for 'shar' or evil; if the 'khe's predominate the inference is favourable, but it is otherwise if the 'sheen's are in the majority. Another mode of divination practised by the Muslims is to take hold of any two points of a

rosary after thrice reciting the "Surât al Fâtihâ" ( the opening chapter of the Qoran ) and then to count the beads between the two points, saying in passing the first bead through the fingers:—" (I assert) the absolute glory of God ", in passing the second:—"Praise be to God," and in passing the third " There is no deity but God." The inquirer should repeat these expressions in the same order till he comes to the last bead. If the first expression falls to the last bead, the answer is taken to be a favourable one; if the last bead is arrived at when reciting the second expression, the reply is held to be but an indifferent one; but when the third expression coincides with the last bead, the response is decidedly in the negative. The "Sortes Qoranicæ" is the favourite form of divination in the Muslim world even at the present day.

But the Muslims also prefer to draw auguries from the Diwan of Hafiz, the great Persian poet, who remains unsurpassed in his ravishing lyrical raptures and the radiant glow of his inspiration. Though often criticized as a writer of profane and licentious poetry, harping eternally on love and youth, the cypress-statured beauty and the ruby-red wine, his wonderful hold on the Persian mind even after centuries is remarkable and can never be disputed. The custom generally is to take his odes in an allegorical light throughout, when suddenly his bacchanalian chants are found to be but the fervent out-pourings of a God-intoxicated Sufi, possessed with the divine frenzy of poetry. Fortunately he escaped the lot of Virgil in not being transformed by the Persians into a magician, but his admirers have bestowed on

him the esteemed titles of the "Lisân al Ghaib" (tongue of the invisible) and the "Tarjumân al Isrâr" (interpreter of mysteries.) A table called the "Fâlnâme" or book of omens with instructions for its use is often prefixed to Oriental editions of the Diwan. But the other and better way is to open the Diwan at random after uttering suitable invocations and take augury from the first line that meets the eye. The latter method has been found to yield better results than the former, through which the majority of answers obtained are distinctly of a negative or uncertain character. Prof. E. G. Browne, who possessed in an English body the soul of a Persian, has discussed this question in his "Persian Literature under Tartar Dominion", quoting from a work called "Latifeh e Ghaibiyeh" by Muhammad bin Muhammad of Dârâb many successful instances of the "Istakhâreh" or omens, taken from the Diwan of Hafiz.

Strange to say even Hafiz himself does not quite seem to favour divination as he says in one of his odes:—

"Ân dam ke dil ba 'aeshq dehî khush dami buwad  
Dar kâr e khair hâjat e heech 'istakhâreh neest."

Or "the moment you devote your heart to love is a blessed moment; there is no need to consult oracles when a good deed is about to be done." But whether he wished it or not, omens are still taken from Hafiz's works, and one celebrated instance was at the time of the poet's death. The orthodox Muslims had objected to the burial of Firdausi in consecrated ground on the plea that he had immortalized the non-Muslim princes of Iran; and now came the turn of Hafiz whose remains

were about to be excluded from the graveyard because he wrote against the hypocritical mullas and apparently in favour of a fast life. It was decided to take an augury from the Diwan, and the following verse appeared:-

“Qadam darigh madâr az janâzeh e Hâfiz  
Ke gar cheh gharq e gunâh ast miravad be bihisht.”

or “withhold not thy steps from the funeral of Hafiz, for though he be sunk in sinfulness he goes straight to paradise.” The objectors were speechless with astonishment, and the poet received his last rites with due devotion and solemnity. Once Shah ‘Abbâs II Safavi was meditating a campaign against the province of Azerbaijân of which Tabriz is the capital. He consulted the Diwan of Hafiz and got the following augury:-

“‘Irâq o Fâris girifti ba sha‘er e khud Hâfiz  
Beyâ ke naubat e Baghdâd o waqt e Tabriz ast.”

or “Oh Hafiz, your poetry has conquered ‘Irâq and Fâris: come up, for it is now the turn of Baghdâd and the time for Tabriz.” The king acted up to the injunction and his campaign proved successful.

Sometimes the answers obtained are wonderfully appropriate to the situation, as if given by a living and thinking person. Once Shah Tehmâsp Safavi happened to drop his ring, which could not be discovered in spite of minute search being made for it. The Diwan of Hafiz then helped the inquirer with this verse:-

“Dili ke ghaib numâyast o jâm e Jam dârad  
Ze khâtimi ke dami gum shavad cheh gham dârad?”

Or “why should your heart, which reflects the unseen and possesses the cup of Jamshid, be worried over

the momentary disappearance of a ring?" The King clapped his hands on his knees in admiration at the suitability of the verse, and, strange to say, in doing so immediately felt the missing ring in a fold of his robe wherein it had accidentally slipped! One more out of several apposite instances may be cited. Muhammad bin Muhammad of Dârâb, from whose book these anecdotes have been quoted by Prof. Browne, was once in Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat, in 1642-3. He there found a noble named Kan'ân Beg fearfully worried over the disappearance of his brother Yusuf Beg, who had taken part in a battle and was reported missing. But the Diwan of Hafiz consoled him with this well-known verse which eventually came out true:—

"Yusuf e gum gashteh bâz âyad ba Kan'ân gham makhur  
Kulbeh e ahzân shavad ruzi gulistân gham makhur".

or "the missing Joseph will return to Kan'ân, grieve not; the house of sorrows will one day become a rose-garden, grieve not". It is most remarkable that this verse should have exactly referred to the names of the two brothers, though of course Kan'ân in the ode stands for the Promised Land of the Israelites while Yusuf is the Biblical Joseph. The verse turns out to be so extraordinarily appropriate to the occasion that one may be permitted to wonder whether Hafiz wrote it with foreknowledge of the situation, or whether God brought about the situation just for the purpose of this wonderful sortilege and the glorification of the greatness of Hafiz!

Divination among the Hindus seems to have been associated with the Ramayana, a work whose influence on their life and character is second to none in its

marvellous extent and power. A mode of divination is prescribed in the introductory pages of the Ramayana as composed by the saint Tulsidas. There is a large classified table of 225 letters and syllables, and the inquirer is desired, after meditating on the name of Shri Rama, to put his finger on any one of these; he is then to take the tenth letter from the one he has hit upon, and then the next tenth, and so on till he comes back to his original letter. Thus will be formed a quatrain which will satisfy his doubt. But this method presents obvious difficulties and is not calculated to yield the best results, for very often the syllables are found to be disarranged here and there and care has to be taken to set them in proper order. But if faith in Shri Rama has enabled his first and greatest devotee to uproot the rock and span the ocean, it must surely endow the pious Hindu with the patience necessary to conquer a disordered array of syllables.

From sortilege through books let us now turn to cycliomancy or divination by looking into cups. Certain vessels like the fabled cup of Jamshid and the Holy Grail connected with the name of Christ have a mysterious and powerful value attached to them. What is peculiar to such vessels is that only the pure in heart could look into them to get the most reliable results. Even at the present day in India children are made to gaze intently in vessels of water in order to trace the clue to a theft or murder or discover the whereabouts of the offender. Here too it is essential that the person who gazes into the water must be pure and innocent. The Arthurian romances reach the zenith of glory and mystery in



picturing the marvels of the Holy Grail. Mr. H. A. Guerber in his "Myths and Legends of Middle Ages" records an interesting tradition about the Grail that when it was in the custody of the brave and saintly Titurel and his virtuous companions in the temple built on Montsalvatch, it was found that the knights were fed, their wounds healed and their necessities supplied through the holy vessel. In times of danger bells would ring out, and, what is to our present purpose, supernatural messages would appear on the Grail from time to time for the enlightenment of the pure-minded custodians. The cup of Jamshid was also known as the "Jâm e Jahânumâ" or the world-reflecting cup, since it could reveal the traces of individuals in the most distant places throughout the world. According to Firdausi, only the pure in heart could look into it after prayers and invocations and that too only on the New Year day. From the Shahnameh we learn that the envious Gurgin, having landed his companion Bizan into trouble, returned to Iran with a cock and bull story about his friend and was deservedly committed to prison for his lies. King Kaikhusru then desired Giv, who had become restless at the disappearance of his son Bizan, to wait till the New Year day, when he (the king) would look into the Cup of Jamshid and make out where the hero was. The day arrived and the king, noted in Iranian lore for his extreme purity, offered prayers and looked into the Cup. He saw the world and "all the seven climes" and at last discovered Bizan in the land of his enemy Afrâsiâb, heavily fettered in a deep dark cave with the faithful princess Manizeh standing in his service near by. The late Shams ul

Ulamâ Dr. Sir Jivanji J. Modi in his Gujarati work "Irâni Vishayo" (Iranian Studies) Part II makes the ingenious suggestion that the Cup of Jamshid was something like our modern heliograph, while the Ervad Kutar brothers in the Introduction to their Gujarati translation of the Shahnameh have identified the same seven-lined Cup with the telescope. We need not pause here to discuss these interesting speculations.

The Persian romancers, influenced by the marvels of Jamshid's Cup, have attributed to Alexander the Great the construction of a magic mirror in Alexandria, reflecting the distant parts of the world. The admirers of Virgil have not been far behind in this respect and have ascribed to the wonder-working faculties of their hero the construction of two mirrors, in one of which the guilt of Roman citizens was visible, while the other reflected the enemies of the Empire as soon as they rose in arms. Dr. D. S. Margoliouth, in his article contributed to the "Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics" quotes the instance of Khalif Mansur who possessed a mirror which told him whether a person was his friend or foe, for in the latter case the mirror was coated with rust. The Old Testament refers to the cup of Joseph whereby he was able to divine (Genesis XLIV 2, 5, 15), and the hold that this form of divination has on the popular mind could be seen from the numerous anecdotes of cups and mirrors in our myths, fairy tales and romances. Closely connected with this is the custom of crystal-gazing with the object of getting a clue to one's difficulties. The beryl stone is frequently used for this purpose but it foretells future events only to the person who is pure;

if not, only the apparent semblance of the truth would be visible and even the reverse of what is going to happen is imaged forth. D. G. Rossetti, the founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, took delight in poems of a mysterious and supernatural character. In his ballad of "Rose Mary" a girl of the same name is asked by her mother to consult a beryl stone regarding the whereabouts of her lover, being unconscious of the fact that the girl had already surrendered her honour to that person. When the impure young woman looked into the beryl, evil spirits possessed the stone and revealed to her that though her lover was in difficulties his life was not in danger. This was remote from the truth as the girl came to know later on, and the poem ends tragically.

But the most famous instance of divination from precious stones is to be found in the Jewish practice of consulting the Urim and Thummim. This custom was invested with the most sacred grandeur and it was only on rare occasions and when the interests of Israel were in danger that the high priest, dressed in his official robes, could practise this divination, the answer received being supposed to represent the will of Jehovah. In Book III of Milton's "Paradise Regained" Satan flatters Christ in the following lines which incidentally bear testimony to the infallible character of this Jewish oracle:—

“ Should kings and nations from thy mouth consult,  
 Thy counsel would be as the oracle  
 Urim and Thummim, those oracular gems  
 On Aaron's breast, or tongue of seers old,  
 Infallible ”.

In the first place very little is known of this practice which is referred to only seven times in the Holy Bible. It is said that on the occasion of taking this oracle the high priest appeared in his pontifical robes on which was thrown a highly decorated mantle called Ephod. It was in two pieces covering the front and hind portions of the body and was joined at the top by two shoulder-pieces, set forth with onyx stones, on which were inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. From the shoulder-pieces hung the breast-plate (or rather pouch) containing the most sacred stones Urim and Thummim. How these stones were handled to express the will of God is a mystery. According to one account the stones literally mean "lighted up" and "dark", because they lit up when there was a favourable reply but remained dark in case of a discouraging response. Another account suggests that there were three stones on the high-priest's breast-plate, the one representing Yes, the other No, and the third Silence. In case the oracle was to be consulted, the priest put his hand into the pouch and pulled out a stone and judged the divine will according to the meaning of the stone drawn forth. The Urim and Thummim, speaking directly from God, were called the 'mother-voice', but about the 5th century B. C. these precious stones became dim and the light of prophecy was quenched. It was only when the 'mother-voice' ceased to be heard that the Jews began to trust the 'daughter-voice' (Bath-col), whose significance has been previously explained. Wordsworth, according to the ingenious speculation of Mr. E. E. Kellett in his "Reconsiderations" was probably thinking of the Bath-col when he wrote the opening line of his "Ode to Duty".

But people do not always approach their spiritual leaders except on occasions of great peril to the State, but rather wish to practise divination by themselves in a much less ceremonial manner. The movements of reptiles, insects, birds and animals have provided abundant food to superstitious people basing their divination thereupon. The serpent has been invariably regarded as the object of almost religious awe by the nations of the world, and there is scarcely any religion where this dreaded and vengeful reptile with its death-dealing fangs fails to figure either as an object of worship or as the incarnation of the Evil Principle. Another reason why the serpent is respected by some nations may be found in the fact that it is often supposed to represent a departed ancestor. About forty years ago the late Dr. Sir Jivanji J. Modi made an interesting contribution to the subject of ophiomancy (divination from snakes) by unearthing the Persian "Mâr-nâmeh" (book of snakes) which he dates about the 15th century. It discusses the efficacy of omens from the observation of a snake on every one of all the thirty days of the month. Dr. Louis H. Gray in his learned article contributed to the Dastur Dr. Hoshang Jamasp Memorial Volume suggests tentatively and with reservations that Zarathushtrian ophiomancy may be a survival of Babylonian lore on the same subject, as the Babylonians had a fairly advanced system of divination from serpents. A story from Cicero's work on divination may here be quoted to show how the very appearance of snakes is supposed to affect human life. Tiberius Gracchus, who was twice consul and censor, finding two snakes in his house, convoked the soothsayers. He was told that if the male snake was

allowed to escape, his wife would die in a short time; but if the female snake was let off, Tiberius himself would not survive long. Tiberius thereupon, anxious to spare his youthful wife, allowed the female snake to escape and himself died a few days afterwards. The traditions of several countries, supported by slight, if any, historical authenticity, would have it that a sleeping man over whom a cobra spreads his hood or the fabulous phoenix casts its shadow, would surely rise one day to the throne, however insignificant be his status in life. The elephant is another sentient animal and we read in Indian folklore that when a king died childless the royal elephant was led out in procession, and he whom the animal raised on its head by means of its trunk was acclaimed king.

The movements of the bees have played a great part in helping diviners to come to their conclusions. In ancient times the bees were in some vague unintelligible sense connected with the human soul. The Roman augurs considered the flight of bees a bad omen. Tradition maintains that the future greatness of Plato as well as of St. Ambrose was anticipated when a swarm of bees settled on their mouths when they were in the cradle. The fortune of the tyrant Dionysius was announced by the bees a little before the beginning of his reign. Once he dismounted and drove his horse into the river, but the animal was suddenly swept away by the fury of the current. Dionysius came out alone bewailing his loss when all of a sudden he heard a familiar neigh behind him, and to his great joy he found his horse in excellent condition with a cluster of bees hanging on his mane.

The soothsayers thereupon foretold a rise in his fortune, and in a few days he ascended the throne.

But the horse of Dionysius reminds us of hippomancy or the judging of future events from the sounds of horses, for people in their anxiety to know the will of God have scarcely failed to take note of any object, animate or inanimate. Tacitus observes in his work on Germany that the Teutonic people were much attached to divination, but that no species of augury was more popular among them than hippomancy. For this purpose milk-white horses were specially maintained at the public expense in certain forests and groves. When their services were required they were yoked to a chariot, and the priests were then able to predict the future by the snortings and neighings of the animals.

An illustration in support of hippomancy may also be quoted from the History of Herodotus regarding the Achæmenian times of ancient Iran, though our venerable historian the late Mr. Palanji B. Desai considers the story of very doubtful value. A person named Gomatis, assuming the name and rôle of Smerdis, the slaughtered son of Cyrus the Great, ruled for seven months in Iran during the reign and after the death of Cambyses. At last a conspiracy was formed of seven leading Persian nobles who forced their way into the royal palace and succeeded in slaying the pretender. Now arose the question as to who out of the seven should come to the throne. It was at last decided that they should betake themselves outside the city limits before dawn, and he whose horse first neighed at sunrise should be crowned king. This has been understood by some writers as an

appeal to the sun, to whom the horse was sacred. One of the seven nobles was Darius Hystaspes, the future great potentate of Iran, who happened to have in his employment a long-headed equerry. The latter coming to know of the arrangements tied up a mare at night at the appointed place in such a way as to be seen first in the morning by Darius' horse, who neighed and thus raised his master to the throne.

Birds and their movements have been in all countries a favourite means of foretelling the future. The Vedic Hindus were fond of taking auguries from the flight of birds, and the custom is found perpetuated in our Gujarati word "Shukan" (omen) which is derived from the Sanskrit word "Shakuni" meaning bird. So too the derivation of the word "augury" from the Latin avis (a bird) shows that thereby hangs a tale, for the Roman augurs also followed the practice of foretelling future events from the sounds, flight and other movements of the birds. It is possible that the Western custom of consulting birds before entering upon an important undertaking may have originated among the early navigators, who, when unable to discover land, observed the flight of birds and thereby judged their proximity to or distance from the shore. These ancient mariners always took birds with them during the voyage and let them off when they were sorely perplexed in their search for land and a dismal fate awaited them on the high seas. In case the shores were near the birds would fly away for good, but if they returned, it meant that as yet there was no sign of land in the vicinity.

Animals have often been substituted for birds for



divination purposes. Mr. David Murray observes in his "History of Japan" that the oldest Japanese method of divination was to scrape the shoulder-blade of a deer entirely of its flesh and then place it over a fire made from cherry-wood; the divine will was then supposed to be determined by the cracks caused by the fire in the bone. The ancient Greeks and Romans resorted to aruspicy or the practice of foretelling events by examining the entrails of animals sacrificed to the gods. (That this custom prevailed even among the Babylonians is apparent from the reference made to it in Ezekiel XXI 21, 22). The student of Roman history is sufficiently familiar with the numerous prodigies that happened before the death of Julius Cæsar. On the very day he sat on the golden throne, the hero offered a fat bull in sacrifice but no heart was found in the intestines of the animal. This was a very unusual phenomenon and was interpreted as the very worst of omens, and so did it turn out to be very shortly. There are several instances of generals delaying all action for a considerable time till the victim's entrails gave a favourable omen. In the battle of Plataea B. C. 479 the Lacedæmonians were much annoyed by the Persian bowmen but even under these circumstances Pausanius, the Greek general, disheartened by the unfavourable appearance of the victim's entrails, refused to order his troops to charge the enemy. On the contrary he invoked the aid of Hera, whose temple rose conspicuous at Plataea. The omens taken from the eviscerated animal now proved favourable, and the Greeks rushed to the work of carnage and on to victory. This would serve to show how tremendous was the grip of these semi-religious types of divination on the Spartans, who

chose to remain inactive even when the enemy was upon them, until they were animated by an encouraging omen.\*

We admit that some of the instances of divination above discussed would stagger the most incredulous minds and compel them to revise their views on the subject. Yet it must be said that divination cannot long maintain its ground in civilised times, for there are valid arguments against the same. There is very little of unanimity in the interpretations of dreams, auguries and omens, while the obscurity of oracles and the Sibylline books has passed into a proverb. Some dreams have come out remarkably true, but dreams are frequently the result of physical causes like overeating and indigestion, and consequently too much reliance cannot be placed upon them. We should think but meanly of our own intellect if, after reaching the present degree of civiliza-

---

\* In fact constant consultation of omens among the Greeks and their readiness to seek auguries from all events, however familiar or trivial, had amounted to a nuisance, and was ridiculed by Aristophanes in the following lines from the chorus of Birds in his comedy of the same name, as translated by Frere:—

“ On us you depend, and to us you repair  
 For council and aid, when a marriage is made,  
 A purchase, a bargain, a venture in trade;  
 Unlucky or lucky, whatever has struck ye,  
 An ox or an ass, that may happen to pass,  
 A voice in the street, or a slave that you meet,  
 A name or a word by chance overheard,  
 You deem it an omen, and call it a bird. ”

The last word of this passage jestingly suggests the intimate association between omens and birds, referred to in the preceding pages.

tion, we were to be put out at the flight of a bird or the sight of a snake. A black cat passing from our left to right is said to bode misfortune among our people; this is superstition pure and simple and scarcely deserves to be associated with any form of divination. Besides, it is to be remembered that we have discussed only those instances of divination that have proved successful, for nobody has cared to preserve a record of dreams, omens and auguries and various other forms of divination that have failed or proved misleading. If such a record were ever available we would be in a position to take a comparative survey and say whether divination is after all a great help or hindrance to humanity.

How idle it is for men to regulate their momentous actions by an examination of the entrails of animals can well be seen from a story cited from Cicero's work on divination. (Cicero, as was usual with him, composes this work in the form of a conversation, divination being defended by his brother Quintus while the great orator himself represents the opposition. It should appear therefore that Cicero, who was invariably of a sceptical bent of mind, had no genuine faith in divination but only summed up the arguments for and against the national belief on the subject.) The story in Cicero says that when Hannibal fled to the treacherous king Prusias of Bithynia and was eager to wage war with the enemy, he was advised by the king to desist for the entrails of the slaughtered animal prognosticated an ominous future. Hannibal thereupon pointedly asked the monarch whether he trusted a bit of calf's flesh more than the advice of a veteran general. Under similar circumstances Cæsar

also told his legions that no omens were required in fighting for one's own country, as none were wanted, as Hafiz is previously observed to have said, when a good deed was to be done. Again, if divination is practised incessantly without due restraints, it may amount to a craze and render a person irresolute and unmanly, leading him to consult soothsayers for the most auspicious moment for him to mount his horse or sit down at his meals. If Napoleon had waited for such auspicious moments in the manœuvring of his armies, his career would probably have ended with the thunder of his victorious artillery at the walls of Toulon in 1793.

Sometimes gloomy omens have been averted by a timely joke or an appropriate display of presence of mind. An instance in point may be taken from the history of Iran. By order of Khalif 'Omar, his general Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqâs sent messengers to the court of the Persian king Yezdejad Shehriyâr, calling upon him to accept the Qoran or part with his kingdom or submit to the imposition of taxes or decide the issue with the sword. The monarch was infuriated at the point-blank impertinence of the demand made by the children of the desert, and after rating the messengers soundly for their impudent claims, contemptuously sent them back with bags filled with dust. Far from being depressed the envoys took the bags to their leader, cheering him with the news that they had brought with them a portion of the soil of Iran as a fore-token of the complete occupation of that country by the Arabs in the near future. A still better instance shows how a grave situation, which might have ended disastrously, was saved by the

presence of mind of the general. When in the eventful year 1066 Duke William of Normandy brought his army to the shores of England, he in landing suddenly fell forward on the ground and filled his soldiers with superstitious dismay. But with ready wit he got up and said:—"Here's a very favourable omen indeed, my friends, for I have taken possession of England with both my hands." Similar stories are also current regarding P. C. Scipio Africanus (the elder), Julius Cæsar and Napoleon I in Egypt. In these cases, if superstition had had its way, there is no knowing how history would have been written; but a flash of ingenuity is worth more than a thousand omens, and the progress of the world is measured in terms of ages wherein the human reason, collectively or individually, has most manifested its greatness.

We have now passed through some of the leading forms of divination, omitting those only which are too familiar to us like dreams, presentiments, astrology, demonology, ordeals, oracles, games of chance or arrangements of luck. When to wed or not to wed was the question which vexed Panurge in Rabelais' immortal work, he eagerly frequented doctor and saint and heard great argument about it and about, but the poor man, like old 'Omar Khayyâm, evermore came out by the same door as in he went. Among those whom he consulted was Herr Trippa, a prodigy of learning, who took the puzzled inquirer through a maze of divinations, till Panurge could stand it no longer and, cursing the professor heartily, proceeded along his way. The various forms of divination practised by Herr Trippa were alphetomancy or divination by barley, aleuromancy by flour,

astragalomancy by knuckle bones, tiromancy by cheese, giromancy by circles, sternomancy by the breast, lebanomancy by frankincense, alectryomancy by the cock, axinomancy by throwing of the axe, cephalomancy by roasting the head of an ass on burning coal, and very many others. Divination is in fact an inexhaustible subject and can be as wide as the selfish, superstitious and tremulous nature of man can make it. Any one is free, for instance, to catch an augury from the tossing of a coin or the falling of a leaf. In this science-ridden world divination is fast losing its efficacy and hides its diminished head among the vulgar errors of an uncultured past. Still it cannot be said to have been dead, for it is sometimes practised secretly even by sensible people who are the first to discredit it in public. Such persons may be tempted to say about divination what Dr. Johnson once observed about the reality of ghosts:—“All argument is against it, but all belief is for it.” Denounced by reason and discouraged by religion, divination nevertheless retains its perennial romance as well as a certain academical value for scholars, eager to ferret out such historical and traditional curiosities from the nooks and corners of world-civilization.

## The Vision of Dante.

---

Every great epoch comprises a portion of the divine plan, while it is given to the hero, powerful enough to comprehend the past, epitomize the present and foreshadow the future, to reveal to the world what is to him the open secret of Providence. A great soul, proud, gloomy and reserved though he be like Dante, still possesses the eagle glance of genius, the piercing insight of a poet and the burning irrepressible aspiration of an idealist. The thoughts and passions, the aims and ideals of several dumb centuries of the Dark Ages suddenly found their sublime utterance in the "mystic unfathomable song" of such a great soul—Dante, the Christian Homer, who was thus destined to lay the finishing touch to the edifice, the materials for which lay entirely at his disposal. His mind, says Dr. Garnett, is more architectural than creative; though local and insular, he was able to evolve a world-poem by reflecting in memorable verse the love, hatred, joy, despair, cruelty, fanaticism, scholarship and sanctity of the humanity he knew. Dante is the forerunner of the Renaissance as well as the spokesman of his country and his age, and none but he can claim to have thoroughly interpreted the mind of that "millennium of darkness." His minute descriptions and complete familiarity with his subject strike us with astonishment and remind us of Mazzini's observation:—Great men do not create, but their clear insight enables them to see the stars of the Galaxy while the feeble vision of ordinary minds recognises only the foggy brightness of

the Milky Way. He was familiar with every nook and crevice of the human heart and touched with awe the solemn chords of pity and terror, sublimity and mystery. It is seldom that in the hands of a master a mighty subject is thus wedded to immortal verse. Here was the man, the central person, as Ruskin says, in all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral and intellectual faculties, all at their highest. Adversity is the true nurse of genius; most wretched men, says Shelley, are cradled into poetry by wrong; they learn in suffering what they teach in song. Brooding and morose by temperament, Dante through failure in life retired all the more within himself to meditate on eternal verities and divine retribution. When Milton's eyes were veiled in darkness and when he was husbanding out life's taper at the close in obscurity and disgrace, he turned his sightless orbs towards Paradise and sang his mighty poem which the world would not willingly let die; so too the Mediæval poet, heart-broken after the death of his beloved Beatrice, and mortified with the injustice of the Florentines when they banished him from his heart's best city, enshrined his sorrow in a literary monument, more lasting than any which even the most illustrious sculptor of Italy can boast of. But we must now try to know the man before we judge the poet even though in the former there be little to love though much to admire.

Dante Alighieri was a man of middle stature, with large eyes, aquiline nose and a dark serious-looking face, which once made a woman who saw him passing in the streets observe to her companion: "Here's the man who



has been to hell". "Ha; just so," replied the other, "that's why his face has been darkened by the smoke of the nether world". Dante was haughty and scornful of others thinking a bit too highly of himself. Once when the question was discussed as to who should take the lead of a certain embassy, Dante's name was proposed, when he was heard to say: "If I go, who remains? and if I remain, who goes?"—thus expressing his ill-disguised contempt for his companions. Even after his banishment he dissociated himself from "the worthless and vile company" of his fellow-exiles, and part of his miseries must doubtless be attributed to his supercilious disdain towards others, which made his exile all the more unbearable. At the court of Can Grande della Scala at Verona mimics and buffoons were the object of interest and their wisdom was appreciated by the frivolous circle there assembled. Dante was thereupon asked why he with all his scholarship failed to please the company, when he silenced them with the crushing retort:—"Like manners and like minds are the real causes of friendship." Boccaccio in his well-known life of the poet observes that Dante's ill-temper could be worked up to such a height of frenzy as to lead him to throw stones on women and children if they dared to speak against the Ghibelline party to which he latterly belonged. Once Dante found a blacksmith misquoting his verses as he hammered away the iron; the poet quietly approached him and threw away his hammer and tongs into the street. When challenged to give an explanation Dante said:—"If you do not want me to spoil your implements, do not you spoil my poems." The late Mr. Paget Toynbee in his interesting "Life of Dante" gives us an anecdote

of a donkey-driver singing some of the poet's verses and punctuating them with frequent cries of "Arri" (get on, gee up), as he delivered blows on the backs of his animals. Dante was so scrupulous about the correct recitation of his verses that he gave a great thump on the back of the man saying:—"That 'Arri' was not put in by me."

He was as it were made to govern, not to obey; and he recognised no law except that of his conscience. Carlyle, enlisting Dante among his heroes, naturally emphasises his sincerity, but he certainly carried straightforwardness to an aggressive extreme till it lapsed into a vice. Once Dante was asked to intercede before a magistrate for a youthful libertine named Adimari. The poet went and told the magistrate everything he knew about the youth, a good part of which was not to his credit at all. This on the contrary enabled the magistrate to pass a heavier sentence on Adimari. This strange conduct of the poet was never forgiven by the influential relatives of the youth, and in the opinion of Franco Sacchetti (quoted by Mr. Paget Toynbee), constituted the principal reason of Dante's banishment soon after from his native city. The Florentines issued an amnesty to the exiles (excluding Dante and a few others) inviting them to their city on condition of a heavy fine and a public apology. Dante, under the mistaken impression that he was included in the amnesty, disdained to return on these humiliating conditions. His uncontrollable wrath is manifest in his letter written in 1311 inviting the Emperor Henry VII to come and crush "the viper Florence", while in another terrible epistle written in

the same year to the Florentines he says:—"If my prophetic spirit be not deceived, your city, worn out with long sufferings, shall be delivered at the last into the hands of the stranger, after the greatest part of you has been destroyed in death or in captivity, and the few that shall be left to endure exile shall witness her downfall with weeping and lamentation." Here was a man prepared to bring desolation to his own city; but when the Emperor laid siege to it in 1312 the poet was too overpowered with his feelings to accompany him, though he had urged him to the attack. Dante would not fail even to take the Emperor to task as Milton chose to criticise the Lord Protector; but Dante's ideal Emperor was compelled to raise the siege and he died in 1313, at which event Dante's hopes were completely and irretrievably shattered. The poet died in 1321 at Ravenna, an exile to the last, for the people of Ravenna, though repeatedly requested by the Florentines to hand over his remains, refused to part with the precious relics. As Byron says in Canto IV of "Childe Harold":—

"Ungrateful Florence! Dante sleeps afar,  
Like Scipio, buried by the upbraiding shore."

A good deal of resemblance may be noticed in the characters and works of Dante and Firdausi. Both were the pioneers of their national literature, and, if it be not too much to say so, of their national languages. Dante immortalized his own age as well as Mediæval Catholicism; Firdausi in the magnificent roll of his undying couplets perpetuated the glorious traditions and history of the Iranians before the Arab conquest. Both

writers are distinguished by an epic magnitude, a lofty aim, a devout soul and a fervid patriotism. Both poets are mines of wisdom which, even apart from the position they occupy in the hearts of their fellow-countrymen, would serve to keep their memories green in poetic literature. Both were unfortunate, both were exiled, both of a peevish and unforgiving disposition. Dante was hard on friend and foe and never spared the enemies of Italy, nor the Florentines, nor even the Emperor whom he otherwise idolised so much; while the scathing satire written by the defrauded Persian on Sultan Mahmud will walk its way to eternity in company with the "Shah nameh." Both were made of stubborn stuff, but Dante on the whole was perhaps the sterner man: he could have returned to Florence if he had been a person of accomodating disposition and amiable manners, while the return of Firdausi depended solely on the whim of an autocratic sovereign. Dante even in exile was as proud as Lucifer and spoke bitter things even in the Veronese Court of his host Can Grande della Scala; while Firdausi, broken by age, exile and loss of his only son, is said to have flattered his orthodox patron Khalif Alquâdar Billâh of Baghdad by cursing himself for devoting thirty years of his life in recording the annals of the heathens, and tried to make amends for the "sin" by composing a poem "Yusuf-o-Zuleikhâ", based on a Qoranic subject. But Firdausi was in his seventies when he is alleged to have recanted, and time has tamed down even the most refractory. Dante, be it remembered, died in 1321 aged only 56, and thus, though both poets had their ample share of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

the Italian passed away before his proud spirit could be subdued by the rigours of age.

Dante's life was throughout inspired by two lofty ideals—love for Italy and love for Beatrice Portinari—and everything else was subordinated to this two-fold all-absorbing passion. Late in life, smarting under the injustice of the Florentines, he was burning with rage against his own city, yet even then he had a soft corner in his heart for the same, which is seen from the fact that, when invited by the poet Giovanni del Virgilio to come and receive the laurel crown at Bologna, Dante declined the offer with the remark that he would accept the laurel from no other place and people except from the Florentines at the font of San Giovanni where he had received his baptism. In those days Florence was rent asunder by mutual hostilities between the Ghibellines and the Guelphs. The proud, insolent and irreligious Ghibellines were attached to the Court; they championed the cause of the Emperor and may be compared to the Royalists of the times of Charles I. The religious-minded but austere and intolerant Guelphs who belonged to the middle classes, were adherents of the Pope, and resembled the Puritans and Roundheads of the 17th century. Early in life Dante was a Guelph and indeed his connections were largely with that party; his tutor, Brunetto Latini, his friend Guido Cavalcanti, and his wife Gemma Donati were all Guelphs. Dante had taken part in the battle of Campaldino and shared the triumph of the Florentine Guelphs. But the Guelphs were soon divided into Black and White, which corresponded respectively to pure Guelphs and disaffected Guelphs, and Dante who

belonged to the latter party was soon assimilated to the Ghibellines or the adherents of the Emperor, and thus became the bitter opponent of Pope Boniface VIII against whom he has launched the shafts of his invective. But as Mazzini observes—and the observation comes appropriately from the emancipator of modern Italy—Dante looked beyond Guelphism and Ghibellinism to the national unity of Italy. It was, however, not Dante the politician that did so, but Dante, the poet and idealist. It has been observed that the eagle always soars alone, when sparrows fly in flocks; the lion invariably ramps by himself, while sheep may move about in herds. Ordinary people adhere to parties and camps and work in close co-operation with others: while great minds, like Dante, even when outwardly conforming to a definite programme, fret at their bonds and in their inner life always enjoy a proud isolation from their fellows. Before we proceed to the crowning work of Dante's life, we shall discuss his political views which to us moderns, trained in the school of democracy, appear shockingly reactionary.

“De Monarchia” was written in Latin when the Emperor Henry VII visited Italy in 1311, and contains Dante's political views after he had embraced the Ghibelline creed. Hence this book is distasteful even to his early Guelph associates. According to Dante, man cannot help living in society, for the good of the individual is interlinked with the welfare of humanity. He felt that the misery of the world is largely due to the fact that there are numerous monarchs with their incessant bickerings and wars, resulting in the massacre of the innocents who scarcely know why war-clouds should occa-

sionally burst upon them. Dante's panacea for this evil was a universal king to whom all owed allegiance, but he quietly took for granted the unopposed accession of such a king and the hearty co-operation of all his subjects. He held that it is only through universal monarchy that universal peace can be possible, for as Shaikh Sa'di observes, ten beggars may sleep calmly on a sheet but two kings cannot reign amicably in the world without coveting each other's possessions. All the nations of the world were to bow their necks to one supreme law which in Dante's utopian scheme was to satisfy the requirements of the entire human race. The universal king will be crowned with all the virtues; he will be a despot but held in check by his moral perfections. This universal monarch (conceived nearly six centuries before Nietzsche thought out his Superman) cannot even better himself, since he has already reached the height of mortal ambition. He is to derive his supreme power from God without any intermediate agency and is therefore responsible to God only and not to the people or any other power on earth. Worse and worse!

But now Dante lets the cat out of the bag. He proves by reason and scripture that the Roman people acquired the dignity of empire and the privilege of "universal monarchy" by divine right. He held that the history of the Jews and the Romans reveals the divine plan on parallel lines, the Jews being responsible for the evolution of the Gospel, the Romans for the promulgation of the Law. According to Dante the Empire was not dependent on the Papacy but co-ordinate with it,

both being established by God. So Rome was to be the cynosure of all eyes, the centre of the universal Church and State. It is surprising to find how Dante resolutely refuses to look beyond his own nose, conveniently ignoring every nation and creed but his own as if outside the divine plan altogether. Prophets and kings of other countries have somehow to adapt themselves and their principles to Dante's scheme, or perhaps he may assign them a place in one of the circles of his Inferno. Dante's scheme, we are afraid, can succeed only when that pious hope of the Christian is realized—when the whole world in some dim distant Golden Age becomes converted to Christianity and Christ comes down to rule mankind in peace and love. But pious hopes and practical plans stand poles apart, and if every great thinker were to waste his reasoning powers in conceiving for his country a "universal monarch", whom all are called upon to pay homage, we should be having the Armageddon within a month. But, as Mr. A. G. Ferrers Howell observes, the political views of Dante were the result of the entirely hopeless situation of Italy in those days, torn by internecine violence, greed and disorder; but the poet in his perplexity trying to evolve a "universal king" who would be above all strife and animosity, thought out a plan which, if ever put into execution, would plunge not only Italy but the whole world into unspeakable chaos.

There are few forces in the world more calculated to fire the heart of man to nobler issues than the overpowering love of woman, and even literature bears ample testimony to the fact, especially when studied by the psycho-analytical methods of M. Freud. Who could have



thought that the grim and melancholy Dante was the victim of a woman's passion and was nursing in his heart the deep and secret wound of unfulfilled desire? Dante first saw Beatrice, the daughter of Folco Portinari, in 1274 when both were in their ninth year, and strange to say even at this tender age Dante was smitten by a passion, which completely mastered his soul and haunted him to the last moment of his life. Henceforth so long as Beatrice lived, her moonlike face was responsible for the various ebbs and tides in her lover's life. If she turned and saluted him, he would retire to his chamber and think of nothing but her, and pour his soul in a sonnet or canzone. When Beatrice was married, he was seriously ill, and when she died in 1290, Dante's life was in danger, and it seemed as if the sun of his earthly happiness had set for ever. After the first pangs of grief were over he devoted himself to the study of philosophy. Boethius' "Consolations of Philosophy" was his favourite work, and under its influence, as it appears, he identified Beatrice with the goddess of philosophy. He was no love-sick sentimental Werther to think of suicide but took an active part in current politics. He made an unhappy marriage with Gemma Donati, and to judge from the rebuke administered to him by Beatrice towards the end of the "Purgatorio," he was even involved in questionable relations with other women. In spite of all this Beatrice continued to be the polestar of his existence, and now that she was dead, she was idealised and deified by her devotee. His "Vita Nuova", which is the proper introduction to his masterpiece, is a collection of 31 poems prefaced by a prose text giving their interpretation. He here shows how love had revolutionised and

renovated his life. Dean Church observes that it was political life that unfolded the poetic genius in Dante, and but for his interest in politics the poet may have held a high place among writers of fugitive verse in company with other idlers of the same type. This view, though set forth by an acknowledged authority on the subject in his well-known essay on the great Italian, is open to serious doubt. Politics (which need not be confounded with patriotism or the gospel of liberty), can rarely, if ever, inspire a person to great poetry, and Ebenezer Elliott's "Corn-Law Rhymes" may serve to show how high in the realm of song a poet may soar on the wings of politics. It was not politics but love and grief that are responsible for the birth of the "Divine Comedy." Love and grief (as will be shown later on) were the real parents, politics only the wet-nurse of this immortal offspring of genius. If Nature was the spur to the genius of Wordsworth, Beauty to Keats and Idealism to Shelley, Love was doubtless the soul-subduing master-passion of Dante.

But now it is earthly love no more; it is incompatible with any thought of sensuality; it provokes no pang of jealousy at the thought of Beatrice's marriage. It is purified and elevated and its object enskied and sainted. It is not love but worship of moral or spiritual beauty in its most exquisite form. It is, to use a much-abused term, Platonic love, if ever there existed a historical illustration thereof. Even in English literature one shall have to come down to Shelley's "Epipsychidion" to realize something like the Platonic fervour of Dante. To put beside Dante's ideal love we can only

produce the instances of Giuseppe Caponsacchi's affection for Pompilia in Browning's "Ring and the Book", or the exquisitely tender and sacred attachment between Saraswathichandra and Kumud in the great Gujarati masterpiece of the late Mr. G. M. Tripathi. This "Platonic love" which may exist between a man and the wedded wife of another is often a sham, and when genuine, is apt to be mis-construed. We know what serious trouble was created in the courts of Charles I of England and Louis XVI of France by their queens who were victims to this dangerous fancy. Judging from the literature of the 17th and 18th centuries in England, we find that the very term had fallen in such low repute that the expression "Platonic lover" was synonymous with paramour. So long as human nature, so largely sex-ridden and jealous, continues to be what it is, it would be more conducive to domestic happiness if "Platonic love" be confined to the region of literature only; and there the expression of Dante's unfortunate passion has ever enjoyed unquestionable supremacy.

Dante's lyrics and odes by themselves, even without his masterpiece, would have prepared the way for Petrarch. Some of his love-poems are sensual and were written under the influence of the Troubadour Arnault Daniel, whom he meets in Purgatory. Italian poets in those times had nothing better to do than imitate the Provençal love poetry of the Troubadours and the result was a highly artificial literature, characterized by insincere effusions of love. But with the exception of a few poems in which Dante seems to be consumed by an earthly passion, he raised the love of the Troubadours

to a very high level. The shallowness, artificiality, and open sensuality of the Troubadors are changed in Dante into the deep, spontaneous and sacred devotion for a woman, who was no longer in the land of the living to inspire any fleshly ideas. The Troubadors frankly professed to sing the charms of their beloveds and pay neatly turned compliments to their mistresses' eyebrows as was done by the 17th century lyrists in England, and Dante in their company reminds us of the Puritanic Milton in the degraded days of the Restoration—a strange sort of Milton, however, whose soul is thawed into poetry by the warmth of love. Dante's Beatrice, says Mrs. Oliphant in her life of the poet, is not a mere tournament queen of love and beauty but a spotless, unblemished angelic presence. It was only when the later Troubadors turned to religion and hymned the Virgin in the language of love that they could attain to the height and rapture of Dante.

Dean Church observes :—"Dante wrote not for sport, nor to give poetic pleasure; he wrote to warn; the seed of the "Commedia" was sown in tears and reaped in misery; and the consolations which it offers are awful as they are real". After the death of Beatrice philosophy pacified but did not extinguish the grief of Dante, which was soon to be transfigured into something rich and strange. Love, Grief and Philosophy have often presided at the birth of the world's best literature. Tennyson, overwhelmed with a despair that drove him to the verge of suicide at the loss of A. H. Hallam, entered into philosophic contemplation and enriched English literature with a work which enjoys undisputed pre-eminence

over all similar poems. Towards the end of the "Vita Nuova" Dante says that he was admonished by a wonderful vision not to speak further of Beatrice till he could more worthily treat of her, and hence, to quote his own words in English, "if it shall please Him, through whom all things live, that my life be prolonged for some years, I hope to say of her what was never said of any woman." Dante's life was at least long enough to enable him to fulfil his promise with the production of the "Divina Commedia", the central figure of which is Beatrice glorified.

This monument of poetic imagination describing the soul's progress from Hell and Purgatory to Paradise is, strange as it may seem, designated not an epic nor a satire but a comedy. Tragedy opens happily but soon the clouds of trouble begin to gather in the skies and it ends disastrously, while comedy, though beginning with complication and perplexity, terminates with the smiles of good fortune. Even in language tragedy is exalted and sublime, comedy is commonplace and low-pitched. Dante called his work a comedy because it ends happily, and what happiness could be greater to Dante than the reception given him by Beatrice in the other world? The work may also be appropriately called a comedy because it was written in the humble Italian vernacular. The poet preferred to call it only a comedy, but, looking to its great and sacred theme, the term 'divine' was subsequently added to it by its admirers.

The poet was essentially a dedicated spirit, writing this work not to gain renown but, as Dean Church says,

to stamp on the mind of humanity the eternal issues of good and evil doing in the world. Like Milton, who also approached his subject with all seriousness and sincerity of purpose, Dante too in his own way justified the ways of God to man, by displaying the eternal justice of the Almighty and the retribution one receives for his actions. Boccaccio's story proving that Dante was conscious of receiving a direct mandate from God is disputed by certain scholars. According to his account the "Comedy" was first commenced in Latin during the poet's happy days, and it was in Latin that Dante wrote the first seven stanzas of the "Inferno." A few years after the banishment of Dante this manuscript was discovered in one of the receptacles into which Dante's wife had hastily thrown the family valuables during her husband's flight. The manuscript caught the eye of Dante's poet-nephew who forwarded it to his uncle. Dante had thought the papers lost, and he received them as a special indication from God that the work should now be accomplished.

To Goethe sin could be easily atoned for, and was not after all a matter of great consequence, and even after a long life of iniquity Faust repented in his last years and was saved from the terrors of damnation. Not such is the opinion of the stern Mediæval poet who metes out justice and retribution with relentless exactitude in accordance with the nature of human deeds. It is unkind and even to a certain extent untrue to remark that Dante placed his favourites in paradise and his adversaries in hell. Rather those villains of a deeper dye who persist in evil ways and never repent for their

deeds are placed in Hell; those who after a morally lax existence repented sincerely and tried to turn over a new leaf in their life even at a very late stage are given a home in Purgatory; while men devoted to Faith and Christian Charity, who have made it the aim of life to further the progress of goodness in this world, are permanently exalted in the regions of the blest. Dante in his scheme makes room for an Earthly Paradise, situated beyond the limits of Purgatory, being the lot of those who study philosophy and act according to the moral virtues, while the eternal bliss of Central Paradise will be his only who follows the Revelation and moulds his life according to the gospel of Christ.

The idea of man passing through the world of shades is no novel feature in Dante, since it could be traced in ancient mythology as well as in classical literature. Demeter, for instance, had been to the dismal region of Pluto to recover her daughter Persephone as Orpheus in search of his wife Eurydice, while Hercules, Castor and Pollux and others have all been described as having undertaken a journey to that undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller is said to return. Scandinavian mythology also contains the famous account of Odin's journey to recover his son Balder from the shades. To turn to a few instances from classical literature, we find this journey to Hades described by Homer in Book XI of "Odyssey", wherein Odysseus recapitulates before king Alcinous how he descended into the nether world. Virgil in "Æneid" Book VI describes the Sibyl taking Æneas to the infernal regions, which are also depicted by Plato in his "Gorgias", "Phædo"

and especially in the "Republic". In the last mentioned work is discussed the legend of Er, the son of Armenius, whose soul leaves his body on the pyre and goes forth to observe the world of spirits but eventually returns to his body still lying on the funeral pile. Aristophanes in his "Frogs" pictures the amusing trial-scene in the world of shades between Æschylus and Euripides. The dream of Scipio in Cicero's philosophical work, the "Republic", clearly corresponds to the vision of Er in Plato. Even Assyrian, Chaldean and Persian legends (not to talk of Indian ones which were beyond the scope of Dante) abound in references to the journey to Hades. Nay, even in Dante's own times Franciscan and Dominican friars acted their Mystery plays describing the terrible penalties the sinful souls are subjected to in the other world. The fantastic extravagance of such works was later on deservedly ridiculed by Rabelais through the character of Epistemon. Dante was the heir of all the ages, and may be expected to be conversant with most of this Hades-literature.

There are so many accounts of the journey to the spirit-world that it is difficult to say what is the exact source of Dante's work. It is rather amusing to see scholars trying to persuade their readers that it was a certain favourite work of theirs that suggested the "Comedy" to Dante. Our departed venerable scholar, the late Shams-ul-Ulamâ Dr. Sir Jivanji J. Modi holds a brief for the "Ardâ Virâf Nâmeh," wherein is described the journey to the next world of a pure and saintly Iranian priest. Dr. Modi also refers to Mr. C. S. Boswell's translation of an Irish work "Fis Adamnain,"



dealing with an exactly similar subject. Mr. Miguel Asin in his "Islam and the Divine Comedy" holds very fantastically that Dante was indebted to Muslim sources, being familiar with Arabian philosophy and legends. Mr. Asin believed that the legend of the island which turned out to be a sea-monster in the "Divine Comedy" was taken by Dante from the tale of Sindbad, but we think that these leviathan-like monsters are common to many legends. Mr. Asin fancies that Dante's journey through the three worlds is based on the "Mae'rāj" or Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad as given in Islamic theology (cf. Al Qoran XVII 1). But if that were so, one wonders why the prophet of Arabia should be placed by Dante in the Inferno! Again, it should seem unaccountable that Dante should accept the "Mae'rāj" of Muhammad in preference to the Ascension of Christ himself on the 40th day after his resurrection, when we know that the Italian poet had an undisguised contempt for all other faiths but his own. According to Mr. Asin, Christian theology has no place for purgatory, which Dante borrowed from the "Barzakh" (a place intermediate between hell and heaven) of Islam. If Mr. Asin had studied the Zarathushtrianism of the Pahlavi period or had at least read the "Ardā Virāf Nāmeḥ," certainly written before Islam originated, he would have been familiar with a region called "Hamistagān" or purgatory for those whose good and evil deeds weighed equal.

Though it is thus unsafe to be over-zealous about any one particular origin of Dante's work, still there is one source, mentioned by the Rev. H. F. Cary in the Introduction to his famous Translation of the "Divine

Comedy," which cannot be easily set aside. This source is "The Vision of Alberico" written in Latin about the beginning of the 12th century. It is said that Alberico in his 9th year was seized by a terrible illness which temporarily unhinged his mind. During the trance which lasted 9 days he had a vision that he was being carried about by a dove and conducted by St. Peter and two other angels through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. Alberico's mentality was so thoroughly changed by his experiences that on his recovery he immediately joined a monastery, where he dictated his vision to a monk in 1127. Dante had in all probability gone through the work which may be supposed to be the immediate source of the "Divine Comedy." Though many have tried to make their mark in Hades-literature, Dante had special qualifications for the work by which he was able to secure the palm above all other writers. Mr. H. V. Routh in his "God, Man and Epic Poetry" observes that the type of man most needed to visit the next world must be the master of moral power and of immense aspirations, thirsting for the truth which can be revealed only in eternity. Such a typical man is Dante, who is not only an epic poet but an epic character and himself the hero of his own epic. Besides such were his endowments that he became the mouthpiece of the age, and summarized the theology, philosophy, history and literature of centuries.

There is a perfect unity in the "Divine Comedy" brought about by the continuous presence of Dante himself throughout the work. He has been taken in different lights by different scholars—as an individual

curious to see and describe the other world; or as a Florentine of the 14th century anxious to see what became of his friends and foes; or as an ideal Christian like the Pilgrim of Bunyan yearning for divine grace; or as a special messenger from God deputed to reveal His secret will to the world. Take him as we may, his personality dominates the poem and lends it an abiding charm. The glory of the other world would be lost upon us if communicated by an ordinary person; but when we realise Dante to be the true centre of the poem and share his joys, griefs and opinions on men, manners and systems, we feel we are in no mean company but are guided by the brightest and most capacious genius of the times.

In so great a work it was necessary to follow a definite cosmology, and Dante following the Ptolemaic geocentric system considered the earth to be the centre of creation round which revolve the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. The eighth sphere is that of the stellar regions; the ninth was the Empyrean and the tenth and last was the Primum Mobile. Every one of these is peopled by different kinds of spiritual beings, in the last sphere being found the Virgin Mary and the Triune Deity. Dante could not help describing this false system, for Copernicus' great work came out more than two centuries after the "Divine Comedy," and even Milton, the contemporary of Galileo, was content to base his great epic on the Ptolemaic plan. According to Dante, when Satan was hurled "headlong, flaming, from the ethereal sky," he punched a deep hole in the earth upto its very centre just near Jerusalem.

This was Hell, the abode of the accursed, being a funnel-shaped hole, a gigantic amphitheatre, divided by Dante into nine circular ledges of diminishingly small area with rocky stairways. Exactly opposite Hell there was formed by the portion of earth thus displaced a huge mountain rising out of the wilderness of waters; this was Purgatory or the Mount of Purification, on the summit of which was situated the "Earthly Paradise," whence the penitent soul, restored by purification to his original innocence, would wing its way to Paradise. Dante was almost ignorant of Greek, though he was much indebted to Aristotle whom he had absorbed through Latin translations. He was also influenced by the Vulgate, by St. Augustine, by Neo-Platonism, by Boethius, but most of all by St. Thomas Aquinas.

The "Divine Comedy" opens like an allegory, the poet finding himself in a dark trackless wood (human life). He sees a hill (virtue) lit up by the rising sun (righteousness). As he tries to climb it he is scared away by a leopard, lion and wolf, typifying envy, pride and greed respectively. It was then that Virgil (human wisdom) came to his help and asked him to abandon that way and accompany him by a different route—that of "subjective experience"—which led through Hell and Purgatory to the Earthly Paradise and thence to the realms of immortal bliss. After passing through Hell when they came to Purgatory, Virgil walked timidly since the place was unfamiliar to him, and hence the shade of the poet Sordello became their guide as far as he could go. On the border of Purgatory flows the river Lethe where Virgil vanished leaving Dante alone; but he now

met Beatrice (Divine Wisdom, Revelation or Faith) who led him to Paradise right up to the Empyrean or the sphere of "unbodied light" beyond which even she was unable to pass. Finally, St. Bernard becomes his guide till he gets a view of the Vision Beatific. It is abundantly clear why Dante should have chosen Virgil to be his guide in the nether regions. Virgil filled the same place among Mediæval poets as Aristotle among philosophers. The "Æneid" is the glorification of the Roman Empire on which Dante based his politico-religious system. Again, Virgil was the greatest Latin poet to whom all subsequent writers of Italy were considerably indebted. In the superstitious Middle Ages Virgil came to be regarded as a wizard, a man of mystery, deeply versed in occult lore, which he was supposed even to practise successfully. But the one feature in Virgil that must have weighed the most with Dante was that Virgil himself had in Book VI of his great work described the journey of his hero with the Sibyl to the underworld; and we think no better and more suitable guide could ever have been thought of than Virgil.

It is not possible to give even a cursory idea of Hell, so full is it with people of sundry sorts paying the penalties for their misdeeds on earth. Certain remarkable features may however be noticed. It is deplorable to observe that Dante believed in eternal Hell, the very inscription on the portals being:—"All hope abandon, ye who enter here". According to Dante it is impossible that an inmate of the infernal regions should ever come round to the right path, for in hell repentance is not to be thought of. So those that died impenitent on

earth are transferred to hell where they show not the least sign of remorse. Since the will has been entirely enslaved to evil, sin does not cease and hence the necessity, according to Dante, of eternal punishment. For instance, the well-known pair Francesca of Rimini and her brother-in-law Paolo, who committed adultery, are to be found in hell ceaselessly tossed about by stormy winds. They are in great pain but absolutely unabashed and unrepentant. Francesca tells her tale, how the two were once reading the guilty love of Lancelot and Guinevere, how they fell into sin, and how "that day we read no more". The most terrible story in the "Inferno" is that of Count Ugolino, the Chief of the Guelphs in Pisa, gnawing with vindictive relish the skull of the Archbishop Ruggieri, who had betrayed the former and had him, his sons, and grandsons imprisoned and starved to death in the "Tower of Famine". The whole infernal region reeks with the effluvia of crime and blood, and the atmosphere is heavily charged with the vapours of sin and guilt. There is never a spark of repentance, a ray of hope, a gleam of light. Evil itself is the good of the inmates, and despite their terrible pain they revel eternally in the ravages of wickedness.

Reason and conscience both revolt at this theory of perpetual damnation especially when set forth by a poet who proposes to demonstrate the working of divine justice. But Dante was a child of his times which consigned all unbaptized infants and unenlightened heathens to hell. He never thought there was anything wrong and cruel in eternal suffering even though the Supreme Being is Himself identified with Love in the religion

he professed. Another peculiarity which also goes to show the injustice of God according to Dante's plan is that scarcely any pagan, however exalted, is to be found in Paradise, but he must be accomodated either in Hell or Purgatory. Degraded Christians may be found in Hell but distinguished and noble pagans can never be found in Paradise. It is sad to find Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in Hell; Hector, Achilles, Agamemnon, Alexander all in Hell; the noble and chivalrous Saladin is in Hell; and those illustrious sons of Arabia, Hazrat Muhammad and Hazrat 'Ali are also consigned to the realms of the unblest in a terribly mangled condition for spreading "heresies and schisms" in the world! Surely this exclusion of non-Christians from Paradise, as if that region was the monopoly of the good followers of Dante's religion only, succeeds in presenting the poet's faith in anything but a favourable light. But Dante alone can scarcely be blamed when blind fanaticism was to be found raging in England as it did elsewhere almost three centuries after the Italian poet ceased to write. "Turk" was Bacon's favourite term of reproach; the "proud paynims" of Spenser's allegory usually embodied his vices, while Milton, as is well-known, consigned the deities of other nations to the infernal regions. Intolerance, religious and national, is a Hydra-headed monster and dies hard, if it be said to die at all.

But then it may be repeated that the age of Dante was the age of blood and iron when life and property were insecure. Mr. Lonsdale Ragg in his "Dante and his Italy" has given a terrible picture of the times, when religion itself taught man to be reckless, ready to

do all, endure all or lose all. The methods of this religion, as enunciated by St. Dominic, were unduly forceful and superstition was rife among the laity. The heartless cruelty of the age could be judged from a custom according to which during the last four months of the year a sort of boxing was played on a bridge without a parapet, with the result that many were killed and more who escaped with their lives were grievously injured. In those days Philip, Archbishop of Ravenna, was such a disgrace to his cloth that he would roast a man alive or send him to prison to be bitten to death by rats. It was not unusual for the Franciscan and Dominican monks of those days to act their Mystery plays in which the persons were represented as boiled in fire or stung by serpents. No wonder therefore if Dante has displayed instances of extreme cruelty in his "Inferno." However, punishment in Hell is often appropriate to the offence committed; for instance, gluttons have their throats filled with mud; the intemperate are tantalized with fruits which are just out of their reach; the deceitful have kind faces but snaky bodies; flatterers are immersed in filth; speculators are plunged in a lake of boiling pitch; while those guilty of simony, perhaps the prevailing vice of the clergy of the age, are fixed with the head downwards in certain apertures so that only the legs appear on the surface with flames burning on the soles of their feet.

Dante was always a believer in the Trinity of Power, Love and Wisdom to which he opposes the Devil, the incarnation of Impotence, Hatred and Ignorance, the sum and substance of evil in every conceivable aspect Milton's Satan is lofty and magnificent and depicted



almost in a sympathetic light; Dante's Lucifer is extremely repulsive and loathsome, his physical deformity being the embodiment of his moral hideousness. Lucifer is depicted as a monster with three faces crushing in his mighty jaws three persons whom Dante regards as arch-sinners—Judas Iscariot (the enemy of the Church as symbolized by Christ), Brutus and Cassius (the enemies of the State as represented by Julius Cæsar). It is distressing to find the honourable Brutus, "the noblest Roman of them all" in such disreputable company, but this only enables us to realize how firm was the belief of Dante in the union of Church and State, and how extreme was the penalty he was prepared to assign to their enemies. By a rather clumsy expedient Lucifer is himself made to serve as the means of transit for Dante and his guide from Hell to Purgatory till the light of the stars bursts upon their sight. Mr. E. G. Gardner observes in his article on Dante in the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* that in "Inferno" the poet especially displays the dramatic side of his genius; the "Purgatorio" which is quite original, is full of sustained harmony and tenderness, while the "Paradiso" in its noblest passages is lyrical rather than dramatic, and there is less action and less individualization or character than in the two preceding sections. Naturally the "Inferno" is the most interesting, just as Milton's Hell and Satan surpass in force and vividness his description of Heaven and its denizens. So rich is the "Inferno" in descriptions and so graphic is the portraiture that it has impressed the imagination of mankind far more than the mystical and theological "Purgatorio" and "Paradiso". We are also

more interested in the "Inferno" because the material sublime is more impressive than the moral. Again Dante's journey through Hell is much more perilous than in the other two regions, and this fact would also contribute to our interest. Lastly, an additional source of interest is to be found in Virgil, the guide, who is more tangible and human than Beatrice, who has become a mere abstraction.

Dante's style is considered by scholars of Italian language and literature as extremely condensed, vivid, passionate and full of variety of intonations and imageries. His description of nature is also grand and awe-inspiring. He can render a complete scene in a few lines, sometimes even in one. Like Virgil himself he could immortalize anything by a luminous word or phrase. This characteristic stood him in good stead for without such succinctness his work would have grown prodigiously bulky and he would have left it incomplete. Sometimes, however, he proceeds to minute particulars and that too in unpleasant matters; the result is that his details make him grotesque, while Milton often evolved sublimity through a deliberately vague and hazy treatment of similar themes. The greatest and most remarkable feature of Dante's literary style is his intensity. As Carlyle says, he is world-great not because he is world-wide but because he is world-deep. There is a brevity and abrupt precision in him and his movements are swift and decisive. Though full of wrath and rage, he at times displays the greatest pathos and tenderness, his rage reminding us of some ancient prophet, his pathos of a kind-hearted friar sympathizing with a

fellow-brother in distress. We have not discussed here his unrivalled services to the Italian vernacular but it must be admitted that he bestowed a permanent stamp and character on that language, in which nothing great before him had been achieved. His profound and subtle allegory, his mysticism, his prophecy, his bold metaphors, his occasionally hard and uncouth phraseology and his historical, theological and various other kinds of allusions—all bespeak a crying need of commentaries which are certainly numerous.

We now turn to purgatory, the hospital of souls, the object of which is to restore to the penitent the freedom of his will which has been enslaved by his sin. Those only are put into purgatory who died in grace but whose penitence was not complete here below. The ferocity, cruelty and hopeless misery of the "Inferno" are no longer to be witnessed here, for the purgatorial punishments are not of a vindictive but of a curative nature, benefiting the sinner by extinguishing his liability. The soul in purgatory is therefore anxious to undergo pain because it only facilitates his progress towards the goal. Dante considers the seven deadly sins as only perversions of corresponding virtues; these sins are—Pride, Anger, Envy, Sloth, Greed, Gluttony and Lust, which are so often personified and described by English poets, especially by Spenser in his "Faerie Queene." At the gate of Purgatory, which could be reached by the stairs of Faith, Penitence and Piety, stood an angelic Porter who marked on Dante's forehead seven P's (peccata or sins) and told him he would lose one at every stage till he reached the bounds of that region. Cato Uticensis, who welcomes the visitors to Purgatory, is considered by

Dante as the finest example of a pagan moralist who has attained to the freedom of the will through penitence. The poet Statius, the imitator of Virgil, is another instance of a pagan thus cleansed and purified. Since Virgil is not quite at home in Purgatory, the shade of Sordello, also a Mantuan like himself, offers to be their guide. The circles of Purgatory are not well-like in form as those of Hell, but they are ledges or cornices round the steep slope of the mountain, sometimes furnished with stairs and sometimes with an ascent of broken rock on the hillside, leading from one to another but all free to the sunshine and the air. According to Dante's theology repentance is useless after death but would prove efficacious even a moment before it. A person who prevented sinners from repenting on this earth would consequently deserve the heaviest punishment. "Pray for me! Ask my people to pray for me!" were the constant exclamations addressed to Dante by the inmates of this region. Prayers for the dead are serviceable only to those who are in Purgatory, helping on their progress and relieving them sooner from their miseries. "Purgatorio" is largely taken up with moral disquisitions, Dante suggesting various doubts and Virgil resolving them. These matters of purely academic interest will appeal to theologians but not to the general reader. Towards the border of Purgatory Virgil disappears because a pagan, even though he be the author of the "Æneid" and the idol of Mediæval Christianity, dare not set foot in Paradise according to our poet's bigoted notions. Hence Dante alone comes up to the Earthly Paradise, where Beatrice now becomes his guide and begins by

administering him a rebuke for his moral delinquencies. The repentant poet is then dragged through the river Lethe and is thus enabled to forget his past sinful memories. He is then refreshed with a draught from the river Eunoe which vitalises and rejuvenates his system, so that he passes on with his guide to the Central Paradise.

Dante himself says that in the description of Paradise he had taxed his powers to the utmost. It is conceived as a region of eternal fruition and perfection, where the human will and divine will are entirely identified. There is no hankering or ambition left, for the highest ideals ever entertained in human hearts realize their eternal fulfilment in this blessed spot. Love and goodwill reign supreme without the pains of Hell or the repentance of Purgatory, whose very memories have been extinguished by the sweet oblivious antidote of the waters of Lethe. The visitors now breathe "an ampler ether, a diviner air," realizing nothing but kindness and affection which are promptly reciprocated. Dante and Beatrice visit the planets and spheres above-mentioned one after the other and meet the shades of numerous great persons like Charlemagne, Orlando, Godfrey of Bouillon, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis, St. Dominic and others. Dante also meets the shade of his ancestor Cacciaguida who recounts the history of Florence and condemns the degeneracy of its modern citizens; he predicts the calamities the poet has still in store for him and exhorts him to write the present poem. The poet accosts even Adam who speaks of his "first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree," of the occasion of his fall, and of his admission into heaven after 5232 years

had passed and when the Christian Saviour was born. When Dante was in the firmament of the fixed stars, he was told by Beatrice that since he was now very close to the sum of blessedness he might look downwards and contemplate the spheres which they had just passed. Then follows a sublime description of the Sun, Moon, Mercury, etc., floating like midgets in the immeasurable realms of space round the scarcely visible sin-laden globe of this earth. No wonder this description should have fired the genius of Milton and set him thinking over those mighty plans divine, which have baffled both our scientific calculations as well as our towering imaginative flights.

But the description of heaven is too much obscured by the discussion of philosophical problems. The religious aspect of Dante's work cannot be adequately studied without a sound knowledge of the "Summa Theologica" of St. Thomas Aquinas, who died when our author was nine years of age. We feel that Dante would have done well to leave his theological arguments and inquiries to Aquinas instead of dragging them into his poem, and that too at a stage when we are fast approaching the climax—the sublime and unutterable splendour of the Divine Presence. When for instance in the midst of the ineffable glories of Paradise, we find Dante being examined like a schoolboy by St. Peter regarding Faith, by St. James regarding Hope, and by St. John regarding Charity, we feel there is a sad falling off in the sublime sentiment of the poem. This preponderance of the theological element and the fanatical zeal with which it is set forth once made Horace Walpole mischievously compare Dante

to a "Methodist parson in Bedlam." Mere didacticism and theological catechism are inconsistent with poetic inspiration and are hard indeed to reconcile with the poetic mood. Yet Milton has slipped in the very same direction in his description of Heaven, which made Pope remark:—

"In quibbles angels and archangels join,  
And God the Father turns a school divine."

Great theological problems have always puzzled human ingenuity, and the greatest minds are often seen arguing in a circle, finding no end "in wandering mazes lost." Tennyson had the rare knack and ability of tackling religious and philosophical problems in a way so as to subordinate them to the poetic afflatus. Even here Dante has his fling against the rapacious Popes of his days, and St. Peter is described as bitterly rebuking the greed of his successors in the apostolic see, and is sympathised with by the heavenly host in his condemnation. Ever since Dante at Beatrice's request cast a look at the spheres he had passed, looking so mean and insignificant from that immense distance, he had realized the contemptibility of earthly longings, and was now prepared to behold the divine essence. Beatrice leaves him in the Empyrean and her place is taken by St. Bernard, who showed him countless thrones, occupied by blessed souls, not in order of merit but by virtue of divine grace, according to the poet's theological notions. These thrones are so arranged round the Divinity as to present the appearance of a mighty Rose. Dante is now asked to offer sincere prayers to the Virgin Mary

if he wanted to observe a gleam of the Divine Light. His prayers being granted, he is vouchsafed a view of the Vision Beatific, the Divinity of Eternal Light and Love; "but what I saw was not for words to speak", and Dante closes his eyes as well as his poem in a moment of unutterable ecstasy. As Mr. R. P. Downes observes in his "Seven Supreme Poets", no poet has been so keenly sensitive to light in all its manifestations as Dante was; and never in world-literature has light been used with such magnificent effect as in the "Paradiso", where joy is expressed by effulgence as on earth by laughter and song. In corroboration of these remarks we may cite a remarkable point mentioned by Mr. H. Baynes in his "Dante and his Ideal". It should seem more than a mere coincidence that the last lines of the "Inferno", "Purgatorio" and "Paradiso" invariably end with the word "stars", at least in Cary's translation. When Dante and Virgil have passed the Inferno "thence issuing we again beheld the *stars*". When Dante, refreshed by the waters of Lethe and Eunoe, left Purgatory, he was "pure and made apt for mounting to the *stars*". Finally, having attained the vision of the Supreme Being, he feels his will identified with the Love of the Divinity "that moves the sun in heaven and all the *stars*". This Italian star-gazer at last succeeded in commemorating his visions and ideals, which will last as long as his favourite stars will continue to shed their light in the skies.

Students of Iranian lore will naturally be interested in the comparison of the "Divine Comedy" with the *Ardâ Virâf Nâme*, a Pahlavi work, dealing with an exceptionally pure man named *Ardâ Virâf*, who in



Sassanian times, when the laity were plunged in indifference to religious matters, voluntarily entered into a trance in which he saw the world of the dead, rose on the 7th day and dictated his experiences. On this subject I have derived valuable help from Dr. J. J. Modi's "Dante Papers," and from a learned article contributed to the Dastur Dr. Hoshang Jamasp Memorial Volume by the Rev. Dr. L. C. Casartelli. Though a span of nearly eight centuries divides the Persian from the Italian vision, the two very often move along the same lines. In both, the crimes are often similar with the exception of certain offences specially condemned by the Zarathushtrian religion, e. g. pollution of fire and water, ill-treatment of cattle, disregard of the poor etc. In both works the punishments are suited to the crimes committed. Their hells are dark with a palpable darkness: their heavens gleam with resplendent effulgence, celestial light being the leading feature of the Zarathushtrian religion as it is of Dante's "Paradiso". Ardâ Virâf is accompanied by the angels Sarush and Âtar as Dante by Virgil and Beatrice. The angels rebuked Ardâ Virâf for not taking proper care of fire, as Beatrice taunts Dante for neglecting her memory. In both Purgatories souls suffer from extremes of heat and cold, but the Iranian purgatory is meant for those whose good actions equibalance their evil ones. Ardâ Virâf first goes to Purgatory, then to Paradise and finally to Hell, while Dante progressed from Hell and Purgatory to Paradise. Ardâ Virâf has four heavens and hells, Dante has nine of each. Ardâ Virâf on taking the first step of "good thoughts" was taken to the first heaven, and with two other steps of "good words" and "good

deeds" was taken to the second and third heavens till he ultimately reached the fourth heaven, the House of Song, the abode of Ahuramazda. Then again with the three steps of "evil thoughts," "evil words" and "evil deeds," the Persian mystic moved in the three hells till he came to the fourth, where dwells Ahriman or Satan. With this simple allegorical design may be contrasted the elaborate cosmology of the Western poet.

Dante peoples heaven with warriors, theologians and martyrs, Ardâ Virâf with the benefactors of humanity—with intercessors for peace, disseminators of knowledge, mundane and spiritual, and with industrious souls who made the barren fields smile in plenty. In heaven Ardâ Virâf meets Gayomard, the primeval man of the Persians, as Dante met Adam in Paradise. Dante refers to the four classical rivers of Hell—Acheron, Styx, Phlegethon and Cocytus; while the Iranian river is formed of the futile tears shed over the dead. While the Acheron is crossed by Dante and Virgil in surly old Charon's boat, the Eastern river is spanned by the well-known Chinvat Bridge, the Sirât al Mustaqim of the Qoran. Satan taunts the victims of the Iranian hell, while the fearful and and prodigious Lucifer of Dante chews the bodies of Judas, Brutus and Cassius. The gnawing of human skulls, suspension with the head downwards, tearing and flaying, crushing beneath heavy metals and punishments through serpents and fierce animals—are common to both seers. Among the remarkable points of contrast one may note that Dante's journey to the other world records only the personal experience of an individual, while Ardâ Virâf was specially chosen from 40000 pure Mobeds (priests)

and deputed to proceed to the spirit world and bring a message of divine justice to his materialistic age. The victims in Ardâ Virâf's hell are all anonymous with the single exception of a lazy man called Davanos, whose body was in the infernal regions while his right foot was in heaven, only because by it he had once kicked a bunch of grass before an ox, so that his solitary good deed went not without its adequate reward. The anonymity seen in the Iranian hell disappears to a certain extent in heaven where Ardâ Virâf meets the prophet Zarathushtra and his colleagues Vishtâsp, Frashostra and Jâmâsp. Dante was a poet and politician writing his own vision; Ardâ Virâf was a yogi who cared not a jot for the world's goods, voluntarily superinduced on himself a trance by tasting the herb called "mang," and described his experience to the priests who took it down. Dante's work is written in sublime and nervous poetry; the Persian work is in Pahlavi prose described as "of the baldest and most monotonous character." Finally, Ardâ Virâf but for his "Nâme" is well nigh forgotten, while Dante's name is filed among the immortals on fame's eternal bead-roll.

Let us now turn to the great work of the 20th century written in elegant Persian couplets by the famous Indian author Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbâl, who like Dante is a poet, philosopher and politician. His work, the "Jâwid Nâme" is so named because it is addressed to his son Jâwid, and its plan and structure are directly inspired by the "Divine Comedy." Here the writer, the child of a scientific and comparatively tolerant age, does not visit heaven and hell, for it would be inconvenient

to the poet to consign any person, however iniquitous, to the infernal regions in modern times. Iqbal is very appropriately guided in the other world by Maulânâ Jalâl-ud-Din Rûmi, the doyen of Persian mystics, and the metre of the "Jâwid Nâneh" is based on the renowned "Mathnavi" of the Maulânâ. Iqbal moves about from planet to planet and star to star and meets the great prophets of yore e. g. Zarathushtra, Buddha, Christ and Muhammad. Satan is described as moaning that ever since the gospel of Zarathushtra has been announced, his devilry has received a crushing blow. Among the moderns he meets men like Tolstoi and Lord Kitchener. Iqbal is very severe on Indian traitors like Mir Ja'far of Bengal and Sâdiq of the Deccan whom he describes as the "disgrace to their country, their creed and to all humanity." Iqbal has also poured out the vials of his wrath on the British, some of whose actions, in his opinion, having proved the ruin of the country of his birth. He has humourous remarks to make on English social life but he is fully aware of the stern virtues of the British character. Some of his verses are as follows :—

"Qoovat e Maghrib ne az chang o rubâb  
 Nai ze raqs e dukhtarân e bihijâb:  
 Nai ze sahr e sâbirân e lâleh roost  
 Nâi ze 'uryân sâq nai as qat'a e moost:  
 +        +        +        +        +  
 Qoovat e Afrang az 'ilm o fan ast  
 Az hamin âtash cherâghash roshan ast."

"The strength of the West does not lie in music and song, nor in the dance of unveiled damsels; neither

in the fascination of those tulip-faced enchantresses nor in their naked legs or bobbed hair.....The greatness of the Europeans lies in their proficiency in knowledge and science since it is from that that their lamp has been kindled." Staunch Muslim that he is, Iqbal almost seems to justify the much-disputed theory of "the Qoran and the sword"; but for the good of the religion he professes as well as for the peace of the world, we very much wish those few pages had not been written. "Religion and the sword", that exploded notion of uncivilized ages, is at present, we hope, as dead as the dodo, and it would be hopelessly out of date to revive its ghost in modern times, ringing with the watchwords of unity and brotherhood. The difference between Dante and Iqbal is the difference between the 14th and 20th centuries, accentuated by the gap which always subsists between the West and the East.

Hades-literature has an enduring fascination for poets, but among the numerous writers who have tried the tempting theme there is not one who can displace the laurel from Dante's brow. Dante's other works may be read just because they are written by the author of the "Divine Comedy," which is itself a work not for one age or race but for all times and countries. Few works so suddenly rose into fame after their author's death as did the "Divine Comedy." Perhaps one reason may be found in the extreme curiosity it excited among the people as to whether their friends and favourites were placed in heaven or hell, and whether kindly remarks were made against them or not. A like curiosity was manifested by the contemporaries of Pope, who had

fluttered the literary dovescotes of his time by his amusing mock-heroic poem, the "Dunciad." When one wishes to know something about a less-known English writer of the 18th century, it is worth while looking him up among the dunces immortalized by Pope; so too when one is anxious to be informed about a Classical or Mediæval character, he will perhaps find his pains rewarded if he refers to Dante's work, where a few lines of trenchant criticism may be found against his name. But the two poems stand poles apart; the English poem is an epic of mischief and malice, the Italian is characterized by what Matthew Arnold would call "high seriousness" and sincerity. The "Dunciad" is a "Diabolical Comedy" which annoyed Pope's adversaries by its pin-pricks and flea-bites; while Dante's masterpiece overwhelmed people with the notion of guilt and its terrible consequences. The one has little to do with philosophy and less with religion, while the other is saturated with philosophical notions and replete with theological discussions. There is scarcely another instance of an immortal work comprising all that is great in history together with the pettiest and obscurest of incidents and characters. Our poet is endowed with an impartial vision. He never blinks the facts; he has sounded the depths of human degradation in Hell, but has also in Paradise scaled the sublimest heights which human goodness and benevolence are capable of. Dante had his defects and they were fairly serious ones too; but there was no pettiness or meanness in the man, who was distinctly of an epic mould. Like Milton he was fearless in his zeal, relentless in his hatred of cowardice and treachery, and was

kindled to prophetic fury in his denunciation of political and moral wrong. Nevertheless, knowing that he was verging towards pride, he exalted humility above all other virtues, and in his "Paradiso" glorified the pious and the saintly, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Great men, like Dante, Milton and Wordsworth, are distinguished by a singleness of purpose and an unflinching devotion to a lofty ideal, from which no seductions can ever tempt them away. Dante's old master Brunetto Latini is described in the fifteenth Canto of the "Inferno" as telling his disciple: "If thou follow but thy star, thou canst not miss at last a glorious haven." Our poet has followed the advice, and by hitching the wagon of the poor, neglected Italian vernacular to his exalted, starry subject, has been able to present Man and Nature in the mirror of eternity, winning the "glorious haven" promised by his master of being unchallengeably regarded as the greatest poetic genius from Homer to Shakespeare.



## The Romance of the Elgin Marbles\*



The rare collection of artistic remains made from the Parthenon of Athens after incalculable difficulties by Lord Elgin forms an important though an unworthily neglected episode, which is likely to be of absorbing interest to the student of English art and literature. The causes that led to the growth of Pre-Raphaelitism in England towards the middle of the nineteenth century have been discussed exhaustively in many a learned treatise; while the numerous rills that fed the mighty stream of British Romanticism in the opening years of the same century have been ably traced to their sources; but few works there be (and not even the "Cambridge History of English Literature" is among them), that have deigned to record a line in recognition of the labours of Lord Elgin, or in appreciation of the influence exercised by his art-collection particularly on both these movements. Here is an attempt to shed some light on the achievement of this well-nigh forgotten personality, who during the major part of his career was rewarded with nothing but odium and obloquy for his labour of love, to which he had dedicated the best part of his life.

The ablest race in history, says Sir Francis Galton, the father of Eugenics, was built up in Attica between B. C. 530 to 430, when from 45,000 free-born males, surviving the age of 50, there came 14 of the most illustrious men of history. But the whirligig of time had

---

\* This Essay was contributed to the Journal of the Bombay University for November 1932, Vol I. Part III.



brought the country of Alexander, the world-conqueror, to the lowest point of the circle, when she lay crushed and bleeding for three centuries under the iron heel of Turkey. It was thus that Byron found her when he wrote in "The Giaour":—

" Such is the aspect of this shore;  
'Tis Greece, but living Greece no more. "

And Byron's generous soul was stirred to fight for this country, and he reclaimed a wild and wicked life by an honourable death at Missolonghi in 1824. The struggles of Greece continued till liberty eventually dawned on that sore-tried land two years after the European victory of Navarino which broke effectively the naval power of Turkey in 1827.

Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin, had begun his diplomatic career in 1790, and in 1799 was appointed British ambassador to the Porte, where he came to know that the Turks wielded authority over all lands that had once fostered Greek art. With the eye of a true art-connoisseur he realized the importance of his opportunity. He desired to know from the British Government if he could receive State-grant for the excavations he intended to make: but Britain was too seriously occupied with the grim Napoleonic struggle to be diverted with æsthetic fancies, and looking to her financial embarrassments she was perhaps justified in returning a negative reply. But Elgin was a man of firm resolve, and he started making excavations at his own expense, and that too in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles. The Turks at first took him to be a thief, and then suspected him as a spy;

while some simple folk went to the length of considering him a pryer into their zenânâ by building high scaffolds, as if his Lordship the British ambassador at Constantinople had no other serious business in life! But in those days such was generally the hard, unenviable lot of all archæologists in countries where excavations were unknown and their motives misjudged. Z. A. Ragozin, in her "History of Chaldea" refers to the troubles of another illustrious excavator and British ambassador to Turkey, Sir Austin Layard, who sometimes worked at the site of Nineveh and Babylon with the temperature at 120° and was occasionally suffocated with sandstorms. To add to his vexations, the Muslim Pasha of the place forbade all excavations on the ground that idols were being dug out, which was extremely offensive to his religious feelings. This gave rise to the absurd belief that excavation was but idol-worship in disguise, that the British were an idolatrous nation, and even Queen Victoria was designated the Queen of idolaters! Another Pasha interfered on the ground that Muslim graves were disturbed by the excavations, while as a matter of fact, says Ragozin, the Pasha, who wanted bribes, had himself caused tombs to be rifled and the corpses to be thrown on Layard's works.

But to return to Lord Elgin, we find that his misfortunes were no less. On going to Athens his heart broke on seeing that Turkish boys were playing at targets with the grand old monuments of the Parthenon, the world-famous temple of Athena on the Acropolis, the work of the great Pheidias and his able assistants Ictinus and Callicrates during the administration of Pericles. Of

course the temple had passed through various vicissitudes and had been changed in the 15th century into a mosque by the Turks, and later on into a powder-magazine when the Venetians were about to bombard the Acropolis. Now Lord Elgin was alarmed to see that many excellent statues were disfigured or broken; some marble slabs were used as seats and their valuable inscriptions were shaven off, while various rare monuments were pulverized to be used as lime and mortar. Sic transit gloria mundi! The Turks were unable to appreciate, nay, even to tolerate the sight of these works of art, for idols and effigies have ever been revolting to the religious sense of the Muslims. The Qoran may be accommodating on other matters, but on the question of idols and "those that join other gods with Allah" it has invariably and consistently assumed the most uncompromising attitude. (*Vide* Al-Qoran, IV, 51 and 116).

At first Lord Elgin wished to make casts and drawings of the 4000 square feet of frieze and metopes and pedimental sculptures of the Parthenon, of the temple of Nike Apteros and the various other Greek antiquities, but finally he was determined to remove the statues themselves rather than leave them to the tender mercies of the rulers. With great difficulty he managed to secure from the Turkish Government a firman empowering him to do what he pleased with the works of art. The Turks issued the passport in 1801 only after being satisfied that England was capable of holding her own against Napoleon. Had this great captain been fully successful in his Egyptian campaign, we are sure that the precious monuments, now in the British Museum, would have been

adorning the Louvre at Paris. But when in 1803 Elgin's ship, the "Mentor", had started on its voyage for England, it was unfortunately wrecked near Cerigo with its valuable load, and the catastrophe was complete when Elgin himself was imprisoned in France soon after the violation of the Peace of Amiens. Was there ever a greater disappointment? We know how Carlyle felt when his only copy of the "French Revolution", which he had given to John Stuart Mill to read, was negligently burnt to ashes by the latter's maid-servant. Carlyle by his great energy rewrote the work anew, but Elgin not only had energy but something still more valuable on this occasion—gold. After undergoing a heavy expense, which only a peer could afford, and after weary trials for three years, the treasures were recovered from the realms of Neptune, and were at last destined to see the shores of England.

But Elgin never dreamt that his labours were only to be greeted with vehement denunciations from his own fellow-countrymen. He had been pestered and hounded by the Turks, baffled and almost defrauded of his valuable prize by the vagaries of Nature, but the contemptuous reception at the hands of his own people, scarcely less unappreciative than the Turks, was more than flesh and blood could bear. He was openly condemned as a vandal, a robber, a dishonest officer whose rapacity was inconsistent with the dignity of a British ambassador. But the fiercest onslaught came from the pen of a brother-peer, Lord Byron, who in his satire "The Curse of Minerva," written with almost the same acridity with which he lashed Robert Southey, has the senseless affrontery

to bracket Alaric and Elgin together as the two great devastators of civilization, the former being compared to a lion, the latter to a jackal. The words supposed to be spoken by Minerva to Byron are worth quoting:—

“Lo! here, despite of war and wasting fire,  
 I saw successive tyrannies expire.  
 ’Scaped from the ravage of the Turk and Goth,  
 Thy country sends a spoiler worse than both.  
 Survey this vacant violated fane:  
 Recount the relics torn that yet remain:  
*These* Cecrops placed, *this* Pericles adorned,  
*That* Adrian rear’d when drooping Science mourned,  
 What more I owe let gratitude attest,  
 Know, Alaric and Elgin did the rest.  
 So when the lion quits his fell repast,  
 Next prowls the wolf, the filthy jackal last:  
 Flesh, limbs and blood, the former make their own,  
 The last poor brute securely gnaws the bone.”

Byron hastens to remind Minerva that Elgin was a Scotchman:—

“Frown not on England, England owns him not;  
 Athena, no! thy plunderer was a Scot.”

But Athena is adamant, and unrelentingly pronounces the following curse:—

“First on the head of him who did this deed  
 My curse shall light—on him and all his seed:  
 Without one spark of intellectual fire,  
 Be all the sons as senseless as the sire.”

And so on and so forth. But was Elgin a vandal? The ruthless and deliberate destruction of precious works

of art is generally condemned as vandalism, which may also be said to consist in the tearing away of valuable artistic monuments from their natural and suitable environments and transferring them to one's own country at the expense of a conquered or exploited nation. But though some fault may perhaps be found with Elgin's methods, it is surely unreasonable to brand as vandalism the services of a man who at enormous personal expense and insuperable difficulties succeeded in preserving for England certain artistic Greek remains which would undoubtedly have perished by neglect and ill-usage under a foreign government. It sounds incredible that just a century ago so enlightened a Viceroy as Lord William Bentinck should have contemplated the destruction of the Taj Mahal at Agra for the price of its marbles; while after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 it was seriously proposed to level to the ground so beautiful an edifice as the Jâmi' Masjid of Delhi. Fortunately these proposals were confined to the paper on which they were penned; had they materialized into deeds, they would certainly have done credit to the Vandals of the 5th century. But, as will be admitted on all hands, modern European love of art and culture is too strong consciously and wilfully to desecrate any famous monument even in order to feed the flames of revenge. The insane hostility against Elgin gradually died away. Benjamin Haydon, the famous painter, fervently espoused the unchampioned cause, and though he long seemed to cry in the wilderness, he held out with characteristic pertinacity and even maintained that if the Elgin marbles were lost, there would have been as great a gap in art as there would have been in

philosophy if Newton had never existed. Canova, the great Italian sculptor, was decidedly in agreement with Haydon, and pronounced the Elgin marbles "the works of the ablest artists the world has seen". Encouraged by the favourable opinions of art-experts, Luciere, the Neapolitan artist and agent of Lord Elgin, still continued to direct the excavations and between 1811 and 1816 eighty other cases of sculpture were shipped over to England.

Then, and not till then, did England arise to a sense of her responsibility as a patron of art and enlightenment. Great works in art and literature have always been adversely criticized at the outset, and have been usually slow in winning the adequate recognition they deserve; and the Elgin collection was no exception to the rule. Elgin had at first exhibited the monuments to public view in his own mansion; but the Select Committee of the Commons now purchased the great collection from Lord Elgin for the nation in 1816 at a cost of £ 35,000, though his Lordship is said to have defrayed over the work more than double the amount. The Select Committee also decided that the ambassador's conduct in the affair was above reproach. The valuable remains were deposited in the British Museum, of which Elgin and his heirs, so roundly cursed by Byron through the mouth of Minerva in lines quoted above, were appointed perpetual Trustees.

Certain other sculptures from the Parthenon are in the Louvre, in Copenhagen and elsewhere: much still remains in Athens, either in the temple or in the Acropolis Museum. The sculptures on the Parthenon represent figures that have always thrilled the hearts of artists,

e. g. the battle of gods and giants, of the Greeks and the Amazons, of Athena and Poseidon for the land of Attica, and most famous of all—of the Centaurs and the Lapithæ. The Elgin marbles have exercised considerable indirect influence on literature also. Mount Ben Ledi and Loch Katrine, Rydal Mount and the Wye are not literature, but they have inspired literature by firing the gallant heart of Scott and soothing the peaceful soul of Wordsworth with the inspiration that breathes from those lovely haunts of nature. The Elgin relics are not literature, but they have made literature, for long indeed must have been the roll of persons to visit that corner of the British Museum which is for ever Greece, and Greece of the Periclean Age too, and to respond to the silent but overpowering appeal of art.

We can well imagine men with artistic inclinations like Hazlitt and Thackeray loitering near the Elgin relics, which could never have failed to feed and enrich the minds of such masters with the choicest figures and imageries. Keats was æsthetically as much a born Greek as physically he was a born Englishman, and his genius was nourished not only by the reading of Chapman's "Homer" but by association with the Elgin marbles through his friend Benjamin Haydon, who deserves our hearty meed of eulogy as being the first to awaken in the youthful poet a love of Greek art. Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is usually believed to have been based on the well-known vase seen in Holland House, but it is more likely, as Sir Sidney Colvin observes, that Keats' urn was an imaginary one made up of several that he had seen at the British Museum. The result of



his observation was the famous ode, that rare poetic gem, "as calm and unimpassioned as a Greek statue," wherein is to be found the poet's remarkable conclusion regarding the identity of all genuine Beauty with Truth. The unfortunate Haydon, bold and outspoken to a fault, would not rest in peace till by ceaseless endeavours he aroused the people of England to a full appreciation of these treasures. In the opinion of Dr. Hugh Walker:—

"As surely as Ruskin was the first of his time to recognise the greatness of Tintoret, so surely was Haydon the first professional artist to see and proclaim the matchless beauty of the Greek sculptures." These relics may have helped to mould the theories of the greatest of Victorian critics, Matthew Arnold, who was never weary of proclaiming his devotion to the Greek classical masters, and who held that it was through adherence to them only that literary perfection could be attained. But who can say how vast, deep and abiding was the influence of these monuments on such artists, poets and critics as D. G. Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite group, W. Morris, J. Ruskin, W. Pater, J. A. Symonds and A. C. Swinburne? This would in itself be a fascinating subject for study and research, though remote from our present purpose. The mission of art is to present the universal in the particular, the ideal in the real, a world of significance in a symbol of beauty. If so, a sight of these broken but precious relics in the British Museum would open up to the mind of the casual but cultured visitor whole vistas of the faded magnificence of the past, and light up his imagination with the departed lustre of "the glory that was Greece".

---

## The Greatness of Goethe.

---

The current Christian year\* which marks the centenary of the passage of the Reform Bill, one of the greatest landmarks in the evolution of the British constitution, also records that of the passage from this world of two eminent men of letters, Scott and Goethe, leaving behind them the rich harvest of their productions and that richer legacy of inspiration to those kindred souls who are capable of receiving and transmitting the torch of genius. Scott, through his poems, novels or his little-read dramas, stirs the hearts of his youthful readers as with a flourish of trumpets; Goethe enralls and overawes his audience with the versatility and the unapproachably wide range of his intellect. The good Sir Walter, in life as in letters, evokes our love; but the gigantic genius of the German author commands our admiration, and by the side of the German's universality and catholicity, the Scotchman's genuine love for his country dwindles into sheer provincialism. Most writers are the creatures while a few are even the creators of their age; many authors reflect in their works one or more sides of society which they endeavour to uplift to the best of their ability, while some there be who can bestride the narrow world like a Colossus, fathom the deepest recesses of the human heart, and flood their whole epoch with the light of their mighty intellect. Homer is said to have concentrated in himself the spirit of antiquity, Dante of the Middle Ages,

---

\* This Essay was originally written in May 1932, the centenary year of Goethe's death.

Shakespeare of the Renaissance, Milton of Puritanism and Byron of Revolutionism; so too Goethe stands forth as the representative of the modern era with its numerous problems and bewildering attempts at their solution. Goethe had taken all knowledge to be his province; his reading was enormous, his memory extremely tenacious, and in the midst of a busy life he found time to write a huge pile of books of the richest variety. In literary output he surpasses Voltaire as he excelled Dryden in versatility. The total number of his poems alone comes up nearly to 40,000. Like Sahasrârjuna of Indian legend he seemed to be endowed with a 1000 hands, and such were his incredibly rapid powers of assimilation and expression that even the great Napoleon was struck with admiration and exclaimed to his companions within the hearing of Goethe "Viola un homme" (There's a man).

It is not possible for us to agree with Prof. J. G. Robertson who blames Goethe for having deserted poetry for other fields of knowledge, instead of confining himself to the field for which he was properly meant and carving out for himself a still greater reputation as a poet. To our mind, Emerson has adopted the proper point of view when he describes Goethe as "writer", not a linnet to pipe and sing, but a person to exercise his uncommon genius on all manner of questions that came up to him. Milton was a poet out and out, and we certainly deplore his voluntary exile at duty's call from the pleasant paths of poetry to the dreary domain of polemical and political works in prose, but we have no reason to find fault with Dryden for exercising his intellect on a variety of subjects, for if poetry was the

loser by this defection, various other branches of knowledge were distinctly the gainers thereby. Besides, it is impossible to confine men of the type of Goethe or Dryden to any one particular subject, for they soon exhaust the one and are anxious to suck the essence from the others. We rather think that to call Goethe a poet only is to belittle him; he was a poet and much more. He was a critic of literature and art, dramatist, jurist, statesman, chemist, optician, physiognomist, osteologist, mineralogist, biologist and mathematician. Not that he had merely studied these subjects, but he was not content till he had made important researches in these departments and crossed swords with the champions who dared to oppose him. So exceptionally wide was his range of reading and activity that, as Georg Brandes observes, the civilization of a people should be measured by its appreciation of Goethe.

The genius always sees a thread of order and connection where the masses are only able to find stray scraps and fragments. To Goethe nature was an organic whole and in trying to examine its laws he endeavoured to establish unity throughout its kingdom. In anatomy he discovered the intermaxillary bone in men and animals; in botany he proved that the various organs of the plant are but variations and modifications of the leaf. He held that as the leaves proceed from the stem so too the various limbs of the body sprout out from the vertebral column, and as the stem ends with flower and fruit, so too the culminating development of the animal body is the head. Goethe is said to have had a notion of Darwinism before Darwin, but it was perhaps a poetic

vision or at most an inference of his theory and not the result of patient investigation and research which should characterize a scientist. Once Goethe borrowed Prof. Buttner's prisms in order to study optics, but never cared to return them even when they were demanded. At last the Professor made a stern demand, and Goethe before parting with them just saw through the prisms at the walls, and in that flash he jumped to the conclusion that a certain theory of Newton regarding colours was mistaken. One of the weak points of Goethe was his overbearing pride which only grew worse when he was contradicted. He refused to see that his knowledge of mathematics was limited, and yet proceeded to refute Newton's theory of colours. His critics sarcastically deplored that he should not have reserved his imagination for his poetry, but Goethe vanquished the whole herd of scientists and treated them with ill-disguised contempt. We certainly do not praise the man here for his disdainful attitude or his hasty conclusions, but for the spark of genius which he in common with Napoleon possessed, and which shone out on every occasion, even in matters which did not strictly fall within the domain of these prodigies.

As Johnson recorded on Goldsmith's monument, he scarcely left anything untouched and touched nothing which he did not adorn. Our astonishment is still further increased when we find that he could do so much while leading at the same time a very full life in Weimar, where as Privy Councillor he regulated finances, administered educational affairs, discharged important diplomatic functions, looked to public roads and buildings, super-

intended mines, and raised the local stage to a high degree of excellence. This looks incredible and yet is not impossible, for God sometimes lavishes His gifts with an extremely liberal hand, as He did on Cardinal Mezzofanti, the Briareus of languages, who knew 58 different tongues, or on Pico della Mirandola who is said to have mastered 22 languages when he was only 21 years of age! Emerson says about Goethe in his quaint language: "The old Eternal Genius who built the world has confided himself more to this man than to any other." Goethe was a true eclectic and he once told Jacobi that as a poet and an artist he was a polytheist, as a scientist a pantheist, and the one as decidedly as the other. Looking to his capaciously-endowed intellect he is considered by common consent the greatest German since Luther and the Coryphæus of German literature. Hence the wreath that President von Hindenburg laid on Goethe's grave in Weimar on 22nd March last (1932) was not merely the token of a nation's gratitude but the symbol of a universal homage that the world of culture spontaneously pays to one, who, in the field of modern arts and sciences, has proved to have been the most versatile interpreter of the Divine Mind to humanity.

From his early years the precocious Goethe displayed a brooding disposition and he often had fits of melancholy meditation. In 1755 he heard of the earthquake of Lisbon, which exacted a terrible toll of 60000 human lives, and at the age of six this event, which punished the good and bad alike, shook his faith in the justice and beneficence of God. He had what Carlyle calls "the

seeing eye'', and he pierced through the heart of a thing with his imagination, passions and intellect all aquiver, as if determined to seize the Proteus of life in all its forms. He was exceedingly susceptible to female influence, and a large allowance must be made by his admirers for the laxity of his morals. In spite, however, of his irregularities, his mind remained unimpaired till the end of his long life. How superhumanly powerful his mind must have been in youth may be imagined from what Goethe himself once said to J. P. Eckermann, the German Boswell, who has faithfully recorded the incident in his "Conversations". Goethe was firmly convinced that by very powerful thought we can attract our desired object to ourselves. Hence he used to walk out at night for some girl, and such was the concentrated force of his will, inflamed by his passion, that the poor maiden would feel uneasy in her room and come out to see as if she were summoned by a higher power. This experiment, said Goethe, was tried by him repeatedly and successfully.

An anecdote preserved by Gleim will serve to show with what extraordinary vigour his mind used to work. In 1776 Gleim was reading some poems out of the "Musen Almanach" before a company of listeners, when Goethe, who was then famous as author of "Werther" but was not known to Gleim, offered to relieve the latter and read some poems himself. As soon as Goethe began to read, he lost complete control over himself and his mind began to burst with ideas and imageries that had no existence in the "Almanach". "Hexameters, iambics, doggerel verses one after another or blended in strange confusion, came tumbling out in torrents". At last the

joke was revealed to the hearty merriment of the company. "That is either Goethe or the Devil", cried Gleim to Weiland who sat near by. "Both", replied Weiland, and he was right if we take Devil in the Socratic sense of dæmon which stands for one's highest genius. Even physically Goethe was remarkably strong and handsome with an enormous appetite which enabled him to wash down a hearty dinner with two or three bottles of wine per day; and as G. H. Lewes says in his memorable life of the poet, his doctors were agreed that they had never seen a man so physically and mentally perfect as Goethe was in old age. So striking was his personality that as he entered the dining room people laid down their knives and forks to stare at him. Such was the halo of greatness that had gathered round Goethe in his advanced age, that when Heine went to see him he half expected to see Jove's eagle hovering about his head and was tempted to address the great Olympian in Greek. Poor Heine had crammed a few fine flattering remarks to be addressed to Goethe, but the appearance of the old lion completely bewildered the youthful poet who forgot all he had got to say. These preliminary remarks may suffice to show the intellectual stature of the man with whom we have to deal.

Till the time of Lessing, Germany was peculiarly unlucky in her literature. The Reformation ended the ecclesiastical monopoly of letters; the fetters of dogma were relaxed and scope was given to individual genius to shine out. But as Prof. J. G. Robertson remarks in his "Literature of Germany", Germany only received from the Reformation a heritage of blood. Even the



Renaissance which shed the light of knowledge everywhere in Europe came late to Germany, and before it could do anything substantial, it was quenched in the blood and terror of the Thirty Years' War, which effectively killed all intellectual activity in Germany for nearly a century. Germany slavishly imitated France and her literary ideals, and even the German language was considered unfit as a medium of high literary expression. Frederick the Great was ashamed to write or speak in his mother tongue, which he discarded in preference to the accomplished French language. In 1740, nine years before the birth of Goethe, the literature of Germany was at its lowest ebb, and the Germans were considered as an intellectually sterile nation; but in 1800 Germany stood foremost in the realm of letters and served as a model to other nations in various directions.

To Lessing must be given the first credit of awakening the dormant literature of his country from her long sleep of centuries. It was Lessing who freed the German stage from French bondage and turned his eyes from Corneille and Racine towards the glory that is Shakespeare. Lessing was nevertheless a classicist though his classicism contained seeds fraught with infinite romantic possibilities for the future. The pioneering work of Lessing was ably supported by Winkelmann and Klopstock, who thus paved the way for Goethe and Schiller, which immortal pair carried the literature of their country to heights it had never dreamt of aspiring. But Goethe did not take England by storm, and as Carlyle says in the preface to his translation of "Wilhelm Meister", to the English the name of Goethe "is sound and nothing

more; it excites no definite idea in almost any mind". The English were admirers of Schiller and there was none to burn incense at the shrine of Goethe till his great devotee Carlyle turned his attention from the artistic Schiller, the mystical Novalis, the quaint and rugged Richter, and fixed it full on Goethe, whom he was the first to popularize in England. It was the philosophy of Goethe, his insistence on duty and work, his emphasis on self-culture and self-development, his persistent application to the perpetual questions that crop up in life, his broad sanity, his unprejudiced wisdom, and his piercing insight into men and things that attracted Carlyle, and he immediately set about the task of interpreting this German master to his countrymen. Even in distant America Goethe was hailed by Emerson, a sort of a mild Carlyle, as the type of the "representative writer" par excellence.

But it would be much more interesting to turn nearer home and examine Goethe's relations with the East. The Hindus never will or can forget the memorable services rendered in the elucidation of their scriptures by German pandits like Max Muller and Paul Deussen; and which Parsi will ever be so ungrateful as to ignore the great names of German savants like Spiegel, Geldner and Geiger, who have laboured so incessantly and selflessly in the cause of Zarathushtrianism? It is true that Nietzsche, that unhappy genius, totally misinterpreted and even maligned the prophet of ancient Iran by making Zarathushtra a convenient mouthpiece of his own irreligious philosophy; but who ever loved Nietzsche or took his philosophy seriously? Treitschke, the

ultra-patriotic German historian, was the real cause of the ruin of his country in the last great world-war through his inhuman philosophy of "Might is Right"; but India remembers too many German scholars worthy of her best esteem to pay heed to some few who are universally condemned. It is gratifying to find that India and her literature have not escaped the encyclopædic grasp of Goethe. He was not much attracted to Indian mythology which he hastily pronounced as a "monstrous jumble", but the artist in him was transported with an ecstasy of joy when he read the "Shākuntala" of Kālidāsa, which he said "must be reckoned among the most beautiful of the stars which make my nights more splendid than my day." This Indian drama is said to have made Goethe dance with sheer joy, which has found expression in that memorable compliment so generously paid by the German to his brother-poet across the centuries. Goethe says about the "Shākuntala" :—

"Wouldst thou the life's young blossoms and the  
fruits of its decline,  
And all by which the soul is pleased, enraptured,  
feasted, fed,  
Wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself in one  
sweet name combine,  
I name thee, O Shakuntalā, and all at once is said."

His next Indian poem is "God and the Bajadere", in which he describes a Bajadere or a poor Shudra "Devadāsi", who is dedicated to the service of the gods. One night she entertains a forlorn stranger, who is Śhiva in disguise, and who passes the hours in her com-

pany, but is found dead by her side in the morning. The dead body is consigned to the flames, and the woman too in an agony of grief immolates herself in the fire, when Shiva before the eyes of all takes her to paradise, thus rewarding her for her heartfelt devotion. Goethe also wrote a poem named "The Pâriâh" in which he condemns the evils of the caste system and recognises the equality of all—the Brâhmin and the Pâriâh—before the throne of God.

But Goethe was equally interested in the culture of Arabia and Persia. He wrote a poem named "Muhammad's Song" and had meditated a drama on the Prophet Muhammad for which purpose he had made a sound study of the Qoran, but the scheme fell through. As Lewes records, Goethe was going to describe Muhammad not as an imposter at all (as was done by Voltaire), but as a worshipper of the star-god. The prophet was however to be made to succeed by cunning; he was ultimately to be poisoned, and his better nature was to return on his death-bed. If these were to be the main outlines, we do not regret that the drama should have remained unwritten. The character and career of Muhammad have often been too lightly handled by his Western critics, and we are glad that the prophet of Arabia was spared the Procrustean torture that the German poet had prepared for him.

About 1814 Goethe happened to read Von Hammer's translation of Hafiz, that inimitable nightingale of Persian poetry, and once again his artistic soul danced with joy as it had done when thrilled by the charms of "Shâ-

kuntala." Inspired by the ineffable moonlight glow of the Diwân of Hafiz, Goethe wrote the "West Ostliche Diwân" or "West-Eastern Diwân", so called because Western ideas were here embodied in the fascinating imagery of the East. Goethe's inflammable heart was at this time set on fire by a new beloved—Marianne von Willimer—and it is this fair charmer that has inspired the love-element in this work. The Diwân of Goethe comprises 12 books called "Nâmehs," of which the "Pârsi Nâmeh" or Book of the Parsis is the 11th. This attracted the notice in 1914 of our indefatigable scholar Shams ul Ulama Dr. Sir J. J. Modi who, being bitten by the tarantula of knowledge as incurably as Goethe, has given the fruit of his studies in an interesting essay in his Asiatic Papers Part II. Dr. Modi has also rendered a further service to Goethe students by getting the "Pârsi Nâmeh" and the notes attached thereto translated into English by a German scholar. Goethe was not a man to do things by halves, and in order to create within and about him the proper Oriental mood and atmosphere, he took to smoking opium and drinking fuqâ' (a kind of Persian beer.)! This shows his wonderful enthusiasm in identifying himself as completely as possible with the object under consideration. The "Pârsi Nâmeh" which is only two pages long contains the "Testament of the old Persian faith" as expressed by a devout Parsi from his deathbed. The dying man enjoins his survivors to continue the worship of the sun with unabated devotion. Goethe in a fine description compares the sun rising from the peaks of Mt. Damavend to a king decked in gold and riding forth in pomp. The next Zarathushtrian injunction mentioned by the dying Per-

sian was purity—physical, moral and spiritual. He calls upon his hearers as true Zarathushtrians to maintain what Goethe calls “the dignity of the elements” and to destroy noxious weeds and reptiles which disfigure and devastate the fair creation of Ahura Mazda. The last advice is about the “daily observance of heavy duties”, beyond which, says the poet, no other revelation is required; and this fitly brings into prominence the Karma Yoga of the Zarathushtrian religion. The *Diwân* of Goethe proved to be an epoch-making production and inspired younger poets like Ruckert, Platen and Heine to write on Eastern themes.

Goethe during his long and eventful life happened to respond to a variety of influences, and we now proceed to a discussion of the literary growth of so impressionable a personality. When a student at Leipzig, he assiduously imitated any poet that caught his fancy at that time. Then he was attracted to the bitter and sarcastic Herder, through whom he learnt to appreciate Shakespeare and Goldsmith. After a time Rousseau became his idol and it was in the spirit of “*Nouvelle Heloise*” that Goethe wrote his “*Werther*”. It was Rousseau that acquainted him with the barbaric sublimity of Homer, the weird glory of Ossian, the rich variety of the Bible, and the rude but genuine charm of folksong. Now the genius of Goethe was thoroughly awakened and his numerous love affairs served to keep his imagination and passions in a feverish state of excitement. Goethe’s productions, like those of Goldsmith and Byron, are too autobiographic, and as he himself says:—“Everything that I have put into writing is only a fragment of

a great confession". Goethe had passed through the pseudo-classicism of his Leipzig days to the genuine classicism of Lessing and had been in turn influenced by the individualism of Herder and Rousseau, when there burst on Germany the thunderclap of the "Sturm und Drang" movement which took its peculiar name of "Storm and Stress" from a drama by Maxmilian Klinger.

This movement was an over-violent revolt against the hide-bound and formal classicism of the 18th century with which people were now getting wearied. Rules, restraint and regularity were thrown to the winds; petty ornamentation, stereotyped ideas and "disciplined imagery" were abandoned, and the French literary tyranny over Germany came to a speedy end. Now the cry was all for nature not art; creation not imitation; liberty of thought and expression and not slavish and monotonous adherence to authority. There must needs be a storm to sweep away the dead and dying relics of a fading age clinging on to a new one and hampering creation. But it must be admitted that the "Sturm und Drang" was purely negative and destructive, more inclined to ridiculing worn out traditions than to creating solid literature. It ignored the artistic element too consistently in favour of nature and attached too disproportionate a value to the emotional rather than the intellectual nature. Herder and Goethe took a leading part in this movement and even formulated some of its principles. It was now that the works of Shakespeare, Percy's Reliques, Northern mythology and Ossianic mystery made a particular appeal to writers, especially in the field of drama, wherein we may only mention the numerous melodramatic

plays of Kotzebue, which so unpleasantly influenced the dramatic literature of England towards the close of the 18th century. As Prof. Dowden observes in his essays on Goethe in his "New Studies in Literature", the "Sturm und Drang" appeared in two forms:—(1) Titanic egoism and unbridled energy; and (2) Sentimental egoism, unrestrained sensibility and excessive desire. The masculine aspect is seen in Goethe's "Gotz von Berlichingen" and the feminine in his "Werther".

Goethe wrote his "Gotz" in imitation of Shakespeare, violating the three dramatic Unities, though there is still a good deal of difference between him and the great English playwright in construction and character. The hero, Gotz of the Iron Hand, is a historical character of the 15th century, a brave knight of the type of Robin Hood, a friend of the helpless, incessantly warring against the Electors of Brandenburg and Bavaria. He always shook hands with the left, asserting that the right was meant for fight only. In the wild career of this soldier Goethe interpreted the struggle of his own age, and the play remains typical of Goethe's participation in the "Sturm und Drang" movement. "Clavigo", "Stella" and the first draft of "Faust" were also the productions of this period. Now Clavigo was actually alive when the drama, of which he is the hero, was written; and that Spanish publicist, notorious for his love-affair, must have had the doubtful pleasure of seeing himself done to death every night at the hands of Beaumarchais on German stages. This reminds us of Dryden's drama on "Aurangzebe" written during the lifetime of the Mughal Emperor.



The three chief epochs in Goethe's life were his residence in Weimar, his visit to Italy and his friendship with Schiller. Goethe departed for Weimar in 1775 and according to Lewes converted an insignificant Duchy into the Athens of Germany. Very soon Weimar was to poetry what Jena was to science, though it must be admitted that Goethe's early years in Weimar were spent in dissolute luxury as if he had become oblivious to the mission of his life. But though Goethe's moral lapses were great, greater still was his self-control, though he is very rarely credited with the possession of that virtue. He exerted all his will-power, shook off all weak-kneed dilettantism and endeavoured once again to express that which was greatest within him. Goethe's visit to Italy is as memorable and fruitful of great results as that of Chaucer to the same place, and may also be compared to what Morley calls the "hijrat" or flight of Voltaire to England. Flying from the narrow provincialism of Weimar, Goethe's outlook was broadened and the range of his sympathies became more extensive by his sojourn in Italy. Goethe was a man of double nature; he had imagination and passion but he was also gifted with meditative faculty and self-control. He had hitherto been too much at the mercy of the former, but in Italy the two elements in him were properly united. It was here that he learnt the value of law, order and discipline in life and letters, and he now came to regard his completely unrestrained, unconventional, fast and free career in the "Sturm und Drang" period as a mistake. In short he left Weimar an ultra-Romanticist and returned a Classicist, which is abundantly clear from the works he

then produced—from “Iphigenie,” “Egmont,” “Tasso” and “Wilhelm Meister”. He was now a much more careful artist and paid due attention to the form and execution of his work. But while Italy helped to adjust the balance of Goethe’s mind and as he became more conscious of the artist’s claims, he found that his original spontaneity and creative power were to a certain extent impaired. This is one of the greatest differences between Goethe and Shakespeare, for the latter’s productions, though changing in quality with the change in his circumstances, seem to have directly issued, like the full-grown Athene, from the brain of Zeus, and, to use Prof. Saintsbury’s simile, are as perfect as Giotto’s O.

Goethe’s friendship with Schiller began from 1794 and continued till the latter’s death in 1805 when Goethe was left completely heart-broken. We know of no other literary friendship—not even that of Southey and Landor—that can come up to the German pair in intensity of affection and mutual appreciation without even a tinge of jealousy. This is all the more astonishing when we find that both were completely different in almost every way, physically, mentally, artistically and morally. Goethe to a certain extent represents realism, Schiller comparatively is the representative of idealism. Goethe was animated by the idea of nature, Schiller by that of art and freedom. Lovers of poetry will thank Schiller for having often drawn his older companion from science to poetry, and Goethe once said to Schiller; “You have created a new youth for me.” Schiller though a pure idealist was as much a Classicist as Goethe was in the post-Italian period of his life. But now though the “Sturm

und Drang" was dying out, it had left behind it a new literary offspring which had none of the wild freaks and fantastic vagaries of its parent. This was the Young Romantic School in which the excesses of the "Sturm und Drang" were very properly pruned, and with which the best rising authors of Germany had now identified themselves. This Romantic School was in direct opposition to the Classicism of Goethe and Schiller, who held out as long as they could, but at last they gradually drifted with the tide and Goethe lived long enough to become himself the greatest exponent of the new School. We have thus seen how Goethe passed through the influence of his Leipzig days to that of Lessing; how he was impressed by Herder, Rousseau and the "Sturm und Drang"; we have observed the temporary set back at Weimar, the conversion into Classicism in Italy, the purely intellectual friendship with Schiller, and his final adherence to the Young Romantic School.

It is not possible for us to discuss all the eminent works of Goethe, but we shall speak only of those that exercised considerable influence on literature. The first is "Werther", which is Goethe's classical presentation of sentimentality and disappointed love as Hamlet is of hesitation, Macbeth of ambition and Othello of jealousy. A melancholy youth named Jerusalem had ended his unhappy life by suicide, because his beloved, a married woman, would pay no heed to his overtures. There was something of this youth in Goethe who himself at this time was head over ears in love with Charlotte Buff, the fiancée of one Kistner. Goethe during the "Sturm und Drang" period "immortalized his own shame" by

depicting Werther in love with a married woman called Lotte. This lady is described as a person of the most decorous behaviour and of an intensely practical turn of mind. She does not care a fig for the sentimental dreams and hypochondriac humbug of her lover and goes on "cutting bread and butter", as remarked by the brilliant English parodist, till the whining lover and his vexation drop out of the world. This book is written in an epistolary form, familiar to us in the novels of Richardson. Mere sentimentality is always nauseating, but here the book is a piece of Goethe's own heart, and it is the truth and genuine sincerity at its bottom that have made the little work a masterpiece. It took the readers by storm and, according to Prof. Herford, discovered German literature to Europe. The great Napoleon, the least sentimental man going, took "Werther" with him during his Egyptian campaign, read it seven times, and once on meeting Goethe showed him a passage which the Emperor thought unnatural. But the worst of such books is that they are as catching as they are deficient in morals. Gay's "Beggars' Opera" and Schiller's "Robbers" actually attracted some youths to the highwayman's profession; and after Goethe published his book a girl named Fraulein von Lassberg, disappointed in her love, drowned herself in the river Ilm, and the reason for her action was found in her pocket—a copy of "Werther".

But "Werther" inspired the intellect of Byron and released to its fullest capacity the poetic powers of that wayward and irregular genius. Byron was also another Werther, for he had his amours and his disappointments. The influence of "Werther" on Byron was most unwholesome

for it was from this German work that the English poet found sufficient encouragement in his affected sentimentality, his cold cynicism, his shrill self-revelations and his gloomy despair. Yet Goethe was neither Werther nor Byron but greater than both. Goethe was an irrepressible optimist, a believer in self-culture and endowed with the capacity of self-control. It took Goethe 50 years to go from the world of Doubt to that of Faith, from the Everlasting Nay to the Everlasting Yea, while Byron dying at 36 was unable to achieve any such triumph at all. If Goethe had died in 1774 after writing "Werther", his attainments would have resembled those of Byron, but to Goethe age brought the philosophic mind and he saw through the futility of that stage of his life that had produced "Werther". Yet there was a good deal in common between Goethe and Byron and the former had the very highest opinion about his young contemporary, whom he ranked next to Shakespeare. According to Eckermann, Goethe is once reported to have said:—"Byron is a person the like of whom in eminence was never born before nor will be born since." Though Byron had none of the sanity, balance and restraint of Goethe that brought the German back from the "Sturm und Drang" to sense and sobriety, still Goethe cannot be acquitted of exercising an unhealthy influence on Byron and through him on English literature. The so-called "Spasmodic School" was the direct result of Byronism and was finally extinguished by the well-known parody, "Firmilian", of Prof. Aytoun. It will be noticed that when Carlyle in his "Sartor Resartus" appeals to England:—"Close thy Byron, open thy Goethe"—he refers not

to Goethe, the author of "Werther" (between whom and Byron there was hardly any appreciable difference), but to Goethe, the author of "Wilhelm Meister", the "physician of the iron age", who with calm serenity and bright composure, prescribed remedies to a war-weary Europe.

"Tasso" is the direct product of Goethe's sojourn in Italy and he said to Eckermann what George Eliot said of her "Romola"—that "Tasso" was "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh". It is an account of the famous love-lorn creator of "Jerusalem Delivered", the story of whose heart is here depicted with minute psychological details. Tasso is another sickly, sentimental Werther, pining away for the love of the princess; only he is more calm and philosophical than his predecessor. Tasso is contrasted with Antonio Montecatino, Secretary of State to Duke Alphonso II of Ferrara, who is a practical man of the world and is unable to appreciate the idealism of Tasso. The play is celebrated for its fine characterisation and profound insight into the human heart. The action of the play is confined to a few hours and only the most momentous period of Tasso's life is touched. The poetry is said to be superb but there is hardly any action and the execution of the play is very defective. There was a shade of Tasso and Werther in Goethe, yet Goethe was far greater than these two characters. This is evidenced by the fact that Goethe always took care to present pairs of opposite characters e. g. Werther and Albert, Gotz and Weislingen, Wilhelm Meister and Jarno, the Captain and Edward (in "Elective Affinities"), Tasso and Antonio Montecatino, Faust and

Mephistopheles; and thus Goethe himself was the fantastic dreamer of dreams and the clear-headed man of affairs as well.

As "Tasso" is an instance of the most modern drama, "The Elective Affinities" is Goethe's most modern novel and the precursor of those English, French and Russian works of fiction that are devoted to psychological study of character. The attitude that Goethe here takes up is that of Browning—to stand apart and allow his characters to evolve of their own accord and account for their own motives. The work seems to bear the unmistakable stamp of an Ibsen or a Shaw and delineates persons who are sexually attracted to those from whom it is their duty and the social convention to withdraw. The sex-attraction is almost irresistible but greater still is depicted the force of character, and in that clash between character and passion the former comes out triumphant. This work is like one of the Shavian problems in sex-psychology, based on a scientific idea and given the strictly non-moral treatment of an impartial artist, who is not obsessed with the claims of poetic justice.

But the ripest product of his Italian visit is the "Apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meister", the first true novel in German literature, full of the author's mature, practical wisdom. Prof. J. R. Seeley considers it the text-book of the Goethean philosophy, while F. Schlegel classed it with Kant's "Kritik" and the French Revolution as one of the three greatest events of the century. After writing some portion of it, Goethe went to Italy and after 10 years he resumed the work under a totally

different frame of mind; hence the want of unity and defective execution noticeable in the work. It contains the author's ripe reflection on the problems of life; it has much to say about the theatre, and contains the famous and masterly criticism of "Hamlet," for which alone the book is often read. Wilhelm again is a sort of Goethe with numerous beloveds, gathering experience from his lapses. Out of all characters the most unforgettable is that of little Mignon, and the sweetest songs are put in her mouth. This lovely little Italian girl falls in love with her saviour Wilhelm and on finding her love unreciprocated becomes insane and falls the victim of a cruel destiny. She inspired the character of the charming gipsy dancing-girl Esmeralda in Victor Hugo's "Notre Dame de Paris." Another pathetic character is that of the Old Harper, always living in the past and absorbed in that early love which thrills him with joy while it fills him with horror and remorse.

Goethe had shown in Werther and Tasso that a life of dreams is a futility, and in this novel Wilhelm is at last led from vain dreaming to a life of practical activity. The author's object in this book is his favourite theme, "Bildung" or Culture, and this work itself is fitly called the *Odyssey of Culture*. Life is the harmonious development of the various human functions which have to be cultivated through a career of activity and not starved out in idle dreams or fantastic follies. The moral of "Wilhelm Meister," said Goethe to Eckermann, is that man in spite of all his errors may reach a happy goal being led by a higher hand, as Saul, the son of Kish, went out in search of



his father's asses and founded a kingdom. The second part of the work is known as "The Wanderings of Wilhelm Meister." It was taken up long after the first part, and Goethe found it impossible to revive the old world and continue in the same mood that he had once done. Hence this second part, which looks like a new book tacked on to the old one, is fragmentary and tedious. To make it still more disagreeable to the general reader, it is coloured with symbolism for which Goethe had cultivated a liking in his old age. The work remains a strange collection of miscellaneous odds and ends, and must be so regarded, and not as a work of art, in order to be appreciated in its proper spirit.

But the crowning masterpiece of Goethe, of German and perhaps of modern European literature, is the inimitable "Faust," begun by the author during his stormy youth of the "Sturm und Drang" period, worked up in three stages, and concluded only a few months before his death at the age of 83, thus occupying a long and rich life for its composition. Because of its vast range and universality it is fitly known as a "weltepos," or world-epic, the hero standing as the representative of the whole age or of the whole of humanity. The symbolism in Part II seems to have been deliberate, and Schelling considered this work a "Divina Tragedia", embodying the spirit of the whole history of the world and embracing the whole life of humanity, past, present and to come. Goethe has here made the well-known Mediæval tale of Faust the vehicle of his criticism of life. The story had already received the attention of Marlowe and Calderon and was to be attempted once

again on a vastly elaborate scale after Goethe by P. J. Bailey. Instead of pausing to discuss the relative merits of and the theories expounded in these works, we may only observe that the Devil is baffled in Calderon, Goethe and Bailey but succeeds only in Marlowe, because Dr. Faustus as depicted by the Elizabethan dramatist is so thoroughly imbued with the devilishness of his infernal companion, that to save such a human being would have appeared an outrage on the moral sense of the audience.

But let us confine ourselves to Goethe who in his masterpiece teaches us that selfishness and dissolute joys only pave the way to a disastrous end, but that self-sacrifice, benevolence, charity and love lead life to sovereign power. In "Faust" we notice how persistent are the attempts of man to solve life's problems and how terribly dejecting are his faults and failures. We realize how man tries to pursue his end by ceaseless activity, by reason, by passion; how he is tutored in the bitter school of adversity; how he slips into vice but pulls himself up; how his vices help to ruin others, how he is fascinated by beauty and sobered by experience, how he pursues the light everlasting as age begins to grow upon him, and how he finally finds peace in one last determined attempt to serve his fellowmen. Part I looks much more like a drama than Part II which is overlaid with philosophy and symbolism. In Part I we come across Faust, the intellectual epicure, maddened by the fair face of Gretchen, and pass through one touching scene after another—the seduction of this frail creature, the poisoning of her mother, the murder of her brother, the birth of a natural child, the crime of infanticide,

the imprisonment of Gretchen, and the most heart-rending scene of all—the insane Gretchen singing in prison and visited by Faust. Goethe's conception of evil has evolved from the hideous, horned and cloven-footed Devil of Mediæval times, and his Mephistopheles rather resembles a wicked German philosopher of his days. Mephistopheles describes himself as "a part of that power which always wills evil and always produces good," showing that in God's good world evil, though opposed to Him, ultimately happens, even unconsciously and against its own will, to serve the Divine purpose. In Marlowe the Devil tempts Faust from without with wealth and women and the creature comforts of the world, but Goethe's Faust is an idealist, and has to be tempted through his own spirit, and thus there the temptation is internal and the Devil lies within him. The only stipulation made by Mephistopheles with Faust was that if ever Faust felt satisfied or renounced his ideal or forgot his aspirations or said to the passing moment "Linger a while! Thou art so fair," the Devil was at liberty to take him away. But so voracious is Faust's appetite after "more light" that for a whole lifetime the Devil had to wait in vain.

Among the numerous adventures of Faust, many of which are symbolical, of which some are obscure to the verge of incomprehensibility, we linger over one wherein the hero raises Helen of Troy for the Emperor but is himself ensnared by her charms and becomes her devoted worshipper. Helen stands for ideal beauty and this love of Faust represents education through the Beautiful. By the union of Faust (Romanticism) and

Helen (Greek Classical Art) is born a child—Lord Byron, having the qualities of both parents. Had Faust been satisfied with Helen (Æstheticism), the Devil would have been justified in seizing him but Goethe has shown that Beauty is no end in itself but must lead the worshipper onward in the service of mankind. In one of his last adventures Faust mercilessly dispossesses an old couple of their home, from the smoking ruins of which issue Want and Guilt, Need and Care, and the last mentioned couple blind the sinful hero. But though surrounded by external darkness, the light of spirituality at last dawns upon his inner consciousness. He now devotes the evening of his life in draining a marsh that future generations may settle there and bless the man who ministered to their comfort. At last Faust knew the luxury of doing good and felt radiantly happy in carrying out this selfless work. He saw through the mission of life—happiness to him through whom others are happy—which is the characteristic life-principle of the Zarathushtrian religion. On his death-bed the blind old regenerated sinner in an ecstasy of joy cried to the passing moment "Linger a while! Thou art so fair", and passed away.

Mephistopheles was about to pounce on his soul, as Faust by speaking these words had certainly broken the stipulation, but immediately angels appear, scattering roses, and lead up the soul of Faust to heaven where it is received by the patient Gretchen and taken up to the feet of the Virgin. It may be doubted if the poor Devil was not thus defrauded of his legitimate prize; but Goethe holds that a man who has tasted virtue can-

not become the Devil's victim. Even though according to the strict letter of the law the Devil ought to triumph, yet God looks more to the spirit than to the letter, and the Shylocks of the world who always turn to their bond are foiled by the Divine Mercy that is greater even than the claims of justice. As the angels bear away the soul of Faust, they exclaim:—"He who strives in never-wearying activity can be redeemed by us"—an expression which may be taken as the keynote to the play. Faust had known evil (Angramainyu) and was now on the side of good (Spentomainyu), and the Devil dare not stand where love, charity and benevolence pitch their camp. This immortal handling of an immortal subject, this triumph of good over the intrigues and entanglements of evil, this redemption of an almost ruined person through love, charity and benevolence, this salvation of a soul through selfless and disinterested endeavour for the uplift of humanity, made Samuel Laing exclaim:—"Faust' is a great Zarathushtrian drama", and those that have known even the rudiments of this great religion will assuredly accord their hearty acquiescence in this judgment. But whence came this Zarathushtrian conclusion? Goethe penned this closing scene in the last moments of his life, when the memories of the many Gretchens he had ruined must have crowded upon him, when he was himself mourning over the death of his son and meditating over the drop-curtain that was soon to end his earthly career. Was our veteran poet then thinking of the "Pârsi-Nâme" of his "West-Eastern Diwân",—the dying Zarathushtrian whom he there depicted, and the third injunction of the Faith he had put

into his mouth about the "daily observance of heavy duties"? Who can say?

Lyrics, to be enjoyed, must be read in the original, and hence it is not possible for those of us who are innocent of the German language to appreciate the bewitching charm of Goethe's tender, mournful or passionate little poems. He has wonderful spontaneity and the directness to appeal to the human heart. The rugged and harsh German language has been smoothed and softened by the silken touch of this born poet. He remains one of the greatest lyric poets of the world, and H. Heine, himself a poet of the very first rank, once recorded:—"We will all of us, Germans, Britons, Spaniards, Frenchmen, Italians—we will all of us go forth into the green wood and sing, and the nightingale shall be our umpire. I am convinced that in this lyric contest the song of Wolfgang Goethe will carry off the prize." Goethe is also memorable for his wise maxims and gnomic sayings, crystallizing in a brief and crisp form the experience of a life-time. The minds of great men work algebraically through symbols and images, and they can compress in a nut-shell what an ordinary person would take half a life to realize and half a volume to express even imperfectly. Great aphorisms are the cream of life as they are the salt of literature, and Goethe's profound reflections on and insight into human life and character have enabled him to fill his volumes with apophthegms that would also place him in the rank of Plutarch, Tacitus and Horace among the Classics and Bacon, Montaigne, La Rochefoucauld and Pascal among the moderns. A few of his wise utterances are as follows:—"Ever strive

to be whole, and if thou canst not become a whole thyself, to the service of a whole give thyself up." "Character calls forth character". "The truest liberality is appreciation." "That which we do not understand we do not possess." "It is a terrible thing for a distinguished man to be gloried in by fools." "Against the superiority of another there is no remedy but love." "The brightest happiness of a thoughtful man is to have fathomed what is fathomable, and silently to adore the unfathomable."

Goethe was both a poet and a scientist—a rare combination—and he had studied nature from different standpoints. Being influenced by Spinoza he was a pantheist, but his was the pantheism which did not militate against monotheism, and he considered atheism as the acme of human folly. To him God and Nature were inseparable as is the soul from the body, nor could God be known except through Nature as is the soul only through the body. He saw in reality the incarnation of the ideal, held that Nature was the manifestation of God, and the Earth Spirit is made to sing in "Faust":—

"'Tis thus at the roaring Loom of Time I ply,  
And weave for God the Garment thou seest Him by."

He was alive to the unity that pervades the universe and maintained that the harmony of the whole made every creature what it is. In the opinion of Goethe human Reason is incapable of attaining to absolute Truth, yet he held that it was man's duty to form some idea of God, imperfect though it be, and that Reason is the least inadequate means to help us in getting a glimpse of the Ultimate Reality. He was against all

dogmatic systems and vague speculations and held that there could be no finality in human thought.

Yet Goethe was of an intensely religious frame of mind, and being endowed with robust optimism he maintained:—"God's in His heaven, all's well with the world." His cheerfulness was not superficial and affected as was the melancholy of Byron, but was the result of his deep faith and reliance in a wise Governor of the universe. We are unable to accept the view of R. H. Hutton, who in his essay on Goethe observes that though this great German was immensely wise he had little of devotion for anything, divine or human, and was lacking in moral humility. Goethe's wisdom was on the contrary associated with piety, and his religion can best be seen in his "Wanderings of Wilhelm Meister", where he talks of the Three Reverences—for what is above us, what is around us and what is beneath us. If this theory be followed, it would make of man a truly religious being with resignation in the powers above, zeal in the discharge of his duty, and love and charity for those who are inferior to him in society. When man learns to revere God in the universe, in Nature, in art, in men both great and small but particularly in heroes and saints, in grief, in joy and in everything, he will attain to the highest Reverence, the Reverence for one's self, where he will be able to continue, says Goethe, "without being again, by self-conceit and presumption, drawn down from it into the vulgar level."

But Goethe was much more of an ethicist than a philosopher, and few great poets have laid down the law



for man to follow so ably and exhaustively as Goethe has done. Above all he was thoroughly autobiographic, and he felt that what was true of himself would very likely be true of the world. Goethe was not a meek, submissive soul, and would never like to attain a thing till he put up a hard fight for it, and he had himself struggled up from the scepticism and despair of "Werther" to the faith and hope of "Wilhelm Meister." Everyone has got to master himself, conquer his doubts and win peace for his own soul. Goethe passed through the ordeal successfully, and as Carlyle says we find in him both the belief of a saint and the clearness of a sceptic. This essential spirit of Western culture is realizable by us through the works of the German master. The most momentous teaching in Goethe is that of self-culture and he ceaselessly insists on the importance of the development of one's individual powers. From early childhood he submitted himself to the most rigid forms of self-control, knowing that there could be no true mental peace till physical cravings and disabilities were subdued. Once at school he desired his mates to beat him with rods so that he may gain the power of conquering bodily pain and irascibility. On another occasion, to overcome the sense of giddiness he climbed the Strasburg spire and sat on its summit. In opposition to Aristotle he maintained that we learn by action not by contemplation. He held that when we cease to grow we cease to live. He was bitterly opposed to the Eastern theory that the universe is an illusion and that abstinence or self-denial is the goal of life. Although Goethe invariably emphasised the necessity of altruism and selfless-

benevolence, he was so thoroughly opposed to the illusion-theory that he would prefer even selfishness to it, observing that selfishness, which in one form or another is present in one and all, is Nature's principal agent for the amelioration of mankind. Goethe preached and himself practised a life of endless activity, and he once said to Eckermann: "I think I may say that during my 75 years I have not enjoyed as much as 4 weeks of real comfort." Self-renunciation he understood only in the sense of "reverence for what is above us", the surrender of the lower for the sake of the greater, the subordination of individual desires to the interests of the whole. This means not sickly and morbid asceticism but a healthy life of Christian love and charity. He rather believed in self-reliance and self-development through steadfast strength of will and purpose. He took the most lively interest in his work, which he compared to the base of a pyramid, and he wished to advance ceaselessly till he should reach the top before the shears of Fate cut the thread of his existence; and we can do no better than quote the enthusiastic words of this giant of activity which he wrote when he was aged only 31:—"This desire to raise the apex of the pyramid of my existence, the basis of which has been given and laid for me, as high as possible into the air, surpasses all else, and can hardly for a moment be forgotten." These inspiring words are enough to instil faith and devotion into the heart of the most dejected and low-spirited worker in the field of letters.

But no criticism is complete without its growth, and we here enter upon the unpleasant duty of noticing some

of the limitations which human flesh and blood, even of a genius, is invariably heir to. The first and most glaring defect in Goethe that accosts even a casual reader of his life and works is his numerous and degrading love-affairs. Our poet, we are told, had started making love as soon as he had entered into his teens and pursued this dishonourable career incessantly till the snows of 75 winters had silvered his venerable but all too human head. His early years at Weimar, where the women were said to be of exceptionally easy virtue, were truly deplorable, and the poet and his friends during their nightly orgies drank wine from human skulls. Nor can Goethe be credited with displaying a refined taste in the choice of his beloveds, for he would once be attracted by a cultured young damsel or a boorish peasant woman, even by a betrothed lady or by an elderly woman with several children. This is sufficiently debased, and we can only praise Goethe for having exercised his will-power to the extent that he did not reach the loathsome depths of Rousseau nor the almost satanic monstrosities of Byron during his sojourn at Venice. The reader is unfortunately not at liberty to waive aside these aberrations of a genius, since they had considerable influence on his works, which could not be thoroughly understood till we know from what fountain this erotic flow was derived. As in the case of Burns, the genius of Goethe was often kindled by the heart rather than by the head. Lockhart says regarding the numerous love songs of Burns that they were never written on imaginary heroines, and much the same will have to be observed about the poetical works of Goethe. It was as easy for Goethe

to say, as it was difficult for his readers to believe, that earthly love was to the poet only a symbol of the Divine Love, and it was through such apparently degraded stepping-stones that he rose to the love of higher things. Shelley also said just the same when he, a married man, was attracted to Emilia Viviani, to whose love the world is indebted for the "Epipsychidion". Men pursue a certain line of action, good or bad, and then they usually get into the habit of whitewashing their deeds, however indefensible they may be. We can very well afford to lose the superbest literature if it be attainable at the cost of individual degradation and social abasement. The immaculate chastity of a maiden and the untarnished honour of a man are incomparably more precious than the erotic songs of Burns or the æsthetic charms of an "Epipsychidion", for "what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Another disagreeable trait in our poet is his overweening pride and irritability especially when challenged or refuted. Even from his early years he displayed fits of melancholy and peevishness, and he once burnt all his works in sheer disgust. Even in Weimar he would brook no opposition from Prince or Parliament but often chose to have his own way. Once the Czar of Russia had sent a famous chemist named Dobereiner a bar of platinum which was sent by the chemist to Goethe to perform experiments. Goethe kept it with him and refused to part with it just as he had refused to return Prof. Buttner's optic instruments. In reply to Dobereiner's complaint the Duke of Weimar said good humouredly:—

“Leave the old donkey in peace for he will never return it”. We have seen how superciliously he came forward to break a lance with the defenders of the Newtonian colour-theory, although his knowledge of mathematics was hardly adequate to warrant him in doing so. Pride can never be justified and often serves to lower the man in the esteem of the people. But it must be admitted that men with the power of a Napoleon or the attainments of a Goethe would find it extremely difficult to battle against this failing from which the pure in heart alone are exempted. Great men often display a strange perversity in judging the merits of their own works. Milton classed “Paradise Regained” higher than “Paradise Lost”, while Charles Reade, the eminent Victorian novelist, after writing some dramas which nobody would stage, left instructions that he should be described on his tombstone as “dramatist, novelist, journalist,” thus assigning preference and precedence to the art in which he failed than to that wherein he succeeded. Strange to say Goethe also estimated his services in science far higher than those in poetry and drama. He once said to Eckermann:—“To that which I have been able to achieve as a poet I do not attach much value..... But of the fact that in this century I should have been the only person who in the difficult science of colours knew how to distinguish the true from the false, I am not a little proud, and in this respect I am conscious of my superiority over the many.”

Goethe is particularly condemned for his lack of patriotism and even for his sympathy with the French. But before we denounce the man it is necessary to

analyse his political views. Goethe was a Tory in almost every respect, in intellect, temperament and even in culture, wherein he was more Greek than German, and he often took delight in calling himself an "Old Pagan". He did not care much for politics and had no decided views on the subject, though on the whole he was inclined towards despotism. Even in politics he placed culture foremost and considered the State as a means to secure the culture of the component individuals. The state of Weimar under a despotic but benevolent ruler aiming to advance the cultural development of the people came nearest to his ideal. The existence of perfect individuals would imply a perfect nation, and a cultured nation would not deserve the name till its outlook broadens into cosmopolitanism, which is not the negation but rather the fulfilment of nationalism. The world was thus to Goethe an expanded fatherland, to use an expression of Prof. Herford. The true patriot in Goethe's eyes was one who cultivated his own faculties, ordered his own house and contributed to the formation of a commonweal and a world-brotherhood. Hence Goethe remained absorbed in his art and science, considering the French Revolution and the struggle of Germany as a disturbance which he would not allow to drag him from his proper vocation. Matthew Arnold in his memorable lines on Goethe has beautifully caught up this partiality in the German poet for culture and art. He says:—

"He looked on Europe's dying hour  
Of fitful dream and feverish power;  
His eyes plunged down the weltering strife,  
The turmoil of expiring life;

He said—the end is everywhere;  
 Art still has truth, take refuge there.”

To do him as much justice as possible let us quote Goethe's own words on the matter. He said:—“I did not hate the French, although I thanked God when we were rid of them. How could I, to whom culture and barbarism are alone of importance, have hated a nation, which belongs to the most cultivated in the world and to which I owed so large a portion of my own culture?” Besides temperamentally Goethe was a lover of peace; he composed no war songs not because he was a coward but because he was not inclined that way.

But in spite of all this the lack of patriotism in a person cannot be so lightly explained away. Everyone in the world labours after his vocation and during times of peace may be identified with it in order to attain as much perfection therein as it is possible for him to do. But if everyone was to stick to his own work when national independence is menaced, the fatherland would soon be under the heels of a foreign conqueror. The question whether a poet should take part, active or passive, in politics or remain confined to a Utopia of his own is at the present juncture hotly discussed in the literary academies of India, but we are not tempted to enter into that long subject here for fear of a needless digression, but proceed with Goethe and his unpatriotic adherence to art which immensely irritated his contemporaries. Goethe had joined the army against France but instead of taking part in the fight, he went on performing botanical experiments in the jungles. When he heard the news of the Revolution of July 1830, he

evinced more interest in the philosophical contest between Cuvier and Geoffrey St. Hilaire at Paris than in that political upheaval. This reminds one of Archimedes experimenting during the siege of Syracuse, or Harvey, of the circulation-of-the-blood fame, reading a book on the battle-field of Edgehill. Goethe was thoroughly hypnotized by the greatness of Napoleon and discouraged his own people by telling them:—"Rattle at your chains; the man is too great for you; you cannot break them but will only drive them deeper into your flesh."

The excessive annoyance of the Germans at Goethe's absence of sympathy for the sufferings of his country may be judged from the fact that 5 days after the irretrievable disaster at Jena in 1806, the poet married Christiane Vulpius with whom he had lived as man and wife for many years. Nero is said to have fiddled when Rome was burning, and the greatest man in Germany in the terrible Napoleonic crisis of 1814, when the fate of that country as of all Europe trembled in the balance, was absorbed in his "West Ostliche Diwân", pouring, in the manner of Hafiz, the wine of passion into the cup of fulfilment, and harking to the lovelorn nightingale unlocking its heart to the rosebud of beauty! When such was Goethe's apathetic attitude towards his fatherland we are not at all astonished to hear that he evinced no interest for the sufferings of the Poles and the Greeks groaning under the yoke of Russia and Turkey. Though it is not possible to compel a poet to write anything on a subject that does not stimulate him to artistic expression, we think it necessary here to condemn not Goethe the poet but Goethe the man. The poet may per-



haps even at this juncture be justified in dwelling in his own idealised Palace of Art (though even this will hardly be granted by many); even a soldier in old age may be excused if he does not take part in active warfare (and it must be remembered that Goethe was 65 in 1814); but if a poet never shows the slightest sympathy for his country, and continues to sing erotic songs and make love when the foemen are at the gate, he is sure to incur the severest censure of his people. With all their faults Byron and Shelley were stirred to the most fiery poetic expression as soon as they heard of liberty trampled under foot, while Milton made the glorious self-sacrifice one can ever offer when he forsook poetry and defended England against the European scholars for the part she had taken in the Civil War. Men of Dante or Milton's stuff would never think of bending the knee when their principles were at stake. But Goethe belonged to the unheroic type of men like Horace, Dryden and Edmund Waller, who are only too eager to spread their sails to catch the favourable current. There was something of Browning's Bishop Blougram in Goethe whose lack of patriotism has rightly evoked the condemnation of Europe.

Among the literary lapses of Goethe we must mention his habitual disregard for plot and construction. The poetry may be captivating, the scenes in the drama may be excellent, the reflections in the novel may be profound, but these gems are often thrown pell-mell instead of being woven into a suitable plot. Coleridge condemned certain scenes in "Faust" Part I as "mere magic-lantern pictures." Goethe acquired classical virtues by his visit to Italy as seen in "Iphigenie", but in "Tasso" again the

imperfection of form is clearly apparent. But his inadequate execution is seen at its worst in "Wilhelm Meister's Wanderings", which is wearisome and dull to go through, just because it is carelessly written. It is said that Goethe had by mistake dispatched the manuscript to the press forgetting that part of it had remained unwritten. Coming to know of this, Goethe wrote out some papers on miscellaneous subjects to fill up the gap as best the pressman could. This, says G. H. Lewes, almost amounts to cheating the reader. Carlyle often referred to the most respected men in the most contemptuous terms, and but few eminent persons escaped being nicknamed by him. While translating "Wilhelm Meister" he was disgusted with the incongruities we have noticed in the work, and consequently he bestowed one of his rare abusive utterances on his idol in these words:—"Goethe is the greatest genius that has lived for five centuries and the greatest ass that has lived for ten!" We would perhaps be somewhat justified in applying this qualified encomium to the foul-mouthed critic himself.

Again as Goethe advanced in age, the habit of allegorizing fastened upon him, till in "Faust" Part II, he became, as G. H. Lewes says, as full of symbols and mysticism as a priest of Isis. De Quincey has written an exceedingly disparaging review of Goethe in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, wherein he observes that the German poet has been overestimated for three reasons:—(1) Owing to his venerable age he was regarded as the patriarch of German literature. (2) His high rank as *Geheimrath* at the Court of Weimar and his friendship with the Duke did much to swell his fame. (3) The enigmatical nature

of his latest works invited much discussion, and according to De Quincey, this was deliberately done by Goethe to keep the controversy going and his memory green in future ages. If Goethe's fame increased owing to his old age or his high position at Weimar, it is ridiculous to blame him for it; the third reason however is true, but the implication that Goethe deliberately mystified his readers to keep them constantly busy about his work is both cruel and puerile. As Mr. M. P. Willcocks observes, it is like accusing Mount Everest of putting on a snow-cap lest one should forget its height. We have often seen the same shaft aimed at the writings of Browning also, particularly by those who are floored by his obscurity. There is nothing vexatious about symbolical art, though care should be taken by the author that the symbolism is subordinated to artistic considerations and is not indulged in for its own sake. Excessive and recondite symbolism, however, carries the work beyond the domain of art and appears repulsive to the reader. The worst of it is that when an author is recognised as symbolical, his critics search for hidden secrets and significances even when there are none; gradually the author himself, finding like Saul that he is among the prophets, tries to bewilder the readers by becoming intentionally obscure and mystical. It must be admitted that in "Faust" Part II there is more of symbolism than can justifiably be associated with great art.

God gives an author a definite principle to discover, a certain thought to develop, a particular branch of knowledge to cultivate. To others He gave the broken chords, to Goethe He almost gave the rounded whole. God

lavishly bestowed on Goethe the faculty of embracing all knowledge, enriching it with his Olympian insight into the essences of things, and unifying it with his catholic and universal outlook of life. Then when he spoke trumpet-tongued, Europe hung upon his words and hailed him as the herald and apostle of the modern age. As Sime observes in his "Life of Goethe" no modern writer is so clear on the conduct of life as this great poet. To Matthew Arnold culture meant contact with the best that has been said and thought in the world: Goethe gave the world all that he found to be the Whole, the Good and the Beautiful to discover which, he said, was the function of criticism. His religion was art, his God was Nature, and his goal was culture. He had his failures and disappointments, but they only sharpened the edge of his desire; he derived benefit from his very despair and taught the world the spiritual value of suffering as in the following lines of "Wilhelm Meister" translated by Carlyle:—

"Who never ate his bread in sorrow,  
Who never spent the midnight hours  
Weeping and waiting for the morrow—  
He knows you not, ye Heavenly Powers".

But he bent all the energies of his life towards the development of the self, and we see in his works how impractical dreamers receive their doom, and how fortune smiles upon those who despite their failures keep struggling on, building up their character till their attempts are crowned with success.

When Goethe lay dying, his last audible words are reported to have been—"More light". We are not sure

whether this light referred to was only physical or allegorical. If however it be taken in an allegorical sense, it beautifully sums up the career of this titanic genius, brimming with energies and bursting for intellectual light in this world, and judging from his last words, in the hereafter as well. Goethe was never a man to say to any blessed moment:—"Tarry a while! Thou art so fair": he was rather one to take no count of time but pluck fair knowledge from the pale-faced moon, or sail beyond the lands of the sunset if he was convinced that learning was available there. Goethe was an idealist like Browning's Grammarian thirsting for knowledge, but while Goethe possessed knowledge, the Grammarian was possessed by it. Knowledge had not disfigured Goethe as it had made the Grammarian bald, with "eyes like lead and accents uncertain". There was something masterly in Goethe's pursuit of learning which assimilated without being absorbed. What an inspiring gospel to the toiling student is that couple of words on the dying Goethe's lips, when understood as the essence of a long career consecrated to knowledge! It speaks more than volumes can do to those who are smitten with a similar passion and treading the self-same arduous uphill paths.

We have seen what interest Goethe has evinced in India, Arabia and Persia; what ascendancy he asserts in Germany; how unhealthy was the influence of his "Werther" on English literature as transmitted through Byron and how considerable and wholesome was the sway of his subsequent works as communicated through Carlyle. We have seen some of his novels and dramas setting the standard of similar works throughout Europe,

and have observed the universality of his genius beaming through "Faust". We have noted his reverence for religion, his impetuous hankering after science, and the arduous passion with which he pursued beauty, irrespective of creed or country. Among the makers of the modern spirit each writer is wedded to a dominant principle which in his opinion solves the riddle of nature or society. Bentham is all for the happiness of the majority through legislation, while Ibsen is nothing if not an iconoclast. Darwin's name will for ever be linked with Evolution as Karl Marx's with Socialism and Nietzsche's with the Superman. But Goethe realized and expressed the complexity of the modern spirit in all its fulness, the very comprehensiveness of his genius refusing to be bound down to any particular principle or propaganda. "When I think of Goethe", says the famous historian Dr. G. P. Gooch at the end of his brilliant essay on our hero, "I see the vision and promise of the universal man. I dream of widening horizons, the breaking down of barriers between religion and science, the co-operation of the nations, the cult of beauty, the un-resting march of the human spirit, the fashioning of a richer life".

In literature as elsewhere one good turn deserves another. If Goethe popularised (though he did not introduce) Shakespeare in Germany, Carlyle returned the same services by acquainting the people of England with the genius of the German poet as well as of Frederick the Great; nay, even the best and most exhaustive biography of Goethe was written by a versatile Englishman, G. H. Lewes, whose book remained the standard work even

in Germany till it was replaced by that of Bielschowsky. Our author, as we have seen, always remained a fervent lover of France even when the country of Blucher was fighting for its very political existence against the country of Napoleon; and in the world of literature such invariably are and ought to be the harmonious relations between belligerent nations, whether the country of Carlyle be at war or at peace with the country of Goethe. "Literature", said Goethe "is the humanization of the world." It tames down the ferocity in man and curbs the brute within him that is only too ready to work havoc when the diabolical human instincts let slip the dogs of war. Fortunately the hearts that were lacerated in the last world-war have to a certain extent been soothed by the healing touch of time; and we are sure the centenary of the death of the Father of the Modern Age, which was celebrated with due eclat throughout the civilized nations in March last (1932), must have gone far to eradicate the lingering remnants of bitterness and cement amicable relations between the world and Germany, which her illustrious savants through their devoted endeavours in the domain of literature have ever sought to establish.

---

## \*Is Metre Indispensable to Poetry?



"There is in souls a sympathy with sounds", said W. Cowper, and it is universally acknowledged that the bewitching sounds of poetry affect the soul more than the tame humdrum language of prose. Poetry is truth, coloured by emotion, winged by the imagination, sweetened by melody, prompted by inspiration and couched in an imperishable form that captivates the heart even of an anchorite by its powerful æsthetic appeal. But this Essay commences ominously with a mistake—it attempts rashly to define the indefinable; yet the mistake is deliberate, for it is wise to begin with definitions, however inadequate on the whole, rather than drift on without aim or purpose. Many definitions of poetry have been attempted but none has arrested that indescribable aroma which constitutes the quintessence of poetic charm. The Ariel of poetry has always managed to elude the rough scientific grasp of the Calibans of criticism. As Mr. A. Symons says, three things have to be abandoned as inexplicable—why Love is Love, why Beauty is Beauty and why Poetry is Poetry. But here, however, we intend to discuss not the essence but the form of poetic composition.

Strange as it may seem, some critics believe that genuine poetry can exist without form. Emerson thinks

---

\* The substance of this Essay was originally contributed to the "Vasant Silver Jubilee Memorial Volume" dedicated to Principal Anandshankar B. Dhruva of the Benares Hindu University in 1927.



that great poets often enter into a state of ecstasy where they see things steadily and see them whole, but by the time they come to "redeem from decay the visitations of the divinity" by beginning their composition, the inspiration is already on the wane, and words can convey but the broken glimpses of that refulgent light of poetry which was theirs only during the trance. Hence it is argued that poetry is independent of form and even of words, but exists only in the poet's heart till his fine frenzy continues. This may be theoretically true but such arguments do not help us much: One is at liberty to consider himself the greatest of poets, but if he wishes this claim to be endorsed by the world, he has to couch his poetry in suitable form. As sculpture or painting can scarcely be conceived without the simultaneous conception of something to be sculptured or painted, so too it is impossible to think of poetry without the concomitant idea of language and form. If not, the term poetry must have been used figuratively, as when Shelley said that the poetry of Rome may best be seen in the bravery of her sons. Water exists independently of the cup, yet in fact as soon as we think of water, it is always associated in our mind with some receptacle, shores or limits within which it can be contained. Genuine poetry may dwell only in the poet's heart independently of words, yet to realize it as poetry an adequate form becomes a *sine qua non*. God as He is must be above all forms and attributes, but God as He is worshipped is given as many names, forms and qualities as His adorers choose to impart. Hence if man is so bold as to circumscribe the Infinite Being for his

own purpose, should the Muse be allowed to defy the inherent laws of time, space and causality and exist independently of forms and words? It is equally idle to assert that poetry is not bound by any law. Great religions have considered God as the Universal Law, restricting all and even Himself by the exercise of a benignant providence. As Tennyson says :—

“I curse not Nature, no, nor Death,  
For nothing is that errs from Law.”

Thus tempests and floods, earthquakes and volcano-eruptions and all the wildest vagaries of Nature are not the result of a blind chance but are invariably directed by an Omniscient Law, which it is not given to human mortals to penetrate. If, therefore, there is nothing in and out of this world “that errs from law,” is it not reasonable to argue that there must be some accredited law, some salutary restraint, to which poetry should be made to submit?

But what is that law and in what form can poetry best be embodied? The determination of these questions brings us into the thick of the fight. It has been observed by actual experience that all genuine poetry invariably vibrates with a subtle hidden music, even though the poet may not have been musically inclined. As Carlyle said :—“He that thinks deeply thinks musically,” and melody will be found to be inseparable from all profound poetry. Poetry again is the offspring of emotion, in the absence of which it loses its warmth and its glory. It is by the gunpowder of emotion that the bullet of truth is made to strike with telling effect on the human heart.

Thus true poetry which is inseparable from music is also indissolubly associated with emotions. In fact Poetry, Music and Emotion are as much interwoven in one sphere as Beauty, Goodness and Knowledge are in the other.

It is music that runs through and regulates the thoughts, feelings, imageries and words of poetry, thereby raising the language to a pitch far higher than that of prose. With the help of music and emotion, which are inherent and not superinduced from without, even a trivial thought can pass muster in poetry, though it can readily be detected in prose. A musical line can easily be remembered, and the ancients associated poetry even with external music to enable them to remember their literature in times when the art of printing or even of writing did not exist. Thus the derivations of lyric and ballad signify that the former was sung to the harp and the latter to the accompaniment of the dance. The ancient motive does not hold good at present, yet music has remained the faithful and intimate friend of poetry, which fact constitutes a fundamental difference between verse and prose.

Now let us consider which form of music can best harmonize with and augment the charm of poetry. There is no verse which is not associated with a certain measure or rhythm in its expression. Rhythm is life and is felt in the beatings of the pulse and the throbbings of the heart, in the flowing of the winds and the raging of the seas. Rhythm is to composition as symmetry to sculpture and the laws of perspective to the pictorial art. Applied to movements of the body it leads to dance; applied to inarticulate sound it produces music. When rhythm is

used in connection with articulate sounds, we get the cadences of prose and measures of verse. Mr. J. L. Lowes considers all poetry as steeped in convention, but he goes too far when he considers rhythm itself as a major convention of poetry, as necessary to it as the curtain is to the drama. We rather think that rhythm is too inherent and fundamental in poetry to entitle us to call it a mere convention. As. G. H. Lewes observes in his "Inner Life of Art," rhythm cannot be and is not invented by man, but is rather evolved from him; it is not an accidental form of poetry but the only possible form of poetry. Rhythm is not an ornament superadded to the expression; rather the exaltation of the mood beyond a certain pitch naturally forces the rhythm into the composition, whether it be prose or verse, as we see in the case of most of the scriptures of the world. It is as impossible to separate rhythm from "the language of the imagination and the passions" as it would be to distinguish life from the blood that flows in the veins. Rhythm is an orderly succession of sounds so arranged as to fall with pleasing effect on our ears. The object of this Essay is to show that rhythm though invariably present in poetry is by no means sufficient to keep up the emotional pitch and thus provide adequate pleasure to the reader. Rhythm is a suitable companion of prose; poetry, as Matthew Arnold says, is the most delightful and perfect form of utterance that human words can reach, and consequently demands a prosodic presentation more in keeping with its exalted character.

Before we come to metre, it is necessary to consider the claims of rime as an adjunct to verse. Rime is the

recurrence of similar sounds at certain intervals particularly at the end of lines in poetry. It encourages point, makes the rhythm more emphatic and the ending of a line more pronounced. Being always associated with music it is pleasing to the ear, but its mere advent is fatal to prose, degrading it into petty sing-song. The ancients were particularly fond of rime, which enabled them to remember their literature with ease. Early English literature is characterized by a system of internal rimes, perhaps because it was then thought a great qualification in a poet to show his riming skill in every line. Children of all times and countries learn their first lessons in rime which sweetens the bitter pill of knowledge and makes it more appetizing to the childish palate. Petty but favourite English nursery rimes like :—

“ Jack and Jill  
Went up the hill ”

or

“ Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall ”

are ever dear to the hearts of children and from their pleasant associations to the grown-ups as well. Because of its connection with music, rime always appears with very successful effect in lyrics, songs, ballads and metrical romances as well as in comedies, operas, masks and lyrical dramas or in any other form of literature, where music predominates or where the sentiment is below the usual level of sobriety.

✓But rime in spite of the delight it affords, can never be considered indispensable to poetry. It has obvious

limitations and its jingling is entirely out of tune with that spirit of "high seriousness" which Matthew Arnold always associates with great poetry. Hence it fails in epics, tragedies, monologues, longer subjective poems and in all great and lasting poetic compositions. It is annoying to a great thinker to snap the chain of his thoughts and dam the current of poetic inspiration in order to start in search of a suitable rime. Even in these days of riming dictionaries, rime is found to hamper thought, cool the emotion and play havoc with poetic afflatus, in return for which a mere tintinnabulation of words is but a sorry remuneration. Hence those who are lacking in the true essentials of poetry will often be tempted to please others by their mastery over rime. One of the profoundest observations of Dr. E. Young runs as follows:—"Rime raises lesser poets but sinks the great, as spangles adorn children but expose men". The "heroic plays" of the 17th century presented the poor spectacle of heart-rending tragedies shackled with rime. The hero of a tragedy is usually a high-born man, far above the average in every way, whose fall is due to that "amartia" (moral flaw) in him which he is unable to control. The very language of tragedy is high-pitched and its atmosphere is serious as if threatening the approach of a great calamity. It passes our understanding how men like Dryden, the most masculine of English poets according to Sir E. Gosse, should have chosen to enslave themselves and their genius to the tyranny of rime, which must have obstructed their imagination and emotion at every step, thus preventing them from exerting their highest powers. But Dryden and his contemporaries were probably "born

under a riming planet", and the evil genius of rimes imported from France, continued to haunt the "heroic play" till Dryden was weary of dancing in fetters and saw through his mistake, when in the Prologue to the last of his riming tragedies—"Aurangzebe"—he said:—"Passion's too fierce to be in fetters bound". It is true that post-Shakespearean blank verse in the hands of inferior artists had become loose and invertibrate, and rime in tragedies, though entirely ill-suited to the buskin and therefore a ridiculous failure in many respects, was at least useful in supplying the necessary backbone to poetry. This timely service to literature, however, does not justify the application of rime to tragedies, the fiery wheels of whose progress are clogged by the dead weight of this incubus. /`

∨ Rime is a good servant but a bad master. It must be, like Ariel, at the beck and call of the Prospero of poetry, not like a Frankenstein, threatening to disturb, if not to destroy, its own creator. Very often a thought has to be tortured and truth shaped differently just because of the exacting demands of rime. Miss Marjorie Fleming in the following lines shows humourously how truth is sometimes sacrificed to rime:—

"He was killed by a cannon splinter,  
Quite in the middle of the winter,  
Perhaps it was not at that time,  
But I can get no other rime."

Thus although the poor man was really killed in summer, in rimed poetry at least he had to perish in winter, just because no season but the latter could rime

with the "splinter" which had taken his life ! Sometimes a poet has to wait indefinitely for a suitable rime, which is generally in this case a "feminine" or double ending. Once Dean Swift was unable to hit upon an appropriate rime to Bettesworth on whom he was writing a satire. As he sat cudgelling his brains, there came a labourer with a parcel of goods belonging to Swift, who paid the man his wages. The labourer felt that he was underpaid and complained :—" You have not given me my sweat's worth ", and Swift jumped with joy for thus having by sheer accident got the rime to his "Bettesworth". He paid double the wages to the astonished man and returned to his satire to murder his victim in cold blood. We thus see how rime fails as an associate of great poetry and becomes more often than not a hindrance than a help. Beethoven remarked that melody is the sensual life of poetry. A reasonable man will however keep his senses under proper control rather than be their slave. Rime certainly creates music but music is not the be-all and end-all of poetry, nor is it desirable for a poet always to live a bondman to rime. We must curb that music in such a way as not to miss it altogether as we are in danger of doing in prose, where the music created by rhythm is vague and uncertain. We are therefore compelled to turn to the golden mean of metre, yielding a music, neither indeterminate like that of rhythm nor too jinglyly overpronounced as in the case of rime, but producing that harmony which may suitably be associated with great poetry.

\*Metre, like rhythm, is the regular succession of sounds, falling with wave-like undulations harmoniously on the



ear. But the only difference between the two is that in metre the succession of sounds is definite and fixed in groups of certain number of syllables, while in rhythm it is left indefinite. The delicacy and undulating grace which are always present in metre are generally absent in rhythmical language, which flows with the fervid and gushing movement of a torrent. Naturally rhythm has been associated largely with prose and metre with poetry, for it is in their own respective spheres that they can best display their powers. Quintilian was conscious of this difference when he significantly said:—"Rhythm is male, metre is female", thus hinting that rhythm may best go in company of the masculine prose than the feminine poetry. Rhythm, the genus, is indispensable to poetry, but metre, the species, is nevertheless necessary to it, because by its regulated music it largely contributes to the æsthetic pleasure which it is our right to claim from poetry. Besides poetry is the outcome of the emotions, which are known to be stimulated far more by metre than by the lax and vague effects of rhythm. Hence S. T. Coleridge compares the effect of metre to that of wine which for the time being animates the person and puts him in an ecstatic condition, which is exactly what poetry in its own way aims to do. But metre not only stimulates but regulates; it not only impels but controls.

✓ The chariot of Poetry carrying the traveller of Truth, rolls on the path of Beauty to the goal of Pleasure. Two horses—of Imagination and Emotion—are yoked to it; the Poet-Charioteer plies the whip of Music, little knowing that an indiscriminate use of the lash on the backs of such fiery horses would mean danger to the precious

life of the passenger. If, however, the Charioteer is wise he will not forget to use from the beginning the bridle of Metre, which, says Coleridge, originates in the balance produced by the power of the will trying to curb the wildness of the feelings. Metre creates the adequate harmony, yields pleasure, regulates emotion and imagination, and helps the poet to idealize reality. Metre does not obstruct the flow of thought as rime does. Compared to rhythm, metre, it must be admitted, does slightly tend to hamper thought by the compulsion on the poet to compose lines of a certain number of syllables only; but then metre yields far more music than could ever be available from rhythm, and adequate music, as we have seen, is inherent in all great poetry. Thus metre, being both freedom and restraint, secures a twofold advantage to the poet and may therefore be considered a necessary adjunct of poetry.

Wordsworth held that the language of prose is the same as that of poetry, but ever since the publication of Coleridge's "Biographia Literaria", critics have left not a stone unturned in their attempts to prove the entire futility of the theory, which need not be discussed in these pages. Suffice it to say that, as David Masson observes in his "British Novelists and their Styles", poetry has been called "oratio vincta" or bound speech, while prose is known as "oratio soluta" or loosened speech. Now if poetry, being far more emotional, imaginative and inherently musical than prose, has necessarily to be couched in a different kind of expression, is it not advisable to give it also a different prosodic form than embody it in rhythm in which prose has always

been embodied? Language and prose have a rhythm of their own which is far more free and variable than that of poetry. Now if the rhythm of poetry be not measured and definite (in the form of metre), it will be mixed up in the free rhythm of prose and will completely lose its individuality, as the wavelets of a river are lost in the tremendous billows of the sea. The writing of poetry in rhythm tends more to make poetry prosaic than to make prose poetic. Again, as Hazlitt says, in the absence of metre, the jerks, breaks, inequalities and harshnesses of prose would be fatal to the flow of imagination. The four walls of a room are not impediments but safeguards preserving the inmate from all undesirable encroachments from without. The destruction of one such wall may incorporate his own room with that of his noisy children: the demolition of the other wall may absolutely expose the privacy of his house and bring the passers-by and the vehicles on the road straight into his apartment. If poetry is to maintain her ancient dignity and characteristic grace, she should be allowed to preserve her own independence, instead of permitting her to be bobbed of her natural beauty, thereby bringing her into perilous proximity with the plain masculine features of prose.

~Metre enables the poet to keep the emotional pitch at its highest level, like a ball dancing on the jet of a fountain, and prevents it from falling down as it soon does in prose, where such pitches are not easily attainable, and when attained, are impossible to be maintained for a considerable length of time. It is easy to ridicule metre, or for the matter of that any other form of prosody, by associating it with a strictly scientific or a trival

subject. The platitudinous truths contained in those proverbially tame lines:—

“Thirty days hath September,  
April, June and November”, etc.

or the plain commonplace of the well-known quotation:—

“I took my hat into my hand  
And walked into the strand,  
And there I met another man  
Whose hat was in his hand:”

need not have been dressed up in metre at all. If the lines appear ridiculous, it is not the fault of the metre but the humdrum subjects, which were incapable of being dignified by poetry. When metre is applied to a very petty subject we experience, says Coleridge, a shock as unpleasant as that which we feel on a dark night while descending what we think to be a step, when step in fact there is none. Metre by itself does not undertake to make poetry; it is only a valuable helpmate to poetry contributing largely to its charm and glory.

Experiments have always been and will be tried with the form and medium of poetic expression, and some will pin their faith on rime, some on metre, and others on what is called “vers libre” (free verse) or verse written in rhythm only. The Sanskrit rhetorician Dandin in his “Kāvya-darsh” divides literature into “Gadya”, “Padya” and “Mishra” or prose, poetry and a combination of the two respectively. In fact in Sanskrit literature we possess what are called “Champu”s or compositions that partake of the nature of both prose and poetry, among which works the “Nal Champu” is the most

famous. In the last half of the 18th century in England, J. Macpherson translated "Ossian" and W. Blake composed his "Prophetic Books" in rhythmic form, but their experiments were not taken seriously either by the reading public or the critics, criticism on Macpherson being confined to the question whether he was a forger or not, while Blake, being an occultist, was conveniently ignored as a crank. Thus for centuries together English poetry continued to be written in metre. Not even Shelley, the wild and wayward child of fancy, nor Wordsworth, "who both by precept and example shows that prose is verse and verse is only prose", nor Byron, that mad bull in a china shop, trampling on time-honoured traditions—had the audacity to set aside metre in favour of rhythm. But about the middle of the 19th century there burst on the literary horizon of England a luminary shining from the distant verge of the Atlantic. This prince of egotists, Walt Whitman of America, "sounding his barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world," rode rough-shod over all academical conventions, and honoured the rules of poetry more in the breach than in the observance. He was the first important poet to divest English poetry of metre, and write what he called his "chants" in rhythm.

The following is an anthology of abuse which goes a great way to show how Whitman was received by his critics. W. J. Long referred to Whitman's poetry as "multitudinous gabbling", while Sidney Lanier styled him the "butcher of poetry." When Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" was first issued, the "Boston Intelligence" hailed it as the effusion of an escaped lunatic. Tennyson once

expressed his opinion of Whitman thus:—"He is a monster of some sort—a monster, sir; I can't make him out; but I hear the noise he makes and see the commotion of the waters as he dashes along". Reading Whitman's poetry, J. C. Collins is reminded of a venerable stalwart man standing on his head in the public streets and proceeding to other improprieties of which the police may take cognizance, only with a view to attract some notice and create some excitement. R. L. Stevenson records that he has come across many readers of Whitman's poetry who have called him either an ass or a charlatan. J. A. Symonds, one of the most enthusiastic admirers of Whitman, is yet compelled to describe him as "a behemoth wallowing in primeval jungles, bathing at fountain-heads of mighty rivers, crushing the bamboos and the crane brakes under him, bellowing and exulting in the torrid air." But the climax is reached in A. C. Swinburne, once an admirer of Whitman, characterising his Muse as "a drunken applewoman indecently sprawling in the slush and garbage of the gutter amid the rotten refuse of her overturned fruit-stall."

This volley of vituperation from the British and American critical batteries is loud enough to damp the spirit of the stoutest champion of rhythm in poetry. But it must be remembered that Whitman has been criticized adversely not merely because he dared to write in rhythm but because of his extreme indecency of thought and the other repulsive oddities of his language, for which the use of rhythm in poetry need not alone be blamed. On the other hand, even his worst critics admit that he could sometimes touch the chords of his

harp with such power as to thrill our emotions into a state of positive rapture. Even Swinburne has to admit that Whitman is "a strong-winged soul with prophetic lips hot with the blood-beats of song", while H. D. Thoreau thought all the sermons ever preached not equal to Whitman's poetry for divinity. Emerson regarded Whitman as the voice of America and even said:—"Americans abroad may now come home: unto us a man is born." Mr. John Bailey considered Whitman as the voice of a great nation to an extent to which no Greek can represent all Greece, no Frenchman all France, no Englishman, not even Shakespeare, all England. J. A. Symonds observed that, except the Bible, the "Leaves of Grass" influenced him more than any other book, more even than Plato and more even than Goethe. But blind adulation overreached itself in Dr. Bucke, the friend and biographer of Whitman, who held that even the two Parts of Goethe's "Faust" and "Dichtung und Wahrheit" together would fall far short of Whitman's work, and that Whitman stood above Aristotle, Newton, Sophocles, Leonardo and Bacon, even if Bacon wrote the plays ascribed to Shakespeare! The magic exerted by the great American has thus thrown some of his admirers off their balance.

Without subscribing to this creed of Whitmanolatry, it must yet be admitted that there can be no doubt about the greatness of this poet, who is the mightiest representative of the ideal of Democracy. But we are here concerned not with his genius but his manner of presenting it through *vers libre*. Turning to three level-headed critics we find Prof. Dowden disposed to forgive

Whitman for his literary sins on the ground that the poet feared to lose the vital if he troubled himself to be formal and mechanical in metre. Sir E. Gosse thought Whitman to be the maker of poems in solution, waiting for the structural change which never came, and so, for want of a definite shape and fixity, this writer is doomed to sit for ever apart from the company of poets. Prof. Saintsbury, probably the greatest authority on English prosody in his days, considered Whitman's poetry on a par with Blake's "Prophetic Books" and Macpherson's "Ossian" which were written in rhythm. He scanned these three works as poetry and found them prose; he then scanned them as prose and to his infinite amazement found them poetry. He therefore in his "History of English Prose Rhythm" states that these three writers stand on debatable ground, and that their work should be called "hybrid verse prose" with a prominent tendency towards poetry. In short Whitman possesses the soul of poetry though not its form, and thus for want of a suitable and acknowledged convention excludes himself from the fraternity of poets. The form of his poetry often reminds us of the preliminary humming of a musician by himself till he catches the right tune, which he proposes to sing before the company. Whitman's art has been rightly considered by Prof. Courthope as "private art"; his sentiments were national and even universal, but his art was private and particular and through it he was able to exercise an unwholesome influence on his imitators.

Whitman's whole career was characterized by a fervid love of freedom, and he gloried in breaking the



shackles of society as well as of literature, however salutary those restraints might be. His conjugal life is shrouded in mystery. He is, however, said to have settled down with a woman of higher social rank than his own; there was no marriage but by her Whitman became the father of six children. Still he maintained that he always remained a celibate because he wanted freedom. At home too he was thoroughly free and unconventional in all his doings and did not consider himself bound to observe family hours and arrangements. When he turned to literature he shocked his readers and even his admirers by his extreme obscenity in his sex poems, especially in those collectively named "Children of Adam". As J. C. Collins observes, since Rousseau no other man had presented himself so absolutely nude to the public gaze. Whitman considered sex as the central energy of the human body, and in the exposition of the subject he showed neither reserve nor delicacy. So great was the uproar against him that on this account he lost his post and exposed his own character more than ever to slander. Still Whitman would never have said with Wordsworth:—"Me this uncharter'd freedom tires". Is it at all astonishing therefore that such a person should disregard the forms of prosody when he had trampled upon the most time-honoured ties in life and literature? He believed that a poet could write in any sort of diction and refused to admit that the daughter of the imagination and the passions should be more suitably appalled according to her rank. He then fell foul of metre and laughed it to scorn as a silly old mediæval superstition, which hampered the progress of

poetic inspiration. Strange to say, he seems quite mediocre when he attempts to write in metre, while without metre he appears an artist, as Mr. John Bailey remarks in his "Life" of the poet, "by a sort of divine accident."

What ever is to be done to a genius who plays any number of mad pranks and is still great ! He surely cannot be made to adhere to this law or that, for he is guided by laws of his own, and even if Whitman had written all his poems in metre, they would have looked flat and insipid by the side of his *vers libre*. Carlyle and Browning are two of the greatest writers in English literature even though their styles are as bad as bad can be. They knew it and regretted it and perhaps honestly wished to improve themselves and failed. Style is too personal to change and even if they had succeeded in writing in a more refined diction, we would have missed the peculiar greatness of these authors, which is inseparable from their expression, as we miss the Carlylean touch in the "Life of Sterling"—perhaps the only book written by the sage of Chelsea in simple and un-Germanic English. We have therefore to praise the good and deplore the evil for we cannot praise or reject both. According to Dr. Hugh Walker, poetry is sanity plus insanity, obedience plus disobedience. Shelley is the embodiment of poetic insanity as Whitman is of poetic disobedience, and whatever be the demerits of the latter, we shall have to open the temple-doors of poetry to admit this erratic "untouchable" American, who remains one of the queerest phenomena in the world of literature. Whitman triumphed in poetry with his *vers libre* as Samson Agonistes conquered his foes with the jaw-bone of an ass in the field of battle. But many a



I am not to speak to you, I am to think of you when  
 I sit alone or wake at night alone,  
 I am to wait, I do not doubt I am to meet you again,  
 I am to see to it that I do not lose you".

Here the cadences soothe, not charm the ear; they move, not stimulate the heart. There is clearly the lack of something more needed to rouse an ordinary person from the weary walks of life and raise him to the heights of poetic rapture. That something is supplied by metre, the absence of which left the cadences loose and flabby and prevented them from falling on our ears with suitable and definite modulations. The advocates of *vers libre* maintain that their poetry is governed by "uninterrupted continuity of rhythm"—the "akhand dolan" of the great Gujarati poet Mr. Nanalal D. Kavi.\* But this continuity sometimes leads, as in the case of Whitman, to inordinate length and sometimes to unusual brevity in the lines, whereas a substantial part of the pleasure in poetry is derived from our power of anticipating the definite movements of metre, which is not possible in the case of rhythm. It is metre that creates in us the expectation that the line is bound to close after a definite number of syllables, and the constant fulfilment of this expectation creates the right music and provides the right pleasure. In order to avoid monotony,

---

\* Mr. Nanalal D. Kavi was the first to flutter the literary doves of Gujarat in 1909 by his advocacy of metreless poetry in the Preface to his lyrical drama "Indu Kumar." Tagore has very recently created a similar flutter in Bengali literature by his collection of poems called "Punahshcha", written in *vers libre*. The "akhand dolan" (uninterrupted continuity of rhythm) of Mr. Kavi is termed "gadya chhand" (prosaic metre) by the Bengali poet.







Far swooping elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd earth!  
Smile, for your lover comes."

The same trick is evident in Whitman's "O Me!  
O Life!":—

"O Me! O Life! of the questions of these recurring,  
Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities filled with  
the foolish,  
Of myself for ever reproaching myself, (for who more  
foolish than I, and who more faithless?)  
Of eyes that vainly crave the light, of the objects mean,  
of the struggle ever renewed,  
Of the poor results of all, of the plodding and sordid  
crowds I see around me,  
Of the empty and useless years of the rest, with the rest  
me intertwined,  
The question O Me! so sad, recurring—What good amid  
these, O Me! O Life!"

In the following poem, the first in the "Leaves of  
Grass," the author makes up for the want of metre by  
the pleasure provided by repetition with the help of  
alliteration:—

"One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,  
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.  
Of physiology from top to toe I sing,  
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for  
the Muse, I say the Form complete is worthier far,  
The Female equally with the Male I sing.  
Of Life immense in passion, pulse and power,  
Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine,  
The Modern Man I sing."





poetry appears bald and prosaic. Again, even Homer may nod at times, and there may be dull, pedestrian intervals even in a Dante or a Milton. But these dull moments appear too glaringly exposed in vers libre while they are concealed to a considerable extent in the hands of a skilful metrist, just as a trotting horse may fall into a pit but one galloping at full speed may be expected to get over the difficulty. The goal of poetry is beauty and yet owing to the peculiar nature of a subject, ugliness may have to be described at length, as was done by Dante, Spenser and Milton. Here the peculiar characteristics of poetry, not the least of which is music as regulated and developed by metre, can make the ugliness tolerable to us. Use the medium of prose in this connection and matters will become unbearable. Emerson makes a profound observation in his "Poetry and Imagination" where he says:—"You shall not speak ideal truth in prose uncontradicted; you may in verse". Thus poetry (not the form of it known as vers libre, which differs very little from prose itself, but metrical verse), is the proper medium for the expression of ideal truth, as it is for the softening of ugly details, which appear in their true hideousness in prose but are divested of their disagreeable features when embodied in metrical poetry.

It must be well within the experience of every reader that the most soul-harrowing details in tragedy are tolerated because of its poetry. When the account of a murder, committed under exceptionally cruel circumstances, is read in the newspaper, we are overwhelmed with grief at the inhumanity of the evil-doer as well as at the sad end of the victim. But let the same particulars be handled

in poetic tragedy, and we are filled with artistic pleasure. In *vers libre*, which very often comes near to impassioned prose, the musical element is reduced to such a minimum that the ugliness becomes apparent and impossible for the poet to control. We have in the preceding pages described metre as a golden mean; Mr. J. L. Lowes puts forward an argument from which one can deduce a similar conclusion. He says that if the line-length and sentence-rhythm uniformly coincide, e. g. in Pope's couplets, we have unbearable monotony; but in the case of the sentence-cadence in *vers libre*, devoid of the regular beat of the line and its echo, we have variety no doubt, but the variety of conversation, which is worse than prose. Metrical verse, however, is the best, being built upon the harmony of both, relaxing the rigid monotony by its free and unfettered movements, and at the same time cautious to preserve poetry from being lost in the boundless deserts of prose.

Art has been described by Mr. Drinkwater as life transfigured into form. Art exists only under restraints; it is based on the selection made by the artist and its charm lies in the form he gives to it. *Vers libre* is formless art or an art in which the form is extremely loose and vague. People are, however, infatuated by everything that is novel. That is perhaps one reason why *vers libre* is practised so freely in France (the country of its birth), America and England. The other reason is that in spite of the numerous time-saving devices of our scientific age, we never really enjoy any leisure nor have any time to call our own. In such an age of feverish hurry and activity poets find it inconvenient to stick to metre

and are content with vers libre which is certainly easier to write. But they forget that in many cases their work is neither good prose nor genuine poetry but something which is hard to classify. We have had English authors who wrote impassioned poetic prose like R. Hooker, J. Taylor, T. Browne, T. De Quincey, J. Wilson, J. Ruskin and W. Pater; but they honestly called themselves prose-writers and never poets. If modern writers find themselves too busy, they are free to turn their energies to poetic prose, trying to raise prose to a higher plane rather than degrade poetry to a level to which it has never hitherto descended.

Another variety of prose called "Polyphonic Prose" has now come into existence, and the few remarks here made about it are based on Mr. J. L. Lowes' "Convention and Revolt in Poetry". This "Polyphonic Prose" is defined as a "way of fusing together unrhymed vers libre and rhymed metrical patterns, giving the rich decorative quality of the one and the powerful conciseness of statement of the other." This Polyphonic Prose contains the subtle qualities of metre, assonance, alliteration, and rime and it is because of the "many voices" arising out of these devices that this prose comes to be known as "polyphonic". It will be seen that this type of prose makes use of metre and rime, which are both avoided by vers libre, and yet calls itself prose and is also written in the form of prose. But if it is to be called prose and written like prose, why make use of metre and rime? and if metre and rime are to be adopted, why not write it like poetry and honestly call it poetry? The Euphuism of Lyly and

his imitators was a sort of polyphonous prose but it is often compared to a literary disease which ravaged Elizabethan England for a generation. When seasons change, when monsoon passes into winter and spring into summer, people are easily susceptible to certain diseases. So too there are incessant feuds on the borderland of two neighbouring countries, treaties being concluded and violated as soon as a nation thinks it to its advantage to do so. Between the realms of poetry and prose there is a similar debatable No Man's Land which some designate as poetry and others prose, and the world of letters will never be unanimous about the limits that are to be fixed to these provinces.\*

---

\* Mr. R. L. Megroz observes in his "Modern English Poetry", written in 1933:—"the new freedoms of rhythm and diction will probably make the last half century appear to future readers as the most revolutionary period in English poetry since the Elizabethans came to exploit unused possibilities of the language." Among the technical innovators of modern times the palm must be assigned to Gerard Manley Hopkins, who died in 1889, but whose collected poetic works first saw the light in 1918, edited by his friend the late Dr. Robert Bridges. Hopkins was soon followed by T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound—men endowed with a rich, subtle and complex poetic genius but who deliberately chose to rebel against the orthodox conventions of poetry. It would be idle to deny their genius; one may even come across highly poetic lines and imageries in their works, but it would be rash to the verge of imprudence, for instance, to designate as poetry these opening lines of Hopkins' "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" (quoted by Mr. F. R. Leavis in his "New Bearings in English Poetry"):—

"How to keep—is there any any, is their none  
such, nowhere known some, bow or  
brooch or braid or brace, lace, latch  
or catch or key to keep

We have, however, noticed that far more justice is done to a poetic idea when expressed in metre than when set forth in vers libre, and assigned reasons for the same. The charm of poetry may be compared to the lioness' milk, which is said to burst through every utensil but can only be contained in a vessel of gold. It seems as if the firm and well-proportioned vessel of metre only can safely contain the essence of poetic afflatus which dribbles away and is partly lost when it appears through the medium of rhythm. As fabled in Hindu mythology, the gods and the demons once churned the ocean and

---

Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty,.....  
from vanishing away?"

How in the name of Apollo and the nine Muses is this farrago of words to be labelled poetry? Is a mere medley of assonance, alliteration, repetition, echo and internal rime enough to yield poetry by itself? Mr. Sturge Moore (quoted again by Mr. F. R. Leavis) has however attempted to transform Hopkins' hairy caterpillar mentioned above into the butterfly of poetry as follows:—

" How to keep beauty ? is there any way ?  
Is there nowhere any means to have it stay ?  
Will no bow or brooch or braid,  
Brace or lace  
Latch or catch  
Or key to lock the door lend aid  
Before beauty vanishes away ? "

This is of course to make the best of a bad bargain. Hopkins after out-Whitmaning Whitman quietly sat down in judgment over his own verses and talked at learned length about certain technical terms, which are his own invention, as Sprung Rhythm, Counterpoint Rhythm, Logaedic Rhythm, Rocking Feet and Outriders, which puzzle the brain if it is not already bewildered by the poems. There is a common cry that there is a falling off in the number of readers of modern poetry. No wonder : under these circumstances matters could not be otherwise.

after infinite trouble managed to secure the precious nectar, which immediately led to a squabble between the parties. It is by a similar churning of the heart that the rare gift of poetry is available. In the first place it is extremely difficult to secure it, and when secured it is madness to lose it. Should the poet hold this precious object, the envy of the gods themselves, in the sieve of *vers libre* or in the vessel of metre fit to preserve the priceless thing for all eternity? Experience has taught us the wisdom of following the latter alternative. Reading a poem in rhythm is to partake of a plate of delicious ice-cream which somehow or other is turned to lukewarm milk ere it approaches the lips. *Vers libre* is the Barmecide feast of literature, where the choicest dishes are announced and the keenest appetite is excited, but where the actual fulfilment falls far short of the expectation.

The object of this essay is not to make a fetish of metre. In these days of the "revolt of youth" and "autonomy of the will", every one considers himself entitled to compose poetry according to his own conception of the term. In the field of Sanskrit rhetorics there are some who hold that untranslatable word "rasa" (which may be taken to mean something like æsthetic sentiment) to be the soul of poetry, while others have pinned their faith on "vyangya" or suggestiveness; some adhere to "vakrokti" or the roundabout turn of expression; others are satisfied if poetry possesses "riti" or style. In point of form too we find that Hebrew poetry is lacking both in metre and rime, while the oldest English poetry was characterized by a rhythmic system other than that which prevails today. In French and Persian

poetry rime plays a prominent part, while only blank verse is to be found in ancient Greek and Latin literatures. It is thus difficult if not impossible to hit upon any one form as indispensable to poetry. The Muslims are as much justified in rejecting idols as the Hindus are in worshipping them. In the fanes consecrated to Apollo the majority worship the idol of metre. It is possible that a few protestants may seek and gain the favour of Apollo in a more unconventional manner, but then they will have to establish a separate church, institute a different worship and wait for their own congregation. It is true there is no advancement in any department without variety and change which are veritably the sauce of life. Almost upto the first half of the 16th century English poetry was written in rime, the Earl of Surrey being the first to introduce blank verse in his translation of Books II & IV of Virgil's "Æneid". This experiment was received with indifference and disdain by the critics, till Shakespeare and Milton explored the possible capabilities of blank verse. Since that time rime has been driven into the shade and is confined largely to lyrical compositions. There is no knowing if the old order should change again yielding place to new, and blank verse be made to suffer the same fate at the hands of rhythm.\* All that we want is a medium, metre or rhythm or whatever it be, that may regulate the poet's inspiration, import an inner harmony into the diction,

---

\*In fact the admirers of Gerard Manley Hopkins are anxious to show that modern times are getting increasingly complex and that their poet's technical devices are consequently necessary to express "complexities of feeling, the movement of consciousness, difficult and urgent states of mind".



and is able to convey all the "rasa" contained in his thoughts in richly imaginative and emotional language. Guided by experience we think that this purpose can best be accomplished by metre, whose claims as the best-discovered form of English poetry upto the present day stand sufficiently high to deserve the "first preference" from all sincere devotees of the poetic art.

Dangerous experiments have been tried of late with poetic composition. There has come into existence a class of "Futurists" who are so enamoured of the future as to seek to destroy all works of art over twenty years of age. These refined vandals also propose to take excessive liberties with the expression by means of their "Wireless Imagination," "Typographic Revolution" and "Semaphoric Adjectivation," and wish one fine morning to be able to dispense with form in poetry by animalising, vegetalising, mineralising, electrifying and liquefying the language, making it to a certain extent live the life of matter! According to Sir H. Newbolt in his "New Study of English Poetry", the Futurists would write the opening lines of Keats' exquisite "Ode to a Nightingale" in the following manner:—"Nightingale misery. Heartache numbness pain=opiate envy+happiness jug jug jug bubble bubble beech trees summer shadows." So then we have come to this—this senseless rigmarole which is going to be the poetry of the future, this hopeless balderdash which is the inevitable result of unchartered freedom which passes muster as liberty today. This sample of Futurist "poetry," which at first sight appears like the hocus-pocus of a juggler's incantation, must follow as the night the day in the wake of the destruc-

tive programme of making a clean sweep of all forms, restraints and laws in poetry. It therefore behoves all lovers of the Muse to preserve her sacred precincts from barbarous incursions and draw a line of demarcation at any stage they consider best. Shall we draw it at metre? On the whole we think it advisable and appropriate to do so, and then the future of poetry may rest, not indeed in the hands of the Futurists, but on the lap of the gods.



## \*Literary Imposture.

---

Till man by personal endeavour or grace divine attains to the Absolute Good, his notion of good here below is as inextricably associated with evil as substance with shadow or matter with form. Despite the light of science and civilization human nature remains much the same as it was, and no department in which human energy has been manifested is without its peculiar limitations and drawbacks. Literature is a record of the noble thoughts of masterminds couched in a style which enralls the reader as much by the beauty of its expression as by the profundity of the idea it embodies. Yet in literature too people have passed off their own flimsy stuff under the names of departed worthies or have electrified their age by announcement of an important find, which after all is the dishonest product of their own minds. Imposture feeds and grows on credulity, and so long as there are people anxious to devour all that is novel or sensational without pausing to probe the merits of what they read, literary deception can still be assured of a long though ruinous career. Fame much more than pecuniary gain has rendered some people deaf to the still small voice of their conscience and egged them on to mislead the world by their duplicity. Imposture has particularly flourished during the restoration of letters, and one favourite method of roguery was to bury spurious antiquities which might afterwards be

---

\* This Essay was contributed to the Journal of the Bombay University for November 1933, Vol. II Part III.

brought to light to confound the public. But evil is always shortlived, and very often in his own life-time the culprit sees the bubble of his vanity pricked by the shrewdness of a critic, and he is brought to his knees to confess to a disillusioned public the sordid story of his deception. These impostors seem to forget the truth so pithily expressed by that great but simple soul, Abraham Lincoln:—You can cheat the whole world for some time, or part of the world for all time; but you cannot deceive all the world for all time. Though Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde will always be found racing about in the field of letters as in all other departments of human energy, we shall here only take note of several prominent instances of deception perpetrated particularly in English literature.

We shall do well to turn to the smaller fry in the beginning. Daniel Defoe was a born intriguer, and Prof. Minto calls him "a great, a truly great liar, perhaps the greatest liar that ever lived." He saw service for ten years under different governments, becoming a Whig with Whigs and a Tory with Tories, and trying to serve two masters by espousing the cause of the fallen Stuarts while he was in the secret pay of the Whig Government. His veracity in his "Journal of the Plague" is often impeached. "Robinson Crusoe", which came out in 1719, was entirely based on the real adventures of Alexander Selkirk who had stayed for four years in the island of Juan Fernandez and had returned to England in 1711. But such was Defoe's notoriety for dishonesty that he is said, on extremely doubtful authority however, to have antedated his work at 1704 so as to make it appear that it could not be indebted to the career of Selkirk. Pope

was another tricky unscrupulous person, and as Prof. Courthope observes in his great work on the poet, he antedated his "Essay on Criticism" in the hope of being considered a precocious genius. In his translation of the "Odyssey" Pope sought the help of two other poets, Fenton and Broome, who did a good part of the work and did it remarkably well. Pope was however dishonest enough to suppress their names completely and pocket the lion's share of the profit. But the public in due time saw through the trick, and a humourist wrote the following verse with a pun on the name of Broome:—

"Pope came off clean with Homer, but they say  
Broome went before and kindly swept the way."

Returning to Defoe, we find he was always ready to seize the opportune moment and was thus able to bamboozle the public by his wonderful habit of "lying like truth". When a report reached England that the island of St. Vincent was blown up in the air, Defoe wrote a bogus description of the calamity, which he considered the greatest since the Flood. It was a tissue of lies, but the public swallowed it with avidity. When the notorious highwayman Jack Sheppard was at last arrested and sent to the gallows, Defoe judged from the public excitement that if a thrilling narrative of his life be prepared, it would sell like hot buns, for people were not then in a mood to scrutinize the facts and figures of his career. And Defoe proved himself equal to the occasion; he got up a highly spiced biography of the highwayman and gave it out as if it was written by Jack himself. Nay, Jack was induced to announce from the gibbet this pamphlet as his last will and confession!

Defoe has also written the history of a terrible storm in minute detail, quoting entirely spurious letters in support of his statements. This work is as wanting in authenticity as his "Journal of the Plague". Sometimes by an entirely misleading heading of a certain work, he deceived the public, and then disappeared for a time to escape the consequences of their fury. His well known political pamphlet "Shortest Way with the Dissenters" is one of the best illustrations of irony in English literature. It was in fact not an onslaught on the Dissenters at all but on the Highchurchmen, who were so far deceived as to hail it with acclamation though the shafts were actually levelled against themselves. When the truth became known, he was arrested, fined and put up in the pillory, where he was covered, not with garbage but with flowers by his sportive admirers.

This love of sheer mischief for mischief's sake is also to be seen in Dean Swift. In his times a cobbler named John Partridge had set himself up as an astrologer and published numerous almanacs. Swift, under the pseudonym of Isaac Bickerstaff, brought out his own predictions in which, among other startling things, he foretold the death of Partridge on 29th March 1708 at 11 P. M. After that date Swift quietly announced the death of Partridge who hastened to assure all of his existence. But Swift now published his "Vindication" in which he tried to make it clear that his prophecies were based on the soundest calculations and that the cobbler had certainly breathed his last. All the wits and wags of the country now took part in this tomfoolery at poor Partridge's expense, till the public were thoroughly wearied of this joke which

went on for two long years. Another freak of this madcap creator of the Yahoos was his poem on "The Death of Dr. Swift," full of that ghastly humour which was so often characteristic of his work. By this feeler he perhaps wanted to know how the information of his own death would be received by various classes of society. Isaac Disraeli, that indefatigable collector of literary odds and ends, quotes in his "Curiosities of Literature" the instance of George Stevens, the Shakespearean commentator, who had a grudge against the famous antiquary, Richard Gough. Stevens was a terror to his friends and was fond of playing malicious practical jokes upon them. Though he had taken a leading part in exposing the literary forgeries of his day, Stevens took it into his head to befool Gough as well as the whole Society of Antiquaries. With this view he got up a tombstone on which was engraved the drinking horn of Hardy-knute to indicate his last fatal carouse, since this king is reported to have died when in his cups. The mischief-monger took good care to see that the inscription was in Saxon characters and sufficiently legible. It was steeped in pickle to give it the appearance of antiquity, and the tombstone was deliberately raised in the corner of a broker's shop frequented by Mr. Gough. The plot succeeded only too well: the antiquary was led thoroughly astray, but he never forgave Stevens afterwards for thus playing a hoax on him in public.

Persons whose fame is already secure by virtue of their high birth or literary attainments have often stooped to earn cheap notoriety by exceedingly doubtful means. Mr. George Dawson in his "Shakespeare and other Lectures" refers to Horace Walpole, the prince of English

letter-writers, who published the "English Mercuries," which, as he gave out, consisted of pamphlets written in times of Queen Elizabeth. But the forger forgot that his papers bore the watermark of G. R., and George Rex could not of course have flourished in the days of Queen Bess. This discrepancy decisively settled the matter against Walpole.

There are certain cases of spuriousness, devoid, however, of all deliberate imposture, which have been the subject of long, bitter and memorable controversies. One of these cases was regarding the notorious "Epistles of Phalaris," which brought into prominence the capacious scholarship and fierce pugnacity of Richard Bentley. Phalaris, tyrant of Agrigentum in Sicily, whose name is always associated with the brazen bull in which he roasted offenders to death, is said to have been the author of 148 Greek letters, whose genuineness has been frequently called into question. When Charles Boyle published his edition of "Phalaris," he was contemptuously criticized by Bentley. But all the scholars of England took arms against the latter, and Boyle with the help of Atterbury and Aldrich wrote a thesis which, it was thought, had finally silenced Bentley. A caricature was published in which Phalaris was depicted as consigning Bentley to the bull, while the great scholar was made to say:—"I would rather be roasted than boiled (Boyled)." But after two years Bentley came forward with his famous "Dissertation", giving the most irrefutable proofs, expressed in his usual disdainful manner, of the spuriousness of the Epistles, thereby winning over all the learned men to his side. This great controversy which had been



begun in 1692 by Sir William Temple closed in 1704 when Swift burlesqued the whole contest as well as the combatants in his "Battle of the Books."

We had now better turn to the big guns of literary fraud. George Psalmanazar, whose real name remains unknown, is perhaps the greatest of impostors and practised deception on an epic scale. In the early years of the 18th century he visited the island of Formosa which was then but little known except through the reports of the Jesuits. Such were his astounding cleverness and impudence that he now got up an entirely imaginary work on Formosa, giving its social life, manners, customs, religion, rituals, history, geography, a strange calendar and a wholly novel language and grammar of that country! The book also contained illustrations of houses, temples and other noteworthy things of Formosa. He was patronised by Dr. Compton, Bishop of London, to whom he dedicated his work. The scholars were entirely deceived and Formosa appeared in the maps as a real island in the spot Psalmanazar had indicated. But the lacunae in his prodigiously bold undertaking now gradually began to appear on closer study. Though he had got up a whole alphabet for Formosa, he actually forgot to give names to his letters, which discrepancy puzzled him before his critics. He had been shrewd enough to observe the utmost consistency and had resolved never to change what he had once given out, but this attitude sometimes landed him in a predicament. He had inadvertently affirmed that the Formosans sacrificed 18000 male infants annually. He persistently refused to lessen the number though it was evident to all and even perhaps

to himself that this tremendous annual loss would surely occasion a depopulation on the island.

He now had the misfortune to form the acquaintance of a clergyman named Innes, who being a rascal himself soon sounded the rascality of Psalmanazar. Innes gave Psalmanazar a passage from Cicero to translate in his Formosan language. After a few days he procured from Psalmanazar another version of the same passage, and both versions were found to be materially different. Psalmanazar had a most retentive memory, but the uncanniest memory in the world would not have translated the same passage twice into an entirely bogus language without falling into serious errors. But when the fraud was detected, Innes exploited Psalmanazar and made him the ladder of his own ambition. It was by advice of Innes that the great "History of Formosa" was written and advertised on a large scale, Psalmanazar being given by the artful clergyman only £ 20 for the work which must have taxed his energies to the utmost. To set a premium on his iniquity, Psalmanazar challenged and refuted certain accounts of preceding travellers, and for the time being his work was regarded as an authority on the subject. But now Psalmanazar met another bird of the same feather who persuaded him to father a composition called the "Formosan Japan," which was to be sold at a high price. The failure of this work which was full of mistakes suddenly opened people's eyes to the spuriousness of the "History of Formosa" itself. Psalmanazar found that his ingenuity in fabricating facts and figures had exhausted all its resources, and he now made a clean breast of all his impostures regarding

Formosa. This deception was satisfactorily exposed only when Psalmanazar, after having fooled the best authorities on the subject, chose to repent of his transgression. Even then there were people who took his confessions to be but an index of his great humility. How "some people can be deceived for all time" can best be seen from the words of Dr. Johnson, who held the moral character of this forger in such high esteem as to remark that Psalmanazar was the best man he had ever known.

Literature has its born forgers as well as its born poets, and some there be who have shown from their tenderest years a tendency to gull the public by their misguided ingenuity. Such a person was Thomas Chatterton, and it was this evil habit that got the better of that "marvellous boy" and led him to "perish in his pride." While yet a child, he deceived a poor pewterer named Burgum by proving his noble birth through the fabrication of several papers. He then forged an imaginary account of the opening of Bristol Bridge in the times of Henry II, which completely took in the local authorities. Emboldened by his success, Chatterton wrote a mass of pseudo-antique poems, consisting of epic fragments and dramatic lyrics, and claimed them to be the work of one Thomas Rowley of Bristol, who, he said, flourished in the reigns of Henry VI and Edward IV. A good many people were deceived by the forgery of the Rowley papers; Horace Walpole was one of them, but finding matters a bit doubtful, he sent the papers to his friend Thomas Gray, whose Ithuriel spear soon detected Chatterton lurking about in the guise of Rowley. The boyish offender in attempting to write the language of

the 15th century had fallen into grievous blunders. He had consulted a bad dictionary, and his misspellings and grammatical slips could only be matched by his faulty metres and anachronisms. Nor was he always able to employ a consistently antique style. According to Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton, his forgery was not inspired by a mercenary point of view, nor was it the result of a masquerading impulse, but rather the impulse of a truly artistic nature to excite interest and controversy in his own production. We are unable to take so charitable a view of this serious matter, for which there can be no reasonable apology except the boyish age of the offender, who, in thinking that he was deceiving the world was only deceiving himself. But it is to be remembered that Chatterton was a juvenile prodigy. He exercised considerable influence on his successors, and in leading people's minds, however falsely, back to Mediaeval times, he gave a great impetus to the Romantic movement, which was then struggling in its birth. So great a critic as Sir Edmund Gosse considered Chatterton the most extraordinary phenomenon of infancy in the literature of the world, and held that had he lived 20 years more and obtained suitable training, his place would have been with Milton and perhaps with Shakespeare. But it is lamentable that this "inheritor of unfulfilled renown" should have taken to dishonest ways from the very beginning and then out of grief and mortification laid violent hands on himself before he was out of his teens.

Deception has often assumed strange disguises to compass its ends. Goaded by self-interest it enables the

evil-doer to pose as an original author or a great discoverer; it may also tempt him to pass off another's work as his own and even to run down a great author unfairly just to win the merit of being the first to show that that eminent writer had often shone in borrowed plumes. In 1747 William Lauder, a school-master and a sound classical scholar, startled his readers by an article in the "Gentleman's Magazine" showing that Milton's "Paradise Lost" was largely constructed out of passages plagiarised out of Latin authors. Owing to the vast scholarship of Milton, the "Paradise Lost" is redolent with such a perfume of literary reminiscences that Lauder was for a time able to lead the people astray by his miserable tricks. Not satisfied with pointing out resemblances between the real passages of Milton and those of his Latin authors, Lauder had the audacity to forge verses closely resembling those in "Paradise Lost" and ascribe them to older poets. Villainy waxes strong with success, and Lauder now extracted several lines from William Hogg's Latin version of "Paradise Lost," published in 1690, and inscribed them in the Latin works of Massenius, Staphorstius and others, thus presenting such passages as the literary larceny of the great Puritan poet. Dr. Johnson, who is hardly fair to Milton, espoused Lauder's cause and wrote a preface to the impostor's "Essay on Milton's Use and Imitation of the Moderns in his 'Paradise Lost'". But to Lauder's misfortune there were shrewder critics in England like Dr. John Douglas, Bishop of Salisbury, "the scourge of impostors, the terror of quacks," as Goldsmith hails him in his "Retaliation". Bishop Douglas' exposure of the man and his methods was

both thorough and complete; the forger made some futile attempts to clear his character, but finding it too hot to abide in England, emigrated to Barbados where he died in obscurity in 1771.

Two instances may now be quoted of misguided writers who tried to seek a bubble reputation by pretending to have made valuable discoveries in the works of Shakespeare. William Henry Ireland was endowed from his early years with a veritable flair for lying. At first he tried his prentice hand in the creation of fabricated documents; he pretended to have discovered a letter from Shakespeare to Queen Elizabeth, another from Anne Hathaway to her husband, a love-epistle from the great dramatist to his wife with an enclosed lock of hair, and a mortgage deed said to have been made between Shakespeare and John Heminge on the one part and Michael Fraser and his wife on the other. Many more such documents were forged by the youthful Ireland who thereby deceived his father Samuel Ireland, a man whose own methods were never unquestionable, but who was now completely taken in by his more rascally son. The elder Ireland exhibited these documents publicly at his house and invited scholars to inspect them. Many were deceived and Boswell with his usual hero-worshipping instincts is said to have kissed the supposed relics on his knees. Finding that his sins had passed undetected, the younger Ireland forged in the name of Shakespeare, a blank-verse play named "Vortigern" based on the reign of an ancient English king of that name. The play was represented at Sheridan's theatre and so vast was the difference between the language of the Elizabethan

giant and his dwarfish 18th century imitator that it was immediately hissed out. In Act V, Scene ii, Kemble had to recite "And when this solemn mockery is o'er"; on hearing this unfortunate line, which was an appropriate though unconscious commentary on the play itself, the audience broke into fits of obstreperous laughter, and the play was irretrievably damned.

But the younger Ireland's ardour for dishonesty had not cooled as yet, and finding that his forgeries had so far passed muster, he reached his crowning iniquity in his declaration that his own ancestor and name-sake, Mr. W. H. Ireland, had once saved Shakespeare from drowning and had been consequently rewarded by the dramatist with all the manuscripts which had just been brought to light. We fail to understand why the forger should have desisted at this stage, for he could have as well identified the initials of his supposed ancestor with the immortal "W. H.," the "onlie begetter" of the Shakespearean sonnets! That would have been a capital hit, but even as it was, Ireland had now gone beyond his depth. Malone smelt the rat and mercilessly exposed the man. When all was lost, Ireland confessed the forgery and wrote in 1786 an "Authentic Account of the Shakespearean Manuscripts." The position of the father, who all along believed in their genuineness, became extremely awkward, and he replied by a "Vindication." But the people now had enough of the father and the son whose quarrels were never reconciled. The father felt the disgrace bitterly and it probably hastened his own end in 1800. In 1805 the remorseful son appeared again with his "Confessions," entirely exculpating his

father from the fraudulent business of which he, the son, was the sole projector. The latter met with his deserts, sank into poverty and died in 1835.

Another person of that ilk was John Payne Collier, a man of acknowledged merit, who unfortunately sacrificed the enviable reputation he had earned in the field of Shakespearean investigation to his fatal propensity for forgery. As librarian to the Duke of Devonshire he had access to the chief collections of early English literature, but he misused these opportunities by bringing out in 1852 a forged volume, notorious as the Perkins Folio, from the words "Tho. Perkins his Booke" inscribed on its outer cover. This book contained, as Collier said, emendations on Shakespeare from the hand of "an old collector." The fraud was first exposed by C. W. Singer and others followed suit. Collier in his replies made matters worse by numerous contradictions and dubious assertions. Still such was the respect in which he was held by scholars that the great Shakespearean J. C. Halliwell-Phillipps refused till the end to believe that Collier, his own senior colleague and guide, could have ever knowingly misled the world of letters. But after Collier's death certain manuscripts were discovered showing that he was actually guilty of forgery, his case remaining a woeful instance of literary fraud, perpetrated by a person from whom such an action had never been anticipated.

We have taken note of traitors in the realm of Minerva, betraying the cause of learning for the sake of short-lived fame; but there are brokers in her kingdom also—men of straw who earn a dishonest living by mak-



ing others, who are far more intellectual, drudge for themselves. Sir John Hill once contracted with a bookseller to translate Swammerdam's work on insects for 50 guineas though he did not himself understand a word of the Dutch language. Sir John then bargained with another translator to do the work for 25 guineas, though this second person was as innocent of the Dutch language as the knight was. Then the second man set out in search of a translator and happened to come across a scholar of the Dutch language who was prepared to undertake the work for 12 guineas. So the two ignorant "translators" got the best of the bargain, while the modest scholarly drudge, whose very name is unknown to the world, broke his daily bread in peace and preferred to remain in oblivion. Verily, the disagreement between the Goddesses of Learning and Wealth as described in Hindu mythology is as transparent in actual life as it is deplorable.

But there are certain dishonest men of letters who are treated with undue severity by the critics. In reproducing fragmentary ancient ballads or epics, the editor or translator has to fill up the gaps by lines of his own invention if he does not wish the work to appear scrappy and disjointed. A scrupulously honest man would certainly indicate what is original and what is his own independent work; but in case he fails to do so, it would indeed be overharsh to condemn his whole work as forgery. Between 1760 and 1763 James Macpherson published certain fragments of Gaelic poetry in the form of two epic poems "Fingal" and "Temora", supposed to have been written by Ossian, the Scottish warrior-bard.

of the 3rd century. "Fingal" was dedicated to Lord Bute, a man who, despite all the faults that Lecky has attributed to him, was endowed with literary tastes, and the publication of "Temora" was entirely financed by the same person. The patronage of this Scottish nobleman, who was the best hated man in the kingdom in those days, affected Macpherson's case unfavourably from the very beginning. The poems were attended by certain suspicious circumstances and were denounced by Hume and Dr. Johnson. Macpherson lost his balance and threatened Johnson with personal chastisement, when the latter, never more happy than when he accepted a good offer, promised to meet his opponent at the appointed place with a stout oaken staff surmounted by a leaden knob as big as an orange. Though the expected fight never took place, long and tedious wordy duels have been held and a great deal of ink has been spilt over this controversy. Shairp and Blair think "Ossian" genuine; Saintsbury, Gosse and Courthope are inclined to think otherwise. In fact there are Davids of the one and Goliaths of the other.

But after all there are certain charges going heavy against Macpherson who was unable to reply to them. In the first place Macpherson professed to have translated his work from Erse manuscripts collected in the Highlands. This was certainly untrue, and he never produced them when challenged to do so nor were any found in his papers after his death. The poems do not breathe the atmosphere of antiquity, for the Gaelic language is pure and simple while Macpherson presents us with a rhapsodical prose-poetic diction; nor do we get a

vivid picture of the social life of the times from the work. But it would be unjustifiable to dismiss the whole work as forgery because Macpherson could not have written so much original poetry in such a short time. The Ossianic works were in fact based on local traditions gathered orally from the villagers as Dr. Elias Lonrot in the last century edited the "Kalevala" from songs and legends collected from the peasants of Finland. But Macpherson deserves to be censured for having got up the fib of the Erse manuscripts which he said he had translated. He may have been constrained to supply certain gaps in the story by materials of his own invention, but it is very difficult to say how far his work is based on genuine local tradition and how far it is due to his editorial ingenuity. Though some of Macpherson's methods are undoubtedly questionable, we would be doing him gross injustice if we condemned as a fraud his entire work, which, by the way, fascinated such great minds as Goethe and Napoleon, and exercised considerable influence on the Romantic movement in Europe by opening up an entirely novel region for exploration.

Thus we see that all forms of deception are not to be condemned equally. In certain cases the author, being a young man or writing his first book, is anxious to appear before the public in a novel guise and to let his readers know that he at any rate has nothing to do with the work. There are authors who under stress of poverty have sold their names to be prefixed to works they have never written, while some writers, anxious to flatter their noble or royal patrons, have prefixed the

latter's names to their own productions. In several cases the writer is himself deceived while he appears to others as if he was deliberately trying to fool his readers. Sir John Mandeville of the 14th century has been recognised, with certain reservations, as the father of English prose. He travelled for 30 years and more, and then described his exploits in Latin, French and English. His work is extremely interesting but consists of the most incredible fibs ever set going by travellers in times when adequate means of communication with distant countries did not exist. It is a typical "traveller's tale", but it is impossible to determine the *mens rea* of the author or to say how far he cheated the public, or was himself deceived by the strange countries and their curious ways and customs, which lend themselves easily to misinterpretation at the hands of foreigners. His very guides may have bewildered him in certain respects and filled his mind with mysterious and magical happenings. He has strange things to say about Prester John, the Phoenix, the Upas poison tree, the cave where Adam and Eve dwelt, the land exclusively peopled by the Amazons, dog-headed cannibals, and the hills of gold at Taprobane, frequented by pismires as big as hounds! Mandeville's work is also far from original, for he has freely pilfered from the preceding historians between whom and him in point of veracity there is little to choose. All this is certainly inexcusable, but as biographers suffer usually from the Lues Boswelliana, so too travellers of olden days were often victims to exaggerations, prejudices, superstitions and miracle-mongering; and though their work would tend to deceive the public, still the

latter were generally too shrewd to take for gospel truth what was only recorded in a book of travel. If Mandeville be contrasted with Psalmanazar, it will be easy to see an almost unconscious fooling of one's self as well as others in the one man, and a conscious and deliberate attempt of the other to delude people by a wholesale and colossal fabrication of things for which no basis existed whatsoever.

The acid of satire is often necessary to wipe out the stains of untruth and exaggeration to be found in such tales of travel. In 1785 Rudolf Erich Raspe, a German fugitive living in Cornwall, wrote his funny "*Baron Munchausen*" being a volume of travels in which the hero meets with the most marvellous adventures. The work, which is compiled from various sources, is said to be (though not unanimously) a satire on the "*Travels in Abyssinia*" by the famous Scotch explorer James Bruce, whose work appeared almost romantic in its novelty to his age. We cite below only a few of Baron Munchausen's ridiculous adventures:—In Russia the cold was so intense and the snow fell in such mountainous heaps that the Baron tied his horse to a church-steeple; but when the snow melted, the poor animal was found hanging in the air. Once the Baron shot a stag in the head with a cherry-stone and in a year a tree grew out of it, which the animal carried about wherever it went. The Baron's clothes being once bitten by a mad dog went mad; and so on. It should seem that this sort of stuff either came out from the head of a rather imaginative schoolboy, or, what is more probable, that it should have been aimed as a satire

against the spicy tales usually related by travellers. What "Don Quixote" was to romances of chivalry, that, we are inclined to believe, was "Baron Munchausen" to books of travel.

Among other instances of "innocent imposture" (if such a contradiction in terms be permissible) we may mention cases of writers whose object was not so much to delude people but only to practise fun on them and raise a cheerful laugh at the detection. Mr. W. J. Long in his *Outlines of American Literature* cites the instance of the famous writer Washington Irving whose *Knickerbocker History* was a playful literary fraud on the public. Having come across one Dr. Mitchell's rather grandiloquent work—"Picture of New York," Irving resolved with the help of his brother Peter to burlesque it and begin right up from the creation of the world. He thereupon professed to have discovered the notes of a learned Dutch antiquarian, Diedrich Knickerbocker, who had left an unpaid board bill behind him. Irving advertised in the papers for the missing man (who of course never existed) and then announced to the public that he would himself publish the manuscript of the antiquarian, the proceeds going partly to the defraying of the bill. This literary hoax created quite a sensation, yet nobody was any the worse for the joke.

Sometimes a writer attempting an absolutely novel theme is so overpowered by lack of self-confidence as to let the people know that he is only editing a certain work that happened to fall into his hands. Our distinguished scholar, Mr. F. W. Bain, ex-Principal of the Deccan College, will ever be remembered, among other

things, for his delightful Hindu tales, light as gossamer, soft as the eider-down and woven from such stuff as dreams are made on. Who would ever wish to get out of that dreamland of love and romance, that cloud-cuckoo-town where youth and beauty exercise their perennial charm, and "where the virgins are soft as the roses they twine"? In the introduction to his "*Digit of the Moon*" Mr. Bain refers to an old Maratha Brahmin of Poona, dying of the plague and handing him over his precious manuscript for publication. For a long time Mr. Bain pretended that he was merely translating into English the stories written by the Brahmin; and so sound was his scholarship in Hindu literature, mythology and religion that the delusion continued to beguile people for years. It was then discovered that Mr. Bain, working with a mind saturated in Hindu lore, was wholly its author. Mr. Bain himself says in the introduction to his "*Substance of a Dream*"—"But who writes them? I cannot tell. They come to me, one by one, suddenly, like a flash of lightning all together; I see them in the air before me, like a little Bayeux tapestry, complete from end to end, and write them down hardly lifting the pen from the paper, straight off 'from the manuscript.' Who can tell? They may be all but so many reminiscences of a former birth." Here 'from the manuscript' must mean the manuscript of the English author's own invention and not that of the Maratha Brahmin who proved to be as illusory as the heroes of Mr. Bain's own stories, vanishing into thin air at the final approach of Shankar and Pârvati. But why write these tales, so tender and yet so passionate, so romantic and yet so

wise, and attribute them to an imaginary Brahmin ? Was this done with a view to deceive the public ? Assuredly not : for a man would stoop to deception only when he finds it to his own advantage. But here the case was just the reverse. Our interpretation of the matter is that this was a piece of "innocent imposture," either due to Mr. Bain's diffidence in triumphing in the field of Sanskrit lore, or his genuine humility in passing off as a mere translator when he was actually the original author of the work.

When authors write in a foreign language or attempt an exotic theme which is to be embodied in foreign forms and imageries, it seems natural for them to conceal their identity till they are sure of success. Such writers either command a glorious triumph or court a ridiculous failure, and fear of the latter consequence compels them to remain concealed till they are tolerably sure of success. Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal in his Urdu Introduction to his beautiful Persian poetical work—the "*Payâm e Mashriq*"—traces the influence of Goethe's "*West Eastern Diwân*" on subsequent German writers, among whom he cites the case of Friedrich Martin Von Bodenstedt, who stayed in Tiflis and acquired a wonderful mastery over the Persian language. In 1851 Bodenstedt published a German work called "*The Poems of Mirzâ Schaffy*," which is thoroughly oriental in form and colouring. The volume met with such phenomenal success that in a short time it ran through 160 editions. Bodenstedt, who is also responsible for his excellent versions of Hâfiz and 'Omar Khayyâm, had so skilfully assimilated the spirit of Persian poetry that, according to Sir



Muhammad Iqbál, the poems of the imaginary Mirzâ Schaffy were long believed to be the translation of some real Persian poet. If this is deception, it is certainly an innocent one, for Mirzâ Schaffy never existed outside the German writer's imagination. If however a great Persian poet of that name had actually existed, Bodendstedt might have been blamed for deceiving the public by passing off his own poems under the cloak of an eminent personality. The case of Haring, the German Scott, stands on a different level. Haring imitated Scott and passed off his imitations as actual translations. So clever was his deceit (for deceit it was pure and simple) that, as Mr. J. G. Robertson observes in his "*Literature of Germany*," one of these imitations was actually translated into English and presented to the English public in all good faith as a hitherto unknown romance by W. Scott! This was indeed going too far; Scott is no denizen of the cloudland of the writer's fancy as Mirzâ Schaffy was and cleverness does not deserve the name if it lapses into deception.

Another incident of "innocent imposture", celebrated in English literature, is associated with the great name of Thomas Carlyle, who, with an ingenuity reminding us strikingly of Washington Irving and Mr. Bain, explained the origin of his "Sartor Resartus" by a quizzical little story which was as false as it was interesting. Carlyle gave out that a German Professor named Teufelsdröckh had written a work called "*Die Klieder*" (the clothing), which was brought over to England by one Herr Heuschrecke. Carlyle found the book in an entirely confused state and promised to

re-edit the work, which was named by him "The book re-edited" or "The tailor re-patched" (*Sartor Resartus*). It was one of his early yet ambitious works, and the author was neither sure of his own success nor of the popularity of his views. He consequently thought it safe to get up an eccentric German bookworm of a Professor and father all his philosophy and satire on him. The disguise was not difficult to penetrate; *Teufelsdröckh* was none else but Carlyle and the work remains a spiritual autobiography of the whimsical sage of Chelsea. It is easy to be satiric when we are enveloped in anonymity or wear a fantastic mask. Hamlet knew his business, and realised that the darts of his invective would work a deadly effect on his victims when discharged under the convenient pretence of mental derangement. Works like "*Utopia*", "*Gulliver's Travels*" "*Erewhon*" etc., aim to deceive none but enlighten many by the wisdom that peers beneath the capricious surface. There is no attempt at deception, for instance, in Goldsmith's "*Citizen of the World*" and Montesquieu's "*Lettres Persanes*", because they are books purporting to be written not by their authors but by a Chinaman and a Persian. It is rather a humorous and effective endeavour to see ourselves as others see us, for the follies and foibles of our society are more evident to foreigners than to the most captious of our own critics.

We have now tried to discuss what is literary fraud, what is prompted by pure love of mischief, what is "innocent imposture", as well as who are the minor offenders and who its hardened criminals. The border-line between innocence and guilt in this department is very

faint, and the same instance may be condemned as guilty by the one and let off as innocent by the other. Who can say, for instance, whether Chatterton, after winning success as Rowley, had not a mind to reveal his own identity as did Mr. F. W. Bain? We must not also forget the adequate limits and restraints with which this question should be considered. It would be puritanical to object to anonymous and pseudonymous literature on the ground that the former savours of *suppressio veri* and the latter of *suggestio falsi*. There is nothing better than plain unvarnished truth, but if one chooses to remain unknown, it would be hypercritically unjust to tear the veil of anonymity and drag the unwilling author into limelight. The question of literary imposture is closely associated with that of plagiarism, the "art" of passing off others' property as one's own, but the subject is wide enough to claim independent treatment by itself.

The one noteworthy feature most apparent in these forgers and fraudulent writers is their extreme dexterity, their subtlety of invention and their shifts and devices when they get into trouble. All great rogues are men of brains, and it is owing to their cleverness alone that we are inclined to overlook, though never to justify, their misdeeds. When Virgil was condemned by his friends for pilfering too freely from Homer, he challenged all to do so if they could, because, said he, it is easier to rob Hercules of his club than Homer of a single verse: and indeed both courage and cleverness are required to attain even a short-lived fame in literary imposture. The capacious memory and wonderful powers

of invention of Psalmanazar, the subtlety and dexterity of the Ireland father and son, and the marvellous attainments and knowledge of Mediaevalism displayed by Chatterton, must extort our admiration even when we feel that such great endowments were worthy of a far better cause.

But all wrong-doers forget that in the long run dishonesty entails greater worries and taxes the human energies far more than can ever be done through an upright straightforward course of action. Chatterton, as Sir Edmund Gosse observed, would have proved worthy in the fulness of time to occupy that seat on Parnassus that Milton held: such a person, even when destined for an early grave, could have easily rivalled the glories of Keats, if only he had given up the thought of humbugging the world with his Rowley papers. If Psalmanazar had the ability to invent a whole sham civilization of a strange and foreign place in all its minutest particulars, with far less trouble could he have given us the "Canterbury Tales" in prose or created the Waverley series for the edification of his grateful readers. But this was not to be. Haunted by an evil destiny, they failed to turn their undoubted abilities to the best advantage even to themselves, and a deluded public has at last given them the treatment they deserve. Unless the world is to go to wreck and ruin, brilliance must ever yield to honesty and art to morality, for an ounce of truth outbalances a thousand pounds of falsehood, however daintily dressed or elegantly tricked out. There is no downfall so overwhelmingly deplorable as that of a highly intellectual man perversely choosing to

tread the easy descent to Avernus, the return from which, as fabled by ancient mythologists, is difficult in the extreme. Intellectual incompetence is preferable to moral bankruptcy; better to rot unknown than to rise like the rocket in the atmosphere of falsehood and then fall like the stick into well-merited obloquy and oblivion. The subject of literary imposture must therefore form a regrettable chapter in the world of letters, indicating the disastrous consequences of misdirected genius.

---

## Ibsen and the Sanctity of Marriage.

---

Three writers in three distant countries born—George Meredith in England, Leo Tolstoi in Russia and Henrik Ibsen in Norway—all saw the light in the year 1828. Meredith was a deep and profound thinker of the problems of life, intellectual to the verge of obscurity, with a psychological insight into the female heart that classes him right with the masters in that line—Shakespeare, Thackeray and Browning. Tolstoi was a powerful and passionate soul, with original and revolutionary ideas on religion, art and society, and one of the greatest names in the literature of his country. The centenary of Ibsen was celebrated with due pomp and ceremony on the 20th of March last\* in Norway, but by this time his greatness has outgrown the limits of his country and even of Europe, and Ibsen has now risen to be a world-figure. It took Shakespeare a pretty long time to do that. Corneille and Racine were shocked at the vulgarity of his art as Voltaire was at the "barbarity" of his scenes and characters; and it was a century and a half after the death of Shakespeare that his greatness dawned in its proper dimensions on Europe through the endeavours of Lessing and Goethe.

Ibsen's works provoked a violent storm when they first appeared owing to his demolition of national conventions and severe satire of certain time-honoured institutions. But Ibsen once said: "I always love stormy weather",

---

\*This Essay was originally written in May 1928, the centenary year of Ibsen's birth.

and the condemnation of his "Ghosts" by the censor only served to fire up his genius and bring his undoubted faculties into prominence. He was a dramatist of ideas and a writer on social and national problems. His plays are meant not merely to be observed on the stage but to be reflected upon. As Mr. G. B. Shaw says, in Ibsen's theatre we are not flattered spectators killing an idle hour but rather we are "guilty creatures sitting at a play"—as guilty as Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, observing a play representing his own sins. Ibsen is an arch-egoist, and the typical Ibsenian character will always have his (or more often, her) own way, and will break but will not bend. In "An Enemy of the People" he shows how the majority can tyrannize over the minority, and he here makes the bold statement that the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone. He is a sworn iconoclast and is at his best when he wields the sledge-hammer (very appropriately chosen as a symbol on his grave), which falls with crashing force on the doll-houses of modern society with its worn-out ideals and effete institutions sapped of all true worth and consequence. He is gloomy and cynical, but none can deny his greatness for he gave Europe a new message, a new philosophy and a novel dramatic technique that entitled him to be called the Father of the Modern Drama.

But we here take him only as a writer on women's problems and try to estimate his influence on the world, for he must be held mainly responsible for the creation of that strange phenomenon, the New Woman, potent both for good and for evil. At present English literature

is unduly and unwholesomely occupied with the sex-problem, and to a considerable extent this is due to the impetus that had first been imparted by Ibsen. In the conventional goody-goody Victorian age, when Tennyson sang of blameless Arthurs and innocent Elaines, the Ibsenian gospel regarding love, marriage and divorce fell like a bombshell. But the greatest influence exerted by the Norwegian on English literature was that he gave it a new Ibsen in Mr. G. B. Shaw, as stern, cynical and iconoclastic as his master, but excelling him in the fierce irony of his humour as in the stern defiance of his denunciations.

Ibsen's theories were after all not new for he had been anticipated by Godwin and Shelley in the commencement of the 19th century. Godwin held all promises (including matrimonial ones) to be immoral because they imply blind obedience to the past. He did not see the necessity of marriage, for, in his opinion, where there is love marriage is a superfluity and where love is absent marriage is either a folly or a crime. But poor Godwin was soon to be hoist with his own petard when Shelley taught him a lesson by eloping with his daughter. Godwin held that if husband and wife were mutually tired they had better form new connections, for according to him it is unreasonable to sacrifice one's happiness to an accidental union such as marriage. Godwin further proposes that women should be had in common, but the details of this suggestion worked out in his "Political Justice" are too revolting to be discussed here. Shelley, determined to outdo his master in fantastic ideals, advocated marriage between brother and



sister. It is a mercy that Ibsen and Shaw do not quite proceed to these enormities.

Let us take a brief survey of Ibsen's views on marriage as expressed in some of his dramas. The play that made Ibsen's name a familiar word in England was "A Doll's House". Nora with three children is happy with her husband Helmer and like an over-dutiful wife goes to the length of forging her father's signature to save her husband. She all along thinks that her husband is as noble as she had been to him. At a later time she found that he was unable even to appreciate her self-sacrifice for his sake. This opens her eyes; she feels that she had been all her life a puppet to her husband, living in an illusion, a doll's house; and now that she has realized the situation, Ibsen considers this mother of three children justified in abandoning her beseeching husband to proceed in quest of genuine love. What an ideal of motherliness and wifehood! In "The Lady from the Sea" a young and beautiful girl Ellida has married a widower Dr. Wangel, but she has an indescribable fascination for the sea. Once a sailor comes from over the sea and so charms the lady that she proposes to run away with him. The husband naturally tries to prevent this course of affairs but in vain. At length he gives Ellida complete liberty to choose for herself. But as soon as the wife finds herself independent to do as she pleased, she clings to the husband and bids the sailor be off. Ibsen wants to prove that there can be no perfect marriage without complete independence. But in doing so he thinks that a wife is justified in sitting in judgment over the claims of an elderly husband and a fasci-

nating seaman. What a conception of womanly virtue!

In Ibsen's "Ghosts" we find Mrs. Alving united to a most unworthy husband, suffering from a disease, which, if known, would surely ostracize him from society. Within an year of that marriage, the wife instead of seeking divorce at a court of law, flies away to her lover, Pastor Manders, who is so "good" in the worldly sense of the term that he upbraids her for her unwifely conduct and sends her back to her husband. Ibsen has nothing but contempt for this lover and calls him an arrant coward for doing a clergyman's duty in asking Mrs. Alving to go and cleave unto her husband "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death them do part." But in one of his earliest works Ibsen reminds us of Godwin himself. In "Love's Comedy" we are introduced to a young poet Mr. Hawk, who studies the lives of various couples—lovers as well as married people—and finds them all corrupt, conventional and untrue in one way or the other. Hawk loves Swanhild, the only girl who he thinks possesses a soul, but in his opinion marriage would destroy the bloom and beauty of their love, and so the play ends tragically with a separation of these lovers who consider a lifelong estrangement preferable to marriage, which would destroy their paradise!

Nowhere in his plays has this grim dramatist drawn a loving and united family. It may be freely admitted that there are ill-matched couples in society but it is strange that Ibsen should not have realized that they are the exception, not the rule. It is the wrongdoer—the husband

or the wife—that is to be condemned, not the institution of marriage itself. To satirize this sacred institution for the sins of one or other of the partners is to renounce the good together with the evil, to throw away the baby with the bathwater. But Ibsen is sometimes compelled even against his own will to deviate into sense and acknowledge the power of all-conquering womanly love. Such is the devoted and sincere affection of Brand's wife Agnes, neglected to the last by her unbending, uncompromising husband, "dutiful" to higher things, not to his wife. Such is the saving love of Solveig for the vagabond Peer Gynt, who after a life of shameful adventures and misfortunes finds his true self in the genuine faith, hope and love of a long-expectant beloved. Such are the affection and self-sacrifice of Beata, the invalid wife of Rosmer, committing suicide that her husband may be united with the lady whom he loves, Rebecca. But the most noticeable thing in his dramas is that Ibsen's women are far superior to his men, for the former are almost always characterized by love, truth and reason, while the latter are often cowardly, selfish and stupid villains. Ibsen here decidedly falls below the superb impartiality and catholicity of Shakespeare who sets off a Brutus with an Iago, a Hamlet with a Falstaff, a Desdemona with a Cleopatra and a Miranda with a Lady Macbeth.

But Mr. Shaw has carried some of his master's views to a mischievous extreme. "Candida" is only an echo of Ibsen's "Lady from the Sea". Candida, being given the option by her clergyman-husband Morell to choose between himself and her lover Marchbanks, choos-

es to remain with her husband, not because it is the wife's duty to do so but only because the husband was weak and therefore in need of her help. In "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" Mr. Shaw preaches that marriage is not the best consummation of love, for he thinks love should be free after as well as before the marriage. This would indeed nullify the very significance of that institution. Mr. Frank Harris remarks about Mr. Shaw in his rather over-breezy work on the great dramatist:—"Although he has never so much as thought of asking for one, he thinks divorce should be granted for the asking without any further reason." In "Getting Married" Mr. Shaw is absolutely unable to see the necessity of marriage. He cannot understand the need of a "husband" in woman's claim to bear a child. He considers child-bearing an important element in race-welfare but fails to understand why it should be given such a sacerdotal appearance. Towards the end of "Man and Superman" Tanner is made to say that he is unhappy because his wife Anne has made him too commonplace, for after all it is very commonplace to marry! In these days it is getting very commonplace to shock or electrify others, and the joke is rather getting tame. We hope Mr. Shaw will one of these days come forward with another "Candida" proving that it is too conventional to elope with a lover but more in the fashion and much more romantic to stay at home with one's own husband. That would be a characteristically Shavian touch.

It is certain that Ibsen and Shaw have given us plenty of food for reflection. Their sole mission as dramatists seems to be to take away all the false glitter

from life and show it in its natural hideousness. Perhaps they intentionally go to unpleasant extremes only to make the situation so emphatic as to bring it home to us. As Mr G. K. Chesterton observes, sane and happy marriage is an untheatrical thing and hence most modern dramatists have devoted themselves to "insane" marriages on the stage. But let us now consider how pernicious would be the influence on society if the views of these two "prophets" of modern Europe were to be literally followed for a generation.

It is certain that till women asserted their own independence in modern times they had been treated by men with glaring injustice. "Frailty, thy name is woman" has as its counterpart "Tyranny, thy name is man". All our social laws regarding marriage, divorce &c. have been framed by men for their own advantage, and all that women have to do is only to yield a tacit compliance. Many are the wrongs to which a married woman is silently subjected in her private life and which she is ashamed to put into public. Till recently women have been forced upon the Procrustean bed of principles postulated by the arch-tyrant—Man. But it is one thing to revise our laws of society if found to weigh too heavily against women, and quite a different thing to ridicule marriage in such a way as to bring its very existence into danger. One of the most powerful forces in human life is the sex-instinct, a potent instrument for the welfare and continuance of society but ruinous if allowed to have free play. Knowing its vast importance men have thought fit to regulate this instinct by law, and when its value came to be increasingly realized it

was sanctified with religious sanctions and ceremonies, and thus arose the institution of marriage which nourishes our social and moral life and without which mankind would again reel back unto the brute.

Polygamy is advocated in many religions but for one reason or the other the world is fast coming round to monogamous marriage, and polygamy may therefore be considered as a stepping-stone to the ideal of monogamy where only true love between man and wife is possible. Marriage is much more than a contract. In a perfect couple two virtues are required, Love and Independence; Love so staunch as to ignore the deficiencies and shortcomings of one's partner, unless they are such as the law should take cognizance of; Independence so complete that the man and the wife in their respective spheres should each be at liberty to do everything that he or she honestly thinks to be true. But here's the rub and here the conflict arises. Marriage, however, says Lecky in his "Map of Life", is a sort of compromise between man and wife, and without a fair spirit of give and take there can be no peace in the family. An ever-unbending man and wife with too rigid an adherence to certain standards can never make an ideal couple, unless off and on each party chooses to accommodate himself or herself to the wishes and views of the other. But eventually love conquers all, and if love be powerful between both it is easy for the one side or the other to yield according to circumstances. Marriage without love is "Hamlet" without the Prince of Denmark, a meaningless mockery, a series of ciphers without the indicating number. Love without any intention of marriage.

(unless such love be truly Platonic) is a violation of the law of civilized society. Marriage without independence is servitude. Marriage without love and independence is concubinage pure and simple and need not be dignified with the sacred name of marriage at all. Thus though independence is an important factor in wedded life, it is not the be-all and end-all of marriage, for it has to be curbed and softened by countless little deeds of kindness and self-abnegation. Ibsen's mistake consisted in his over-emphasizing the need of independence, without which in his opinion self-realization is impossible, and he actually went to the length of considering self-sacrifice in marriage as a form of suicide. It is evident that the most affectionate couple would find it difficult to continue as man and wife if they chose literally to follow the advice of the Norwegian dramatist.

How strange that great thinkers like Ibsen and Shaw should not have realized the duties and responsibilities of married life but dwelt only on its rights, forgetting that there can be no rights without corresponding duties! The essential charm of married life lies in its continuance; a butterfly flitting from flower to flower is unable to realize what genuine honeyed sweetness is. It is only when man and wife permanently stay together that one is accustomed to tolerate and therefore to provide for the shortcomings of the other. It may bear a further repetition that in no case can tyranny be permitted, and if the present law of divorce is too one-sided, steps should be taken to reform it. Law, however, does not undertake to remedy an evil caused by the choleric temper of, say, the husband till the grievance amounts

to actual cruelty. It may well be imagined how hard is the life of a woman matched with an ill-tempered man like W. S. Landor, or of a patient philosophic Hooker united with a shrewish Xantippe. But if separation be granted by law on the ground of irascibility of one or the other of the partners, the remedy would prove worse than the disease, and the multiplicity of divorces in the land would soon pull the fabric of society to pieces. Married life is a lesson in patience and toleration, and care has to be taken by every sensible couple that the chariot of society, rolling through soft or rocky soil on the mighty wheels of Husband and Wife, is not allowed to lose its balance or be overturned by mutual mistrust and dissension. Much is made of liberty forgetting that in its extreme form it begets license and defeats its own object. Rousseau's greatest mistake was committed by him in the very opening sentence of his "Social Contract" when he says—Man is born free. If man were born free, if nobody were to sacrifice his or her freedom to take care of the infant, the man would surely not survive his infancy. The fact is that as soon as man is born, he is born under certain restraints and regulations with which he is taught to comply. So too the man and woman on the threshold of matrimony would do well to season their notions of liberty with mutual respect and confidence which would of their own accord beget wholesome and salutary restraints.

It has become a growing fashion nowadays to dissolve a marriage because of difference of opinion and "incompatibility of views". In such a state of affairs one is in all likelihood inclined to smell the rat, for very often



a separation supposed to be due to "incompatibility of views" is only a camouflage to conceal something very serious at the bottom. Even admitting that such incompatibility of views actually exists between a pair, it would seem to be an exceedingly flimsy and improper ground on which to base one's claim for divorce or judicial separation, as if the sanctity of marriage were nothing more than the triteness of a bare bargain or the mere business relations of a couple of contracting parties. Again it is impossible that two minds should ever entirely coincide, for if they did, the workmanship of God would be considered deficient, since no two elements in nature are exactly similar. "Minds differ as rivers differ" and Swift says with his usual acerbity that the only way to make two persons think alike would be to break their heads and transfer mutually the half of each brain into the other! A loving and cultured couple can pull on in the closest intimacy in spite of the difference, for example, in their political opinions, even when the husband is a believer in Communism and the wife sides with the Capitalist, or when the husband is a Government servant and the wife a Nationalist.

It is not the difference of opinion that matters but it is the difference in temperaments that leads to domestic bickerings, and the real danger arises when the one party has completely lost his or her love for the other. Ibsen in this case would certainly wish the wife to part from her husband and make a new alliance. Very well, but where is the line to be drawn? Who knows but after a time there might again be "incompatibility of views" with the other husband, a further loss of love and

consequently a further separation, for Ibsen sees no duties where he finds no love. Are there any limits to the number of husbands a woman should thus secure? Is she constantly to roll on like a stone gathering no moss, like a Shelley in pursuit of an ideal, till she finds a perfect partner with whom "incompatibility of views" would be impossible? It is not difficult for a wife in this wide world to find another man more learned, prosperous, sweet-tempered, healthy and handsome than her own husband, but is she on that account justified in deserting her partner and eloping with a stranger as Ellida thinks of doing in "Lady from the Sea"? It is sickening to read the last scene of Maeterlinck's "Monna Vanna", and one cannot help thinking that the dramatist had either his own axe to grind and his own problem to prove, or that he has degraded the character of his heroine by depicting her resolution to forsake her honest but sorely puzzled and suspicious husband and elope with the captive general.

But the question becomes more complicated when we think of a mother's duties towards her children. Even animals and birds take care of their young till they are of an age to shift for themselves. When a male bird of a particular species is killed, the female is said to pine and die after her mate. This is not romance but sober fact. Yet Ibsen seems to have an easy conscience in these matters, for in his "Doll's House" he makes Nora abandon her husband and even the three innocent children who are entirely unable to know the cause of the domestic storm. This she does, for Ibsen thinks her love-life to have been extinguished in her on her disco-

vering the unappreciative character of her husband. But human beings are a peculiar compound of the divine and infernal elements, and it is not astonishing if a good many persons give way to hypocrisy and meanness under very trying circumstances. Does this provide sufficient reason for the wife to abandon the husband? Is the wife herself absolutely above such conduct? Where is the guarantee that she would not have done likewise under identical circumstances? If Nora had acted as her husband did, and if he had abandoned her and her children, Ibsen would have foamed at the mouth with *sæva indignatio* at the brutality of the man. If women are thus encouraged to part from their husbands, the latter will all the more be tempted to claim the same right with results fatal to the stability of the social structure. This would be monogamy in theory but polygamy in practice—a retrogressive step from the path of evolution. And so it has actually come to be, for “companionate marriages” are seriously being advocated in Western and that too Christian countries. Very often we read of cinema “stars” taking divorce after an year of conjugal experience. They seem to marry in haste and seek divorce at leisure. To such a deplorable pass has our morality descended that appreciative life-sketches of these heroines of Hollywood together with their pictures in various postures, decorous or otherwise, swarm in our daily papers for the edification of the young. If Ibsen has shocked us by picking holes in our most sacred institutions, let us in return shock his followers by the plain question—is Ibsen to be regarded as a remoulder of society or a preacher of cinema-actress morality?

Marriage is the rule, divorce the exception. It is so in all religions; so may it ever be in society. One may reply, however, that Islam permits too much liberty in matter of divorce, but says Khan Bahadur F. L. Faridi in his contribution on "The Mussalmans of Gujarat" in Campbell's "Gazetteer", the spirit of Islam is repugnant to divorce and he quotes a "Hadith" that nothing is so hateful to Allah as a divorce between man and wife. It will be clear to students of Islam that the Qoran has intentionally hedged the question of divorce with such complications and difficulties (which need not be detailed here) as to make divorce in actual practice not so easy as it seems. It is not in India where a woman loves whom she marries but in the West where a woman marries whom she loves that the standard of morality is remarkably low. Mr. C. S. Ranga Iyer, quoting the American Judge Mr. Ben Lindsey in his "Father India" observes that the ratio of divorce in America is two to four. He also makes the startling quotation that there are at least fifty thousand girls in New York living with men who are not their husbands, girls who should become mothers and do not care to have children because of the attitude society would take towards them. Rather than live in "doll's houses" these girls think it more decent to flit and flirt about till youth and beauty last. Carry the Ibsenian gospel to its logical extreme, and there is no knowing to what depths of social degradation it may carry us.

The mother of the woman-emancipation movement in England was the talented Mary Wollstonecraft in her

"Vindication of the Rights of Women"; but it was the genius of Ibsen that gave it tremendous impetus and was responsible for its Europe-wide dissemination. A great man is often blamed for theories he never propagated, if the critics feel that those theories are but the effects of forces set going by the master. Ibsen never talked of birth-control, yet he placed women in a position to think independently about their exclusive welfare, and cultured ladies all the world over have eagerly welcomed this latest child of Eugenics. Birth-control, practised within due limits and proper restraints, is a boon to poor and respectable families, who are able thereby to regulate their progeny in proportion to their means. But it is likely to prove a potent instrument of destruction, when dissociated from moral safeguards. In that case no force will be so terribly devastating in its effects as birth-control, which will prove a veritable torpedo, blowing into smithereens the ship of society. If moral considerations are divorced from science, nothing is going to prevent unmarried persons of both sexes from having recourse to unlimited sensuality. Even married people will be tempted to drown the sacred duties they owe to Nature of propagating their species in an incessant round of fruitless voluptuous pleasures. Mr. Shaw himself is fully alive to the danger, for he observes:—"Just about 40 years ago (about 1890) the propaganda of Neo-Malthusianism changed the bearing of children from an involuntary condition of marriage to a voluntary one. From the moment this momentous discovery was made, childless marriage became available to male voluptuaries as the cheapest way of keeping a mistress, and to female

ones as the most convenient and respectable way of being kept in idle luxury by a man." It would perhaps be unkind to saddle Ibsen with consequences, the remote possibilities of which were beyond his ken; yet it is true he set the ball rolling, and that too in a direction where moderation yields to excess and liberty to license.

India is in dire need of social reform and can no longer afford to rot in inactivity by priding herself on the purity and sacrifice of her Suttees. Yet it would be suicidal of her to pin her faith on Ibsen's theories. It would be interesting here to contrast some of the old conservative ideals with the new-fangled ones introduced by Ibsen. In Indian mythology the saint Jamdagni is said to have ordered the execution of his wife Renuka who only happened to admire within herself the form of the handsome king Chitraratha. This is of course idealism running amuck, yet (minus the execution of the wife) its spirit bears some resemblance to the Christian thought that "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matthew V 28). Contrast this with Candida or Ellida seriously contemplating the exchange of a husband for a lover. Gandhari, wedded to a blind husband, voluntarily covers her eyes with a bandage all her life, for she chooses to endure the same infirmity from which her husband is suffering. On the contrary, Mrs. Alving in Ibsen's "Ghosts" comes to know that her husband suffers from a loathsome disease, and within an year of wedded life, instead of instituting divorce proceedings, flies straight into the hands of a lover. Chastity cannot surely be the monopoly of the East, and instances of

chaste men and women can be found in the mythology, history and literature of various countries. Tennyson's Elaine, "the lily maid of Astolat," loving Lancelot who is more than twice her age, refuses to believe her father who acquaints her of her lover's sinful connection with the Queen. Elaine is so full of love that there is no place in her heart for jealousy or other unseemly vices; in her, perfect love casteth out fear, even that of scandal. But Ibsen's heroines are only too eager to discover the real character of their husbands that they may "realize their selves" by other connections. Listen to the words that fell from the lips of the Master in the Sermon on the Mount:—"But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." (Matthew V 32). Contrast this text with the following edifying piece of conversation from Mr. Shaw's "Overruled":—

Mr. Lunn asks Mr. Juno:—"You're not her (Mrs. Lunn's) husband, are you?"

Mr. Juno replies:—"Not at present, but I'm on the list; I'm her prospective husband; you're only her actual one. I'm the anticipation; you're the disappointment."

It must not be supposed for a moment that I advocate a literal compliance with the lofty ideals mentioned above. It is both impracticable and absurd to follow these ideals literally in society so long as we are not angels; it is only their high moral spirit that is to be appreciated. Ibsen is again open to a serious fault. He seems to hold up the ideal of separation between man and

wife which is always the exception, not the rule. There can never be an ideal of wickedness except ironically. Nobody has ever heard of an ideal cut-throat, an ideal drinking bout, an ideal railway accident, an ideal outbreak of cholera or an ideal separation. There certainly are occasions when fighting (in self-defence), drinking wine (to those who are medically in need of it) and taking divorce (under reasonable circumstances) are quite legal and justifiable, but make fighting, drinking and divorcing your ideals in life and blow them forth to the world with the trumpet voice of an intellectual giant, and you will soon reap in the degradation of society an ample harvest of evil for the few random seeds you rashly happened to sow.

Ibsen is an incorrigible ultra-realist. He sees no devoted couple, no happy family at the hearth. Ibsen himself preferred to dwell in seclusion from society: he was too pugnacious to pull on amicably anywhere: he had few, if any, friends, for friends he considered "an expensive luxury." He always had a glass with a scorpion in it on his writing table. When the little creature looked ill, it was given a piece of soft fruit on which it fell furiously emptying all its poison into it, and thus grew well again. "Does not something of the same kind happen with us poets?" asks the unhappy Ibsen. Mr. M. P. Willcocks observes in his work "Between the Old World and the New" that to Goethe art was a mighty power flung into the air but perpetually fascinating and possessing the soul of the artist: while Ibsen's view of art was a toxin from which he must either rid himself or die of the poison it diffused in the system.



To live, therefore, was to break and smash and satirize, and to do so Ibsen had ceaselessly to be on the watch for defects in human institutions. Hans Anderson in one of his Fairy Tales talks of a wizard who constructed a mirror from which no good was visible but all evil was magnified. The wizard then broke it into bits, which went into people's furniture, their windows, their spectacles etc. and made all human beings censorious and fault-finding. But some unfortunate people, says the story, got a splinter of that mirror in their hearts and became in consequence inveterate evil-seers. Such, for instance, is Miss Mayo, who, poor soul, travelled through the length and breadth of a vast country of thirty crores of people, and saw nothing but their evil customs and shabby manners. Such too (though to a lesser extent) was Ibsen, a mighty thinker if there ever was one, a penetrating analyst of the female heart, but a cynic who is always an inverted idealist, aiming more at destruction than renovation. As Janko Lavrin says:—Ibsen is the sturdiest protestant and revolutionary of modern times: he always knew what to deny but he was never quite sure what to affirm. Ibsen's thought is negative: he seems to think that in order to construct we must first destroy. He does the destruction wonderfully well but leaves the construction to others.

Ibsen's influence on modern dramatic technique is permanent and wholesome. His influence on society is wider and deeper than was ever dreamt of in his philosophy. It will redound to his credit for all time that he served his people as a violent awakener from an age-long sleep and from the soothing conviction that all was well

under the sun. He gave considerable impulse to the woman's movement, though when the Norwegian Women's Rights League in 1898 hailed him as a preacher of feminism, he modestly denied having consciously done anything in that direction. He compelled us to revise our ideals, to see where and how far we had gone astray, and enabled us in his own way to set our house in order. His influence therefore is great as a stimulator and awakener, though not as a model to be blindly imitated in the reconstruction of society. After Ibsen, it is not possible to ignore women's voice in our activities which till recently were conducted by men alone. Women too will do well to remember that it is unsafe, if not ridiculous, for them to discard the willing and well-meant assistance offered by men. As Longfellow says:—

“ As unto the bow the cord is  
So unto the man is woman. ”

The road to social salvation lies not in isolation but harmony, not in mutual contempt but co-operation. Christ prophesies that the meek shall inherit the earth. Dr. Tagore beautifully remarks that if this be true, a day will come when the meek woman shall get the better of the stronger man, and after all the hand that rocks the cradle will be the hand that rules the world. Quite so; but then the modern New Woman of actual life and her unsexed Ibsenian and Shavian sisters of literature appear to be anything but meek. Yet to the idealist gleams of hope are ever visible in the distant horizon, and the prospect may brighten up in the near future. Let the woman only step into her legitimate birthrights—her

unquestioned rights as queen of Love, Purity and Beauty, obedient to her conscience, faithful to her duties, meek and humble in her behaviour, yet independent in thought, word and deed—and the modern woman may soon be expected to attain that ascendancy over the world which she undoubtedly commands over the heart of man.



## The Gleam of Idealism.

---

The very limitations of human nature are its privileges. Our failures are but ill-disguised incentives to further endeavour, while the sense of satiety which creeps upon us after the fulfilment of a desire gradually opens up to our vision an object greater and nobler than the one so recently achieved. The great American idealist R. W. Emerson observes in his essay on "Circles" :—" Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on midnoon, and under every deep a lower deep opens." There is no finality in nature, nor in art: cessation comes only when we fancy it. Nature is in constant progress; continually the old order changeth yielding place to new, and art is the eternal hankering of the soul to express the Absolute and the Infinite in forms that may appeal to the human emotions. The Zarathushtrian conception of the "Fravashi's" is one of the earliest philosophical records of idealism on earth. It preaches the eternal existence of absolute and perfect models whose copies only are to be found in the sublunar regions. Every man, animal, tree, stone and every other object conceivable has its own divine counterpart or Fravashi, and to be consistent, Ahura Mazda Himself is said to have His own Fravashi—the Nameless Name, the Causeless Cause, the "Parabrahma"—that baffles human conception and expression. But it was Plato who made the subject popular by his theory of Ideas. He held that the

Ideas constituted the only reality or pure being and were but poorly represented by their copies here below. Every table, for instance, should remind us of *the* table, the eternal archetype, the universal model, of which the earthly table is but a copy, and it is the function of philosophy to penetrate into its real characteristics. Hence the idealist bears in mind the highest idea it is possible for him to entertain of an object, and devotes his life to its realization. But ideals may often be formed though rarely if ever attained, for as Tennyson says:—

“ That type of perfect in his mind  
In Nature can he nowhere find. ”

It has been happily observed that every man is either born a Platonist or an Aristotelian, either of an idealistic or practical turn of mind. Materialists like Locke rely solely on their sense-data by which they grasp only the representations of things, and then reach the end of their tether. The idealists are not against the help of the senses, but they soar higher and try to attain the things themselves by their intuitions with the help of inspiration, perhaps in a fit of ecstasy. Isaac Newton may modestly talk of picking up pebbles near the ocean of knowledge, but the idealist is never satisfied till he dives beneath the deep and secures the pearls or loses his life in search of the ideal. It is easy for passers-by to feed themselves on the wayside berries, but the golden apples of Hesperides and the fruits of the garden of Alcinous are meant for heroes like Hercules and Ulysses, who must either have perfection or death. It is only by aiming at the highest that we succeed in achieving, if not the perfect, at least a tolerably high stage of the ideal.

This is very beautifully expressed by George Herbert who says :—

“Pitch thy behaviour low, thy projects high,  
So shalt thou humble and magnanimous be:  
Sink not in spirit: who aimeth at the sky  
Shoots higher much than he that means a tree.”

But idealism and realism presuppose each other, and like the eternal couples governed by the law of polarity—action reaction, male female, light darkness, heat cold etc., one can scarcely be welcomed for a long time without the other. The Aristotelian theory that art is imitation has long since been exploded. The object of the artist is not to present a perfectly realistic imitation of an object, but to dwell imaginatively on it and reveal the ideal aspects that the object may have attained in his own mind. As J. A. Symonds observes, the function of the artist is to seize and reveal the character of the imitated object at its very best, representing what it strives to be, expressing its truest truth, not what is transitory and conditioned by circumstance but what is permanent and freed from limitations in it. Thus idealism in art is based on and yet soars far above mere realism, without which, however, idealism may be only a glistening bauble for the delight of the æsthetic idler, while without idealism realism may appear coarse, inartistic and lifeless. Art can scarcely flourish on mere representations presented by the senses, till idealism enters and puts life into the picture and transforms it into something rich and strange.

Poetry, says Emerson, was all written before time was in some glorious archetypal region, and only the poet

with the finest susceptibilities can apprehend it, but when he comes to pen and paper, he forgets half the vision, substitutes something of his own, and thus miswrites the poem. Nature has to be transfigured by the idealistic vision of the poet, and in all true poetry, it is said, the real has to be idealized, the ideal to be realized. So too in painting and sculpture the artist has to depict Zeus as all majesty, Venus as perfect beauty, Hercules as absolute physical strength, and he can only do so by going beyond himself, and conjuring up in his mind, as far as it is possible for him to do, a vision of the ideal he wishes to portray. Indian art, says Dr. A. K. Coomarswami, is a form of "yoga", and the artist by self-identification with the soul of the object he wishes to reflect is able to penetrate into the heart of the mystery and explain its inner significance. Thus though Indian art may remain deficient in technique and in faithful representation of nature, it is eminently symbolical of the object, whose "rasa" or quintessence it succeeds in comprehending. Music again is the subtlest and most idealistic of arts. "Music", says Sir Thomas Browne, "is a sensible fit of that harmony which intellectually sounds in the ears of God". *That* harmony the musician strives to attain here below. Before beginning his song, the musician closes his eyes, sits as if in a state of religious "samādhi", and tries to tune the chords of his self to the pitch of that ideal song which he intends to bring down on earth.

Except in true art, it is the characteristic of idealism to be always in excess, disdaining the golden mean. The idealist always thirsts to know or achieve more,

and the realization of a part of the object only whets his appetite to further his knowledge about it. Idealism corresponds to our dreams, not reality; to our endless aspirations, not satisfaction. Leonardo da Vinci would follow a fair face that caught his fancy all day through the streets of Milan to make her the model of his artistic work. Sometimes he would fall in a deep reverie during the execution of his work, and said it was during that time that he did the substantial part of his business, fashioning the ideal in his mind. Michael Angelo pursued his ideal relentlessly, forsaking food and sleep, lest the figure cherished in his imagination may slip away for ever, and he is said to have toiled away even at night with a candle stuck in his pasteboard cap to leave both his hands free for work. Browning in his "Abt Vogler" describes that musician who in a moment of inspiration has created an exceptionally beautiful song, only to find it vanish irrevocably from his mind. He seeks consolation in the thought that nothing good can ever be lost, for it is only evil that perishes. He pins his faith on eternity which "affirms the conception of an hour", and soothes the artist soul within him by saying: "Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by-and-by."

It is in the unsatisfied longing for the ideal that its real worth consists: an ideal that is attained ceases to be an ideal. It is a paradox that an artist who in music, marble or colour, realizes the highest limit, has missed the true aim of art. Browning depicts in "Andrea del Sarto" a faultless artist, faultless but soulless, "faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null", (to use Tennyson's words), showing that genuine art consists



not in mere mechanical execution but in the depiction of infinite passion and ceaseless longing after an unattainable ideal. In one of the charming romantic tales of Principal F. W. Bain named "In the Great God's Hair", we are told of a man who continually aspired to have a glimpse of the beauty of the Goddess Laxmi. He was informed that the vision though lasting only for the hundredth part of a second would cost him his life. But the man was obstinate, gazed for one blessed second on the ideal Beauty, and was struck dead in consequence. But that was not all. In his next incarnation he took birth as a poet, and so strong was the influence of the ideal working in him even now, that he devoted his life to singing songs in pursuit of the Absolute Beauty, with the result that he was dubbed a lunatic by people of "common sense". I have often thought that this man may have been born in England as the poet Shelley, significantly nicknamed "mad Shelley" by his schoolmates. Shelley seems to have realized in one of his previous births what Absolute Beauty is, and in all his poetry, he is constantly thirsting for the Ideal in Nature, Love and Life. His poetry throbs with excitement, and one can feel in his lyrics the heartbeats of the singer who was to die young like his own creation, Alastor, in search of the Ideal. Wordsworth sings as if the ideal is already realized through contact with Nature; his tone is a tone of satiety, Shelley's of constant thirst. None, not even Shelley himself can explain the *raison d'être* of

" 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."

Wordsworth calms and soothes us with the thought of the inner presence of God in his creation to be realized by the poetic mind or the saintly soul; Shelley thrills and electrifies, and finally sweeps us off our feet by his poetic afflatus, which like his Wild West Wind is "tameless and swift and proud."

Idealism seldom achieves its immediate purpose, and has little to do with the useful or practical. It is not of the world worldly but fixes its aim in the region where alone the perfect types are attained. Ideals are often unreasonable and may even defeat their own object. India is the proud possessor of two mighty epics which are the storehouses of some of the most ideally conceived heroes and heroines that the world can boast of. We are told in the "Ramayana" that when the ornaments of Sita who had been abducted by Ravana were brought to Lakshmana, he could recognise only those which his sister-in-law used to wear on her feet, for the pure-minded hero had all along refrained even from casting his eyes at the face of Sita. So too when Sita was asked to say what Ravana was like, she drew a picture of the giant king's toe, for this ideal of Indian chastity affirmed that she had never raised her eyes to behold the face of her abductor. We doubt however whether in these degenerate days the evidence of a Lakshmana or a Sita would ever be seriously admitted in a Court of Law. But Sita's ideal soared above reason itself. When Hanuman, himself the ideal of a faithful and devoted general, discovered Sita in the garden of Ravana, he introduced himself by

means of Rama's signet ring, and humbly besought the lady to allow him to carry her back to Rama on his shoulders. But to Hanuman's amazement and to the amazement of all succeeding generations, Sita preferred to remain where she was in constant danger of her virtue rather than think of voluntarily touching a man other than her husband. Here the ideal almost defeats its own object. India has not much to say of Sita's powers of logical reasoning, but the crown of conjugal fidelity is indisputably hers.

In the Mahabharata, the ideal of wifely devotion displayed by the princess of Gāndhār verges almost on the ludicrous. This princess, called Gāndhāri, being married to the blind king Dhritarāshtra, bandaged her eyes all her life long, depriving herself voluntarily of those faculties which her husband was unable to enjoy. The man of "common-sense" would surely be heard to grumble:—"What pitiful farce are we having over here! As if one natural calamity in the family is not enough, here is another nuisance to pester the inmates of the house with her notion of conjugal fidelity." But an idealist is often guided not by the laws of the land but by his own laws, and so too the ideal "Sati". These noble characters are too busy with the attainment of their ideals to care a jot for the Philistine laugh with which their action may be received. What cared Jesus Christ whether people would follow or laugh out his sublime but impracticable advice to them to pluck out their eyes and cut off their hands in case they happened to swerve from the path of righteousness, or to turn the left cheek if the right be smitten? What mattered it to Gautama Buddha

or Swami Vardhman Mahavir if their ideals of love and non-violence were to be literally followed or respectfully set aside as unattainable by their adherents? But ideals have their own followers, fit though few. The world is always blest with a few individuals whose mission in life is to love their brethren even if their love be repaid with hatred, who are ever eager to quench their private wrongs in pity for the wrong-doer's person, and who always allow themselves to be duped rather than entertain a shadow of suspicion about the doings of the sons of man: and but for these noble idealists, would not the world be an infinitely worse place to live in than it is at present?

The idealist always believes in self-sacrifice to gain his cherished desire. He shuns society if that interferes with the attainment of his goal. He is ever cheerful and optimistic, for he is not to faint or falter till the ideal be won. He is never cynical, for a cynic has been well defined as an idealist turned sour. It is a mistake to call him idle. An idealist is often a giver of thoughts, leaving their fulfilment in the form of deeds to others. Hence idealists are generally poets, apostles, philosophers, not legislators, politicians and captains of industry. The idealist has ever to toil on in pursuit of perfection for he instinctively knows what the German philosopher has expressed so sententiously—either take Truth or seek Repose, but you cannot have the two together.

Love itself flourishes in the realm of idealism, and the lover invariably "sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt", and realizes in his beloved the archetype of beauty. How many souls have been stirred throughout the world by reading Plato's sublime description of love

in his "Symposium" and "Phædrus"? Plato talks of the innocent love devoid of all sensual thought, between two persons of different sexes, and even perhaps of different countries and creeds. "Amor omnia vincit"—love conquers all, but this love is far purer and holier than anything that the world dreams of. This noble affection has enriched the literature of the world with Dante's "Divina Commedia" and "Vita Nuova" and the sonnets of Petrarch. It was Platonic love for Vittoria Colonna that melted the great heart of Michael Angelo into poetry. But ideals are meant for the enlightened few, not for the uncultured masses. None but a lunatic would advocate the adoption of Platonic love by all the world, lest Plato's heaven be transformed into Pluto's hell. And such a transformation has unfortunately taken place as evidenced in the literature of England. Platonic love became a fashionable fancy, silly and dangerous, imported in the Court of Charles I by his French queen Henrietta-Maria to the inevitable degradation of that lofty sentiment. In Suckling's "Aglaura" and Davenant's "Platonic Lovers" this degradation is apparent, and in the Augustan age of English literature the word "Platonic" became a synonym for paramour.

Platonic love stands at the opposite pole to the love of Antony and Cleopatra, who consumed away their kingdoms in the fierce flames of their sensual attachment. But a Platonic lover is nothing short of a saint, who has crushed the brute within him, and who is able to see in the idol of his affections a woman as she ought to be seen in society—a goddess of sweetness and light. We Gujaratis seek this sublime ideal in Saraswathichandra's

love for the patient, suffering Kumud in the late Mr. G. M. Tripathi's masterpiece, or in the sacred attachment of those consecrated votaries of love, Jayâ and Jayant, in Mr. N. D. Kavi's well-known drama. There is a noble instance of Platonic love in Browning's "Ring and the Book" in the holy connection that subsists between the young priest Caponsacchi and the innocent girl-wife Pompilia. But this love is a form of idealism which has often been misinterpreted and degraded. How many sentimental Werthers have blown out their silly brains because their love (which they fancifully took to be "Platonic") was not reciprocated by married women? Shelley was a born Platonist as much as Keats was a born Greek, and according to Mr. Winstanley, even if Shelley had not read a line of Plato, yet some affinities would have surely existed in their works. After several love affairs, Shelley, already a husband and a father, took a fancy for an Italian girl Emilia Viviani, found in her as usual his long-sought ideal, called the affection Platonic, and immortalized it in his glorious poem "Epipsychidion". The poem is one of the finest in the English language, but it cannot sanctify a profane evanescent passion. It will ever remain a splendid monument of art raised on the frail basis of questionable morality. Platonic love is an exceedingly delicate subject, but unfortunately even in this province fools have rushed in where angels fear to tread.

Although idealism revels in excess and extravagance, it has to be admitted that there are circumstances where plain downright realism and common sense are more desirable. Each thing is best in its own place. It is useless to say to a gang of hardened criminals "Resist

not evil"; dangerous to cite before children "A man's foes shall be they of his own household": ridiculous to preach to an army of soldiers marching to do or die, the ideal of mercy—"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." We are told "Philosophy bakes no bread:" true; nor idealism either. If a cook in the kitchen were to enjoy idealistic flights and like King Alfred, think of conquering kingdoms, he will only end in burning his cakes. England may congratulate herself that Shelley was a poet, not a legislator, or otherwise the Godwinian principles with which he was inspired would have convulsed his country with a revolution similar to that which had broken out in France. It is pleasant to dream of ideal republics, but the control of affairs in matters political will always be in the hands of the "sophisters, economists and calculators" of the age. Politics is a sphere where the less idealism enters the better, and idealists in politics are generally acknowledged to be failures.

The love of Cato Uticensis for Rome has almost passed into a proverb, and Addison makes him transgress the limits of reason and say in his last moments:—"Who'er is brave and virtuous is a Roman." But Cato was a faint-hearted soldier, a philosopher and an idealist in politics, in times when neither idealism nor philosophy would pay. Finding his ideal shattered after the battle of Thapsus, he resolved not to survive the freedom of Rome, and consequently put an end to his own life, cheered in the pangs of death by Plato's philosophy

about the immortality of the soul. His mantle fell on his nephew and son-in-law Marcus Junius Brutus, another lovable personality, a visionary and Platonic philosopher, and unfortunately a politician. He is prepared to murder Cæsar because of his love for Rome, which, as he hastily concludes, would be tyrannized over by Cæsar. Brutus' character is irreproachable, (though Shakespeare's portrait of him is a bit idealized), but in politics he passes from blunder to blunder and after the battle of Philippi sought relief in suicide. Another man of the same stamp was Cola di Rienzi, known to English readers of fiction through Bulwer Lytton's "Last of the Tribunes." Though not such a model of virtue as Cato nor so disinterested as Brutus, he was devoted to the cause of the people and the sworn foe of tyranny. His head was filled with stories of the ancient glory of Rome, which he was romantically seized with the desire of reviving, but he was not of the sterner stuff of which politicians are made. During the brief time he was in power, Rienzi was unable to control the helm of government in the troublesome times of the 14th century and was eventually murdered in the Capitol by the very people whose cause he had so zealously espoused. And, nearer home, comes the instance of Mr. M.K. Gandhi, a virtuous and saintly person, who hates violence as much as he loves righteousness, but who too hastily took people as they are for what they ought to be, and in dreaming of an ideally perfect India, only succeeded in—burning his cakes! Mr. Gandhi, it appears, will go down in history as another illustration of the failure of idealism in the field of practical politics. But it is the privilege of an idealist to fail, while it is a matter of frequent observation how fortune favours



fools and flatters them with ill-deserved success. Only an idealist will realize that "failure is but half success"; it is only he that sees the necessity of perseverance and progress till the cherished goal is reached.

There is nothing, however great or good in this world, that may not lead us to something greater or better still. Every situation provides us with a stepping stone to enable us to ascend still higher in the scale of evolution. The finite is meaningless unless we connect it with the infinite; a man must be a sluggish driveller if he never attempts or aspires to be a superman. As Dr. Donne says:—"Be more than man or thou art less than an ant". Religion is a curse and patriotism a plague if they extend to one's own creed and country to the contemptuous disregard of everything else. But the ideal of religion should be world-wide benevolence, while patriotism should widen into universal brotherhood. Science, dealing with matter, seems to be the most materialistic branch of knowledge, yet it can, even in its own limits, be raised to idealistic heights. The idealism of science is seen in the theory of evolution. No organism can be considered perfect for it is constantly susceptible to numerous changes, till the atom, negligible to the naked eye, evolves into the stone, progresses into the mineral, bursts into the vegetable, advances into the animal and rises into the human kingdom, till it is finally merged in the Infinite.

Perfection and permanence cannot be predicated of anything in this universe, except of God, and in Him our highest notions of idealism must perforce terminate. The climax of idealism is "Bhakti", devotion, adoring

the unknown, the inscrutable Presence. The greatest of saints were the greatest of idealists, who often spoke the highest truths that were misunderstood by the people. It was in a fit of divine intoxication that Mansur Halláj walked the streets which resounded to his cry of "An ul Haq"—I am 'God. It was the ever-increasing love of the devotee for his Ideal that made the Sufi poet Jámi exclaim:—

"Az bas ke dar jân e figâr o chashm e bidâram tui  
Har ke paidâ mi shavad as dur pindâram tui."

"So thoroughly are my love-pierced heart and wakeful eyes permeated by Thy presence, O Beloved, that in everything that appears from a distance I realize Thy identity". St. Francis of Assisi was a changed man ever since he heard the call divine—"Francis, go and repair my house," and the singer of man became the Troubador of God. So perfect and intense is the love of saints for the Absolute Being, and so entirely transformed are they by this spiritual joy that Mirabai could realize the Lord Krishna, and Swami Ramkrishna Paramhansa was able to see the "Mâtâ" or Divine Mother in objects, which to our unenlightened vision are no more than figures of stone.

Let then the idealist advance on his path, confident in his high purpose, resolute to achieve the goal, be it Religion, Poetry, Knowledge, or Service to humankind. He is fortified in the strength of his virtuous convictions. He shudders even to contemplate evil to God's creation, but quails not in the persistent fight for the Truth against the Devil's brood. He is thrice armed in the happy possession of an untainted mind, and like Sir Galahad

his strength is as the strength of ten because his heart is pure. He knows that the rewards and comforts of life are not meant for him. He is aware that his path lies through failures, disasters and disappointments. He is conscious that the foul-mouthed fiend of slander is busy weaving the most provoking fibs behind his back. But every calamity only serves to steel the heart of this dauntless soldier of God; every failure cheers him on to pursue the cherished desire. He seeks his happiness not in the wayward working of the world but in his constant struggle to attain but a Gleam of the Ideal, for which he may seek inspiration in the lines of the Victorian Laureate:—

“There on the border  
 Of boundless ocean,  
 And all but in heaven  
 Hovers the Gleam.  
 Not of the sunlight,  
 Not of the moonlight,  
 Not of the starlight,  
 Oh young mariner,  
 Down to the haven,  
 Call your companions,  
 Launch your vessel,  
 And crowd your canvas,  
 And ere it vanishes  
 Over the margin,  
 After it, follow it,  
 Follow the Gleam”.



## “ He Comes, He Comes, He ever Comes.”



In all the fair creation of God man alone remains an insatiable creature, and in man the mind and heart require to be nourished more constantly than the coarser members of the human organism. But the heart thirsteth after the divine manna and will not rest content with the mere “flesh-pots of Egypt.” To live is just to long for; remove the craving for something unattained or unattainable, and man ceases to live or at least ceases to be human. Mankind has always lived and will continue to live in illusions; it is necessary only to adjust our illusions to the spirit of our age. Not that life is a wild goose chase, for illusions are but the feminine of ideals; the former is to the latter “as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine.” The firm in will and in mind will crave for the ideal; the mentally weak and effeminate will start in pursuit of illusions, but the degraded sensualist will hanker after neither. He is of the earth earthy; wine, women and wealth constitute the Trinity he adores, and his heart remains fast locked even before the “Open Sesame” of the mightiest spiritual call that ever resounded through the world. It has been wisely remarked that angels have no ideals, for to those fortunate beings ideal and accomplishment are identical; animals have no ideals for they cannot rise to so high a stage, being entirely a prey to their own low instincts. It is the proud privilege of the members of the human

kingdom only to soar beyond their instincts, and to stretch the hand of achievement almost beyond the limits of human possibility to grasp the Holy Grail or be consumed in the ashes of a magnificent failure.

One of the constant yearnings of the people of all times and countries is that their prophets who once graced the earth with their presence and were persecuted for their pains will at some future date return among them with a new gospel of peace and goodwill. It seems as if they were too great to die, and submitted temporarily to the God of Terrors only to defraud him of his victory and the grave of her terrible sting. We need food as often as we are hungry; we need the physician as often as we are ill; and God in His infinite wisdom knows when and where to send His spiritual physicians, and what gospel would be best suited to a nation in a particular stage of its development. The following lines of the Song Celestial of the Lord Krishna are an eloquent testimony to the tolerance, the fair-mindedness and the liberal spirit that breathe through the Hindu religion, and gain in significance rather than lose in novelty by repeated quotation:—"Whenever there is decay of righteousness, O Bhârata, and there is exaltation of unrighteousness, then I Myself come forth; for the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the sake of firmly establishing righteousness, I am born from age to age." (Bhagavad Gita IV 7-8). The Gita here does nothing more than to crystallize in immortal words the verdict of universal experience. When the footprints on the sands of time left behind by the prophets grow fainter, the earth reverberates with the cry of "He comes, he

comes, he ever comes", and we shall soon see how un-animously all religions and traditions provide for the future advent of great souls in the world.

Hinduism believes in the ten "avatâras" or incarnations of Vishnu. They all arrived to save the world from some terrible calamity, and from the order of their arrival we realize how consistently and wisely Vishnu assumed an "avatâra" suited to the conditions and evolutionary stage of the times. The nine "avatâras" were—the Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Narsinha, Vâman, Parshurâma, Râma, Krishna and Buddha. It is said that the last "avatâra" will be of Kalki, a man with a sword riding a white horse, coming to redeem the world at the end of the Kali Yuga. Buddhism is frankly atheistic and does not even believe in the existence of the soul; yet Buddha claimed to be in the direct line of the 24 Buddhas, whose noble deeds of self-sacrifice have been recorded in the entertaining pages of the Buddhist Jâtakmâlâ, and who found their perfect "avatâra" in Gautama Buddha in the 6th century B. C. But even he has prophesied the arrival after 5000 years of the Maitreya Buddha who will be the very crown and culmination of his creed. So too Swami Vardhaman Mahavir, the contemporary of Buddha and the founder of Jainism, was himself the last of the 24 worthy "Tirthankaras", and yet there will be great souls after him, for Jainism classifies Time into several vast ages, each of which claims its particular cycle of 24 masters.

The Jews hold that their prophet Elijah is not dead but sleeps in Abraham's bosom and awaits the arrival of Antichrist, when the prophet will proceed to the Hoyle

Land to set right the matters that have been so hopelessly out of joint. Certain Books of the Old Testament point unmistakably to the arrival of the Shiloh or the Messiah. As early as Genesis we find in XLIX 10:—"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be". According to Jeremiah XXIII 5-6:—"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise David a righteous branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called 'The Lord Our Righteousness' ". When Christ appeared, his followers maintained that he was the promised Redeemer—a statement stoutly repudiated by the Jews. Christ was crucified on Good Friday; he scarcely lay beneath the grave for twenty-four hours, for he is said to have arisen on Easter Sunday and bodily ascended and disappeared in the heavens. He postpones his future arrival till the world goes from bad to worse when his appearance will usher in the Golden Age. It needs the genius of a Milton or a Klopstock to say how the devil will be put to flight, how Death itself shall die, how sin and misery shall be annihilated, and how Christ will rule his Kingdom in peace and love. According to the orthodox Christian theory Adam was born B. C. 4000 and Christ will reappear 6000 years after Adam; so the coming of Christ and his Kingdom is due shortly about A. D. 2000, but the grown-ups of the present day will have to yield the privilege of enjoying the Millennium to posterity.

In the Gospel according to St. John XIV 16, 26; XV 26 & XVI 7 there is a definite promise given by Christ of a Comforter, which is the English word for the Greek "Paracletos". Dr. D. B. Macdonald in his "Aspects of Islam" argues the possibility of Hazrat Muhammad having misheard this word as "Periclutos", which means "the greatly praised". This enables us to understand the significance of the following words put in the mouth of Jesus in the Qoran LXI 6:—"I give you tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad". Now Ahmad, (which is much the same in meaning as Muhammad), signifies in Arabic "the greatly praised", and thus the Arabian prophet is identified by his followers with the Paracletos of St. John's Gospel as was Christ by his people with the Shiloh of the Old Testament. Stern was the decree of Hazrat Muhammad, however, when he closed the door of advent of all future prophets in the world, saying "There shall be no prophet after me." All human knowledge and experience militate against this strange pronouncement, and it is curious to notice that in the fold of Islam itself a loophole has been found by the Shi'as to admit not a prophet but a future Imâm. In the literature of Islam we read of the existence of the 12 Imâms, 11 of whom lived and died on earth, while the 12th known as Imâm Mehdi set out in search of his father, entered a cave in the city of Jâbilqâ and disappeared therefrom in 941 A. D. Even upto the 14th century, writes the late Saiyad Amir 'Ali in his "Short History of the Saracens", the Shi'as daily repaired at evening to the cave and requested him to come out, but he is due to appear again only to



restore the Millennium. This Imâm Mehdi is consequently known as "Al-Muntazir"—the Expected One. The ceremony at the cave or sanctuary is graphically described by Ibn Batuta in his "Travels".

According to Norse mythology, the people must patiently wait for the Ragnarok or twilight of the gods, when this present world, begrimed with crimes and sins, will be smothered in its own excess. It is then that the great God Odin and his son Balder the Good will be reborn, and to Vidar, another son of Odin, shall go the merit of stamping out the evil spirit Loki and his brood and establishing a righteous sovereignty on earth. There is a story connected with the religion of Zarathushtra, according to which the prophet had 2 sons—Ushadvâstra and Urvatadner, but that his third and last son will be born mysteriously thousands of years after his father's death. It is recorded in the Bundelesh that Zarathushtra once dropped his seed to the ground but the angel Nairiosangh received it and placed it in the custody of 99999 angels. At the proper time this seed will mysteriously enter the womb of a virgin named Aeretâtfedhri, who will be the mother of Soshyant—the promised apostle of the Parsees. Thus in matters religious the human soul yearns for the arrival of the Great One, and constant is the cry of the nations:—"He comes, he comes, he ever comes."

Hartley Coleridge, who carried into adolescence the fancies of his childhood, exclaims in one of his sonnets:—

"Oh, what a wilderness were this sad world  
If man were only man and never child."

This apprehension would have been entirely out of place in ancient mythological times, when men looked upon nature with the simple untutored gaze of a child: and even now some of our happiest moments are stolen in a humdrum life when we happen to be most childlike. In the mythologies of many countries we find certain ceremonies in which a god was, as it were, put to death only in order that people may wait for him and receive him with joy in the near future. Every day the sun passes through apparent birth and death; four times a year seasons come and go; once a year the vegetation crops up only to wither away and be born anew. These simple truths were mighty discoveries to our primitive forefathers who would represent these abstractions under dignified personifications and pompous ceremonials. Only a few instances may be quoted from Dr. J. G. Fraser's "The Golden Bough", which, if the paradox be pardoned, is the most interesting of encyclopædias. Adonis in Syria, Osiris in Egypt, Tammuz in Babylonia, Attis in Phrygia and Persephone in Greece represent the decay and revival of vegetation. Adonis, the youth beloved by Venus, is killed by a boar near a river in Phœnicia, which ran red with his blood. In answer to the heart-rending supplication of Venus, the Gods ordained that Adonis should be blest with life and vitality for six months and for the remaining six he should be consigned to the realm of the shades. This refers to the earth fresh and green during spring and summer, and dry and withered up during the two other seasons, when, as it were, people eagerly expect the arrival of Adonis. So too Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, is carried away by

Pluto, and when the weeping mother comes to seek her in the underworld, Pluto agrees to part with his beloved only for six months in the year, when there is joy and life at her arrival on earth. Osiris is made to represent, sometimes a corn-spirit or tree-spirit, sometimes the sun or moon, and is killed by his own brother Typhon. Huge crowds lament over his death and his sister-wife Isis is said to go in search of him. Then come the priests bearing the image of Osiris in a sacred ark whereupon people raise shouts of joy—"Osiris is found". We need not enter into similar other legends except to note that there is the usual lamentation over these dead deities who for a while return again to life. The poignant cry that is wrung from the hearts of the primitive people of mythological times is again the ever-unsatisfied yearning for the expected arrival of the Great Soul.

So deep-rooted is this longing that it is connected not only with deities and prophets but even with actual historical persons. A great king reigns not only in his country but much more in the hearts of his people, who cannot bear the idea of his death but patiently wait for generations for his re-arrival. Such a man was the world-renowned Charlemagne, who with his equally celebrated nephew Roland and his Paladins, had fired the epic and romantic genius of the Mediæval ages. The belief lingers in Europe that Charlemagne still sits, crowned and in full armour in Odenburg, waiting for the appointed time when he is likely to reappear and unsheathe his Joyeuse in defence of Christendom. A similar story is prevalent about Charles V of Germany. Tradition again wrestles with history in maintaining that Kaiser Frederick I of

Germany, called Barbarossa or redbear, was not killed in the Crusades in 1190 but is sleeping in a cave with six faithful followers. He is expected to rise and make Germany the premier nation in the world as soon as his red beard, which still grows daily, winds itself thrice round the table before which he sleeps. Mr. S. Baring Gould relates in his "Curious Myths of the Middle Ages" that once a shepherd happened to enter that cave and was asked the time by the Kaiser. On hearing the reply the Kaiser said "No, not yet," and sank in sleep again.

England, Scotland and Ireland have similar legends to tell about their heroes. Lazarus is not dead; he only sleepeth—said Jesus Christ about to perform one of his great miracles. The words apply to numerous national heroes and kings. King Arthur, whose exploits deserved to have been immortalized by the epic pen of Milton or of Scott, did not die but is said to have only sailed away. It is hoped that he will heal himself of his grievous wound and return on earth from his "island-valley of Avilion." A legend says that he is buried in England and over his grave are inscribed the words:—"Hic jacet Arthurus, rex quondam, rex futurus." (here lies Arthur, king for the present, king for the future.) The question what poor Arthur will do in present day England if he arrives now, may better be left to the Utopians. The fall of the Scottish King James IV with the flower of his army in the battlefield of Flodden 1513 is touchingly described in Scott's "Marmion":—

"He saw the wreck his rashness wrought;  
Reckless of life, he desperate fought,  
And fell on Flodden plain."

But here again the simple Scottish peasants refuse to be defrauded by history of the right of indulging in their fond imagination, and hold that James IV is not dead but only sleepeth to rise again and serve Scotland in the moment of her direst need. King Brian of Ireland, called Boromhe, triumphed over the Danes in many a field, but, though successful, was slain in the battle of Clontarf 1014. Should the Irishman be blamed if he expects the arrival of this hero at his country's greatest emergency?

Roderick was the last of the Gothic Kings of Spain and his misfortunes have been commemorated in English literature by Scott, Southey and Landor. Roderick violated Florinda, the daughter of Count Julian, whereupon, like Raja Jaichand of Kanouj in 1193, and the minister Mâdhav of Gujarat in 1297, the implacable old Count negotiated with the enemy, and in retaliation of a purely personal wrong, placed the virtue of thousands of the daughters of his country at the tender mercies of the Moorish soldiery. Roderick was overthrown by the great general Târiq in 711 in the battle of Medina Sidonia which inaugurated the era of the brilliant Moorish civilization in Spain. But the patriotic Spaniards wove pathetic and fanciful legends round the valiant figure of their last king. According to some accounts he was killed in battle; some attribute the cause of his death to drowning; others say he returned and in guise of a monk fought with the Moors but betrayed his identity when in the thick of the fight he inadvertently raised his war-cry. He then disappeared but not from the hearts of his countrymen who still expect his arrival

when they need him most. Strange to say, the same is the belief with regard to Bobadil el Chico, the last of the Moorish Kings of Granada, fondly supposed by his people to sleep at Alhambra, only biding his opportunity to reinstitute the Moorish government in Spain.

Siegfried, a warrior of truly epic dimensions, is the hero of the "Nibelungenlied". Invulnerable in all parts of his body but one, like the Persian Asfandiyâr and the Greek Achilles, he was killed by Hagen, and the account of the terrible revenge taken by his queen Kriemhild fills up the remaining half of that epic. This mighty hero is said to be ready to wield his irresistible sword Balmung for the protection of the good and the destruction of the wicked as soon as his time comes. William Tell, the great archer who shot the apple off his son's head, is the national hero of Switzerland and was a prominent figure in the Swiss War of Independence which terminated in the victory of Morgarten 1315. He is responsible for a number of legends, but all the same his people expect the help of his unerring shafts when the condition of Switzerland is at its worst. Ogier the Dane is the national hero of Denmark and belongs to the circle of Charlemagne. Morgue the fay took away this redoubtable hero to Avalon where he met King Arthur. Ogier was crowned with a wreath which made him forget the past as if he had drunk of Lethe's stream; but one day the wreath slipped from his brow, and his country and friends streamed into his memory. He hastened to fight for king and country but his work being accomplished and the paynims routed, he was recalled to Avalon by Morgue. The Danes, however, think

him immortal and await his return at the call of his country.

Certain less important personages, some of whom have been extracted from Miss Laura E. Poor's work "Sanskrit and its kindred literatures," may now be disposed of. King Olaf Tryggvason, who introduced Christianity into Norway, was defeated in 1000 by Swolde, King of Sweden, and was compelled to fly to the Holy Land, where he became a hermit. At a great age he died or rather fell asleep only to rise and rush to the rescue of Norway when threatened by any European power. In the history of Servia there is an unforgettable date, 1389—the date of the battle of Kossovo, in which the Czar Knez Lazar, who had been recently married as related in a Russian song, was defeated and slain by the Turks. The greatest Servian hero is Marko who fled from the field and took refuge in a cave. Both king and hero are of course not dead but sleep the sleep of ages waiting to realize that their country's emergency should be their supremest opportunity. The very same may be said of Ivo, the national hero of Montenegro; of Sebastian, the valiant king of Portugal cut down in the flower of his life in Morocco 1578 in the battle of Al Qasr al Kabir; and of Montezuma, last of the Aztec emperors:—all of them preserved by tradition from death and ready to shake off their slumbers at their country's call.

But our breath is fairly taken away when we hear of the belief of the French peasantry that Napoleon Buonaparte, whom the world thinks as dead as Queen Anne ever since 1821, will escape from his grave as once

he did from Elba, and again lead his almost unconquerable Guards and sweep through Europe with the fury of a tornado. This belief is found to be dying hard, for even in modern cultured times the superstitious people will fondly choose to await their leaders who died only a generation or two ago. In 1918 the Irish dramatist Mr. Robinson wrote a play, "The Lost Leader," based on the belief prevailing in the peasantry that their distinguished nationalist hero Parnell, who died as late as 1891, was still alive. Who knows, a hundred years hence ignorant people will agree to his death and yet, true to age-long tradition, wait for his re-arrival. As Dryden says we men are but children of a larger growth. To children as to unsophisticated peasants it is all the same whether these heroes are dead or alive, for they are ever alive in the childish imagination as well as in the grateful hearts of their countrymen, and can be conjured up when their country needs them most. It is not at all strange that there should be no Hindu among all the heroes we have enumerated, for the Hindus believe in rebirth, and hence they do not see the necessity of troubling Ashoka or Prithviraj or Pratap or Shivaji to come to their country's help, knowing as they do that these will in the fulness of time be re-incarnated in the forms which their merits best deserve to assume.

We have done with national heroes who are expected to return; let us now take some instances of sleepers whose arrivals are not at all eagerly expected. Rip Van Winkle is reported by Washington Irving to have slept for 20 years in the Kaatskill mountains of America, but we need not expatiate upon his adventures when he



woke up, since, to use the impudent phraseology of Macaulay, they are known to every boarding school girl. The seven Christian sleepers of Ephesus, frightened at the persecutions of the Emperor Decius in 250, hid themselves in a cave, and though by order of the Emperor the cave was blocked with stones, they managed to live, and enjoyed an unbroken sleep of 309 years. Numerous are the legends associated with them. They are mentioned in the Qoran, chapter XVIII called "Kahaf" or the Cave, according to which the seven men are accompanied by a dog who is one of the few animals admitted according to tradition in the Muslim paradise. One of the most fascinating of Greek myths, rendered all the more charming by the honey-flowing pen of Keats, is that of Endymion, the handsome shepherd youth, who enjoyed perpetual sleep in Latmos. Diana, for once forgot that she was goddess of chastity, and the serene moonbeams of her love gently touched his budding lips and slipped away.

We owe the fine romantic tale of Tom the Rhymer or Thomas of Erceldoune to the endeavours of the great Sir Walter Scott, who breathed a new soul in the minstrelsy of his age and country. The name of Thomas is associated with "Eildon's triple heights", familiar to readers of Scott. A fairy once took him away into a cave in these hills where he fell asleep for 7 years. He was however permitted to return to upper earth on his promise that on the appearance of a certain sign he would immediately come away. Once at a convivial party he saw the sign, and faithful to his word, he left his friends abruptly and never returned. Scott in his "Demonology

and Witchcraft" calls him the Merlin of Scotland. Very similar is the story of the German knight Tannhauser, who abandoned his beloved and sought admission in a hill-cavern where Venus held her Court and there spent his years absorbed in sensual pleasures. Smitten with remorse he once came on the upper world and confessed his sins before the Pope, who clearly told him that the knight could no more hope for salvation than the dry staff which he was holding in his hand could be expected to bud again. Tannhauser was disappointed and returned to Venus and her pleasures, but since the all-merciful Lord is ever anxious to hold out hopes of absolution even to the most abandoned of mankind, the Papal staff actually did bud. A thorough search was made for the missing knight but he was nowhere to be found, though, sure enough, he will one day emerge from his degraded life to taste the sweets of salvation.

Another gentleman, said to have enjoyed a hearty sleep, is the huge pot-eared giant of the "Ramayana," named Kumbhkarna, the younger brother of Ravana. When the latter's cause was tottering in the great war, he sent a whole retinue to wake up the sleeper. The men made such an infernal noise with their drums and conches that the very birds of the air fell dead, but no effect was created on the Sleeping Beauty! Numerous other means were tried, which were far from being gentle, and finally a regiment of elephants was made to pass over the giant, who at last awoke and immediately devoured a thousand men to appease his hunger. On the field of battle too he proved a terror to his foes, whom he swallowed alive, some of them, however,

managing to scramble through his ears and nostrils, only to be swallowed again. The monstrous career of this person was at last cut short by the arrows of Rama. Similar to him is the sleeping giant of Slavonic mythology named Sviatogor, who refused to wake even when mountains were tumbled on his body. When soundly hammered, however, by another giant, he woke up and complained of his slumbers being disturbed by the throwing of pebbles.

We have seen various people awaiting the arrival of their religious and national saviours, but such is the wholesome dread inspired in certain people by several wicked votaries of the Devil that they are apprehensive of the arrival of these fallen souls towards the end of the world, though they momentarily wish that their hated advent may be indefinitely postponed. Here too the child imagination seems to be at work. History has often told us of the names of bloodthirsty scourges of God like Attila and Tamerlane being used in the nursery to frighten children to sleep even after the world was relieved from their terrors. So too in certain nations there runs a thrill of fear that some of their most hated conquerors may appear again to deluge their country with blood. The Arabian tyrant Zohâk, who in prehistoric times gained the throne of Iran by killing the King Jamshid, was a veritable minion of the Devil, who once kissed his shoulders and caused two serpents to sprout up therefrom. Two men were daily slaughtered and from their brains the reptiles were nourished. The people were at length relieved from the oppressive yoke of this human monster by King Faridun, of blessed memory,

who again inaugurated an era of peace and prosperity. Among the Parsees, in whose annals the darkest page is that occupied by the Arabian tyrant, the legend runs that he is not dead but alive, fast chained in one of the mountain-caves of Demavend. He is said to lick his chains all day and night till they become sufficiently lean for him to break through, but as soon as he proceeds to snap them, the cock crows at dawn and once again the chains assume their original dimensions. But a day will come when the bird will be found to be a bit slow in discharging its duty; Zohák will then burst his chains asunder, plague the world with his iniquities, and chaos will come again. The Behman Yasht, which contains a description of the colloquy between Ahura Mazda and Zarathushtra, narrates the misdeeds of Zohák and relates how the sons of Zarathushtra, assisted by Behrám Varjávand and Dastur Peshotan in the work of renovation, will proceed to subjugate him. Zohák will be overpowered, but he will re-emerge again and again, till in the age of Soshyant, the third and last son of Zarathushtra, he will be finally crushed by the hero Sâm, the grandfather of the great Rustam.

The chosen messengers of God have ever thought it fit to warn their followers against the guiles of false prophets, as in Matthew XXIV 5, 11 and 24: but it is in the first Epistle General of John II 18 that we hear of the cursed Antichrist:—"Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time". St. John applies the term Antichrist to one who denies the incarnation of the eternal

son of God (IV 3), but the usual Christian belief is that the advent of Antichrist will precede the second coming of Jesus. Islam, however, takes up the idea in right earnest, and among the signs of the approach of the Resurrection we find the advent of the ill-favoured Antichrist called "Masih-ud-Dajjal", who, like a second Zohák, will poison the world with the deadly effluvia which breathe under the upas tree of his malevolent regime. But his reign will soon be terminated with the advent of Jesus and the dawn of Resurrection.

The Christians believe that the Resurrection will be preceded by the advent and overthrow of the terrible Gog and Magog, referred to several times in the Bible and particularly in Revelation XX 7, 8, according to which "Satan shall be loosed out of his prison and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea". According to a British legend, however, there are two giants, Gog and Magog, who were the last of the offspring of the 33 wicked daughters of the Emperor Diocletian. These women having murdered their husbands were set adrift in a ship. They fell into the hands of a band of demons by whom they had several children. Among them Gog and Magog only survive, being brought in chains to London to serve as porters at the royal palace of their conqueror. Readers of W. H. Ainsworth's "Tower of London" will remember that the three natural sons of Henry VIII were nicknamed Og, Gog and Magog, because of their Herculean size and strength. But among the numerous conflicting

legends about these interesting persons the most popular is that given in the Qoran XVIII 93 and XXI 96, according to which Gog and Magog, called in that work Yájuj and Májuj, are the barbarian unbelievers of East Asia, to foil whose repeated expeditions the "Sadd e Sikandari" (rampart of Alexander) was built. According to one version, the world-renowned Wall of China, 1500 miles in length, was constructed in B. C. 221 by King Shi Hwang Li only to prevent the frequent attacks of these barbarians, sometimes called Huns. Whoever they were, they have left behind them a name at which the world grows pale, and among the signs of the Muslim Resurrection, we are not surprised to read of the eruptions of Gog and Magog who are supposed in future to overrun Jerusalem.

We have reviewed the supposed advent of great souls, both good and bad, but we shall now turn to certain unfortunate men who are cursed to wander continually on the face of the globe as a punishment for their sins. The first murder in history according to the Bible was committed by Cain who, in a fit of jealousy at his offering being rejected by God, slew his more favoured brother Abel. Thereupon God inflicted on Cain a lingering punishment and set a mark upon him lest any finding him should kill him. Then the Lord dismissed Cain from His presence with the words:—"A fugitive and vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (Genesis IV 12). Several legends are associated with the name of the Wandering Jew. Goethe once cherished the ambition of making it the subject of an epic, and it appears from the plan of the work sketched in G. H.

Lewes' "Life of Goethe" that the German poet intended to delineate in the Jew not a wholly unworthy character. M. Eugene Sue's novel "The Wandering Jew" is a disappointment, for the author bestows very little attention to that character. The usually accepted story is that Christ on the Via Dolorosa was pressed down with the weight of the Cross and halted to take rest by the door of Ahasuerus the cobbler. But the boorish man drove him away with insults whereupon Christ said:—"Verily I go away, but tarry thou till I return." And thus began the wanderings of the Jew who reaches the age of one hundred and then suddenly becomes a young man of thirty. He is able to speak the language of every country he visits, but he is held in abhorrence everywhere for he is said to carry cholera with him wherever he goes. Few must be so anxiously awaiting death as the Wandering Jew does, but he can expect no relief till Christ comes to earth again. It is said that in all likelihood the pathetic figure of this Jew is an impersonification of the entire Jewish nation, which, after an exceptionally chequered history, now wanders over the earth since the final conquest of Jerusalem by the Emperor Titus in A. D. 70. There is a similar legend of the "Wild Huntsman", cursed by Christ to wander continually for not permitting the prophet to drink water out of a horse-trough, but pointing him out the hoof-print of a horse wherein some water was collected. Mr. Baring-Gould quotes the Icelandic legend of one Vidforull who is a constant wanderer, and at the end of every three hundred years casts off his skin and becomes young again.

In the Mahabharata we come across the legend of Ashwatthâma, son of the Guru Drona, who wreaked a cowardly revenge for the slaughter of his father by killing all the children of the Pândavas in one night as they were asleep. Draupadi, the mother of the children, was beside herself with grief and with her usual impetuosity clamoured out for revenge. But the noble lady soon brought herself to a more charitable frame of mind, and asked the Pândavas not to slay the slayer, lest his mother's heart may be torn by the same agonies with which her own heart was afflicted at the massacre of her children. Besides, the slaughter of a Brahmin and that too the son of one's own Guru would be an inexpiable crime according to Hindu ethics, and so the Lord Krishna was satisfied with disgracing Ashwatthâma by depriving him of the jewel which he always wore on his forehead. The Brahmin was then cursed by Shree Krishna to wander continually on earth with worms in his head and festering sores on his body for a period of 3000 years. But assuredly by this time this Wandering Brahmin's miseries must have come to an end. In one form or the other the legend of the Wandering Jew has arrested the attention of the Europeans as is seen in the story of the "Flying Dutchman", for the origin of which we are again indebted to the prince of story-tellers, Sir W. Scott. The "Flying Dutchman" is the name of a ship; a frightful murder was committed among the passengers in punishment whereof plague broke out among the crew. Since no harbour would ever admit this ill-fated vessel, it is doomed to wander eternally on the deep, and the very sight of thi



phantom ship is supposed to bring misfortune to the mariners. Scott refers to it in his "Rokeby" thus:—

"Full spread and crowded every sail,  
The demon Frigate braves the gale;  
And well the doomed spectators know  
The harbinger of wreck and woe."

This essay may be considered deficient if it fails to take record of certain great souls who in return for their sanctity are blest with immortality. Such a man in Islamic literature is Al Khizr (cf. Al Qoran XVIII 64) identified by some with the prophet Elias and by others with St. George, the patron saint of England. This Khizr is said to have gone in search of the Fount of Immortality which is situated in the remotest parts of the earth and enveloped in Ogygian darkness. Khizr reached the spot, accompanied, it is said, by Alexander the Great, and became immortal by drinking the "Âb-e-Hayât" or Water of Life, while Alexander lost his way in the darkness, and the world-conqueror returned disappointed to die at thirty-two. One of the holiest figures in Firdausi's "Shahnameh" is that of King Kaikhusru who after a beneficent reign was invited in a dream by the angel Sarush to prepare himself for "the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns". The King announced his dream to the people, made his will, and despite the entreaties of his heroes, Zâl and Rustam, immediately set forth on his journey followed by his weeping people (as Shri Rama was followed by the people of Ayodhyâ when he proceeded to drown himself in the river Saryu). The numbers of the people gradu-

ally diminished and the king disappeared as soon as he reached a fountain, and was never more to be seen again, dead or alive. The Persian belief is that the Lord blest the virtuous King with immortality. In the Zarathushtra-nameh, it is recorded that Dastur Peshotan, the devout son of King Gushtâsp, was given by the prophet a cup of milk on drinking which he attained immortality. We have seen above how Peshotan is expected to help the sons of Zarathushtra in the renovation of the world. When Parsis of the present day offer their short prayer—"Doâ Tandarusti" (invocation of blessing), they do not fail to include these two immortals, King Kaikhusru and Dastur Peshotan, in the list of their nearest and dearest ones. In the Arthurian legends we are told how Joseph of Arimathea, the first to take charge of the mortal remains of Christ, derives eternal life and nourishment from his constant contact with the mysterious cup called the Holy Grail.

These legends are sometimes not without a dash of humour. A good many stories are associated with the Hebrew legend of the Man in the Moon—the man whose face only is apparent to our imaginative vision in the full moon. It is generally believed that the only crime committed by this poor man was that he collected fagots on the Sabbath day and thereby broke the divine commandment, for which he is doomed to dwell permanently in the moon, and probably be a constant spectator of all that transpires in the sublunar world. According to Numbers XV 32-36, however, he was stoned to death by order of Moses. The so-called dancers of Kolbeck are said to have been doomed to perpetual life because they once

desired to spend eternity in their mad gambols. But here we are in danger of crossing over into the region of fairy tales.

Hinduism has also its contribution to make to this list of the immortals. The great saint Agasthya, renowned for his prodigious feat of once having sipped away the ocean, is said to be still alive somewhere in Travancore on a mountain which bears his name, and from which Tamraparni, the sacred river runs "through caverns measureless to man down to a sunless sea". But tradition is a bubble that could be made to swell to any extent till it is pricked by the pin of history. The Hindus have endowed the following seven persons with immortal life—Ashwattâmâ, Bali, Vyâsa, Hanumân, Vibhishana, Kripa and Parshurâma. Out of these the mind loves to dwell on two mighty heroes—Parshurâma and Hanumân. In the Ramayana, we come across the mighty Brahmin warrior-sage, Parshurâma, considered to be one of the avatâras of Vishnu. He was the son of the sage Jamadâgni, the devotee of Shiva, and in his wrath had twenty-one times exterminated the members of the Kshatriya caste. The pride of this great but ferocious soul was humbled by the youthful Rama, who had been defiantly called upon by the old warrior to bend his mighty bow. Shri Rama did the work with the greatest ease whereupon Parshurâma was humiliated, and his "tej" or spiritual merit left him and was absorbed in Shri Rama. Parshurâma then went and settled in the Himalayas, where he is said to dwell eternally. One of the greatest characters in the Ramayana is that of the noble monkey general Hanumân, the very beau ideal of devotion and

fidelity, whose affection for Rama equalled and probably surpassed that of Sita herself. Hanumán simply could not bear separation from Rama, who, in return for his great services, endowed him with immortality. It is said that wherever the Ramayana is recited, in whatsoever part of the world, Hanumán is invariably, though invisibly, present, lending a patient ear to the description of his own adventures, and at the close of the narrative, heaving a deep sigh from his heart, saying—"Ha! those days are gone."

True, indeed, those days are gone. Gone are the mighty souls of old, the prophets, the kings, the heroes, that fought the good fight or spread the Light of His message over erring humanity toiling in the darkness. They are gone but not for ever. Religion, tradition and literature declare with one united voice that they are not dead but alive, only biding their time to come to our rescue. But why wait indefinitely for them? Open but your hearts and see within, and you find them all alive—the purity of Zarathushtra, the godliness of Christ, the righteousness of Rama and Krishna, the desirelessness of Buddha, and the non-violence of Mahavir. Open but the heart and you see within the patriotism of heroes, the tenacity of stubborn idealists or the fearlessness of the fighters of the Lord. Close up your heart, and your prophets and heroes sink into a deathlike sleep and you have indefinitely to wait for them. There are perhaps few who indulge in evil for evil's sake, and the divine superscription over whose hearts may have been almost obscured by the rust of their iniquities. If these again only care to be self-introspective, they will find the sins.

of Zohâk and Gog and Magog and all their tribe reflected in the Kingdom of the Devil that is within them.

Nearly two decades ago, the Rev. C. F. Andrews was expounding the message of Tagore at a select gathering of admirers at Ahmedabad. The wonderful emphasis with which Mr. Andrews uttered the line of Tagore, which appears as the heading of this essay, stamped it with unforgettable force in my memory. In moments of sadness and depression, when life's little candle flickers in unusual gloom, the haunting music of the line reminds me of the advent of the Great Soul, coming in due season for the protection of the good and the chastisement of the wicked, but dwelling perennially in the heart of the seeker of the Truth, from whom at times breaks the unconscious cry:—"He comes, he comes, he ever comes."



## The Test of Shri Krishna's Character.

---

Great men are the veritable epitomes of their times, synthesizing among themselves the leading characteristics of a whole age, or standing on the brink of a departing epoch and foreshadowing the "yuga" to come. They work not by the slow process of common sense and logic but by a heaven-guided intuition that soon carries them ahead of their less-gifted contemporaries. Great men are said to be great at all points, but this rule (if rule it be) admits of many exceptions, for very often men who are intellectually head and shoulders above their fellows are deplorably deficient in their morals or cut a sorry figure as reformers, warriors or administrators. Some of them may have reached the topmost rung of the ladder of spiritual perfection, and yet may have been entirely dissociated from mundane affairs. There is absolutely no character in universal history who has touched the circumference of life at so many points as Shri Krishna, whose various achievements in different departments of his glorious existence, sacred or secular, have resounded through the length and breadth of our country for the last five millennia. The greatness of Krishna is manifest in various phases of his life—as child, student, friend, lover, warrior, king, ambassador, philosopher, Lord of Yoga, prophet and full incarnation of the Divinity.

"One crowded hour of glorious life  
Is worth an age without a name—"

says Sir Walter Scott, but Krishna's was a long and rich life of 125 years, and yet crowded with hourly achievements that have shed perennial glory over his name.

But Krishna has paid the penalty of his greatness as all men of might have done, for we now find our hero's name beset with an inextricable mass of myths and traditions from which it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to judge his character. But these are not all, for traditions are almost invariably accompanied by exaggerations, and they are none too restrained when the man in connection is regarded as the complete incarnation of God. The adventures in war and love of any knight-at-arms are hedged round with a halo of romance; and traditions and exaggerations have transformed the life of Krishna almost into a fairy tale. And lastly comes the allegorical touch and more or less every hero in epic poetry sooner or later falls a victim to this process, by which his adventures are made out to be other than what they actually were. The critic must consequently have the necessary patience and perseverance to remove these layers, accumulated by adoring but uncritical ages, before he comes into contact with the actual Krishna. But the traditionalists and allegorists have not worked in vain. Take Krishna as a historical character and he remains "one without a second"; take his life as a fairy tale and it is the most absorbing tale of its class that we have read; take him as a figure in romance or allegory, and we shall have to conclude that nowhere in the world's domain of poetry or fiction can be sought that soul-enthraling charm which surrounds

the magic name of Krishna, which feeds the imagination, and fills the hearts of poets and devotees for ages in succession, and which inundates our Indian literatures with that indefinable "light that never was on sea or land."

Two opposite poles of criticism meet in Krishna's character. On the one hand he is praised as the full incarnation of God and regarded as above all human eulogy; on the other hand Western scholars condemn him for his "Machiavelian policy" and "treacherous dealings with his enemies". How can a "moral poem" like the Mahabharata be written, asks Prof. E. W. Hopkins, when its very heroes do ignoble things? The same critic asserts in his "Great Epic of India" that Krishna openly violates rules of honour on the ground of tit for tat. In his "Religions of India" the same writer goes further and says—Krishna in the Mahabharata is "a sly, unscrupulous fellow continually suggesting and executing acts that are at variance with the knightly code of honour." How can one and the same person inspire unmeasured eulogy on the one hand and unstinted condemnation on the other? Sure enough it argues the necessity of laying down a criterion by which to test the character of the hero.

How then are we supposed to solve the puzzle that is Krishna, when various writers have approached his life from vastly different points of view? Should we allegorize the life of Krishna throughout as Pushtimârgiya Vaishnavas would like to do in imitation of the "Subodhini", the commentary on the Shrimad Bhâgwat by their great leader Shri Vallabhâchâryaji? Should we



accept all that the Shrimad Bhâgwat has to say in its tenth chapter and justify all that Krishna did, and assign reasons for his conduct as Shukdevji does before King Parikshit? Is it in the fitness of things to purge the life of Krishna of much of the exaggeration and allegory as Mr. C. V. Vaidya has done? Are we justified in rationalizing Krishna's life to such an extent as to divest our hero of his very divinity as Babu Bankimchandra has attempted in imitation of M. Renan's "Life of Jesus"? Shall we safely avoid all pitfalls by adopting the view of Mr. Dhirendranath Pal that the writers of the Mahabharata have deliberately laid all possible crimes, committed by individual heroes in the great Epic, at the door of Krishna, because he was considered above good and evil and was consequently untouched by those crimes? Are there any grounds to tempt us to accept Mr. Suryarao's theory that the real motive for the deification of Krishna was to set up a rival figure to Buddha, and that accordingly a spurious dummy Krishna was fabricated and various glorious but false legends attributed to him? Are we to be guided by another theory trotted forth by some scholars of there being two separate Krishnas, the one serenading in Gokul and Vrandâvan, the other being the guide, philosopher and friend of the Pândavas at Kurukshetra? Or finally in our despair shall we dismiss Krishna altogether as an abstraction meaning black as Arjuna was another abstraction signifying white? Thus, many are the shifts and subterfuges to which the bewildered commentators are driven in attempting to solve the puzzle that is Krishna.

In all humility of heart let me venture to put for-

ward my view of the matter. It has been admitted that Krishna was a Yogeshwara, a fully emancipated soul, a personality no longer affected by worldly longings, but one who after obtaining salvation was pleased to work during the allotted span of his life, not for his private ends but for the betterment of humanity. He had subdued his ego, conquered his self and identified it with the Self of the Universe. He had no desire to fulfil, no selfish aim to accomplish, for he had realized the greatest of all aims and desires, to secure which is to secure all that is worth achieving. Krishna's thoroughly detached attitude is explained by himself in the Gita IV 14 where he says:—"Nor do actions affect Me, nor is the fruit of action desired by Me:" and verses 22 and 41 of the same chapter substantiate the statement still further. Krishna had become an instrument in God's hands to work His Divine Will, for his own personal will had been merged in that of God. Morality, as defined by Mr. R. A. Rogers, is the body of laws accepted by an age or community as correct principles for determining the true worth of actions, and expressed in the form of judgments of approval or disapproval. But a God-identified person is above all "ages" and "communities" above all "laws" and "judgment", all "approval" and "disapproval". He follows the law of his own enlightened being and is not bound by external rules and regulations. Ethics may be defined as the science of the good, but one who is devoid of the self must not be expected to submit to our standards of good and evil, for he is guided by his own highly-evolved criteria. Morality or immorality cannot be predicated of Krishna who had

renounced his ego, as a coat is meaningless in the absence of the body. It is the ego that prompts the individual to perform actions most beneficial to his interests, but a person who has sacrificed the "I" within him and identified it with his Maker has evidently nothing to gain or lose, no axe to grind, no purpose to serve, except what his Lord enjoins him to do. His will, purpose and deeds are not his own but the Almighty's. We may criticize his actions as good or bad from our own standards, and yet he is as much detached from us and our points of view as is the lotus from the mire in which it stands.

That Krishna was a Lord of Yoga and a fully emancipated being it would not be difficult to show. During the Râjsuya Sacrifice recorded in the Mahabharata so eminent a personage as Bhishma was the first to do him divine honours, and was unanimously supported by the assembly, where King Shishupâla of Chedi, the only dissentient voice, paid for his insolence with his life. Krishna was not only well versed in arts and sciences which he had studied under the Rishi Sândipani, but the twelve years of exile of the Pândavas were spent by him in spiritual meditation and yogic practices under the Guru Ghora Angirasa. In the Gita Krishna refers to himself as God, as every God-identified person is entitled to do, as Jesus who observed: "I and my Father are one," or as Mansur Hallâj, the Persian Sufi, who said: "An al haq" (I am God). In the eleventh chapter of the Gita Krishna shows to Arjuna his omnipotent form, which according to the Udyoga Parva of the Mahabharata he had once manifested during his embassy to

the blind King Dhritarâshtra. One can proceed at great length to illustrate from the life of our hero his regard for truth, his catholic love, his bravery, generosity, selflessness, impartiality, wisdom, foresight etc. But the Hindu scriptures and especially the Gita are enough to show that Krishna was a full-fledged Yogeshwara and a completely emancipated personage.

A good deal of ink has been spilt over the vexed question of the "immorality" of Krishna, who is supposed to have danced and otherwise associated with numerous "Gopis" or cowherd damsels in the arbours of Gokul and Vrandâvan. All this may be very fascinating as recorded in song or ballad, but, if true, has certainly a devastating effect on the character of our hero. Unfortunately some of the arguments put forward in defence of Krishna's "immorality" in the Shrimad Bhâgwat present him in anything but a favourable light. In that work the saint Shukdevji tells king Parikshit that just as fire consumes all kinds of materials but is never polluted thereby, so too no blame can attach to Krishna even when he violates the social or moral law. Another argument was that God is immanent in all His creation: hence the question of adultery with another man's wife does not arise at all in the case of Krishna who was immanent in all women and the master and owner of every thing, man or woman, in this world. Verily, Krishna is both glorified and degraded by his well-meaning worshippers, who never dreamt how their "arguments" would appeal to less devout but more critical future ages.

Now, it has been shown on reliable evidence that if at all the historical Krishna indulged in "Râs-Lilâ"

or sported with the Gopis he must have been between 7 or 8 years of age, and it is ludicrous to convict a child of such tender age of anything like immorality. The husbands and brothers of the Gopis cannot be supposed to be so lost to all sense of honour as to allow a grown up person to associate himself on questionable terms with their women. There is again no reference to the Gopis in the Mahabharata, except a passing allusion, made by Draupadi, when she was about to be disrobed by Duhshāsana and when in her invocation to Krishna she said :—“ Govinda Dwārkā vāsin Krishna Gopijan priya ” ( Oh Cowherd, thou resident of Dwārkā; oh Krishna, beloved of the Gopis ). Again when king Shishupāla applied a hundred abusive epithets to Krishna as described in the Sabhā Parva of the Mahabharata, he never referred to Krishna's connection with the Gopis. Had there been even a tittle of historical evidence about the objectionable behaviour of Krishna with regard to these women, surely this implacable enemy of our hero was *the* man to make capital out of it. But it must be admitted that subsequent devout but undiscerning writers have introduced into the life of Krishna an element of glowing eroticism which historically did not exist. Thus though Gopis are non-existent in the Mahabharata, the Vishnu Purāna already takes one step forward and describes Krishna's connection with these women as the pure love of innocent girls for a handsome boy. According to the Hari Vansha, which is the supplementary chapter of the Mahabharata, it was the maddening love of maidens for a young man. According to the Shrimad Bhāgwat it was the deep sensual love of passionate girls

for a passionate youth. Finally the ball that had been set rolling in this direction reached the goal of revolting and open sensuality in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāna*. Then poets like Jayadeva laid hands on the tempting theme, and thoroughly transformed Krishna into something vastly romantic and erotic, though such works remained unsubstantiated by historical evidence. Allegory had always been present to rush to the rescue, and attempts were made to view the lurid colours of sensuality from the mellow light of symbolism.

But this essay deals with the historical Krishna, the Krishna of the *Mahabharata*, not what he is made out to be in subsequent works by his worshippers. If Krishna is described in later works as amorous and even sensual, and if his amours and sensuality are to be taken in a figurative light, it is for his adorers to justify the one and explain the other. Since it is they that have dressed up their hero as a rake, it is up to them to explain their own creation allegorically as best they can. I believe in the historical man, Krishna the Yogeshwara, not Krishna the libertine, and hence I do not feel called upon to explain his amours when, according to history, those amours never existed. Those only should explain who have either invented the erotic element or believe in such invention. So too Rādhā does not figure in the *Mahabharata*, the *Vishnu Purāna*, the *Harivansha* and even in the *Shrimad Bhāgwat*, though the Vaishnavas hold that she is vaguely referred to in the last-mentioned work. Rādhā is first noticed in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāna* and her fame succeeded in firing the poetic genius of Jayadeva. In course of time Rādhā became a spiritual

symbol, a devotional idea, and sometimes represented Prakriti (Nature), or stood for the human soul, or was considered an incarnation of the goddess Lakshmi, or any other thing that her adorers chose to ascribe to her. Devotional ideas, though historically non-existent, cannot be refuted by logical weapons, which create no effect on the armour of Faith. I do not intend to say I am dead to the charm, the romance, the frantic devotion and the allegory of Râdhâ, but I would certainly submit that Râdhâ as a historical character simply does not exist but owes her life to later Paurânîk accretion. In poetic or devotional mood one is free to enjoy the æsthetic charms of the "Gita Govinda" of Jayadeva, or bathe his soul in the spiritual raptures that arise from a perusal of the narration of the union of the earthly self with the Higher Self. But when one approaches the question with the glasses of criticism on his eyes, down goes the phantom of Râdhâ to the limbo of nothingness from which she had been invoked by her ardent adorers.

Tradition again has burdened Krishna with 16208 wives, as if merit consisted in having a multiplicity of women. The fact was that Krishna slew Narkâsur and liberated 16000 damsels whom the giant had imprisoned, and the tradition-mongers forthwith concluded that they became Krishna's wives! The unauthentic and exaggerated story of Krishna sporting with 200 Gopis ended in an equally absurd conclusion that they were his wives. Only eight remain, and it has to be admitted that Krishna really had eight wives though Babu Bankimchandra reduces the number to one only—Rukmini. Even admitting that Krishna had eight wives, it appears nothing unusual,

for the Hindus always were and perhaps still are a polygamous nation, though modern social tone is very rapidly verging towards a monogamous union. Thus one of the most controversial points in Krishna's life is seen to be due more to invention and exaggeration than to sober historical fact.

But even if we accept a historical fallacy and maintain that Krishna led a sensual life, still it can be shown that fully-evolved persons, who dwell in the soul, only appear to perform actions, either good or bad, but in fact they are absolutely above them: for as the Gita says in XVIII 17:—"He who is free from the egotistic notion, whose Reason is not affected, though he slay these people, he slayeth not, nor is bound." The Shrimad Garga Samhitâ contains a significant story to show how an emancipated soul may appear to lead a wicked or sensual life and yet be good and pure, how he may feed and yet be detached from food, how he may slay and yet not be said to kill. Once, says the story, the river Yamunâ was in flood and the Gopis found it impossible to cross. When Krishna came to know of it he desired the Gopis to address the river to give them way if he had led a celibate life. The Gopis took this as a huge joke but thought the experiment worth trying, when to their utter amazement the waters parted asunder, ( as the Red Sea did before Moses and his followers ), enabling them to walk across. Once the Gopis accosted Rishi Durvâsâ, who ordered them immediately to prepare a sumptuous dinner for him. Dreading the wrathful nature of the sage, the Gopis made all possible haste and the Rishi made a hearty



meal. On returning the Gopis again found the Yamunâ in flood but were asked by the Rishi to address the river to give them way if he had eaten nothing at all. Unwilling to distrust their eyes, the Gopis still carried out the advice which was followed by a favourable result. The author of the Garga Samhitâ comments that the highest faculty in Rishi Durvâsâ had been absorbed in God and therefore it was only his belly that was fed; and so the Rishi was right when he said "I have not eaten", signifying by that first personal pronoun the highest faculty within him. The same argument would apply to an emancipated person who only seems to lead a sensual life. However, Krishna does not at all stand in need of any such subtle and doubtful justifications, for as we have seen the historical Krishna can never be accused of sensuality.

Coming to other aspects of our hero's character, we find that he was an unusually shrewd person and could at once hit upon the right clue to the difficulty. His presence of mind never forsook him, nor was he ever at a loss what to do even in the most dangerous of predicaments. During the great war recorded in the Mahabharata Karna was working red ruin in the Pândava army and even Arjuna could not prevail against him. Yudhishtira thereupon completely lost his head and severely rebuked Arjuna for his lassitude and asked him to throw away his Gândiva bow if he did not know its proper use. Arjuna bore all the taunts patiently but he had vowed to kill the man, whoever he be, who asked him to cast away his favourite Gândiva bow, once belonging to Varuna and given to the Pândava hero by

Agni the Fire-God. Arjuna therefore rushed to kill his elder brother, and Krishna had a hard time in dissuading him from his purpose. Finding Arjuna determined to fulfil his vow at all costs, Krishna told him that grossly insulting a respectable person is worse than slaying him and therefore Arjuna would do well if he followed this advice. Thereupon Arjuna kept his vow by covering Yudhishtira with abuse before both armies; but being thoroughly ashamed of his own conduct towards his elder brother, Arjuna now resolved upon suicide. This was much worse, because it was impossible to win the war without Arjuna's help. Krishna, however, again persuaded the unyielding hero that boasting of one's own merits was worse than suicide. Arjuna therefore bragged of his own achievements before all and thereby escaped an untimely end. Krishna's policy was invariably characterised by wisdom—wisdom even in the worldly sense of the term. But wisdom is not wickedness, nor is discretion tantamount to deceit, though adverse critics of our hero have often considered him a scheming and intriguing person even when he worked selflessly for the welfare of the righteous party.

When we consider Krishna's dealings with his adversaries, one noteworthy fact immediately attracts our attention; he may be at times severe to virtuous people but he always foiled or killed the wicked ones. This is precisely the moral purpose of Shakespeare in his tragedies (though not in his comedies, where he follows a different theory). In Shakespeare's tragic dramas the virtuous people at times have to suffer as they do in God's world, but not a single instance could ever be

cited from all Shakespeare's tragedies of a villain who has not been finally brought to trouble, disgrace, death or condign punishment by that greatest of English masters. Again Krishna may have indulged in Sâma, Dâna, Danda and Bheda (conciliation, presents, chastisement, and deceit) to compass the ruin of his enemies, but *never to serve his own purpose* or to carry out some selfish aim, but invariably, as the Gita says in IV 8: "for the protection of the good and the destruction of evil doers." This would serve to explain Krishna's severe treatment of wicked men like Kansa, Jarâsandha and Duryodhana, not to mention the Râkshasas killed by our hero. After the slaughter of the tyrant Kansa, his kingdom of Mathurâ was given away to the latter's father Ugrasena; after bringing about the fall of Jarâsandha and Duryodhana, their kingdoms of Magadha and Hastinâpura were assigned by Krishna to Sahadeva (son of Jarâsandha) and the Pândava brothers respectively, our hero taking all the trouble and even the blame but none of the rewards, which itself shows how much he was detached from mundane affairs.

Krishna was sometimes reduced to the painful necessity of getting virtuous and honourable men killed, for no other reason than that they fought, and fought knowingly, on the wrong side, even wishing well to their foemen. Thus matters are not so easy when we come to discuss the slaughter of the venerable Bhishma, the revered Drona and the heroic and magnanimous Karna at the instigation of Krishna. There are occasions in life when a "Hobson's choice" is presented to a person, who has to choose between two evils and

naturally selects the lesser one, knowing full well that he would be censured in either case. Such circumstances in dramatic literature are called "blind-alley themes" and are discussed by Mr. W. Archer in his "Play-Making". A few instances will suffice. In Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure" Isabella has either to sacrifice her own virginity or see her brother executed for a crime. In Maeterlinck's "Mona Vanna" the heroine is called upon to surrender her chastity (as she thinks) or to see all the people of her city put to the sword. About the year 1240 A. D. it actually happened that in England a brutal lord called Earl Leofric proposed to his virtuous wife, the Lady Godiva (the subject of Tennyson's well-known poem) to ride naked through the city if she wished him to revoke a heavy imposition which he had laid on the people. In these three cases what were the heroines to do? Whatever path they followed or whatever policy they adopted was sure to be condemned. So too with regard to the slaughter of Bhishma, Drona and Karna, Krishna found himself involved in a "blind-alley theme" and placed on the horns of a distressing dilemma. The Pândavas deserved to win because their cause was just; on the other hand victory would never have wooed the Pândavas so long as the virtuous and redoubtable Bhishma, Drona and Karna were alive. Krishna boldly faced the issue and took all the obloquy on himself by choosing the lesser of the two evils and bringing about the fall of the three great warriors.

In this connection Mr. C. V. Vaidya's arguments fail to appeal to me. This venerable critic observes that

Bhishma, who had taken a vow never to wield his weapons against a woman or even against a man who in his past life had been a woman, deserved to fall because of his false and exaggerated sense of chivalry. But it is surely harsh to kill a man outright just because he is over-chivalrous. So too several critics have defended Krishna who instigated Yudhishtira to utter a well-known falsehood that brought about the fall of Drona, because, they say, Drona was consciously indulging in unjust warfare by wielding the Brahmâstra weapon against persons who did not know the use of the same, and therefore deserved to fall. The slaughter of Karna by questionable means is defended on the ground that he never raised his little finger when Draupadi was disgraced before the whole assembly. But the policy of "quid pro quo" or "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", though often practised by some great men, does not much raise them in our esteem, and even in these untoward circumstances, Krishna would not have liked, as far as possible, to commit himself to such a line of conduct. It may however be suggested that Krishna rather chose the lesser of the two evils, and preferred to see Bhishma, Drona and Karna dead rather than defeat the just and fair cause of the Pândavas which he had espoused. Krishna's conduct can again be defended as that of a fully-evolved person, who was above all mundane and selfish concerns, and stood on a level far higher than ours. We do not protest against God's justice when he takes off a young, industrious man, the only hope of his family, and leaves his blind, old, paralytic father to mourn his loss. Why then should we be astonished at the doings of a God.

attained person, who is but the instrument of the Divine Will and through whom is done nothing but what the Lord Himself directs? We are sure William Harvey, Louis Pasteur and Lord Lister must have been called unjust and cruel by dogs and frogs who were the innocent victims of their operations, for these creatures were not in a position to know that "partial evil is universal good", and that by such cruel means only could those eminent men of science have made their great discoveries for the benefit of humanity at large. So too the highly-evolved person knows what he is about, but is not always in a position to explain his actions to his victims or inferiors. This may certainly look cruel to us, but as Krishna says in the Gita II 11: "the wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead."

The late Mrs. Besant in her "Basis of Morality" examines the question of ethics from five different points of view, basing morality on Revelation, Conscience, Utility, Evolution and Mysticism. The first four do not concern us at present, but we shall discuss here the highest and best basis of morality, which is that of the mystic. It is quite exceptional and valid only for the individual and not for the masses. It is the morality of one who has realized his God and identified his self with the universal Self. The mystic follows no cut and dried rules dictated by worldly lawgivers, nay, not even the scriptures, but his own peculiar experiences. Here again comes the clue to the character of Krishna, the Yogeshwara, who had reduced his physical system to such complete silence that only the Voice of the Spirit within was audible to him. He is above good and evil, success and

failure, peace and war, being led through the world by the Voice of the Infinite and not "by the shouts and plaudits of the throng". External rules and regulations affect him not, and he may depart from them whenever he chooses, or to be more true, whenever his Lord chooses. Ordinary people respect the law by obeying it; God-attained persons respect the law sometimes by violating it. As Milton paradoxically observes in his "Tetrachordon":—"Men of most renowned virtue have sometimes by transgressing most truly kept the law." How wonderfully well does this statement of a great English poet suit the morality of Krishna!

But, some would object, is it not immoral to prescribe one set of rules for Paul and a different one for Peter? Surely not, because all people do not stand on the same physical, intellectual or spiritual level. Every one in society has his proper duty to discharge, though the duty of the one may be entirely antagonistic to that of the other. It is the duty of a preceptor to teach, of a disciple to study; of a surgeon to save, of a soldier to destroy. What are we to think of a king, who, though in a position to protect his people, hands over his country to the enemy in a fit of renunciation inspired by asceticism? Who ever has heard of a general of an army who turned his left cheek to the foe when the right was wounded in war? If at all such a general be found so oblivious to his duty, shall we call him a yogi or a traitor, saint or sinner? That which is true of individuals is true of classes, and Nietzsche distinguishes between the morality of masters and that of slaves, or of the governors and the governed. The morality of the gover-

nors consists of qualities by which power can be maintained e. g. strength, justice and even violence; while the ethical code of the governed is characterised by qualities by which that power can best be appeased or thwarted e. g. obedience and fidelity on the one hand, mutiny and revolution on the other. Duties and morals evolve and change with the times not only in connection with classes but with ages, for as is observed in the Manu Smriti I 85:—"One set of duties for man in the Kritayuga, different ones in the Tritayuga, and in the Dwáparayuga and another in the Kaliyuga." Is not therefore a perfect person like Krishna justified in departing now and then from the fluctuating ethical code which, by virtue of his God-attained eminence, he had considerably outgrown ?

Living in these democratic times I have a strong dislike for the word "infallibility" when used in connection with anybody and anything except God. I would not like to use this term even with reference to Krishna, but I feel constrained to do so in a certain sense. To dispute the statement that Krishna was a completely liberated soul is to dispute the validity of the Gita and the Hindu scriptures. If then Krishna is taken as a God-attained person, an instrument or medium, through whom God Himself works His own Will, there is no other alternative but to take the actions of such a person as infallible, or else we would incur the ridicule of calling God Himself fallible. But even though the word "infallibility" has a bad taste in the mouths of the moderns, still the term has been tacitly applied to certain corporate bodies, books and even individuals down to our own times. Books on political science discuss the propriety of



the statements :—“The State can do nothing amiss” or “The King can do no wrong”. Machiavelli held that the moral obligations which bind ordinary people could not restrain princes. The decisions of the Privy Council are considered to be the last word in matters of law, and though of course not infallible, yet it is certain that there is no higher tribunal of appeal in the British Empire. In matters of faith the Khojas regard the dicta of their Hâzar Imâm, at present represented by H. H. the Aga Khan, issued in his capacity as the religious head of his people, as infallible; while so late as 1870 it was decreed by the Ecumenical Council at the Vatican that the Pope cannot, when acting in his official character of supreme pontiff, be supposed to err in defining a doctrine of Christian faith or rule of morals to be held by the Church. The Muslims hold that the Qoran represents the very words of God and therefore cannot be anything but infallible, while almost a similar honour is paid by the Hindus to the Vedas to such an extent that, despite the endeavours of the Brâhma Samâjists to the contrary, the expression “Veda-vâkya” has passed into proverb as an infallible oracle. If even in modern times certain classes of people are pleased to regard some corporate bodies, books and even individuals as infallible at least in particular capacities, is it too much to say that a perfect Yogeshwara should now and then be supposed to have the right to be above the law when to his inspired vision the violation of the law would be conducive to the furtherance of justice or peace or the betterment of humanity?

The statement that “the end justifies the means” is a moot point in ethics, and a questionable one in actual

practice. Associated with it is the Biblical statement—"Do evil that good may come". If an irresponsible person, a mere man in the street, were to follow such principles and break the social and moral law at his own sweet will, he will naturally have to be denounced, for if these principles hold good at all in life, they do so in case of authorized persons, great men and especially persons of selfless and disinterested virtue. We daily come across instances where the teacher chastises his pupil, the surgeon performs an operation on his patient and the judge punishes the offender. In all these cases the "evil" is done even in opposition to the wishes of the victims; yet the end aimed at is the good of the individual or the welfare of society. A great man is often the scapegoat of a nation and men far inferior to him in merit hasten to burden him with blame, forgetting the heavy responsibilities under which he worked. True it is that that great man who wishes that the end should justify the means must be either quite selfless or should aim at the greatest good of the greatest number. There have been instances in which a defeated general has been accused of cowardice and cruelty when he left his wounded and dying companions on the battlefield and slipped away with the remaining soldiers; but the critics fail to understand that the general did so not to save his own life but his entire army from sheer annihilation. Napoleon during his disastrous return-march from Moscow left his benumbed and starving soldiers to perish in the Russian snows and himself escaped with a few select followers. This indeed is cruel, but would it have been wise and patriotic of Napoleon to suffer

privations and death with his soldiers, leaving France to her fate? Here too evil was done but in the interests of the whole country.

We are here confronted with the great question of "compromise", which has worked its way in various spheres of life. In rare cases even a lie uttered with a selfless and benevolent motive with a view to do good to others and not to the speaker himself is to be condoned even according to Hindu scriptures, which need not be quoted here. The magnanimous Rajput woman Pannâ offered her own son to be slaughtered, uttering a noble lie that he was the Prince whom the foemen were seeking. Here her falsehood is entirely eclipsed in the greatness of her self-sacrifice. Who ever has blamed Desdemona of dishonesty or deceit when she died with a generous falsehood on her lips, exculpating her husband from the charge of her murder which she took over to herself? On the other hand according to the Mahabharata, Kaushika Rishi is said to have been consigned to hell for having told the truth, and for divulging to the robbers, when asked, the place of refuge of their would-be victims. The upshot of the whole question would be that a person in a very eminent and responsible position, an authorized person or a person of selfless and disinterested virtue working for the good of the world, may in rare and exceptional cases be allowed to transgress the social and moral law for the welfare of humanity.

Another remarkable exception may be found in the genius, whether he be a mystic or a materialist. He is a class by himself, belonging to "the lunatic, the lover

and the poet" variety. Such a man is not exculpated from blame, and the long arm of the law falls and must fall with particular severity on him. Still the restless victim of genius, impelled by the inner urge, persists in his own course, for in the surrounding gloom he sees no light except that which emanates from his own consciousness. None but a blind admirer of Napoleon can justify all his actions or maintain that he was a man of selfless and disinterested virtue; yet even his enemies have acknowledged the greatest of French Emperors to have been a genius. Genius, rightly or wrongly, always dictates but can never be dictated to; it lays down its own laws, but never bows its neck to the yoke of others; it breaks but cannot bend. Genius united with high eminence and heavy responsibilities placed Napoleon in a category, available to a few but closed to the masses in general. Lord Rosebery in his well-balanced work "Napoleon: the Last Phase," in discussing the character of the French hero, has to observe in sheer helplessness:—"Ordinary measures and tests do not appear to apply to him: we seem to be trying to span a mountain with a tape." And surely, if these exceptions apply to a few worldly great men, they would apply *a fortiori* to a liberated soul and God-attained man like Krishna, who is entitled to act, not in the way prescribed by his unenlightened contemporaries, but in a manner which to his higher view-points appears sound and salutary.

Prof. Deussen in his "System of the Vedānta" argues that after salvation all duties and works are abolished, and it is a matter of indifference if the liberated

soul does works or not, and even if he does, they are not his works and cleave to him no more. Even after attaining to salvation the body may still continue to function just as the potter's wheel goes on revolving even when the vessel which it supported is completed. Such an instrument of God is surely above good and evil, for as the Gita says in IV 21 :—" Hoping for nought, his mind and self controlled, having abandoned all greed, performing action by the body alone, he doth not commit sin ". It would be as ridiculous, says Mr. B. G. Tilak in his " Gita Rahasya " to say that immortality dies as it would be to assert that an emancipated soul is open to sinfulness. The same gifted writer argues that a fully evolved person is entitled occasionally to break the law, just because other souls in the world are not as emancipated as he himself is. All this would again go to show how far advanced are the " Absolute Ethics " of Krishna ( to use the phraseology of Herbert Spencer quoted in this connection by Tilak ) when compared to the ethics of worldly and imperfect creatures like ourselves.

Even the mysticism of Islam believes that great latitude must be given to the sages in their moral conduct than is ever possible with ordinary men. The Muslims believe in the " Kirám-ul-Kâtibin " or two recording angels sitting one on either shoulder of every person on earth—that on the right taking down his virtues, that on the left his vices. Thus is composed during the lifetime of a person his " Book of Actions ", which is consulted on the Day of Resurrection, when rewards and punishments will be meted out accordingly. But Maulânâ Jalâl-ud-Din Rumi, one of the most eminent of Sufi sages,

remarks in his famous "Mathnavi" that this register of good and bad deeds will not be examined in the case of holy men, as if they were detached from the performance of all actions and therefore from the attribution of good and evil.

The Persian Sufi is expected to pass through four stages before he reaches the highest goal. These stages are:—"Shari'at (Law), "Tariqat" (Path), "Ma'rafat" (Knowledge) and "Haqiqat" (Truth), the last stage implying complete union with the Divinity. Prof. R. A. Nicholson, perhaps the most authoritative writer on the mystical side of Mohammadanism, observes in his work on "The Mystics of Islam" that so long as the "Wali" (saint) is in one of the disciplinary stages he must necessarily abide by the law, which however he is at liberty to disregard as he advances further on the path of spiritual progress on the stages of "Ma'rafat" and "Haqiqat". The same writer in his Preface to the "Diwân-e-Shams-e-Tabriz" observes that Sufis repose entire faith in their "Pir" or Guru whom they take to be God's representative, and whose actions in their belief are God's actions, the Pir himself being in spirit one with the Divinity. Mr. Nicholson observes in a footnote in his translation of Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal's poem "Isrâr e Khudi" that the highest stage in Sufism is that of the "insân al kâmil" (perfect person). The Sufis believe that every man is potentially a microcosm and that when he becomes spiritually perfect all the divine attributes are displayed by him, so that as saint or prophet he is the God-man, the representative and vicegerent of God on earth. The blasphemies, immoralities

and even the crimes of such a Pir, says Prof. Nicholson, are not only condoned by the Sufis but glorified, since they hold that darkness cannot proceed from the sun nor evil from God. Nay, even the casual words that escape from the lips of a spiritually advanced person in a fit of emotion are said to come so literally true as to surprise that person himself. The fame of the great saint of Gujarat, Hazrat Qutb-al-Aqtáb-Sayyad Burhân-ud-Din of Watwa, a village near Ahmedabad, is well-known to the Muslims of this Presidency. Khan Bahadur Fazlullâh L. Faridi relates a story about this sage in his translation of the "Mirât e-Sikandari", that once he woke up at night for some purpose when he stumbled over a hard object which injured his foot. "Oh! What's that?" muttered the saint; "Is it iron, wood or stone?" Strange to say, when he awoke in the morning he found an object near his bed which appeared to be made up of iron, wood and stone in equal proportions, as if the words spoken at random by so great a personage should not go in vain. We often hear of irascible Rishis like the Rishi Durvâsâ, pronouncing their curses on the slightest provocation. However unjustifiable such cruel fits of peevishness may be held to be, the curse must and does come true for it was uttered by a person of rare spiritual eminence. These parallel sentiments from the mysticism of Islam enable us to understand all the better the vast difference between the fully-evolved and partially-evolved souls, and the latitude that is often conceded to the former by the latter.

Sometimes the morality of a perfect person, when tested by our standards, looks perfectly inconsistent and

even hideous, and a story from the 18th chapter of the Qoran, called the "Surat-al-Kahaf", will, it is hoped, throw considerable light on the question at issue. It is related that Moses once sought the company of a fully-enlightened person, identified by Qoranic commentators with Al Khizr, who permitted him to do so, enjoining him, however, not to question any of his actions or else they would have to part company. The two set forth and coming to the seashore, Al Khizr made a hole in a ship. Moses, forgetting his pledge, asked his companion why he thus endangered the lives of the sailors, but was asked to keep quiet. Proceeding further Al Khizr killed a youth who had apparently done no wrong. Once again Moses bubbled over with protests but was told that if he interfered for the third time, they would have to separate. They then came to a wall which was about to fall down and Al Khizr set it upright. The transparent folly of this action was more than Moses could bear. He expressed his willingness to take the consequences but demanded an explanation of his companion's strange conduct. Al Khizr said that he had intentionally rendered the vessel unserviceable, or otherwise the sailors, who owned it, would have rowed it to a place where the king took every sound ship by force. The youth again was an unbeliever, though born of virtuous parents, and Al Khizr killed him so that the Lord might give the parents a more righteous and affectionate child in exchange for him. The wall too belonged to two orphan youths and contained hidden treasure belonging to them, and it pleased God that they should not take their wealth till they had attained their full age, and hence Al Khizr had to set the wall upright. Finally the



Qoran puts in the mouth of Al Khizr the following sentence which beautifully suits the behaviour of Krishna also :—“And I did not what thou hast seen of mine own will, but by Allah’s direction.” This story requires no explanation but only shows the danger we incur when we hasten to condemn a fully emancipated person for his apparently silly or cruel deeds.

A Yogeshwara is often endowed with extraordinary vision and foresight. He is like a person standing on a high tower while his fellows are sitting at its base. From the tower he sees a merry sight and smiles, or spies a woeful spectacle and weeps, while the people standing below, unable to account for his smiles or tears, consider him mentally deranged. This reminds us of the difference between the enlightened and unenlightened souls stated in the Gita II 69 which says :—“That which is the night of all beings, for the disciplined man is the time of waking; when other beings are waking, then is it night for the sage who seeth”. For instance, it is easy for people, suffering from intellectual myopia, to blame Buddha for having admitted so wicked an apostate as Devadatta into his Order. But the Master was endowed with rare foresight and had done this deliberately, because as a layman Devadatta would have proved far more harmful not only to the Buddhist religion but to the world. Some of the actions of Krishna also look anything but sensible at first sight, and the inherent wisdom of his actions beams out only when the consequences turn out to be what our hero had predicted. Once during the great war recorded in the Mahabharata Karna killed Ghatotkatcha, son of Bhima,

and drove the Pândavas mad with grief, which was further aggravated at the sight of Krishna laughing and dancing on the chariot. On Arjuna's remonstrances, Krishna told him that Karna had with him a weapon called "Shakti", which could be used but once and that too with infallible effect on anyone whom he chose, and that he had especially reserved it for Arjuna, but finding himself hard-pressed by Ghatotkatcha at night, he was compelled to throw it at that warrior. Thus at the cost of Ghatotkatcha Arjuna's life was saved, and hence the reason for Krishna's apparently ill-timed merriment. Another instance of Krishna's seemingly unaccountable behaviour may be seen when the woebegone but vindictive Dhritarâshtra, wishing to embrace Bhima, was given at the advice of Krishna not the actual Bhima but his iron statue, which the blind old king crushed to pieces in his terrible embrace. S. T. Coleridge says in his "Biographia Literaria" that sometimes the folly of man is the wisdom of God, and the iniquities of men are instruments of His divine goodness. Shall we not with equal justice invert this sentence and say that the so-called unaccountable "follies" of God and God-dedicated emancipated persons are in fact the highest limits to which our earth-born reason can ever hope to soar?

But if Krishna be so surpassingly great, does it not behove people to follow him in every way? The answer is most emphatically in the negative. Such a mighty privilege and such unbounded liberties can only be associated with the heaviest duties and responsibilities and can therefore be exercised only by a Yogeshwara, who, after realizing his own salvation, blesses this earth with

his presence to carry out the Divine Will. Such a great soul can act independently since his will is not his but God's, while we ordinary creatures who have not yet been so qualified, have necessarily to abide by the dictates of the Law and the Scriptures. Krishna clearly says:— "He who will try to follow my life will go to hell; listen to my word and obey it if you want beatitude and if you love me. My life is a mystery that is full of lesson for the intellect that can unravel it, but the fool that will take it for a model will go to hell." That which is good for the one is not necessarily good for the other. We find it impossible to walk naked like Shukdevji, drink poison yet remain unscathed like Mirabai, or nourish our systems on venomous reptiles in the manner of Muhammad Beghda, Sultan of Gujarat, or Mithridates, King of Pontus. Even in the case of a fully-evolved person like Krishna we cannot help wishing that he had better adhered to the Law instead of violating it so often; but how can dwarfs measure the height of a giant, and how are we in our insignificance justified in dictating to a medium of the Divine Will, who from his vastly elevated spiritual eminence and wholly disinterested outlook works for the triumph of the good and the discomfiture of evil?

Let us however pursue this question in its further implications. Are we to connive at a fully-evolved person's actions of theft or murder and should we ourselves indulge in such deeds when such a person enjoins us to do so? Our reply, which is in the negative, would run as follows: (a) Fully evolved persons are the very rarest of rare gems, and every Guru, Yogi or Pir is not

to be mistaken for a God-attained person like Krishna. (b) It is supremely difficult to determine whether a certain person is a fully liberated soul and as such above good and evil. (c) The path of the spiritualist is studded with thorns, and as Miss Evelyn Underhill observes in her famous work on "Mysticism", the yogi, almost within hail of the divine goal, sometimes reaches a stage called the "Dark Night of the Soul" when he suddenly finds himself a prey to evil thoughts and desires which he believed he had subjugated long ago. He now feeds with the voracity of a gourmand or falls a victim to carnal temptations, and thus becomes an object of painful surprise to his disciples and admirers. It is very difficult therefore, in determining the words and deeds of a yogi, to decide whether he is fully emancipated or is on one of the lower stages or is overwhelmed by the "Dark Night of the Soul". (d) It is both unwise and unsafe to make distinctions between Krishna and other great spiritual leaders and to assert that if Krishna be exculpated from blame, other prophets should have the same privilege extended to them also. It must never be forgotten that the Hindus attach vast importance only to Krishna's words, not to his deeds, which proceeding from a God-identified person can never be tested by earthly standards nor imitated by ordinary mortals. If this Hindu attitude is open to question, so is that of other people who on the other hand consider their prophets equally advanced and their actions as invariably worthy of imitation by their followers. If Krishna's words and deeds are apparently at variance, it may be doubted if every word or deed of other prophets, uttered or performed under grave provocation, is worthy of obedience or imitation at all times

and in all circumstances. Distinctions are always invidious, and the question whether a certain highly evolved spiritual leader is a Yogeshwara or not, and if so, whether he is entitled to the privileges of Krishna or of other prophets must be finally left to the free and unfettered discretion of every individual.

If a man has really attained emancipation, and having conquered his self works for the welfare of mankind only to carry out the Will of God, he can never be supposed to commit hideous deeds like theft or murder. If, however, a fully-evolved person in his mature wisdom thinks it necessary to perpetrate such deeds, he does so with the full knowledge of violating the earthly law and thereby laying himself open to punishment under the same. It is the duty of every police officer to arrest him and of every magistrate to sentence him according to the law, even though these officers be themselves convinced that the perpetrator was a fully-emancipated person. The latter did what he thought best in his highest wisdom; the police and judicial officers must then fulfil their functions which it is their incumbent duty to discharge. As the Gita says in III 35:—  
 “Better death in the discharge of one’s own duty; the duty of another is full of danger.” Unless this be done, there will be social and moral anarchy in the world, and no amount of sermonizing and preachifying will prevent people from having recourse to immorality and crime, if these are to be condoned in the case of any person, however great. If, therefore, a fully-emancipated person lays himself open to the rigours of the law, still greater and much more exemplary must be the punishment in

the case of imposters, who shine in borrowed plumes, and ruin their followers, body and soul, by their detestable actions, safely camouflaged by the cloak of religion. The scales of law weigh all—rich and poor, great and small—with rigid impartiality, and the Penal Code provides no condonation for crimes committed by a fully-emancipated person. Such a great man, however, may be supposed to have in him the spirit of self-sacrifice, and if he can, in his opinion, help on the cause of humanity by a crime, he would be only too willing to sacrifice himself as a victim to our laws. This does not at all invalidate our theory, but rather presents the emancipated person in the light of a martyr to duty who sacrifices himself and his reputation to the law for what, in his opinion, was perpetrated only in the interests of humanity.

Mr. Tilak quotes a Sanskrit maxim:—"Na deva charitam chareta", which means that we should not imitate the external actions of the gods. He remarks that according to the Taittiriya Upanishad we should imitate only the good actions of the gods and leave the rest. To the perfectly enlightened soul, however, as often remarked above, no guilt can ever attach, even though he should kill his parents, Guru or king; but no crime could be more monstrous and no folly more egregious than that of a common creature who presumes to imitate Krishna without having purged his self, purified his reason, elevated his soul and realized his Maker. We do admit that at first sight it looks both absurd and revolting that a fully-enlightened person should be allowed to misbehave himself by playing fast and loose with the law, which he should be the first to observe in its proper

spirit. "If this great person can disregard the law with impunity", say ordinary human beings, "what can prevent us from imitating him?" But, be it remembered, Krishna is the ideal of ideal persons only, the model only of Supermen, and not of humdrum humanity. As Dr. E. Young observes in his "Night Thoughts;"—

"Pygmies are pygmies still, though perched on Alps;  
And pyramids are pyramids in vales.  
Each man makes his own stature, builds himself".

It is better for us pygmies to be conscious of our utter insignificance, and abandon the brainless arrogance of mimicking the inconsistency, irresponsibility and apparent injustice evidenced by us in the morality of Krishna—the morality of the Superman, of the hero who with his penetrating vision and prodigious power can see and accomplish what it would be presumptuous and futile for us to imitate.

Perhaps in spite of all remonstrances the imperfect will continually be tempted to imitate the God-man; but in that case they may be advised only to digest the words of Krishna and not read his life at all. Better not approach a dangerous weapon rather than handle it carelessly with disastrous results. Krishna's words are meant to be followed by the world at large, but it takes another Krishna to imitate in his life the actions of the Lord of the Yādavas. The ordinary person must completely revive the God within him as the fully-evolved person has done in order to entitle him to behave with the ostensible cruelty and reckless irresponsibility of Krishna. We may take Krishna and his character in any light we choose, and approve or disapprove of his actions as

we please: one fact is indisputable:—if he is admitted to be a fully-emancipated person as in the Hindu scriptures, in spite of all our dislike and even positive aversion for some of his actions, we shall find our tape-lines woefully deficient in measuring his spiritual dimensions, till we rise to his divine eminence. The completely evolved shine by their own light; the less evolved will surely burn themselves if they dare to shine with borrowed glitter, but they would do well to elevate themselves till a similar natural effulgence be kindled within them, when they shall find themselves at liberty to work out through their bodies the Will of the Almighty.

But the heart of the mystic is ever more powerful than his head, and enables him to have a truer and deeper insight into the object of his adoration than is ever possible through the barren intellectual process. According to a profound apophthegm of Pascal, who was famous for his wise and pithy utterances,—“Things human must be known to be loved; things divine must be loved to be known.” Thus in secular matters the knowledge of an object may lead us to love: e. g. we cannot love Kamschatkans or Siberians adequately since our knowledge about them is limited or next to nothing: but in matters divine the reverse is the case, for the kingdom of heaven is closed to all, even to the wisest and the most intellectual, unless they approach their goal with hearts overflowing with meekness and worship and love. So too in the case of Krishna love and worship would breed the necessary knowledge and appreciation, and to love and adore him would be the best way to know him as he really was. Thus the real knower of



Krishna is not the critic puzzling his head at the table, but the Yogi who tries to approach his ideal through spiritual ecstasy and loving meditation. Krishna is best understood not by the defiance of a Shishupála, the cold scorn of a Duryodhana or the condemnation of a Prof. Hopkins, but by the love-consecration of Mirabai (that Gopi of a modern age), the adoration of Surdása and the ardent devotion that vibrates through the songs of the Vaishnava poets. When in Gujarat one hears a "garbi" on the Rás-Lilá of Shri Krishna, in which our hero is depicted not in the strictly historical light but in the glowing colours of romance and allegory in association with the Gopis, one is tempted to forget his history and his scholarship but is led away by his love and devotion to become for the time being a Vaishnava outright. Once, as the beautiful legend runs, Yashodá got tired of Krishna's childish pranks and wished to have a quiet time to herself by binding the mischievous urchin hand and foot. All the ropes in her house were used up, but the divine Dámodar ( Krishna ) stood free and emancipated, giggling archly at the discomfited lady. Such are indeed the vain attempts of critics and commentators who in judging the character of Krishna find their intellectual ropes exhausted and are themselves inextricably enmeshed in their own critical complications; and together with the numerous futile attempts made in that direction, I am afraid, will go this humble contribution, this tribute of love and devotion which a non-Hindu Aryan presumes to lay at the lotus-feet of the Revealer of the Gita.



## The Gospel of the Gita.

The world has never seen an epic of such colossal dimensions as the Mahabharata, which, apart from its various other merits, stands so high in the esteem of the Hindus from a religious point of view as to be commonly known as the fifth Veda. It is in the "Bhishma Parva" of the Mahabharata that we come across the Bhagvad Gita—that precious stone set in the silver sea, that gem of the purest ray serene in the diadem of Hindu religion and philosophy. It is said that syllables govern the world. The pith and significance of Hinduism have been wonderfully summed up in the sacred syllable "Aum", while the soul of Hindu religious thought remains centred in the Upanishadic text "Tat twam asi"—Thou art That—proclaiming the identity of man and his Maker. But the Bhagvad Gita, though not considered a revealed text, presents the quintessence of Hindu philosophy, and unifies in its slender volume of 700 verses the numerous conflicting schools of thought into which Hindu religion is divided. It is consequently far and away the most popular of Hindu scriptures and epitomizes the message of true Aryan culture conveyed through the lips of Shri Krishna, the 8th incarnation of Vishnu, to the Pândava hero Arjuna on the fateful field of Kurukshetra. I propose to approach the Gita only as a seeker of truth and an admirer of genuine greatness, for as Shri Krishna himself says in the Gita X 41:\* "Whatsoever

---

\*The quotations from the Gita are all taken from Mrs. Besant's translation of that work—a classic of its kind.

is glorious, good, beautiful and mighty, understand thou that to go forth from a fragment of My splendour". A soldier once described the Gita as a manual of the military art spoilt by metaphysical subtleties, for the poor man knew little more than that himself, and therefore got nothing more out of the Gita than what he was capable of: and I am afraid my own judgment will be influenced by the range and nature of my knowledge, my circumstances, my inclinations, and various other known and unknown forces that go to the formation of our opinions.

The first noteworthy thing we find in the Gita is complete tolerance to people of all sects and creeds. There is no selfish monopoly of the keys of salvation by members of any one religion; no apostle of God here claims to be the saviour of all humanity. Shri Krishna says in the Gita IV 11: "However men approach Me, even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is Mine, O Pârtha". The liberal-minded catholicism of the Hindu religion is also evident from the following lines of Swami Vivekananda's favourite hymn:— "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their waters in the sea, O Lord; so the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead unto thee (O Purushottama)". When the One Spirit shines through all the universe, duality can only exist in the mind of the ignorant. The Lord says in VI 32: "He who through the likeness of the Self, O Arjuna, seeth equality in everything, whether pleasant or painful, he is considered a perfect yogi." Buddha

included among his disciples a harlot named Amrapali, a thief named Angulimal, a barber named Upali and a sweeper named Sunita. So too Christ clearly told the Jews: "Verily I say unto you that the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you." ( Matthew XXI 31 ). The Hindu religion in general is hard on the Shudras and on women, but this is certainly not true of the Gita where we find in V 18 : "Sages look equally on a Brahmana adorned with learning and humility, a cow, an elephant and even a dog and an outcaste." So too in IX 30 and 32 we find: "Even if the most sinful worship Me with undivided heart, he too must be accounted righteous, for he hath rightly resolved." and " They who take refuge with Me, O Pârtha, though of the womb of sin, women, Vaishyas, even Shudras, they also tread the highest path. "

Zarathushtra never regarded past Iranians as unbelievers but called them "Paoreyo takesh" or people of the former faith, and continued their use of fire as the symbol of the Purity and the Light that dwell in Ahura Mazda, for Zarathushtra also came not to destroy but to fulfil. The Zarathushtrian scriptures praise the great people of both sexes even of other countries and creeds: nay, even a virtuous enemy, Agreras, brother of the wicked Afrâsiâb, is included in the list of pure souls who are invoked with blessings in the Fravardin Yasht. One cannot exactly know when and by whom the Gita was composed: it may be by Shri Krishna, or Sanjaya, or Vyâsa or Vaishampâyana, or it may have existed in a nutshell from ancient times and then received its final elaboration about the second century B. C. by the Great

Unknown, whose identity has baffled the endeavours of generations of scholars. Taking the second century B. C. to be the time of the composition of the Gita, we find that it advocated the equality of men centuries before Hazrat Muhammad saw the light of the day and a couple of millennia before the rise of Swami Dayananda. The degrading persecutions of the present day "untouchables" may find their excuse, if they can, in other Hindu scriptures, but one shall seek in vain for any justification from the catholic pages of the Bhagvad Gita.

It is remarkable that the Gita, though a religious and philosophical work, does not err on the side of unattainable and impractical idealism. It comes nearest our businesses and bosoms when it attaches the greatest importance to duty. The world would practically be a scene of utter confusion if only people renounced their proper duties and did what they chose. Duty is so indispensable in the world that it is often invested with a divine halo, and the poet did not exaggerate when he called her "stern daughter of the voice of God". The Gita says in VI 1: "He that performeth such action as is duty, independently of the fruit of action, he is an ascetic; he is a Yogi, not he that is without fire and without rites". Duty knows no difference of superiority or inferiority; all work is sacred from that of the king down to the coolie, and "all service ranks the same with God." Among the numerous interesting anecdotes in the Mahabharata we have the "Vyādha-gita" in which we come across a youthful yogi who thought a bit too highly of the powers he had attained. He moves from place to place and is finally humiliated to find himself

surpassed not by another and a greater yogi but by a woman whose main work in life was to nurse her ailing husband, and later on by a butcher (vyādha) who, in spite of his filthy and cruel profession which he followed as a duty with perfect non-attachment, had reached a high spiritual stage by looking to the comforts of his parents. Thus life is not a treasure-house to be savagely plundered for the gratification of the self; life is not to be lightly enjoyed as an idle dream suffused with the beautiful; life is rather a battlefield which we enter with duty as our slogan.

The Gita says in III 35: "Better death in the discharge of one's own duty: the duty of another is full of danger." We often judge or misjudge others by our own petty standards, failing to see that what is good for us may be reprehensible to another. The duty of the Brahmana is to study and preach, that of the householder to maintain the family, that of a father to rear and nourish, that of a soldier to overthrow and destroy. The Gita does not lay down one and the same duty for all, for it is generally dictated by the environments and peculiar situation of the individual. As Arvind Ghosh says, the Gita would not send Buddha back to his wife, nor will it turn Ramkrishna Paramhansa into a schoolmaster, nor transform Vivekananda into a householder. The Lord says in the Gita XVIII 41: "Of Brahmanas, Kshattriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, O Parantapa, the duties have been distributed according to the "gunas" or qualities, born of their own natures." The Gita is often criticized adversely for exhorting Arjuna on the bloody path of warfare, but the critics happen to forget

that Arjuna was a Kshatriya espousing a righteous cause, and that it is just in the fitness of things that he should thus be called upon to discharge his duty as a warrior. Hence it is that the Lord frequently repeats "Tasmâduddhyasva Bhârata" (therefore fight, O Bhârata.) If Arjuna had been a Brahmana, one feels sure that Shri Krishna would have addressed him:—"O son of Kunti, prepare thyself for the life intellectual". If at all the blame for bloodshed has to be imputed to someone, let it be attached to the peculiar circumstances in which the master and his disciple were placed, but not to the men themselves.

When Arjuna encountered his cousins, friends and elders marshalled in warlike array against him, he found himself placed on the horns of a terrible dilemma, and to fight or not to fight—that was the question. So far was the hero unmanned at the sight of his kinsmen, that he laid down his Gândiva bow and refused to fight rather than trample on the sacred ties of relationship. That was the opportunity to Shri Krishna to explain to the hero not only his duty but in brief the gist of Aryan culture and philosophy. The Lord inspires Arjuna as David sings to the depressed and melancholy Saul, reminding him of his rights and duties in Browning's poem, and says in the Gita II 31: "Further, looking to thy own duty, thou shouldst not tremble; for there is nothing more welcome to a Kshatriya than righteous war". Again, Arjuna was participating in a thoroughly justifiable struggle fighting not to seize other's property but in defence of his own, of which he had unjustly been deprived by Duryodhana. Every attempt had been made to avoid matters from coming to this critical stage,

but the unyielding and ill-fated Duryodhana, blinder even than his father Dhritarâshtra, refused to read the writing on the wall, and war became inevitable. As Babu Bankimchandra observes, Shri Krishna never advocated the principle of "Might is Right", but only maintained the theory "Might for the sake of Right." Moreover to Shri Krishna, warrior is not synonymous with butcher, for the spiritual armour and weapons needed in the great struggle of life have been fully dealt with in the Gita. The warrior is required to be a soldier of God, a dedicated spirit, carrying out the Will of the Almighty; and Shri Krishna says to Arjuna VIII 7: "Therefore at all times think upon Me only and fight. With mind and reason set on Me, without doubt shalt thou come to Me". Then when the Lord shows Arjuna His Omnipotent Form, the "Virât Swarupa", and when Arjuna noticed his foemen already crushed by the decrees of Providence (Gita XI 26, 27 and 33), he realized his duty, entered into the fight and fought to win.

Religions have often been seen to preach either the "Pravritti Mârگا" (path of progress) or the "Nivritti Mârگا" (path of renunciation). It is interesting to discuss as to which side is favoured by the Gita, commentaries on which have been divided into two great classes, the Renunciation theory being led by the great Shankar, while the Progressivists have been ably represented by the gifted Tilak. The fact is that the Gita favours both theories, but as far as I can judge it has a decisive predilection for the path of progress. The preaching of renunciation pure and simple to Arjuna would prove a huge futility, because we know



that after the conclusion of the Gita the hero fights and does not exchange the Gāndīva bow for the ascetic's bowl. It is only towards the close of a long and glorious earthly career that the Pāndava brothers proceed to the Himalayas in quest of the Eternal. If the Gita is to be saved from a fatal anomaly, one will have to admit that its prominent emphasis is laid on the Karma Yoga or the gospel of work. Most of the great men in history were those who guided their life-bark with the help of the twin stars of Duty and Work, and not those who turned their backs on the world and its affairs. But for a steady persistence in Karma Yoga, how is India to remedy her social, political and intellectual deficiencies? Who is going to help her if she does not choose to help herself? But for the efficacy of work, how would the Gita itself have come down to posterity with such copious annotations and comments? It is to be remembered that Shri Krishna was a yogi like King Janaka leading a worldly life, and not an ascetic like Shukdeva; and this being admitted, does it stand to reason that Shri Krishna should make of Arjuna a recluse when he did not care to lead such a life himself?

Renunciation in the fullest sense of the term is never attainable. However rigid be the self-mortification of an ascetic, he is not long able to remain without eating, drinking, sleeping or breathing. Though he may renounce all work, his pulse will still continue to beat and his heart to throb. A nation of dreamy Lotus-eaters never existed in reality but was only a Utopian flight on the part of Homer and was subsequently dressed out in the luxuriant hues of fancy by a poet of a different

age and country. If true renunciation and worklessness lead to salvation, then, says Tilak, a stone has already achieved it; but what a wise use we make of our Scriptures when we fix for our ulterior goal—the life of a stone! A workless condition is unimaginable, because even when we do nothing, we still continue to do the work of idleness; and Prof. V. G. Bhatt in his booklet on the Gita makes a shrewd hit that even when one does absolutely nothing, he still cannot help getting older every moment. This shows how futile is the path of pure asceticism and renunciation.

Yet even admitting that complete renunciation is possible, the ascetic practising it will still have to depend for alms on the householder; that is, if the ascetic does not work, some one else will have to work and maintain him. Thus it is impossible to refute the ugly conclusion that the ascetic is a parasite on society. Buddhism and Jainism consider renunciation as indispensable for liberation, but even they are alive to the fact that no country can be entirely populated by ascetics, and hence they have wisely provided for the layman class, whose existence only can make the life of the ascetic possible. George Eliot describes in "Romola" the misfortunes of a family of which the only son deserts his filial duty to his blind old father in order to join a monastery and thereby gain a highly spiritual but vastly selfish end. The wreck and ruin of a whole kingdom, that of King Arthur, is described by Tennyson as a result of the knights all starting in the spiritual quest of the Holy Grail, renouncing their duties to king and country.

The Gita is unequivocally clear when Shri Krishna

says in V 2: "Renunciation and yoga by action both lead to the highest bliss; of the two, yoga by action is verily better than renunciation of action." The Gita repeatedly insists on the efficacy and importance of work, as in II 50: ".....therefore cleave thou to yoga: yoga is skill in action:" or in III 14: "From food creatures become; from rain is the production of food; rain proceedeth from sacrifice; sacrifice ariseth out of action." Thus the Gita will be seen to favour inner not outer sacrifice. Shri Krishna's object was to create not "sanyâsis" like Shukdeva, Yajnavalkya, Buddha and Mahavir, but "Karma-yogis" like Janaka, Vyâsa and Vasishtha. This is clear from III 20 where the Lord says: "Janaka and others indeed attained to perfection by action; then having an eye to the welfare of the world also, thou shouldst perform action."

The Gita is as emphatic as Zarathushtrianism in its denunciation of austerities and mutilation offered to the body in the belief that physical pain would be rewarded by spiritual bliss. Shri Krishna says in the Gita XVII 5 and 6: "The men who perform severe austerities, unenjoined by the Scriptures, wedded to vanity and egotism, impelled by the force of their desires and passions, unintelligent, tormenting the aggregated elements forming the body, and Me also, seated in the inner body, know these demoniacal in their resolves." The divine fire of life is not to be quenched, but regulated and trimmed to illuminate the world, "how long or short, permit to Heaven."

The Gita resembles Zarathushtrianism in another essential point, for both these religions have moderation

and the virtue of the golden mean as their keynote. In this respect Shri Krishna may be contrasted with Christ who with the moral fervour of an idealist soars above reason itself, when he says in Matthew V 29, 30: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee...And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee". Shri Krishna rather believes in controlling the erring limb which is but the instrument of a weak and misguided will. The Hindu religion has generally been sicklied over with the pale cast of asceticism. The Pravritti Mârga of the Vedas had terminated in the Nivritti Mârga of the Upanishads, while Buddhism and Jainism had both thrown their weight in the latter scale. Shankar again in spite of his hostility to Buddhism was a pronounced follower of the Nivritti Mârga, and was hardly to be counterbalanced by Mâdhava and Vallabha who had Progressivist tendencies. The Lord Krishna refutes neither, but reconciles the conflicting principles, and preaches in II 48: "Equilibrium is called yoga." The verse VI 16 of the Gita seems to be an echo of the Zarathushtrian scriptures when it says: "Verily yoga is not for him who eateth too much, nor who abstaineth to excess, nor who is too much addicted to sleep, nor even to wakefulness, O Arjuna". What is wanted is the calmness and peace of the yogi who is beautifully described in VI 19: "As a lamp in a windless place flickereth not, to such is likened the yogi of subdued thought, absorbed in the yoga of the Self." The yogi does not discard the necessities of life in so far as they enable him to discharge his worldly duties. But he is the master, not the slave of his desires, and holds his senses

in check as a skilful charioteer effectively controls his horses. He is in the world but not of it: he holds himself detached from all he sees, experiences and does, and is a spectator of, not a participator in life. Such a person, says the Lord Krishna in XII 17 "who neither loveth nor hateth, nor grieveth, nor desireth, renouncing good and evil, full of devotion, is dear to Me".

One of the greatest difficulties human nature has to encounter is the sense of vanity that is almost inevitably associated with the performance of an action. To perform actions is an indispensability according to the Gita but how is one to escape from the egoistic notions:—"I have done it", "I possess this", "I claim to be such-and-such?" Here the wisdom of the Gita is apparent in holding that sin lies not in desires and work but in our attachment to them. Swami Ramtirtha gives us an instance of birds and monkeys sitting on a tree; the branch gives way; the birds fly away, but the monkeys who had clung fast to the tree are dashed down to the ground and killed. So too we may entertain desires but should not be their helpless bondmen; we should perform actions and yet be above them like the free birds of the air. It is attachment that is the parent of all our woe, diverting us from the Almighty to the self. This is seen in the Gita II 62, 63: "Man, musing on the objects of sense, conceiveth an attachment to these; from attachment ariseth desire; from desire anger cometh forth; from anger proceedeth delusion; from delusion confused memory; from confused memory the destruction of reason; from destruction of reason he perishes." We think well of a servant who discharges our work solely in our

interest without having any selfish end to gain by its performance. So too is the Lord pleased with one, who in his work reduces himself and his interests to a minimum, and identifies his will with his Master's. The Gita goes to the length of saying in III 19: "Therefore, without attachment, constantly perform action which is duty, for, by performing action without attachment, man verily reacheth the Supreme".

We have grown to be so saturated in the self, that we erroneously imagine that only a more or less selfish motive can lead to an action, however benevolent. We think that even when a person has conquered all selfish incentives to work, there still remains the thirst for fame and renown. This may be so in an age of "enlightened self-interest", but the Gita favours "Nishkâm Karma" or disinterested action where selfish interests should be entirely eliminated both from the incipient stage of the motive as well as from the final stage of expecting rewards. The Gita says in the ever memorable verse II 47: "Thy business is with the action only; never with its fruits; so let not the fruit of action be thy motive, nor be thou to inaction attached." Thus the renunciation preached by the Gita is not the insane one of actions and desires but of attachment and the fruits, as in XVIII 9 and 11: "He who performeth a prescribed action, saying 'It ought to be done', O Arjuna, relinquishing attachment and also fruit, that relinquishment is regarded as pure.....Nor indeed can embodied beings completely relinquish actions; verily he who relinquisheth the fruit of action, he is said to be a relinquisher." The renunciation is complete

when it extends not only to the desire of the fruit but comprises as well the claim to be the doer of works. Men doing interested actions may seek their reward in heaven but they shall have to be born again: it is only by "Nishkâm Karma" done without the least attachment that the doer attains to the Supreme. Principles of morality always vary in different times and places, and yet one generalization can safely be made—that which is selfless is largely moral; that which is selfish is generally remote from morality. In a masterly chapter Tilak has discussed the various ethical theories of the West—Epicureanism, Interested morality, Enlightened self-interest, Greatest good of the greatest number, Pure benevolence etc.—and has assigned the palm to the Disinterested Action enunciated in the Gita. This work has been done so thoroughly by Tilak that to go over the same ground again would be to run the risk of repetition. Suffice it to say that the heights of morality have been reached by the "Nishkâm Karma" of the Gita, the Pure Benevolence enunciated by Zarathushtra in the Gatha Ushtavaiti, and the Love and Self-sacrifice demanded by Buddha and Jesus Christ.

But the Gita does not stop with selfless work done without detachment. It is persistent in its emphasis on action even after a person attains salvation; for if a fully-evolved soul is privileged to spend his days in workless vacuity, he would be setting a poor example to other unliberated people, and society would be paralyzed by inactivity. This part of the Gita has often been the subject of adverse criticism, which doubts whether any motive will be left for further work in a fully-

evolved soul after attainment of salvation. Personal motive there will not and cannot be, but what motive can be more inspiring and elevating for a God-attained man than to serve God's creatures and bring them on the path of righteousness? Such a person will be truly unselfish, his heart will be passionless, his work genuinely impersonal and devoted to the uplift of humanity. Great and godly though he be, he cannot escape from the toils of action so long as his allotted span of life continues; and to quote a rather hackneyed simile, he will still go on discharging his duty, just as the potter's wheel keeps on revolving even after the vessel which it supported is completed. Work he must, though it will be as God's medium, fulfilling through himself the Will of the Lord. To him the remarkable words of Swami Ramtirtha—"All work is rest" will not sound as a paradox as it does in the uninitiated ears of the majority. He will resemble the sage described in the Gita IV 18 "who seeth inaction in action and action in inaction, he is wise among men, he is harmonious, even while performing all action." Such an emancipated soul doing his duty in the world will be above good and evil, and it would be incorrect to characterize his works as virtuous or vicious. He would say as in I Corinthians VI 12: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any". The finest instance of such a "Karmayogi" is that of Shri Krishna himself, devoting his long and noble life to the pursuit of work, and yet remaining as detached from the world as the lotus is untainted by the water in which it stands.



Though there may be material differences between the Gita and Zarathushtrianism, one feels that the gospel of work, duty and progress enunciated by the former is prompted by the same spirit of "Pravritti Mârga" that inspired the religion of Zarathushtra. The Iranian prophet preached an eminently practical philosophy of life, based on moderation, rooted in the devotion of God, and aiming at universal benevolence. Its outlook of life is one of rosy optimism, and its object is to advance industry, knowledge and civilization. In the "Ahurmazd Yasht", Ahura Mazda Himself says "My tenth name is Progress, My eleventh name being the advancer of Progress." Zarathushtrianism discards fasting and celibacy and has but scant respect for asceticism even when the Zarathushtrian is in the decline of life. He is truly a fighter of the Lord against the forces of "Angramainyu" ( Evil ): like a "Karmayogi" he will discharge his duty to his fellow beings to the last and die with harness on his back. The Zarathushtrian always prays to Ahura Mazda to keep the fields green, the flocks and herds in excellent condition, and the world smiling in peace and prosperity. To such an extent is this gospel indulged in that the Zarathushtrian often runs the danger of being criticized as a materialist, though this charge could be easily refuted by a reference to the lofty teachings contained in the Zarathushtrian ethics. It is comparatively easy to reach a high spiritual stage by resorting to the jungles and practising austerities far away in selfish isolation from the madding crowd. But it is much more difficult, as Nârada Muni was once compelled to admit, to lead a worldly career and discharge our manifold duties beset

by temptations and vexed with the worries of life, and yet be always mindful to render unto God the things that are God's. So similar is the Karma Yoga of the Gita to the spirit of the Zarathushtrian religion that I am sometimes tempted to substitute "âat okht Zarathushtro" (thus spake Zarathushtra) for "Shri Bhagvân uvâch" (the Blessed Lord said). Bearing in mind the essential differences between the two, there is such a close resemblance in the spirit of Pravritti Mârگا that has prompted the two faiths, that the Gita has long been dear to my heart, not only as a great Hindu work, but even as a Zarathushtrian scripture, for, like the French thinker, "I am inclined to pounce upon my own wherever I find it."

The Supreme remains the centre of various creeds though the paths that lead to Him are necessarily different owing to differences in time, place and circumstances. Christianity sees Him through Faith and Love; Buddhism and Jainism enjoin a rigid renunciation of desires to obtain salvation; the Upanishads and the Sânkhya philosophy consider the final stage impossible of attainment till the seeker's eyes are illuminated by "Dnyâna" (Divine knowledge); the Bhâgwat Dharma prescribes the Bhakti Mârگا (path of devotion); but the Gita and Zarathushtrianism dwell, among other things, prominently on the importance of duty and work. But in spite of all this tall talk, the question arises—Have we ever acted up to the Gita? The answer is writ large in the history of India, in our social and religious evils, and in our subjection for centuries together to successive foreign powers. We have failed to lay to our hearts the gospel

of the Lord Krishna and are the authors of our own misfortunes. Perhaps it was the Swami Vivekananda who pointed out the anomaly that Vedānta in its true sense is practised in America, the Gita in Europe, and Christianity in India. It is because the West follows the Gita, shorn of its spiritual and moral safeguards, that the wheels of European progress roll in the blood of the nations. We have erred in just the opposite direction. The passivity and visionariness usually characteristic of the Orient have been well reflected by Matthew Arnold in his poem "The Pagan World":—

"The East bowed low before the blast  
 In patient, deep disdain;  
 She let the legions thunder past,  
 And plunged in thought again."

It is because we have failed to act up to the "Karma Yoga" of the Gita that the history of Aryan India after the downfall of Hindu supremacy, though relieved here and there by a few purple patches of rare merit and heroism, presents largely a picture of helpless impotence and dismal inefficiency.

We have dwelt at considerable length on the "Karma Yoga" of the Gita, but have not yet exhausted all the concomitant virtues that regulate the actions of the aspirant in his Godward journey. According to the Upanishads and the Sāṅkhya philosophy, good actions, however disinterested, may take the doer to heaven but will inevitably send him back to this earth in his next birth, because, according to these schools, in order to reach the final stage of liberation, divine illumination or

knowledge is necessary. This is the Dnyâna-Knowledge—of what is already present in us, the identification of the human soul with the Oversoul, though this fact is hid so long from us by our ignorance. The Gita agrees with the Upanishads and the Sâmkhya philosophy in admitting Dnyâna to be indispensable for liberation, but holds at the same time that this Dnyâna should be supported by action. Thus even according to the Gita action without Dnyâna cannot give liberation, though Shri Krishna continues to insist on the efficacy of works to the last. The Gita may thus be called the gospel of action, but of action which seeks its culmination in Dnyâna or realization of the Supreme. Shri Krishna says in the Gita IV 33 : “Better than the sacrifice of any objects is the sacrifice of Dnyâna, O Parantapâ. All actions in their entirety, O Pârtha, culminate in Dnyâna”. The preponderating importance here attached to Dnyâna would seem to conflict with those verses already quoted where action is considered to be the be-all and end-all of life. But these are the “exquisite inconsistencies” so often connected with great works, and fortunately they are not irreconcilable. In his anxiety to do full justice to every point at a time, a great man praises it as the best and most desirable, not caring to remember that almost the same language had already been used by him with reference to another point. It is because truth is so vast and has so many facets that inconsistencies have to be excused and even provided for in life. Ruskin used to say that he was never satisfied as having thoroughly exhausted a question till he had contradicted himself at least thrice on the point.

The Gita desires the aspirant to curb his senses and soar above the three "Gunas" or qualities, keeping his mental powers in a fit condition to discharge their duties. The Gita says in II 58: "When again as a tortoise draws in on all sides its limbs, he withdraws his senses from the objects of sense, then is his understanding (Pragnâ) well poised." There is a three-fold distinction in the Gita in what we usually call the mind; the first is Pragnâ (Understanding) or the lower mental process as described in II 58; the second is Manah (Mind), which is a higher process of the mental powers; the Gita says in VI 35: "Without doubt, O mighty-armed, the Mind (Manah) is hard to curb and restless; but it may be curbed by constant practice and by dispassion." But the best and greatest of all is Buddhi (Intuition or Discriminative Faculty) which corresponds to Kant's Pure Reason. This Buddhi must be kept essentially pure and refined to enable the yogi to reach his goal. The Gita says in II 49: "Far lower than the Yoga of Discrimination is action, O Dhananjaya. Take thou refuge in the Pure Reason (Buddhi); pitiable are they who work for fruit."

To complete the great Hindu trinity of virtues, with Karma and Dnyâna is associated Bhakti—Devotion or Resignation. We think that some training is required by us before we take up any profession, but we often disregard the spiritual training that is necessary before we embark on the voyage of life or before we begin the struggle for existence. It is precisely this spiritual schooling that is given by the Gita which enjoins us to be illuminated by Dnyâna and resigned completely to the Lord by

Bhakti, as we continue to discharge our Karma. Shri Krishna says in the Gita XI 54: "But by devotion to Me alone I may thus be perceived, Arjuna, and known and seen in essence, and entered, O Parantapa." Shri Krishna also says in XVIII 66: "Abandoning all duties come unto Me alone for shelter; sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins". We have to admit the glaring inconsistency of the Master in thus asking Arjuna to abandon all duties after having preached at great length on the efficacy of duty in life. Unfortunately these inconsistencies have led astray many commentators who in emphasizing one favourite point overmuch have lost sight of the whole. The Bhakti creed laid down in XVIII 66 is strikingly similar to the words of the Lord Christ who said—Come unto me ye that are weary and heavy laden and I shall give ye rest. So too is the Hindu devotee asked to resign his all to the Lord Krishna, for as it has been said:—"Yato Krishnas tato dharmah, yato dharmas tato jayah"—where there is Krishna there is Dharma, where there is Dharma there is victory. Complete resignation to the wish of the Lord so as to identify his will with ours is the keynote of Islam, which itself is derived from the word "Taslim" or Resignation. That which comes from God, good or evil, blessing or curse, is to be received reverently in the spirit of Job who said: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." We own nothing—neither wealth nor children, neither even the body nor the will; we may however hold these things in trust from the Lord to be used as He chooses, not as we please. As Tennyson sings:—

“ Our wills are ours, we know not how,  
Our wills are ours to make them Thine.

This fusion of Karma, Dnyâna and Bhakti is indeed a very powerful combination, and corresponds respectively to our Judgment, Reason and Emotion or to our Will, Intellect and Feeling. On the same great trio of the Gita is based respectively the classification of the forms of human activity into Ethics, Metaphysics and *Æsthetics*. Browning in his “A Death in the Desert” relates the philosophy of the dying St. John, the beloved disciple of Christ. The doctrine he was wont to preach was that man is made up of three souls which by their harmonious co-operation are fused into one another. The first soul is “What Does”, which is identical with Karma or the executive faculty in man. It tends upwards and grows into the next soul which is seated in the brain and which is named “What Knows”: this is Dnyâna or the intellectual faculty. This soul, or rather the combination of both, moves still higher till it mingles into the last and greatest soul, which is known as “What Is”, or the soul as it in itself is; viz. the soul proper—in its special spiritual sense, which is to realize its identity with the Divinity. This last soul corresponds to Bhakti or the devotional element in man. Browning particularly emphasizes the fact that no one single soul, not even the highest, can enable man to work out his own salvation: what is required is a harmonious blending of Karma, Dnyâna and Bhakti.

Mere Karma, unenlightened by Dnyâna, is folly, as Dnyâna alone, which does not end in Karma, is sheer

pedantry. Both Karma and Dnyāna in the absence of Bhakti lead to materialism, growth of science, utilitarianism and various other theories based on the principle of "survival of the fittest", which are not unknown to the West. Bhakti alone by itself, even though it be the highest rung of the ladder, would result in powerless and sluggish asceticism and the mortification of the flesh, which, as we have already observed, are the bane of the East. Thus Action must be illuminated by the Intellect and sanctified by Devotion: Devotion must not be slothful and passive but vigilant and open-eyed through the influence of the Intellect and must terminate in benevolent Action. Karma, Dnyāna and Bhakti—these three alone lead life to sovereign power. In short the Gita undertakes to reform a man internally by Dnyāna and Bhakti, asking him to observe moderation, restrain his senses, purify his Reason, and then discharge his Karma or duty for the sake of duty without any interest or hope of reward till the end of his earthly career for the welfare of humanity. At the earnest request of Arjuna, Shri Krishna gave him the divine intuition and for a blessed moment he saw the Vision Beatific, the Form Omnipotent, spread out before his astonished gaze like "the splendour of a thousand suns blazing out together in the sky", and the gospel of the Master now sank into the soul of the disciple.

It is easy to soar in raptures over the Gita, but it is worth while remembering that its keynote is not empty talk but the realization of the Infinite through the finite, the attainment of the Supreme through work and duty. The Gita is not an old and fossilized religion that




only exists as an interesting relic of the past; it is an ever-living message, which, as Arvind Ghosh says, should be constantly renewed, re-lived and re-shaped in all ages so as to be of infinite use to humanity. There is nothing local or particular in the Gita, but like the Sermon on the Mount this Wisdom on the Warfield is of universal application. Even the most mediocre intellect can interpret Arjuna as a man of the world, fighting his battle of life when the voice divine explains to him his duties and provides the Hindu Achilles with spiritual armour to enable him to triumph in the struggle. The Gita again is a wonderful synthesis of various conflicting creeds, the essence of which is distilled in its few pages. No book of similar dimensions has sounded so deeply the depths of philosophy; no volume of similar size has commanded such popularity among the Hindus; no work of Hindu philosophy deserves to exercise such wholesome and permanent influence on the life of the Aryans as is done by the Gita. The Gita is the true manual of civilization both earthly and spiritual. It has excited the admiration of people of different countries and of various types of mind. It has appealed to enlightened and liberal-minded non-Hindus—to scientists like Al Biruni, princes like Dara Shikuh, thinkers like Emerson, "poets" like Edward Carpenter, sages like Thoreau, scholars like Edwin Arnold, and statesmen like Warren Hastings. So elevated are the teachings of the Gita that they show us not what man can perform but what God would do if He were to come down to the earth in human garb. For the ideal character of the "Happy Warrior", we need not turn to the virtuous soldier of Wordsworth, but

to Arjuna, who fought the good fight with Shri Krishna as his charioteer—his guide, philosopher and friend.

“This is the Happy Warrior, this is he  
That every man in arms should wish to be.”

Genius in men and books works both as a magnet and a flame. Like will attract like, and the ignorant will catch fire by contact with the initiated, or by filling their hearts with “the precious life-blood of a master-spirit embalmed and treasured up” for the profit of posterity. Thus it was the constant association of the “Iliad” that fired the martial ardour of “Bellona’s bridegroom,” Alexander the Great, while Shivaji derived his patriotism as much from the milk of his noble mother as from the inspiration of the Mahabharata. We owe the epoch-making “Critiques” of Kant to his study of Plato, and the melancholy wisdom of Schopenhauer to his perusal of Kant and the Buddhist philosophy. It was by digesting the truths of the New Testament that Francis of Assisi became the “Troubadour of God”; it was the reading of the Ramayana that gave India the God-intoxicated poet-saint in Tulsidāsa. Thus if the perusal of epics can create heroes and that of works on philosophy and religion can produce philosophers and saints, the Gita, if wisely digested and followed in the spirit, can surely give birth to the Superman who is saint, philosopher and hero all in one. Let us tread in all seriousness of heart the Path illuminated by the Light of the Gita; let our manners be as humble, our resolution as firm, our hearts as undaunted as our goal is sublime; and let us hope that before long the scales may fall

from our eyes, and we may be able to say to the Lord within us as Arjuna says to Shri Krishna in the Gita XVIII 73: "Destroyed is my delusion. I have gained knowledge through Thy grace, O Immutable One. I am firm, my doubts have fled away. I will do according to Thy word."



## \*Episodes Kindred to that of Rustam & Sohrab in Epic Literature.



If Firdausi's "Shah Nameh" is pre-eminent among epics for having bestowed an everlasting form to a nation's glorious traditions and history, the character of Rustam is as much pre-eminent among heroes for his conspicuous services to king and country, and as serving as an ideal warrior of ancient times, who may best be calculated to inspire the spirit of nationalism in the forlorn band of fugitives that still bear the proud name of Parsis. The creation of Rustam, a mighty product of a mighty genius, had imposed a tremendous strain on the poet who says:—

"Ke yak nimeh az 'umr e khud kam kunam,  
Jahâni pur az nâm e Rustam kunam."

"I shall devote half my life to this subject till I make the world resound with Rustam's name". The most remarkable and tragic incident in the life of the hero was his unconscious fight with and slaughter of his own son Sohrab—a misadventure immortalized by Firdausi who here rises to the tragic heights of Helicon, scarcely surpassed even by himself. A familiar Sanskrit verse informs us that drama is the most captivating form of poetry, while in dramatic literature the "Shâkuntala" of Kâlidâsa reigns supreme: in "Shâkuntala" the fourth Act is indisputably the best, and in this Act there are

---

\* The substance of this Essay was originally contributed to the Shams-ul-Ulâmâ Dr. Sir J. J. Modi Memorial Volume in 1930.

four verses which are beyond all praise. So too we may say that the "Shah Nameh" is the crown of Persian poetry; the glory of that work centres in the character and adventures of Rustam, but the greatest episode in that hero's long career of blood is the one in the depiction of which Firdausi remains unexcelled—the fight between Rustam and Sohrab. Even after repeated perusals we find it impossible to go through this episode dry-eyed. The slaughter of Sohrab is to the Persian what the fall of Abhimanyu in the battle at Kurukshetra is to the Hindu, the martyrdom of Imâm Husein at the battle of Karbalâ to the Muslim, and the sufferings and crucifixion of Christ to the Christian, especially as represented in the Passion-play at Oberammergau. The object here is not to narrate what is already well-known to readers of Persian and even of English literature through Matthew Arnold's Hellenized version of "Sohrab and Rustam", but to attempt a comparative study of similar tragic episodes in the epic literature of the world.

Owing to the extraordinary popularity of the "Shah Nameh" and particularly of the Rustam-Sohrab episode, numerous other Namehs sprouted up to challenge its glories by weaving the most fantastic legends, supplying freely from the imagination what could not be sought in history or tradition. National legends are ever dear to the heart of the Persians, and so vast was the store of folklore still left after the work of Firdausi that in course of time a cycle of heroic traditions happened to gather round the nucleus of the "Shah Nameh". As far as possible the prominent facts of Firdausi e. g. the enmity of Afrâsiâb, the renunciation of Kaikhusru, the

expedition of Arjâsp on Iran, the extinction of the heroes of Zâbulistân by Behman etc. were brought to the forefront, so as to give the work an authentic aspect, but besides this smattering of semi-historical details the freest possible scope was given to the imagination, and exaggeration and bombast were resorted to in the attempt to surpass the natural grandeur of Firdausi. Some of these subsequent Namehs were—Kershâsp Nameh, Sâm Nameh, Barzu Nameh, Farâmarz Nameh, Jehângir Nameh, Shehriyâr Nameh, Bânu Gushasp Nameh, Behman Nameh, Dârâb Nameh etc. Such was the influence and popularity of Rustam and his forefathers as immortalized by Firdausi that the very large majority of these Namehs were based on the exploits of that illustrious family alone, and Rustam is here provided with a progeny about whom the Shah Nameh has not a word to say. Knowing that the most renowned episode in Firdausi is that concerning Rustam and Sohrab, later writers exerted their utmost powers in attempting to outdo the master in his own province.

Firdausi is entirely silent about Barzu, the grandson of Rustam, but according to the poet Abu Tâher Tarsusi, the author of the "Barzu Nameh," Sohrab's eyes once fell upon the damsel Shehru and found her fair. On parting from her he presented her with a ring to be given to their child in order to facilitate its recognition by its father. This child was Barzu, brought up for a time as a farmer. King Afrâsiâb, the inveterate enemy of Iran, secured the boy and sent him to fight his grandfather as he had once successfully despatched Sohrab for the same purpose. In the combat Rustam is badly wounded,

but he conceals his discomfiture and retires. Meanwhile by sheer good luck Farāmarz, son of Rustam, returns from the Indian wars, and seeing the sorry plight of his father, disguises himself as the latter, and grapples with Barzu, who is overthrown and captured. Then Rustam is described as sending poisoned food to Barzu whose life is saved by Rueen, son of Pirān. It is impossible to conceive the noble and chivalrous Rustam falling so low as to resort to such damnable treachery: and this incident must of course be a scandalous fib on the part of the poet Abu Tāher Tarsusi himself. Again Rustam and Barzu wrestle; the former triumphs and is about to strike the fatal blow, when Shehru, the mother of Barzu, rushes in to reveal the secret and avert the over-hanging calamity.

So too the anonymous author of the "Jehāngir Nameh" describes Afrāsiāb inducing Jehāngir, a son of Rustam, (about whom Firdausi has nothing to say), to join his army and instigating him to try his strength all unwittingly with his father; but on this occasion also a favourable destiny interfered in time to dissipate the malevolence of the enemy by revealing the identity of the combatants. But is it ever possible that Rustam should have the misfortune to fight repeatedly with his own offspring? After he unknowingly despatched Sohrab, Rustam must have thought twice before he engaged in fight with another person, and it is flagrantly absurd to believe that the fierce old warrior should be so blinded with the lust of blood as to go on courting misfortune by extinguishing the lights of his own family. This can only be satisfactorily accounted for by the fact that the

pathos and popularity of Firdausi's Rustam-Sohrab episode had led subsequent writers to ascribe sons and grandsons to Rustam, who was assigned the odious task of butchering them "to make a Persian holiday."

However, the idea of a father unconsciously fighting with and occasionally slaying his own son is so poignantly tragic that it seems to have obsessed the epic genius not only of Persia but of the world. "Ossian" is the great Scotch epic, in editing which poor Macpherson came to grief; nor is it definitely settled upto the present day how far it is the genuine product of the soil. In one of its books called "Carthon" we come across a youth of that name, son of Clessammor, who at the time of his son's birth was in full flight across the seas. In those wild days, when vendetta was supposed to be an honourable accomplishment in a hero, Carthon, determined to take revenge on his enemies for some old grudge, suddenly encountered his own father by whom he was slain. The unfortunate old man mourned for the death of his son for three days and on the fourth joined him in the dim Hereafter.

What a sad commentary on human culture that mankind, proudly known as the crown of creation, should thus fail to recognise its own flesh and blood, when even animals are known to be endowed with the instinct of distinguishing their offspring after years of separation! The reason, however, why these unnatural duels frequently took place in ancient times was that there were then exceedingly few, if any, means of communication, and a person separated from his son or brother was quite unable to know the whereabouts of his family, unless



they all made it a point to return home at regular intervals. Again in those days knights used to fight with visors on their faces, thus making it impossible for a man to know another. The voice may be recognised but that was not practicable in the case of a man who was fighting his own son from whom he was separated from infancy or even before his birth. Another reason, given by our late learned historian Mr. Palanji B. Desai in his Gujarati work "Tawârikh-e-Kayâniân", is that in some nations names were considered so sacred that they were often concealed from the antagonists. The American Indians are known to have adopted different names while fighting their foes. This custom may have originated in the fear that the true name of a person might be used by the enemy for the furtherance of his evil designs through magic. This custom, it must be said, did not prevail among the Persians, who were rather fond of proclaiming their names, boasting of their feats in arms and threatening their foes with the irresistible might of their prowess.

In the case of Rustam and Sohrab the former was wrongly informed by his wife Tehmineh that she had given birth to a daughter, for the lady knew that her husband would take away the child to be trained as a warrior if it was known to be a boy. Again it was Rustam's proud principle not to engage in single combat as far as possible with every raw youth and ragamuffin, but if he did condescend to fight with such a person, he would like to conceal his identity as he was inclined to do when he fought the youthful Sohrab. Thus nothing but the mutual natural yearning of father and son

was left for the recognition, till "fate trod those promptings down" and precipitated the tragedy. Even then one feels at every step that the warriors would disclose their identity and escape the consequences of their own fury. But though we are within an ace of the recognition, the secret is never revealed till matters are past remedy. One feels that it was either thick-headedness on the part of the combatants or an exceptionally cruel irony of fate that led Sohrab to talk on various things, but, despite his anxiety to seek his father, never to disclose his parentage and his armet to the tower-like person to whom he was so instinctively attracted. And yet this want of common intelligence or this heartless mockery of fate, call it what you will, is seen in numerous similar instances collected in this essay. This leads us to the conclusion that at least a few of these instances, as in the "Barzu Nameh" or "Jehângir Nameh," may not have actually occurred but were invented by poets anxious to show off their skill in handling the most pathetic themes and drawing tears from the eyes of their readers. On the other hand, some writers consider such fights between fathers and sons as mere allegorical representations, e. g. of the extinction of the dawn by the advent of morning, or the death of the day on the approach of night. This theory is too fantastic for our belief, and we have already seen that there is nothing inherently impossible in such fights in ancient times when means of communication and recognition were few and far between.

In the innumerable legends that have gathered round the fascinating name of Arthur, we read of his invincible

knight Lancelot, unknowingly fighting with his son Galahad—the paragon of purity in the Arthurian romances, but the combat fortunately ceased before either party had cause to rue the day on which he unsheathed his sword. In the epic cycle of Ireland we come across the tragic tale of Cucullin and Conloch first brought to light in connection with the Rustam-Sohrab episode by the late Dr. Sir J. J. Modi in his “Asiatic Papers”. The legend will also be found dramatised by W. B. Yeats in his “On Baile’s Strand”. The story goes that in the reign of King Conor MacNessa of Ulster, there lived a famous hero named Cucullin, who, leaving his Scotch wife Aife enceinte, started in pursuit of adventure as did Rustam, resigning his wife Tehmineh, the Princess of Samangân, to the care of her father. Cucullin at his departure handed over to his wife a golden chain to be bound round the neck of her child if it happened to be a son, and also gave her the curious direction to instruct her boy never to mention his name in the fight. The son that was born was named Conloch, who, when he had scarcely arrived at the age of discretion, displayed the impetuosity of a hero to flesh his maiden sword in field of blood. Dogged by an evil destiny he went to Ulster and pursued his victorious course over one and all till he was challenged by the invincible knight of Ireland—his own father Cucullin. The youth was asked to give out his name but bearing his mother’s behest in mind he refused to do so. Though both were strongly drawn to each other by some inexplicable power, they began the fight. Cucullin was defeated the first day but his life was spared by his son: but the next day Conloch

fell, more, it should seem, for a punctilio of chivalry than for anything else, and left his father mourning over the calamity he had brought over himself. Conchubor, High King of Ireland, is the Afrásiab of the Irish epic and instigates Cucullin to fight to the bitter end. When the unfortunate father sees the havoc he has wrought, in his frenzy he rushes into the sea and fights with the waves, believing each wave to be King Conchubor, till he is overwhelmed by the rising waters and drowned.

The grim story of *Œdipus* is well-known to readers of European literature, and has been handled in drama by Sophocles among Greeks, by Seneca among Romans, by Corneille and Voltaire among Frenchmen, by Dryden and Lee conjointly and by Shelley among Englishmen. It is also the subject of a great Latin epic poem—"Thebaid"—by Statius. As the story goes, Laios and Jocasta, King and Queen of Thebes, learn from an oracle that they would have a son, destined to murder his father and marry his mother. Horrified at this prophecy, they ordered the son that was born to be suspended by his feet with leather thongs from a tree in the jungle. As it often happens the child was rescued by a shepherd who brought him up as his own son and named him *Œdipos* or Clubfoot because of his swollen legs. (Hence too Shelley's comic attempt is known as "Swellfoot the Tyrant"). Once while walking on the cross-roads, he was nearly driven over by the chariot of his father Laios, who haughtily ordered the youth to clear out of the way. Royal blood could not brook this insult; a fight ensued and the inevitable occurred when the father fell dead beneath the blows of his son. The remaining portion of

the story—Œdipos' marriage with his mother, the revelation of the terrible secret by the blind sage Teiresias, the hero's self-inflicted punishment and the disinterested devotion of his daughter Antigone, need not be described, as it is foreign to our purpose.

Chinese folklore has also its contribution to make to this tragic but interesting subject, which has so powerfully attracted the sympathies of the world. Prof. Sir Jehangir C. Coyaji in a learned article contributed to the Special Annual Number of the "Sânj Vartamân" for 1929 has discussed an episode from Chinese traditions bearing a close resemblance to that of Rustam and Sohrab. Li-ching, we are told, was a valiant Chinese hero and the redoubtable champion of his country. According to Firdausi, when Rustam parted from his wife he gave her a chain or armband to be bound in the hair of the child if it was a girl or on the arm if it was a boy; but when No-châ, the son of Li-ching, came into existence, his mother was put to no such trouble for the child was born mysteriously decorated with a suitable armband. No-châ grows up into a formidable warrior, unbeaten by all, and is once confronted by his father Li-ching who is defeated by the youth and compelled to flee. When Rustam was overpowered by Sohrab in the first two days' fight, he offered prayers to God to endow him with his original strength and thus enable him to triumph over his antagonist; but in the Chinese tale a Taoist monk, armed with a celestial weapon interferes and saves the life of Li-ching. According to the Barzu Nameh, Farâmarz, a son of Rustam, comes up in time to save the situation when his father fought

with Barzu, while in the Chinese story Mu-châ, a son of Li-ching, tries to rescue his father from the fury of No-châ, but the latter puts his brother to flight by hurling at him a golden brick. The Chinese tale ends happily and so it must, for Li-ching, we are told, was semi-divine while No-châ was immortal.

Of all the epics of the world the most bloodthirsty is that which sings of "the children of Nibelung"—the great epic of Germany, the "Nibelungenlied". But there is such a vast amount of epic materials to be found in the sagas that numerous smaller epics gradually saw the light of the day. One of them is the "Hildebrandslied", of which the hero Hildebrand, leaving behind him a wife and infant son, goes off to fight the Huns. Returning after thirty years, he happens to encounter his own son, named Hadubrand, but here the veteran feels that his antagonist must in all likelihood be his own offspring, and his bowels yearned upon him. But the youth, who had received false information of his father's death, would have none of this sentimentality, and compelled him to fight. At last both were exhausted, Hadubrand gave out who he was, father and son embraced each other and returned to the arms of the matron, who would have either been widowed or bereaved of her only son if the combat had been fought to the finish.

In 1859 M. Ruibnikoff after very trying experiences collected the "Bylinas" or heroic ballads of the Russians from the lips of the peasants and the village folk. Many of these bylinas centre round the great name of King Vladimir, who introduced Christianity in Russia

in 980 A. D. From them we find that Ilia de Mourom, the son of a peasant, was the Russian Achilles, who served Vladimir as Rustam of Zâbulistân served King Kaikâoos or as Ogier the Dane enlisted himself in the service of Charlemagne. Once Ilia encountered and overpowered a terrible "polenitza" or amazon, who would not reveal her name. She turned out to be Ilia's own daughter, whose mother was also a polenitza, conquered and abandoned by Ilia years ago.

Few people in the world are so childishly fond of stories as the Arabs, and M. Clement Huart in his "History of Arabic Literature" discusses not an Arabian epic but a celebrated romance, wherein a pregnant queen named Al-Khazra, once seeing a blackbird hold its own against several members of its own species, prayed to God to bless her with as brave a son even though he should happen to be as black as that bird. In response to her prayers a son was born remarkable alike for blackness and bravery. But the king Amir Razq, suspecting his innocent wife's intrigue with a blackamoor, drove away both mother and child from the royal palace. Years after, the son unknowingly met his father in battle, and immediately unhorsing him, was about to slay the author of his own being when the mother of the youth (like Shehru, the mother of Barzu), interferred and revealed the secret, whereupon the lady and her son were reinstated in their lawful possessions.

There is scarcely anything of human interest that cannot be found in the capacious limits of the encyclopædic epics of India. It is true that the "Ramayana"

of Vālmiki does not describe the fight between Rama and his sons, yet such a struggle has been invented by tradition-mongers perhaps to show off the bravery of the youths in comparison with that of their father. According to the "Uttarkānda" of the "Ramayana", Sita, the patient Griselda of Hindu epic, gives birth to the twins Kusha and Lava, in the hermitage of the sage Vālmiki on the very night of the visit of Rama's brother Shatrughna to that place. The boys are given by Vālmiki a careful training worthy of their noble birth as Telemachus, son of Ulysses, was educated by the sagacious Mentor. When Rama performed the horse-sacrifice, Vālmiki, accompanied by the youths, was present at the ceremony, where the two boys thrilled the whole assembly and especially their father by reciting select passages from the Ramayana recently composed by the sage. Then follows the recognition scene, and Vālmiki assures all of Sita's purity, and the much-suffering wife is at last restored to her husband. But Sita's heart was deeply wounded, and this "daughter of the furrow" after swearing eternal fidelity to her lord gives but the final proof of her virtue by disappearing in the depths of her mother, the Earth. Even Kālidāsa in his "Raghuvansha" is silent about the fight between Rama and his sons. Bhavabhuti's play, "Uttararāmacharita", consistent with Sanskrit dramatic tradition, ends happily with the reunion of Sita and her sons with Rama, at which happy consummation the goddesses of the Earth and the Ganges are made to rejoice. According to this dramatist Lava speaks contemptuously about Rama and the horse-sacrifice he was about to celebrate. The result is a duel between him



and Chandraketu, son of Lakshmana, but it is stopped by Rama on seeing whom Lava bows down respectfully.

Not content with depicting the fight between cousins, current tradition goes further and describes the combat between Rama himself and his sons. It is said that during the occasion of the horse-sacrifice a steed was turned loose by Rama to wander at will wherever it chose for a year. Shatrughna, the brother of Rama, followed the horse with an army, ready to offer battle to one and all who dared to arrest the animal's progress and thereby question the undisputed supremacy of Rama. When the horse came to the hermitage of Vālmiki, Lava read the epistle attached to its forehead and immediately tied him up in the stable. Thereupon Shatrughna with his army attacked Lava, who fought with his usual valour but was overpowered and captured. Finding his brother in trouble Kusha came up to his rescue: Lava escaped from his enemies and the two brothers with their celestial weapons bade successful defiance to the royal army. Then Lakshmana, famous for his great strength, confronted them in battle but even he was defeated and knocked unconscious on the ground. Then Rama himself came to the fight and was so strongly attracted by paternal affection towards the youths that he fought but listlessly and he too reeled fainting on the battlefield. But now Vālmiki comes up, reveals the real state of affairs and the boys with their mother are handed over to their father.

That "ocean of Indian tales" the "Kathā-sarit-sāgara" by Somadeva Bhatta of Kashmir has quite a different version of the same story. It is said that Sita had only one son called Lava. Once Sita taking Lava with her went to

bathe. Vālmiki finding the cradle empty was struck with horror and thought that the child must have been devoured by some monster. By his yogic powers he thereupon made another boy out of the "darbha" grass and called it Kusha. Vālmiki then saw his mistake but asked Sita to bring up Kusha also as her son. Now Rama meditates not a horse-sacrifice (Ashwamedha) but a human sacrifice (Narmedha), for which purpose a person endowed with the thirty-two traditional Hindu virtues was required. Lakshmana went in search of such a man, and seeing Lava sitting under a tree found him answering all his expectations. The boy was therefore defeated in a duel by his uncle and taken away. Vālmiki, having come to know all this by supernatural means, sent Kusha with celestial weapons to save his brother. Kusha hurried up to the sacrificial ceremony and defeated Lakshmana, and such was the efficacy of the weapons that he wielded that even Rama could not prevail against him. Then follows the usual recognition, the precursor of a happy union, which was all the more intensified since it came in the wake of long and wearisome years of separation.

Another parallel of the Rustam-Sohrab episode may be found in the "Ashwamedha Parva" of the Mahabharata, wherein we find Yudhishtira celebrating the horse-sacrifice after his triumph in the great war. In accordance with the custom of the times, he set free a horse and sent his younger brother Arjuna to claim the submission of all Indian princes, through whose territories the steed happened to pass. In the course of his travels, Arjuna arrived at Manipur, governed by his son Babhruvāhana, born of the famous amazon Chitrāngadā,

the subject of a well-known play by Tagore. By the directions of his mother, the youth made obeisance to Arjuna and, offering precious gifts, revealed his identity, but Arjuna rudely questioned the legitimacy of his birth and spurned him from his presence, saying that the son of a Kshatriya would be always anxious for war and would never stand helplessly arguing his case before any one. And Arjuna got what he bargained for with a vengeance. Being thus defied and called upon to fight, Babhruvâhana at first showed his superiority over various warriors in the camp of Arjuna and finally challenged his father himself. In the duel which ensued the father's head soon rolled beneath the feet of his son, who, being now beset by the curses and entreaties of his mother, proceeded to immolate himself on a pyre. He was however desired by his stepmother, the snake-princess Ulupi, to start in search of the "Sanjivan mani" (life-restoring stone), which was in possession of the great serpent Shesh Nâg in the nether regions. In the Hindu epics nothing seems to come amiss; after a terrific war with the serpents Babhruvâhana returned to Manipur with the precious stone, and not only Arjuna but all his slaughtered followers were soon restored to life.

We have hitherto noticed fathers unwittingly warring with their offspring; we may now take several instances in which lovers, brothers and friends are unconsciously pitted against their dear ones, and find when it is too late that they are responsible for the slaughter of a person for whom they would have been only too ready to lay down their lives. Tasso in his "Gerusalemme Liberata" describes the amazon Clorinda, who, aban-

done by her mother in infancy, was suckled by a tigress, and afterwards rose to be an intrepid warrior in the ranks of the Saracens. Tancred, the greatest of Christian soldiers except Rinaldo, was deep in love with her. Once at night a sortie was made by a section of the Saracen army, and after accomplishing their work the soldiers beat a hurried retreat; but as ill-luck would have it, Clorinda alone was left outside and the gates were closed. In the darkness of the night she fought with her own lover Tancred and perished under his blows. When the fact was revealed, Tancred was disconsolate with grief, tearing the bandages from his own wounds; and in all the epic literature of Europe there is hardly a page so tragic in its intensity as that which describes the agony of Tancred, which is too deep for tears. This incident appears all the more genuine as the author wrote it not in ink but in blood, for the unfortunate Tasso with his native melancholy was here probably unlocking his own heart, which was throbbing with hopeless affection for the Princess Leonora d'Este of Ferrara.

The "Chanson de Roland" is the national epic which stirs the blood of France, by singing the adventures of the indomitable Roland, nephew of Charlemagne. Roland's friendship with Oliver is as proverbial as that of Achilles and Patroclus in the Greek, Nisus and Euryalus in the Roman, and Krishna and Arjuna in the Indian epics. In the terrible catastrophe that befell the French arms in the mountain pass of Roncesvalles, Oliver is blind with the blood flowing from his own head, and, mistaking Roland for a Moor, strikes a heavy blow at his own friend. The wound is not mortal, though

Roland himself has not much to live; but the poet here finds the opportunity of describing the last meeting between two dear friends with a pathos rivalled only by Homer and Tasso at their very best. In the Arthurian epic we are introduced to a hot-tempered hero, Balin, whose tragic tale is versified by Tennyson and A. C. Swinburne. This knight once considered Queen Guinevere the very ideal of feminine purity, and bore her image on his shield. Coming to know of the Queen's relations with Sir Lancelot, he flew into a rage and trampled upon his shield while in a forest. His brother Balan mistook him for the Demon of the Wood; they fought and dealt each other mortal blows, the mutual explanation only coming in time for the brothers to be locked in the last and loving embrace of death. One of the Arthurian legends connected with the subject of the "Holy Grail" also describes the fight between two brothers. Parzival, a pure-hearted hero, once encounters an unknown warrior and learns in the pauses of the battle that he was about to slay his own step-brother Fierfiss, who was brought up a pagan. The two henceforth became inseparable companions and in course of time Fierfiss was baptized and made to lead a pious and saintly life. We may only refer *en passant* to the very well-known Norse tale regarding the god Balder, the subject of two poems—by Matthew Arnold and Sydney Dobell. Balder was invulnerable to everything except the mistletoe bough, and was done to death unknowingly by his blind brother Hodur, in whose hand the bough was placed by the evil spirit Loki.

This essay only takes record of those incidents in

which warriors *unknowingly* fought with their dear ones. Hence it is not necessary to deal with the legend of Jove intentionally slaying his father Cronos to possess himself of the sovereignty of the universe; or of the American epic hero Hiawatha, who, espousing the cause of his wronged mother, consciously fights with his own father, the West Wind. Of almost the same nature is the Paurānik legend of Shiva, constantly absorbed in meditation and living apart from his wife Pārvati, who by her mysterious powers begot a son, Ganesh, from her perspiration. When Shiva learnt from Nārada, notorious for brewing mischief and plotting trouble in the world, that Pārvati had become a mother in his absence, he was infuriated and rushed home to know things for himself. At the door his progress was checked by the boy Ganesh, but the wrathful god, without caring to ascertain their relationship, immediately chopped off his head. After knowing the truth, he made amends for his rashness by replacing the head of the child with that of an elephant which was the first object that met his sight. This elephant-headed, pot-bellied god is the favourite deity of the Hindu pantheon, and is invoked before the commencement of every auspicious undertaking, for he is known to remove the obstacles of his worshippers. For similar reasons we must leave out of consideration another Paurānik legend dealing with the slaughter of Renukā by her son Parashurāma in obedience to the stern mandate of his father Jamadāgni for her "sin" in bestowing an appreciative glance on the Gandharva king Chitraratha, and her subsequent revival.

Nor can we here enter at length into the stories of

fathers deliberately sacrificing their children to propitiate the Lord, as seen, e. g. in Abraham's attempt to dedicate to the Almighty his son Isaac (cf. Genesis XXII 9, 10 and Al Qoran XXXVII 101), and Agamemnon's endeavour to immolate his daughter Iphigenia to the wrathful Diana as immortalized by the Attic dramatists. This essay deals with instances taken from epics and epical traditions and not from various other forms of literature. Hence we must reject tales like the Greek one of "Merope", dramatised by Voltaire and Matthew Arnold, in which the heroine of that name is saved by an old and faithful servant from unknowingly killing her own son Aepytus under the mistaken impression that he was that son's supposed murderer. A deliberate mortal combat between two persons aware of their intimate relationship fills us with horror, not pathos; it is butchery, not warfare. We must therefore also leave out of consideration the incident narrated in the "Thebaid" of the Roman author Statius, who describes the monstrous struggle between the two sons of Œdipos—Eteocles and Polynices—their unnatural vows to destroy each other and their too literal fulfilment.

Even history is not without the tragic episodes of the Rustam and Sohrab type. The habit of fighting with visor on the face proved almost fatal to King William I of England, who, while besieging the castle of Gerberoi in Normandy, was unwittingly knocked down in combat by his eldest son Robert, surnamed "Curt-hose" from his short legs. Recognising his father's voice, the young man immediately asked pardon on his knees. It is said, however, that from this time the Conqueror bore a

grudge against Robert and finally dispossessed him of his rights, leaving the throne to his second son William Rufus. But history is at present out of our province, nor are we here concerned with the numerous incidents of patricidal or fratricidal wars for the crown, that have disgraced the annals of almost every nation in the world.

It is heart-rending to read such incidents in epic poetry; and yet to the Persian reader nothing is more poignant in its pathos than the cry that rent the lion-heart of Rustam; nothing so touching in its overwhelming grief as the tears that flowed from the eyes of Tehmineh, who joined within an year her valiant son Sohrab in that realm of peace "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."

---



## The Historical Epic with particular reference to the Shah-nameh.\*



Human knowledge may be said to have originated either in wonder or fear. The earliest gleam of civilization now visible through the complex fabric of modern culture had assumed the universally prevalent form of Nature-worship. Man bowed his head reverently in admiration of the beneficent forms of creation, while he crouched in terror and worshipped in awe the fierce and frowning moods of "Nature red in tooth and claw." It is recorded in Proverbs I 7 that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge", while a great saying is attributed to S. T. Coleridge:—"In wonder philosophy begins, in wonder philosophy ends, and admiration fills up the interspace". Ever since primeval man put to himself the question "how", science in her faintest form dawned on the earth; his question "why" gradually opened to him the treasures of philosophy; his question "when" led him to remember and ultimately record the occurrences of the past, and thus was the Muse of History enthroned in the realms of knowledge. But ever since man began to *feel*, poetry flowed from the human heart. J. G. Hamann, the German philosopher, sententiously observes:—"Poetry is the mother-tongue of the human race: in the same way that the garden is older than the ploughed field, painting than writing,

---

\*The substance of this Essay was delivered as a lecture before the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute of Bombay and subsequently appeared in its Journal No. 10 in 1927.

song than declamation, barter than trade." There is no time or place on record wherein poetry in her crudest and most primitive form did not exist. Man's primeval smiles and tears, his earliest religions, mythologies and histories were all poetic.

The most ancient form of amusement with our ancestors was dancing, and says Mr. T. F. Henderson, it cannot be said with certainty whether man, when he emerged from the ape, first exhibited his powers of singing or dancing or both simultaneously. The earliest form of poetry was the ballad, a mixture of song and dance, derived from the French "ballare" to dance. The "popular ballad" or folk poetry is the seed from which has sprouted the mighty oak-tree of literature with its numerous branches and offshoots. The ballad is the first as journalism or perhaps the short story is the latest child of literature. In course of time a vast collection is formed of these popular ballads, and then arises a master-poet, gifted with the power of representing the genius and the peculiar greatness of his country. With the breath of poetry he infuses life and order into this miscellaneous mass of details, and we have the epic, the sublimest and most majestic among the forms of literature.

Mr. F. W. Newman defines epic as a compromise between poetry and history, but both epic and history have to be evolved from the ballad. An epic is a ballad writ large. It is produced by idealizing, exalting and magnifying the characters and incidents in ballad-poetry giving full vent to the imagination, appealing powerfully to the reader's emotions, and handling a grand subject

in a suitably grand style. Contrariwise, history is derived from a collection of ballads when the writer weighs his facts by taking all possible evidence on the subject, sifts the false from the true and keeps his eye fixed only on the truth by demolishing as best he can the four Baconian idols. The epic has dignity, sublimity, comprehensiveness and variety: Clio is satisfied if she wears but one jewel—too rare a commodity on earth—Truth. The epic with its idealizing tendency soars high; history aiming at truth penetrates downward in accordance with the words of Dryden:—

“Errors like straws upon the surface flow;  
He who would search for pearls must dive below.”

To bring about a mixture of epic and history is thus as difficult as to attempt to look up with the right eye and down with the left. Generally a historical epic is either all poetry with a slight historical background or a dryasdust chronicle of facts and dates devoid of the poetic afflatus. It requires the genius of a Firdausi to bring about the proper fusion between epic and history.

In ancient times it was by no means easy to distinguish between ballads and history. Herodotus in the 5th century B. C. used to recite his history in the streets, and people were at a loss to judge whether they heard history or poetry. Tacitus also in his “*De Moribus Germanorum*” observes that early German history existed in the form of songs. Even now it is difficult to say whether the “*Rāsmālā*” of Mr. Forbes or the “*Rājas-thāna*” of Col. Tod (being traditional histories of Guj-

arat and Rajputana respectively written in the 19th century) are epics or history. The Bible contains within its comprehensive bounds a variety of literary forms, and Dr. Moulton in his "Literary Study of the Bible" supplies the key to distinguish between epic and history. The critic, he says, should try to consider whether any part of the book under consideration fires the feelings and appeals to the imagination and æsthetic sense as only creative poetry can do; if so, that portion is epic, the rest may be history. Thus in the Bible, in the Jacob cycle there is embedded the epic of Joseph; in the "Rājasthāna" passages like the battle of Haldighāt and the fight near Chitor may be said to rise to epic heights; those that refuse to soar by the dead weight of fact appended to them are history.

It is always advisable that the prime material of an epic should be real, historical or scriptural, not fictitious, because people are not permanently interested in fiction, when used as the basis of epic poetry. People turn with greater pride and reverence to the statues of Socrates and Cæsar than they do to the sculptured figures of the goddesses of Reason and Victory. When history lends her strength to sublime poetry, the resultant epic becomes the epitome of some mighty epoch, the summary of a glorious civilization. It stimulates the national consciousness of the people, and brings home to them as no other form of literature can do what greatness and magnificence their country enjoyed in the past. Great epics are popular and successful according as they faithfully represent national traditions in stirring verse as Firdausi has done. An epic ceases to become truly national when it becomes

“artificial” in subsequent literary ages when overmuch attention is paid to the style and the body of the composition, allowing its soul to starve.

But a historical subject in epic poetry is attended by peculiar difficulties. The subject being historical, the writer is unable to indulge in imaginative flights, and what is an epic or any other form of poetry devoid of imagination? Again a historical subject is well-known to the readers, who consequently feel no particular curiosity to learn what is already familiar to all. As remarked above, the epic writer cannot use pure fiction as the basis of his composition, and he thus finds himself between the devil and the deep sea. The safest course for him, as Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie observes, is to take up an incident belonging to the hoary past, or one sufficiently remote from the author's age, round which many legends may have gathered in course of time. The subject being semi-historical, the epic will be welcomed as national property, and since it is partly legendary, the writer finds himself at liberty to colour and magnify his accounts by the depiction of glowing pictures, for which he relies to a certain extent on his powers of imagination. Jamshid and Rustam, Rama and Krishna, Alexander and Behrâm Gur, Arthur and Charlemagne, even Saladin and Prithvirâj Chouhân may be considered excellent themes for epic treatment. But epics written on subjects too near the times of the poet himself are generally not successful. Rânâ Pratâp, Shivaji and Napoleon are epic personalities, but they may be considered too near our times to form the subjects of historical epics. Lucan's "Pharsalia", Barbour's "Bruce", Blind Harry's "Wallace",

Camoens' "Luciad" and Voltaire's "Henriade" are epics whose heroes flourished only a short time prior to the poets who have commemorated their deeds, and this fact mars to a certain extent the greatness of these works; for it was not always easy for these poets to successfully encounter the difficulty of dressing up their too familiar historic figures in uncommon epic apparel.

Lucan has the wisdom to discard celestial machinery for it would seem absurd to invoke the Olympian deities to explain the motives of Cæsar and Pompey who had met with their violent ends scarcely a century ago. Yet the poet indulges in extravagant hyperbole aggravated by the flamboyant art of the rhetorician; e. g. when he says that the fishing-boat of Cæsar, meeting with a tempest, alternately touched the clouds and the bottom of the sea! Such exaggerations may perhaps suit the adventures of Hercules and Jason, of the "hafteh-khân" (seven exploits) of Rustam and Asfandiyâr, the passage of Satan through Chaos or the flight of Hanuman across the sea; but they look ridiculous in the case of a hero who had been laid in his grave only three generations ago. Barbour was born in 1316—only two years after his hero Bruce triumphed in the battle of Bannockburn. Barbour aimed at writing true history, but in his "Bruce", according to M. Jusserand, everything succeeds as in a fairy tale. The claims of the epic predominate over the love of truth, and without the slightest critical sense miracles are seriously admitted as historical facts. Similarly Camoens was born in 1524—the very year which saw the death of Vasco da Gama, the hero of his epic "Luciad". Camoens too pays the penalty of taking up

a subject too near his own times. He tries to weave the old-world epic imagery round the adventures of the modern hero Gama; but the scenes in which Jupiter and Mars favour the Portuguese and Bacchus espouses the cause of their enemies, and the picture of the sensual paradise where Gama and his men make love to Venus and her nymphs are outrageously absurd, and almost verge on the burlesque. It may be disputed whether no epic could ever be written on a modern theme, however grand or heroic in its range and spirit, e. g. the great European War of 1914-18, and whether it is a recognised literary fashion to turn only to ancient subjects for the work. The only answer that could be given to this objection is that the days of the "natural" epic with all its sublime but conventional machinery are over. Certain forms of literature must drop out in course of time yielding place to new, or should lend themselves to such necessary changes as are demanded by the wholly different age in which we live. What the form and spirit of the epic of today are and what they are likely to be in future would prove a very interesting subject for discussion and speculation, but it need not divert our attention at present.

Our remarks, that in successful epics the subjects are invariably remote from the author's age, do not apply to the Indian epics, the Ramayana, written by Vālmiki, a contemporary of Rama, and the Mahabharata, attributed to Vyāsa, the progenitor as well as the contemporary of the Pāndavas and the Kauravas. The fact is that these Indian epics were not written by an individual or two, but they contain the intellectual wealth of India poured

into them by many of the poets of this country through the course of centuries. Vyāsa, in fact, is said to have written a poem of 8800 verses called "Jaya" or "Bhārata", which was much elaborated by his disciple Vaishampāyana, when he recited it before King Janmajaya, the great-grandson of the Pāndava Arjuna on the occasion of the serpent-sacrifice. Numerous additions continued to be made to the poem, till from an epic it was transformed into an encyclopædia and was finally edited about 200 B. C. by Sauti or Suta Purāni and named the "Mahā-bhārata", a huge pile under which Vyasa's original "Bhārata" lies hopelessly and inextricably buried. It is not therefore just to apply the above remarks, which suit all other epics, to the two Eastern works in their present condition.

In a historical epic a certain amount of liberty can be taken with historical truth as Shakespeare does in his dramas and Scott in his novels. In order to heighten the greatness of a hero, fictitious incidents and even characters are invented, and persons who flourished slightly before or after the hero are represented as his contemporaries. These inventions and anachronisms are pardonable, provided that substantial historical truth is not perverted, and the essential spirit of the age is preserved. It was Lucan's error in the "Pharsalia" to unduly exalt Pompey and blacken Cæsar with the tar-brush. To take an instance recently discussed in one of the literary societies of Gujarat, it may be said that if an "artificial" epic on the adventures of Rama were to be composed in which Sita were to be described as false to her marriage vows when she was in the "ashoka-van"



of Ravana, it would simply be bringing about a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Ramayana. Apart from the blasphemy involved in such a view of the matter, this impudence, which the misguided modern writer thinks to be art, would cut at the very root of religion, history and epic.

In the fusion of epic and history the highest place may be assigned to the *Shahnameh*. Most of the epics are based on the adventures of individuals; for instance the "Iliad" on the wrath of Achilles, the "Odyssey" on the wanderings of Ulysses, the "Æneid" on the career of Æneas, the "Argonautica" (treated by Apollonios of Rhodes, Varro of Atax and G. V. Flaccus) on the exploits of Jason, the "Chanson de Roland" on the adventures of Roland, the "Cid" on the heroism of that champion of Spain, the "Nibelungenlied" largely on the fortunes of Siegfried, the "Ramayana" on the life and death of Rama. Chinese literature (and consequently that of Japan which is based on the former) has no epic poetry worth boasting about, while a few fragments are all that remain of the Babylonian epos. Some epics record the fortunes of a family, for instance, the Mahabharata is based on the wars between the cousins, the Pândavas and the Kauravas, while Statius' "Thebaid" describes the war between the brothers Eteocles and Polynices. Certain epics depict the rise and fall of a dynasty, for instance Kâlidâsa's "artificial" epic "Raghuvansha", describing the vicissitudes of the race of Raghu. There are other epics which are largely taken up with the descriptions of warfare, for instance Naevius' "Bellum Punicum" describing the first war with Carthage, Silius Italicus' epic on the Second Punic

War and Tasso's "Gerusalemme Liberata." Several writers like Dante, Milton and F. G. Klopstock have been attracted by scriptural themes to which they have paid the homage of their unquestioned genius.

Some epics at the most record certain important landmarks in the history of a nation; e. g. the Russian "Song of Igor" describes the defeat, imprisonment and escape of the warrior of that name who fought against the nomad tribe of the Polovtys in 1185 A.D. Trissino, the Italian author of "Sophonisba", wrote an insufferably dull epic on "Italia liberata dai Goti" (Italy liberated from the Goths). The Swedish author Olaf von Dalin in the 17th century wrote a great epic poem on the freedom of his country. W. Potocki, the Polish writer, described in his "War of Khotim" a victory of the Poles over the Turks; while Adam Mickiewicz, the most gifted of Polish authors and in fact the greatest litterateur in the Slavonic race except the Russian Pushkin, celebrated two mighty heroes of his country in his epic poems "Grazyna" and "Conrad Wallenrod". But there are few epics in the world like the Shahnameh, which combine the contrary functions of poetry and history, and which, besides being poetry of a high order, are at the same time a tolerably reliable account of a whole nation's traditions and history from the earliest down to modern times. The "Râsmâlâ" and the "Râjasthâna" may be set aside, since they are neither fish nor flesh, neither epic nor history, though in certain passages they do figure in one category or the other.

Before coming to the Shahnameh it would be well to discuss the claims of other epics similar to it in

matter and manner. In the third century B. C. Livius Andronicus wrote a vast epic on Roman history in 35 volumes of which not one is saved. Had this work been extant, it might have rivalled the Mahabharata itself, at least in bulk, but at present it has to be consigned to the limbo of lost existences. Another Roman writer Quintus Ennius wrote about 200 B. C. the "Annales," being a versified account of Roman history from mythical times to his own. Only fragments of the work have escaped the ravages of time, and are found written in a rough, prosaic, unequal form, not to be put beside the pure and chaste expression of Firdausi. Ennius was soundly influenced by Homer, and his work, which stirred up the nationalism of his readers, attained much popularity till it was displaced by the masterpiece of Virgil. Ronsard in the 16th century was the most brilliant star of the French Pleiad. He wrote an epic on the ancient history of France and named it "Franciade", tracing the origin of the Franks to Francus, a son of Priam, King of Troy. It is certain that this work does not hold an eminent position in French literature, as a great national epic may undoubtedly be expected to do, but it seems to have issued still-born from the press. France forgot the epic in the horrors of the Bartholomew Massacre and never cared to revive it afterwards.

In English literature several national epics have to be considered. In 1205 a clergyman named Layamon wrote the "Brut" which gives the traditional history of England from ancient times, Brut (from whom the word 'Britain' is derived) being the great grandson of Æneas and the founder of London or Troja Nova. Layamon is the

greatest poet between Cædmon and Chaucer and was the first Englishman to unfold before his countrymen their legendary past—their Lears, Cymbelines and Arthurs. But though he certainly possessed poetic gifts, English expression was not efficiently developed before Chaucer, and Layamon suffers not so much from his own deficiencies as from those of his age. He wrote in the old English alliterative metre which modern ears find difficult to admire. Sir William Jones considers the *Shahnameh* as only on a par with the “Brut” of Layamon. This statement is unjust to Firdausi, as it leaves out of consideration the question of literary excellence which is easily solved by comparing the stirring and nervous style of the Persian poet with Layamon’s shambling, broken lines of two short sections. Layamon’s valuable services in point of matter need not blind the critic to his deficiencies in point of expression, which is an indispensable element in literature. After Layamon’s “Brut” several metrical chronicles were attempted for the use and delight of the English people, but they have all been consigned to oblivion, the only work of that species worthy of a bare mention being the metrical history of Robert of Gloucester written in the last years of the thirteenth century. In 1586 William Warner wrote “Albion’s England” and Michael Drayton in 1614 composed his mighty “Polyolbion” in 30 books in nearly one hundred thousand lines. The “Polyolbion” shares with Browning’s “Ring and the Book”, W. Morris’ “Earthly Paradise” and P. J. Bailey’s “Festus”, the naughty reputation of being one of the longest poems, if not the longest poem in the language. These poems of Warner

and Drayton are not deficient in merit, but they are unable to present a proper fusion between history and poetry. The "Polyolbion" contains a vast variety of bric a brac, and ultimately falls dead of its own weight. This encyclopædic work is generally referred to like a curiosity shop for information about old antiquated things in the annals of England.

Swinburne's three "historical dramas" are more appropriately designated "dramatic histories", because the writer pays more attention to the historical element in the work than to its dramatic proprieties. Similarly the "Brut" and especially "Albion's England" and "Polyolbion" should not be called "historical epics" but rather "epical histories", for their authors were mainly concerned with the composition of versified history, which here and there rises to epic heights. The Shahnameh on the contrary is a historical epic, though, as will be seen later on, it does dwindle at last into epical history when dealing with the modern Sāsānian period. The Shahnameh may now be examined at greater length.

When a nation is still barbarous there are abundant materials for composing epic poetry but no poet is available, for epic poets are products of comparatively civilized times: but when in a subsequently refined age the poet is found, it is discovered that the national traditions are on the decline. The poet has therefore to catch the spirit of a moribund or a wholly dead age, and represent its traditions in the form of a story or history, carefully supplementing the lost materials by his balanced imagination. The Parsis cannot be charged with being negligent in the preservation of their historical records. It is stated

about King Ahasuerus in Esther VI 1:—"On that night could not the King sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king." Again in Esther X 2 it is recorded:—"And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?" These statements show that the Persian kings even of the Achæmenian dynasty used to preserve their historical records, but not much could be expected to survive the Alexandrian vandalism or the cataclysm of the Arabian conquest.

There is no wonder that the Arabs should have entertained hatred for the Iranian traditions, for these "sportive legends" seem to have been condemned in the 31st chapter of the Qoran known as the Sura of Luqmân. European commentators of the Qoran are of opinion that a professional story-teller named Naozar ibn al Hâreth carried from Persia to Arabia legends like those of Rustam and Asfandiyâr, and extolled the power and magnificence of ancient Persian kings, preferring their stories to those of Âd and Thamud, David and Solomon and others mentioned in the Qoran. Naozar recited these legends to the accompaniment of music and attracted more crowds to himself than the Prophet Muhammad could summon by expounding the word of God. It was then that the 5th and 6th verses of the 31st chapter of the Qoran were revealed, disapproving of these legends, and desiring the Arabs not to pay heed to them. The stern displeasure of the Prophet for these traditions and

for their disseminator is further evidenced when in the battle of Badr Naozar became his captive and was put to death by his orders, while many other prisoners were permitted to be ransomed. The destruction wrought by the Arabs in Persia may also be judged from a well-known story mentioned by Daulat Shâh Samarquandi in his "Tazkarat-ush-Sho'arâ". During the regime of the 'Abbâside Khalifs, the book of "Wâmiq-o-'Uzrâ", composed in Pehlavi by order of King Naushirvân, was brought before Amir 'Abdullâh Tâher, governor of Khorâsân, who ordered it to be destroyed, for he thought it was not desirable for Muslims to read books written by those who were not their co-religionists. He also issued orders that all books found to be written by the "infidels" of Persia should be immediately consigned to the flames. Sir John Malcolm, however, considerably overstates the fact when he says that the Arabs made a complete sweep of Iranian literature, and that for 400 years after the Arab conquest not a single soul dared to write on Persian history.

On the other hand Shams ul 'Ulamâ Maulânâ Shibli refutes Malcolm and says that several Pehlavi works had been actually preserved, and that even before Firdausi the history of Persia was written by several Arab authors like Tabari, Hamzâ, Mas'oudi, Ya'qoobi, Dinawari and others. But then the history of a nation written by foreigners, even with the best will in the world, is never able to stir up the patriotism of the natives of that country. If, for instance, the Mahrattas wish to compose a national epic of their own province, they would not like to base it on Grant Duff's History but rather on their history,

unfortunately incomplete, as written by M. G. Ranade, or perhaps on the original "bakhars" of their territory as preserved by Rao Bahadur Parasnis and Mr. C. A. Kincaid. Firdausi too was a staunch patriot, and though born a Muslim, his heart invariably throbbed in sympathy with the ancient faith and traditions of his fatherland and with the fortunes of the few and forlorn adherents thereof. Instead of basing his epic on Arab historians Firdausi was on the lookout for a work on Iranian traditions written by Iranians themselves—a work which may well be expected to rouse the sense of nationalism of the Persians. God in His infinite mercy had rescued such a work from the fanatic fury of the conquerors, though its preservation in the midst of incalculable difficulties may be considered as little short of a miracle. This work was the "Khvatâinâmak" commonly known as the "Khudâi nameh" (Book of Kings) or "Bâstân nameh" (Ancient Book) of Dehqân Dânishwar.

Again, M. Inostranzev in his "Iranian Influence on Muslim Literature" (translated from the Russian by our brilliant scholar, the late Mr. G. K. Nariman) points out that right upto the 10th century were to be found, preserved in one of the castles of Fârs, several Pehlavi manuscripts dealing with Persian history and containing portraits largely resembling those found on the rock-reliefs of Iran. These archives were the true sources of the Shahnameh, though it is difficult now to say how many of these literary treasures were available to our poet. For the present, however, let us confine ourselves to the "Khudâi nameh" which passed through as many vicissitudes as Firdausi himself.



The "Khudâinameh", looking to all other circumstances, must be considered invaluable, though it was not without certain serious defects. Noldeke complains that it was unfairly biassed and rhetorical; it was aristocratic in outlook and its one mission was the apotheosis of the fatherland. It did not much matter to the writer of the "Khudâinameh" whether the persons depicted therein were mythical, legendary or fully historical, and Jamshid and Faridun sailed in the same boat as Naushirvân and Khusru Parviz. It was the characteristic of such works to conceal the paucity of their information by ingeniously coining long speeches and putting them in the mouths of kings, or by having recourse to descriptions of Nature or pompous ceremonies, and failing all—to sheer rhetorical display. The "Khudâinameh" does not refer to the Achæmenians but after Gushtâsp and Behman falls plump upon Dârâ and Alexander, and after omitting the Parthians it immediately begins with Ardshir Bâbkân, the first of the Sâsânian dynasty. Most of these defects, which are reflected in Firdausi show how considerably he was indebted to the "Khudâinameh". This great work, through its numerous copies and translations, became the source of various other Arab historians of Persia, but unfortunately, owing to interpolations or the negligence of scribes, the copies of the "Khudâinameh" differed from each other so substantially that there is little wonder if the histories based on the same work were found to differ occasionally from one another.

In 1425 Gayâth ud Din Baisanqar Khan, grandson of Tamerlane and a great patron of arts, edited the Shah-nameh, to which he appended an introduction in which

he traces the history of the "Khudâinameh". The usual and familiar account is that King Naushirvân was the first to think of collecting the national traditions. The work was soon abandoned but resumed by our last unfortunate king Yazdejard Shehriyâr. For this task he appointed Dehqân Dânishwar, who with the help of other learned Mobeds composed the "Khudâinameh" from the time of Kayumars to that of Khusru Parviz. During the Arab conquest this invaluable work, which was all that was left among documentary native sources to relate at length our national legends, fell into the hands of the conquering general Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqâs, who sent it to Khalif 'Omar. The Khalif was pleased to order its translation into Arabic, but when the translator came to the name of Zarathushtra and the cult of fire-worship, 'Omar was annoyed, for a mention of the ancient religion of Iran was something more than his pious orthodoxy could stomach, and by his orders the work was immediately discontinued. The discarded volume fell into the hands of a common soldier who took it to Abyssinia whence it went over to India in the army of Muhammad Qâsim, the conqueror of Sindh in 712. In India it came into the possession of Ya'qoob Laith Saffâri, who took it back to Iran where he became the founder of the Saffâri dynasty in 868. Before he could do anything with the work, the Saffârides were overthrown in 903 by the Sâmânides, who traced their origin to Behrâm Chubin. The Sâmâni King Nuh II bin Mansur, who reigned from 976 to 997, engaged a Zarathushtrian poet Daqiqi to compose the Shahnameh, based on the "Khudâinameh", but after writing about 2000 lines Daqiqi was murdered

by his own slave. Then the Sâmânides were conquered by the Ghaznavides in 999 and Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni cherished a strong desire to entrust the versification of these national traditions to a celebrated poet. Then it was that a Zarathushtrian, named Khur Firuz, who traced his pedigree to Naushirvân and who had now been reduced to poverty, happened to possess himself of this precious volume. Hearing of the craze for the compilation of Iranian legends in the court of Ghazni, Khur Firuz presented the book to the Sultan, under whose patronage Firdausi was destined to complete his immortal work. According to another account a Zarathushtrian named Ázar Burzin, who claimed descent from Shâhpur II, submitted this book to the Sultan of Ghazni through his master, the ruler of Kermân.

But Baisanqar Khan's preface has now been discredited by scholars, and, as will be seen later on, Firdausi had not to wait till Sultan Mahmud should favour him with the "Khudâinameh". In the opinion of M. Inostran-zev and Dr. J. J. Modi, the "Khudâinameh" had never left the bounds of Persia at all, but that Ya'qoob Laith Saffâri had ordered his minister Abu Mansur bin 'Abdur Razzâq bin 'Abdullâh bin Farrukh to get the work translated and to supplement it with a description of kings from Khusru Parviz to Yazdejard Shehriyâr. The minister accomplished this work about 872 in prose through Sa'd ibn Mansur al Ma'mari with the help of four Zarathushtrians—Samâh ibn Khorâsân of Herât, Yazdândad Shâhpur of Seestân, Mâhui Khurshid bin Behrâm from Shâhpur (probably Nishâpur) and Shâdân bin Burzin of Tus. This tallies to a certain extent with

the "Dibâcheh e Qadim" or "ancient preface", recently discovered in a very old manuscript of the *Shahnameh*. The difference is that according to the "ancient preface" Abu Mansur bin 'Abd ur Razzâq, who got the "prose *Shahnameh*" compiled by the four Zarathushtrians was not the minister of Ya'qoob Laith Saffâri but was himself an independent ruler of Tus, and that the work was accomplished much later in 958 while Ya'qoob had died in 877. This view is upheld by Noldeke and Prof. Sherâni who consider the "ancient preface" substantially trustworthy.

We are however inclined to believe that this "prose *Shahnameh*" was compiled about 872 and that Abu Mansur bin 'Abd ur Razzâq must have been the minister of Ya'qoob Laith Saffâri. The latter was an uncouth Persian adventurer but a thorough-going nationalist anxious to reanimate the dormant and dying culture of his country. The very beginning of modern Persian is often attributed to him and it is consequently natural to conclude that he should have, in spite of his ignorance, conceived the idea of reviving the ancient glories of his nation by patronizing the scheme of the "prose *Shahnameh*." Noldeke has tried to identify one Muhammad bin 'Abd ur Razzâq, who in his opinion was ruler of Tus from 945-960, with the above mentioned Abu Mansur bin 'Abd ur Razzâq, but such an argument cannot but be unconvincing. Firdausi pays a warm tribute of eulogy to and bewails the death of a governor of Tus—a "mehtar e gardan farâz" (exalted lord) named Abu Mansur bin Muhammad who patronised the poet in his early days. But here too the difference in names is so clear as to

nullify any attempt to identify this Abu Mansur bin Muhammad with Abu Mansur bin 'Abd ur Razzâq; nor is there the least reference in Firdausi's many flattering compliments to the former about his having sponsored the scheme of the compilation of the national legends in prose. Our poet was always frank in his obligations as he was in his grievances, and if Abu Mansur bin 'Abd ur Razzâq had been his own contemporary and fellow-citizen, and if it had been at his court that the four Zarathushtrians had compiled the "prose Shahnameh", Firdausi would never have failed to record his indebtedness for so signal and invaluable a favour.

Firdausi in his introduction to the Shahnameh speaks of a "pahlavân" of "dehqân nîzhâd" (lord of noble descent), who compiled a vast volume of ancient national annals with the help of scholars summoned from various parts of the country. Noldeke takes this "pahlavân" to allude to Abu Mansur bin 'Abd ur Razzâq and his great work, while Firdausi's nameless reference clearly applies to Dehqân Dânishwar, who was the first Iranian known to have compiled a record of his country's annals in the reign of the last Sâsânian King. One of the four Zarathushtrians was named Samâh bin Khorâsân, and another clumsy attempt of those who wish to bring down Abu Mansur bin 'Abd ur Razzâq to Firdausi's own times is to identify Samâh with the landlord Mâkh of Herât who, as will be seen later, helped the poet with his knowledge of ancient history and is remembered with gratitude in the Shahnameh. The last of the four Zarathushtrians, Shâdân bin Burzin of Tus, has been actually mentioned by Firdausi as being responsible for the famous episode

of the physician Barzui who brought the volume known to fame as "Kalileh and Damneh" from India to the court of Naushirvân. Here Firdausi merely says:—

"Nigeh kun ke Shâdân e Burzin cheh guft  
Badângeh ke bukshâd râz az nehuft:"

"Listen now to what Shâdân, the son of Burzin, said when he opened the contents of secrecy." It is not at all clear from this couplet that Shâdân himself told this episode to Firdausi. Sometimes our poet writes in a way as to make us think as if he was personally indebted to a particular annalist, and Noldeke himself holds out a warning to us in this connection. He says:—"The poet often does speak as if he had actually heard the things he had only been reading about." Noldeke is again so candid as to observe in a footnote:—"Both the introductions contain along with good materials also indifferent and quite bad materials." In short we find it difficult to take even the "ancient preface" as entirely trustworthy but venture to differ from it and hold that Abu Mansur bin 'Abd ur Razzâq and the four Zarathushtrians were not the contemporaries of Firdausi but of Ya'qoob Laith Saffâri and that the "prose Shahnameh" was compiled by them not in 957 but about 872 when the Persian Renaissance had begun in right earnest.

But such was the difference between the various copies of the "Khudâinameh" that some scholars have refused to consider this "prose Shahnameh" as a translation of the former but quite an independent work of the four Zarathushtrians. Another trustworthy version of the "Khudâinameh" was its Arabic rendering named the

"Sair al-Muluk" by that eminent translator of Pehlavi works—'Abdullâh ibn al-Muqaff'a, whose book must also have proved helpful to our poet. According to M. Inostran-zev, Ibn-al-Muqaff'a also translated the "Âyeennâmeh", giving an internal history of the Sâsânian times and its institutes. It is possible that such books may have been available at one time or the other to Firdausi.

But Maulânâ Shibli goes further and quotes numerous works relating to Iranian annals, which in his opinion were within reach of Firdausi. Some of these works cited by the Maulânâ are—the "Târikh e 'Ajam", translated by order of King Hishâm; the "Bikarân", the "Târikh e Daulat e Sâsâni", the "Kârnâmeh e Naushirvân", the "Shehrzâd o Parwiz" the "Kitâb at-Tâj", the "Behrâm o Narsinâmeh" and the "Mazdaknameh". None of these works will be found to survive to our days, and it is very hard to say if they ever were at the disposal of Firdausi, or were mere names to him as they are to us of works written in Sâsânian times only to sink into extinction shortly after the Arab conquest. Even admitting that they were available to Firdausi, it will be seen from the very names of most of these books that they describe the Iran of the Sâsânian regime and could not therefore be of much use to our poet in his narration of the Pishdâdian and Kiyânian times. It is better to be always sure of the ground we walk upon, and it is altogether safe to say that Firdausi's greatest written source, besides a few Pehlavi works, still fortunately extant and shortly to be considered, was the "Khudâi-nameh" and its versions.

But when and where did Firdausi come across the

“Khudâinameh” or the “prose Shahnameh” based on it? Did he secure it in Tus during his early years or was it given to him by Sultan Mahmud later on in Ghazni? Maulânâ Shibli and Dr. J. J. Modi lean to the latter view (though both are unanimously of opinion that the Sultan did not inspire the Shahnameh). This view is now found to be untenable: latter-day researches have made it clear that Firdausi’s debt to the Sultan was not as considerable as scholars at one time were inclined to believe. Firdausi himself says that the “Book of Kings” was given to him in Tus by a friendly landowner, and Palmer and Noldeke identify that person with Muhammad Lashkari, who on learning that Firdausi was anxious to write the “Shahnameh” requested him to peruse the book and convert it into his matchless verse. Firdausi’s words on the point are quite clear:—

“Ba shehram yaki mehrbân doost bud  
 Tu gufti ke bâ man yaki poost bud.  
 Marâ guft khoob âmad in râ e tu  
 Ba niki kharâmad magar pâ e tu.  
 Navishteḥ man in nâmeḥ e Pehlavi  
 Ba pish e tu âram magar naghnavi  
 +            +            +  
 Chun âward in nâmeḥ nazdik e man  
 Bar afrukht in jân e târik e man.”

“In my city (of Tus) there was a kind friend, so thoroughly intimate with me that we two, you would say, lived in the same skin. He said to me ‘I welcome your idea (of composing the Shahnameh), and I feel that your feet will walk on the path of virtue. I shall



write out a copy of this Pehlavi work and bring it to you, but I hope you will not go to sleep over it'..... When my friend brought the book to me, my dark soul became illuminated."

There were again three small Pehlavi works, the "Aiyâdgâr i Zarirân", the "Kârnâmak i Artakhshir i Pâpkân" and the "Ganj e Shâyegân" which proved to be of great use to Firdausi. The first mentioned, also known as the "Shahnameh of Gushtâsp" deals with the war between Arjâsp, King of Turân, and Zarir, the brother of Gushtâsp, and Dr. J. J. Modi in his Gujarati edition of the work has pointed out that Firdausi has sometimes made use of the very words of the Pehlavi original. The "Kârnâme" gives a brief record of the reign of the first Sâsânian king, Ardshir Bâbkân, and it bears a close resemblance to the corresponding portion in Firdausi's epic, as seen from the edition of the "Kârnâme" issued by the late Shams ul 'Ulamâ Dastur Dr. Kaiqobâd Âdarbâd of Poona. The "Ganj e Shâyegân" (edited by Dastur Dr. P. B. Sanjana) narrates the conversation between King Naushirvân and his minister Buzurchemehr, and there is a striking similarity between some of its passages and the parallel ones from the Shahnameh.

Finally Firdausi sought the help of the Dehqâns who constituted the ancient Persian nobility. The word 'Dehqân' is one of those puzzling terms signifying two different things: it means both farmer and historian, and generally designates a person of an ancient Persian family in possession of substantial hereditary estates. The Parsis owe a deep and unforgettable debt of gratitude to the Dehqâns who stubbornly refused to be converted

into Islam. Like the Saxon yeomen bidding a stubborn but unsuccessful resistance to William the Conqueror, these Persian zamindárs, with a tenacity worthy of their noble purpose, refused to be Arabicised and persistently withstood the social and religious influence of their vanquishers. The minstrels of all nations have rendered great services during the evolution of ballad poetry into epic, and conspicuous among them is the work done by the Dehqâns. They remembered by heart and transmitted the national legends from father to son, and the very word Dehqân at last came to mean a bard or a chronicler. Firdausi often acknowledges the debt he owes to the Dehqâns to whom he used to turn for help and corroboration. For instance, he says:—

“Ze guftâr e dehqân yaki dâstân  
Ba paivandam az gufteh e bâstân.”

“Hearing a Dehqân I have prepared this account from the traditions of the past.” The Dehqâns were thoroughly conversant with famous episodes as those of Jamshid and Zohák, Rustam and Sohrab. Eminent among them was a Dehqân named Âzâd Sarv to whom Firdausi was indebted for the episode of Shoghâd. Firdausi says about him:—

“Yaki pir bood nâmash Âzâd Sarv  
Ke bâ Ahmad e Sahl boodi ba Marv:  
Kujâ nâmeh e khusravân dâshti  
Tan o paikar e pahlavân dâshti:  
Dili pur za dânish, sari pur sakhun  
Labân pur za guftârhâ e kobun:  
Ba Sâm e Narimân kashidash nizhâd  
Basi dâshti razm e Rustam ba yâd.”

“There was an old man named Âzâd Sarv who lived at Marv with Ahmad, son of Sahl. He possessed many pamphlets about kings; he had the face and figure of a puissant hero. His heart was replete with wisdom and his head with words: his tongue was familiar with ancient traditions. He traced his ancestry to Sâm, son of Narimân, and remembered many of the wars of Rustam”. In Herât Firdausi met a learned man named Mâkh to whom he expresses his obligation as follows:—

“Yaki pir bud marzbân e Hari  
 Pasandideh o dideh az har dari:  
 Jahândideh o nâm e oo bood Mâkh  
 Sakhundân o bâ barg o bâ barz o shâkh.”

“There was an old landowner of Herât admired by all and to be seen at every door: he was quite experienced and his name was Mâkh: he was eloquent and (like a full-grown tree) blessed with leaves and grain and branches: (that is, he was endowed with many virtues)”. It is indeed very strange that Noldeke should conclude that there were no Dehqâns to help Firdausi, and that it was only conventional for a poet to say that he had heard a particular episode from a certain minstrel. This statement of Noldeke is as futile as his assertion that Firdausi knew neither Pehlavi nor Arabic. Not only was Firdausi assisted by the Dehqâns but, as Prof. Warner observes, he was himself the son of a Dehqân, glorying in the national traditions, though of course the family had been converted to Islam some generations previously.

Together with the Dehqâns we should not forget to

mention the Mobeds or Zarathushtrian priests, who besides remembering these traditions, used to preserve written copies of the same, which proved useful to Firdausi. The poet himself says that the account of the troubles of Khusru Parwiz was related to him by a Mobed. There were again several Persians who for worldly reasons had sought safety in Islam but who were never really reconciled with the new faith, which was but a thin veneer to hoodwink the Arabs. The hearts of these Persians long continued to be lighted by the fire of Zarathushtra, and they were only too anxious to communicate to a great master like Firdausi their national traditions which they had done their level best to preserve. Nay, even in the camp of the conquerors, says M. Inostranzev, there was a party of Iranophiles who patronised all attempts to preserve the Iranian traditions. It is to be deplored that occasional extracts and bare titles of books are all that remain of the well-meaning endeavours of those sympathetic Arabs. Firdausi helped himself to every available source, written or verbal, at Tus or at Ghazni, and thus it was that:—

“Basi ranj burdam dar in sâl e si  
‘Ajam zindeh kardam ba din Pârsi:’

“I laboured excessively for thirty years and revived the faith and nation of Persia.” It is too well-known to describe here what reward was reaped by Firdausi—hope’s poor deluded pensioner—at the hands of a cruel destiny working through the will of a misguided monarch.

But then if Firdausi is not the first recorder of our national traditions, being preceded by the Arab

historians, how is he entitled to the devoted affection of the Parsis? The answer is abundantly clear. His first sources—the “Khudâinameh”, the “prose Shahnameh” of the four Zarathushtrians, the “Sair ul Muluk”, the “Âyeennâmeḥ” and other indigenous sources have perished, probably as Noldeke conjectures, because of the immense popularity and success of Firdausi’s great epic. The “Aiyâdgâr i Zarirân”, the “Kârnâmeḥ” of Ardashir Bâbkân and the “Ganj e Shâyegân” are still extant, but they are very slender in size, the first being confined to a single episode, the second being an abridged account of a reign, and the third being only the record of a conversation. These three works are surely not fit to challenge the fame of the Shahnameh, and unable to arouse to a considerable degree our love and devotion for the forsaken land of our ancestors as a national epic only can do. Some of the Zarathushtrian scriptures like the Fravardin Yasht, the Zamyâd Yasht and the Chitradât Nask contain a list of names of our ancient kings and heroes, and the last two works have been rightly called “abridged Shahnamehs” by the late Shams ul ‘Ulamâ Dastur Dr. Dârâb P. B. Sanjana: but great though these works may be from a purely religious point of view, can a bare list of names stand by the side of a mighty epic like the Shahnameh?

Lastly, it has to be admitted that there were Arab historians prior to Firdausi. It has already been discussed that foreign historians, however great and reliable, are unable to fire the patriotism of a nation, which only the sons of the soil are able to accomplish. Again, such is the weakness of human nature that foreign historians are generally apt

to display their national and religious prejudices, writing with an eye to the subjects nearest their heart instead of doing justice to the matter they have taken in hand. The works of these Arabs, especially those of the immensely learned Tabari and Mas'oudi, possess considerable merit as history, but can no more be regarded as national monuments by the Parsis than historical epics composed by Muslims on Ranjit Singh or Shivaji would be by the Sikhs or the Mahrattas. Among the preceding historians let us take only the greatest name—that of Abu Ja'far ibn Jarir at-Tabari, called by Gibbon the Livy of the Arabians, for Dinawari is frequently lacking in accuracy and is overfond of romance, while Mas'oudi, called the Herodotus of the Arabs, sometimes sacrificed history to his love of anecdote. Even Tabari's history is a huge compilation from other works which he has not taken the trouble to fuse into one whole. There is a good deal of resemblance in the details and even the arrangement of Tabari and Firdausi. It is certain that Firdausi never tapped any foreign material but only native sources and hence the conclusion is clear that both these writers, who are often so similar, must have drawn their works from the same authority, and both Inostranzev and Noldeke agree that this common authority was the "Khudâinameh" or any one of its versions. Admitting that Tabari was also of Iranian descent and used indigenous materials, still it must be recognised that he was a Muslim writing in Arabic, and hence the sympathies of such a writer could no longer be in favour of the country of his ancestors. Firdausi was indeed a rare exception, a Muslim outwardly and yet a true

Zarathushtrian at heart, whose devotion for Iran, its traditions and its culture could only be paralleled by his ill-disguised contempt for the "lizard-eating" Arabs, their outlandish language and their upstart civilization. He was far more proud of being called a Persian than a Muslim and he is never at his best when he admires the faith of the conquerors, in which he himself had his birth. Tabari may be the earlier historian but he can never appeal to the Parsis as does the glorious poet of Tus, who has bestowed everlasting fame on our national legends.

Even if Tabari and Firdausi are similar in many respects, still the great difference between history and epic should not be lost sight of. Charlemagne, for instance, as treated in the "Heroes of the Nations" series is different from the Charlemagne of the "Chanson de Roland". History informs and educates; epic exalts and stimulates; and there is small wonder if the ordinary Parsi remains ignorant of the very names of the Arab historians who were the first to tackle the mighty theme. Again Tabari was compelled to use native sources not because he loved Pehlavi and things Iranian but because in his days very few or no histories of Iran written by Arabs were available; whereas Firdausi with scarcely an exception was resolved never to set his eyes on foreign materials. Lastly Firdausi, unlike Tabari, was a poet, and that too one of the greatest in the world, smitten from his early years with the life-long passion of glorifying the annals of his country. In view of these considerations, Tabari, the historian, gives way, and Firdausi, naturally enough, sits enthroned in the hearts

of the Persians. Thus it was wise of Firdausi to turn from the Arab historians to absolutely indigenous material gathered by the Persians themselves. So then since all the works preceding the Shahnameh have either been lost or weighed in the balance and found wanting, it happens that Firdausi's epic is the only great work that is left to tell the story of Iran's vanished greatness. The Parsis will always consider Firdausi as entitled to their spontaneous love and veneration, and they will endeavour, though in a different sense, to discharge their debt to the poet, which Sultan Mahmud with all his magnificence was not destined to fulfil.

In fact Firdausi has rendered the same services to our legends as Malory to the traditions regarding King Arthur. The enchanting subject of Arthur had already attracted the attention of the best minds of Europe, for instance, Layamon, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Gaimar, Wace, Robert de Borron, De Gast, Walter Map and others, but the last word on the subject was uttered, and the final and permanent form to the Arthurian legends was shaped in 1469 by Sir Thomas Malory, who in his prose epic "Morte d'Arthur" worked upon English and French sources. The noblest marble monument in the world is not to be sought in marble mines but in the Taj Mahal; the best and the most permanent form of the Arthurian traditions is to be found not in the predecessors of Malory but in the "Morte d'Arthur;" and likewise, the greatest and noblest monument of Iranian traditions is not to be found anywhere among the scanty and scattered sources of the Shahnameh but in the glorious Taj Mahal that Firdausi has raised over



the fallen remains of a once formidable nation. It is not to be supposed, however, that the "Morte d'Arthur" equals the "Shahnameh" in worth and consequence, for the former glorifies an individual, while the latter immortalizes a nation and that too in times when it lay crushed and bleeding under the iron heels of its relentless conquerors.

Not even superiority but in a sense even priority can be assigned to the Shahnameh in spite of the works that precede it. Herodotus is called the father of history, though according to Prof. Gilbert Murray he was himself indebted to a prior historian Hecataeus of Miletus, who was the first to distinguish between myths and facts and attempt serious history. It was from him that Herodotus learnt the marshalling of facts, method and scheme in history. Herodotus was also indebted to Hellanicus of Lesbos, who was his senior in years and was called the father of logography and scientific chronology. But then Herodotus in his greatness of aim and method stood above the shoulders of these two men and is recognised as the father of history. Similarly in spite of the Arab historians who preceded Firdausi and whose weak point has been discussed in the preceding pages, one should feel little hesitation in calling the author of the Shahnameh the father of Iranian national traditions.

Firdausi is also an eminently veracious and honest historian. He says about his great work:—

“ Tu in râ darugh o fisâneh madân  
 Ba yaksân ravesh dar zamâneh madân :”

“ Do not consider my work as falsehood and fiction : never fancy that time flows on with changeless uniformity.” M. Mohl is never so keen on any other point as he is to prove that the *Shahnameh* is a faithful representation of national traditions as they came into the poet's hands. When Firdausi's sources are garbled and defective, for instance, in the description of the Arab conquest or in the omission of the Assyrians, Medians, Achæmenians, Greeks and Parthians, he only versifies his origins without adding anything of his own. One lapse of his is however on record. No nation likes to describe at length its own defeat. Finding the narrative of the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great defective, Firdausi lengthened it out with the help of the Arabian translation of a Greek work on the subject. It is not to be supposed however that the *Shahnameh* is free from blunders, some of which almost provoke a smile; for instance, Firdausi's confusion of Zarathushtra with Abraham; his statement that Alexander the Great who lived and died in the 4th century B. C. was a Christian; his assertion that Kaikhusru possessed the *Zend-Avesta*, though Zarathushtra with whose name it is associated flourished later on in the time of Gushtâsp; and his testimony that Baghdâd existed in the times of Faridun while in fact it was built by the Khalifs. He has not always given equal treatment to different reigns, and has woven more incidents round a favourite hero than have fallen to the lot of other less fortunate ones. But these shortcomings were evidently derived by Firdausi from his authorities, and as M. Mohl observes, these very mistakes serve to make it clear how faithfully our poet had adhered to the

original, and what hopeless confusion would have resulted if he had thought fit to swerve from the version of Dehqân Dâneshtar.

It can be clearly seen that Firdausi has never trifled with history but has with remarkable accuracy enshrined the materials that came into his hands in his undying verse. As the poet himself confesses :—

“Chunânchun bakhândam za daftar sakhun  
Ba nazm âwaridam za sar tâ ba bun :”

“As I went on reading my sources, I reduced them to poetry from beginning to end.” Whenever detailed history was not available, he is careful to mention his living sources, the Dehqâns. How eager Firdausi is for truth and exactitude can be seen from his own words :—

“Gar az dâstân yak sakhun kam budi  
Ravân e marâ já e mâtam budi :”

“If one word be curtailed from my history, my soul would be plunged in lamentation.” Many proofs have been adduced by Dr. J. J. Modi in his Gujarati criticism on the Shahnameh to show that the poet’s work is genuine and honest. Many of the names of our kings and heroes recorded in the Shahnameh are the same as those found in the Fravardîn and Zamyâd Yashts, in the Chitradât Nask, in the Aiyâdgâr i Zarirân, the Kârnâme of Ardshir Bâbkân and in the Arab historians. Several of Firdausi’s episodes, which would be too long to discuss here, bear a close resemblance to those which we find in Eastern and Western epics. Firdausi’s episodes of Jamshid and Zohâk, Rustam and Sohrab are also to be

found in an Armenian writer, Moses of Chorene of the 5th century A. D., which shows that these episodes were known even to foreigners before the Arab conquest, and have not been coined by our poet to tickle the tastes of his readers. If Firdausi had dared to sing just for the love of song and indulged in the creation of fanciful and false episodes, he would have been surely discovered by the Dehqâns, who were always jealous about the veracity of their traditions. Again Firdausi had many malicious detractors at court, who were ever ready to make a mountain of a molehill if they came across any lapse in the poet's version. If at all Firdausi had a mind to describe imaginary episodes, he must have been sorely tempted to do so with regard to the Parthian kings about whom nothing but the bare names was mentioned in his sources. But Firdausi simply copies that list of names of the Parthian kings and passes on, proving that the poet in him had not crushed the historian. Firdausi had commenced writing the Shahnameh in his young age long before he went to Ghazni: now if he was concerned with the mere writing of fiction there was no reason for him to wait for several authoritative sources which he got through the help of Sultan Mahmud. Lastly it may be asserted that Firdausi's status as a great historian has always been recognised by subsequent writers on Iranian history. Even Maulânâ Shibli believes that on the whole no detailed history of ancient Persia can be found to be more veracious than the Shahnameh. These proofs will perhaps be considered sufficient to lay at rest the troublesome ghost of sceptical inquiry about the genuineness of Firdausi's work, haunting the camp of Iranian scholars.

The Shahnameh may best be studied under five aspects :—(1) mythological (2) heroic or epic proper (3) purely historic (4) romantic and (5) didactic. It is not strictly true to say that the Shahnameh is pure history from cover to cover, because the portion from Kayumars to Faridun is really mythical. The kings dealt with in that portion have often been identified with Vedic deities : for instance, Jamshid or Yama-kshaeta is compared to the Vedic Yama, or to Manu and Noah whose names in the “Shatpath-Brâhmana” and the Old Testament respectively are connected with the great Flood. Zohâk or Azidahâk is often compared to the Vedic Ahi or dragon; Faridun or Thretâon is compared to the Vedic Trita or Trita Âpatya, and Kershâsp to the Vedic Krishashva. According to Max M’üller’s favourite theory, ancient epic poetry is in its original elements a metamorphosis of mythology, and that too, nowhere more so than in the Shahnameh. He also tries to show that the rape of Helen and the siege of Troy are in all likelihood a representation of a solar myth. Hence in the opinion of the great German savant, the mythic demigods of the Zend Avesta representing the struggle between light and darkness, good and evil, came to be regarded in course of time as historic kings as depicted in the Shahnameh. Be that as it may, it is clear that in the account of these early kings, Firdausi is not able to display his full powers, but appears to preen his wings for the eagle-flight that was to follow. It is only from the times of King Minucheher, in the last years of whose reign was born the great Rustam, that real life and epic movement appear in the Shahnameh.

From Minucheher to Gushtâsp begins the heroic or

epic period of the *Shahnameh*, and it is here that Firdausi's genius reaches its zenith. The duration here taken up is partly historic and partly legendary, and reasons have been given in the preceding pages to show that the proper subject for an epic is semi-historical. Firdausi is seen at his very best in his descriptions of Sâm, Zâl, Rustam, Sohrâb, Gudarz, Giv, Bizan, Asfandiyâr and all that brilliant galaxy of heroes that made the name of Iran ring throughout the world at one time. The very greatness of the *Shahnameh* depends on this heroic period, to which Firdausi devoted the best portion of his life and genius. But after the death of Rustam, Firdausi's pen is broken and the charm of the *Shahnameh* is appreciably diminished; it seems as if "Othello's occupation's gone." This fall may have been caused by the poet's old age or his weariness or the death of his only son, but it was certainly due to the fact that after Rustam, Firdausi found no great subject equal to his genius and after the age of Gushtâsp he came across no such heroic epoch upon which he could construct his edifice.

The third period under consideration is the purely historical one of the Sâsânians from 226 A. D. to the second quarter of the 7th century. No wonder if the poet occasionally appears to nod here, for this period is the weakest in the *Shahnameh*, pure history being a clog on the aerial wheels of Firdausi's poetic chariot. It is here that the poem sometimes slips from the dignity of the historical epic to mere "epical history" and sinks to the level of the works of Layamon, Warner and Drayton. Yet even here when Firdausi lays hold of a truly heroic subject—a

Behrâm Gour or a Naushirvân—he rises to “the height of his great argument” and shows us once again what mettle he is made of.

Firdausi also attracts the youthful reader by his charming romantic descriptions. The romance in the *Shahnameh*, however, is not so predominant as to convert it from a historic into a romantic epic. The age of the romantic epic was yet to dawn in Persian literature, where its chief masters are Nizâmi Ganjavi, Amir Khusru Dehlavi, Hâtifi and the prolific Abu Tâher Tarsusi. European critics are against the infusion of romance in epic poetry, though they admit that in every epic this element is more or less bound to enter. The “*Iliad*” has little of romance, the “*Odyssey*” has a good deal of it, while Ariosto’s “*Orlando Furioso*,” Boiardo’s “*Orlando Innamorato*” and Spenser’s “*Faerie Queene*” are altogether romantic epics. As Prof. Ker observes, romance is the enemy and yet the inseparable companion of the epic. Firdausi has woven the most thrilling romance in describing the “*hafte khân*” or the seven adventures of Rustam as well as of Asfandiyâr, in the depiction of the exploits of Alexander the Great, and the wonder-working feats of Behrâm Gour. Love often plays the leading role in romantic poetry, and some of the tenderest passages in the *Shahnameh* are those depicting the loves between Zâl and Rudâbeh, Bizan and Manizeh. Firdausi may be forgiven if for the sake of his poetry he dwells more on the most glorious reigns, successful wars, romances and amours, rather than on administrative and political affairs.

Firdausi is particularly fond of the moral or didactic element, which is the peculiar characteristic of all great Eastern works, epical or non-epical. Firdausi rarely misses an opportunity of pointing a moral to his readers, and after the description of a great reign or incident he is always eager to moralize over the omniscience of God, the irrevocable decrees of fate and the vanity of human wishes. According to Mr. Johnson, no grand principle of self-culture, Stoic or Christian, Aryan or Semitic, old or new, is wanting in the *Shahnameh*. Firdausi is very fond of making his kings, like Ardashir Bâbkân and Naushirvân, preach to their princes and nobles, these sermons being composed of the proverbial lore of the age. Even Behrâm Gour, noted as much for his miracles of archery and superhuman strength as for his dissolute character, is sometimes inclined to indulge in moral homilies! This characteristic is found particularly in the Indian epics; for instance, when the dying Bhishma from his bed of arrows discourses to Yudhishthira the philosophy embodied in the "Shânti Parva", or when Shri Krishna preaches to Arjuna on the battlefield the divine message of the *Bhagvad Gita*, or when Rama instructs his younger brother Bharata in the science of government.

From a purely artistic point of view the critic would wish to know what the artist does with his materials, not where he gets them from, and the chief merit in our poet is the art of presentation, the poetic fire which welds the heterogeneous materials into an artistic whole, the spark of genius which raises the *Shahnameh* from the dry bones of history to a living, breathing, immortal



epic masterpiece. Nowhere among the extant sources of Firdausi, certainly not in the Arab historians, can we ever hope to find our poet's splendid imagination, his fervid enthusiasm in his work as if discharging a sacred duty imposed by Providence, his gusto and zeal in descriptions of war, his glowing and vivid depictions of adventure, his tender and delicate pictures of love, his matchless powers of pathos, his wonderful grasp of human nature, his spontaneous prayers to God, his frequent moralizings on the rise and fall of men and nations, and above all his burning love for the fatherland which runs throughout the poem and unfailingly thrills the heart of every Persian reader. Maulânâ Shibli considers the Shahnameh as an encyclopædia mirroring forth the civilization of Iran for centuries together. Firdausi's chief claim to our veneration is that he is not only our Homer but our Herodotus as well, amalgamating in himself the twofold offices of a national bard and a national historian. The Shahnameh deals not with the fortunes of isolated individuals or families or dynasties, but with the rise and fall of a mighty nation. It is not a mere collection of traditions like the "Râsmâlâ" of Mr. Forbes. It is not so dreadfully precise as to become an unpoetic chronicle; neither is it so completely imaginative and romantic as not to be a tolerably reliable history. Rarely, if ever, in the world's literature has such a glorious poetic shrine been raised over the legends of an illustrious nation, which at present numbers its descendants by a bare hundred thousand among the teeming myriads of India, than has been erected in the supreme achievement of Firdausi.

A few words are necessary to determine the claims of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as historical epics. On the whole these two works may be said to excel every other epic in the world. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are exceedingly comprehensive and encyclopædic, and the latter in particular has almost ceased to be an epic and is known as an "Itihâsa" or a rambling narrative of heroic traditions. Being written by numerous persons, who have tried their hand on every conceivable subject, there is scarcely any common basis for comparison between the Persian and the Indian epics. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are as much superior to the epic of Firdausi as the Encyclopædia Britannica is to the works of Shakespeare, and this comparison evidently does not detract a jot from the illustrious fame of the Persian or the English poet.

Unfortunately Sanskrit literature is woefully deficient in history, and according to Max Muller, the Hindus have no historical sense at all. The cause of this deficiency may perhaps be sought in Hindu philosophy and religion summed up by the great Shankar in his famous hemistich:—"God is reality, the world is an illusion, the soul is God and nothing more." The Hindus are accordingly inclined to believe that the world and all the occurrences taking place therein being mere illusion, any historical record of those happenings must be all the more illusory, and hence they may have refrained from paying due attention to history. Even among the famous "Navratnas" or "Nine Gems", rightly or wrongly associated with King Vikram's court, not one is a historian. It does not seem proper to argue that the Hindus had

their historical works but that they were all destroyed by the Muslims. The Hindus may have had a few chronicles but they could boast of no solid reliable work of history till the "Râjtarangini" of Kalhana Pandit of Kashmir, who composed the work several years after the Muslim conquest.

The Mahabharata is called an "Itihâsa", which word means heroic legends and old traditions. In fact the Indian epics are full of historic details, which are not however presented in any definite form. According to Dr. Rabindranath Tagore the Indian epics contain the eternal history of India, but the history in the Indian epics lies like concealed pearls in the sea, and it is no easy task to fish out these pearls from the huge mass of miscellaneous material. In the Mahabharata, for instance, there is plenty of discursive information about the history and geography of various places that serve at one time or the other as theatres of action, for instance, Hastinâpura, Indraprastha, Pâncâla, Kâshi, Virâtnagar, Dwâarakâ, Ayodhyâ, Kishkindhâ, Lankâ, and many more. The Pândavas in the Mahabharata as Rama and Lakshmana in the Ramayana, during their wanderings in their long exile got into touch with numerous provinces. So too in the "Ashwamedha Parva" of the Mahabharata, a horse is described as being let loose by Yudhishtira to run wheresoever it chooses, and war is to be declared by Arjuna who follows the steed against any king who dares to check the animal's progress. In this way Arjuna has to pass through various kingdoms, and thus *indirectly* the reader of the Indian epics comes to know of the history and social life of these places.

A "samudra-manthan" or churning of the ocean must be undertaken on a gigantic scale by scholars to extract the nectar of history from the bottomless depths of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Purânas, but we look forward to the Bhândârkar Oriental Institute of Poona to accomplish this work. After all, though on the whole the Ramayana and the Mahabharata may be the greatest epics in the world, still as historical epics they are not to be compared to the masterpiece of Firdausi, who retains the palm of superiority over all other works belonging to this category. Finally it may be concluded that in purity and delicacy of style, in vigour and vivacity of expression, in grandeur of subject and excellence of execution, in comprehensiveness of conception and sublimity of treatment, and above all in the fervid and stirring devotion to the fatherland that suffuses the entire work, the Shahnameh, as a historical epic, occupies a unique and pre-eminent position in the literature of the world.

---

## The Life of Firdausi.

---

There is no age without an ideal, no race without a religion, no nation without an epic. The ideal fixes the goal, which marks the climax of culture arrived at in that epoch, and to which the age consciously or unconsciously aspires: a collection of such ideals will be found recorded in religion which at the same time preaches the importance of the greatest of all goals—the union with God: while an epic is a record of the most glorious landmark of a country's history, the high-water mark of its civilization, showing how that nation rose superior to others at that particular time or had sustained a crushing but not dishonourable defeat. Devoid of a worthy ideal, a country remains static in its civilization; without a suitable religion, it grovels in materialism; in the absence of a glorious epic it remains uninspired with the fervour of nationalism, and the heroes of history fail to stir that legitimate pride in the fatherland which an epic is known to stimulate. The Parsis were destined to lose their country and their ancient supremacy over nations, but they still retain their religion, their history, their ideals, and thanks to Firdausi, their epic as well. We do not here propose to discuss the greatness and importance of Firdausi's work but to attempt a detailed picture of the chequered life of the poet-hero, the millenary of whose birth falls in October of the current year\* and has inspired this essay. Usually the life of a

---

\* This Essay was written in May 1934.

man of letters is dull and devoid of variety, while that of an adventurous soldier makes interesting reading; the happier the man, the more monotonous does the record of his life become. But Firdausi had tasted in a large measure the vicissitudes of life and consequently, though a poet, the story of his earthly doings and sufferings promises to entertain even the casual reader.

It is deplorable that at every step in Firdausi's life we should be confronted with differences of opinion, and they begin right from the very name of the poet. According to the majority of critics his name was Hakim Abu Qâsim Mansur which Baisanqar Khan has mentioned in his celebrated preface to the *Shahnameh*, though tradition preserves the name of Kunyâ Abul Qâsim. Shams ul 'Ulamâ Maulânâ Shibli gives the name as Hasan bin Ishâq bin Sharaf, while T. W. Beale in his "Oriental Biographical Dictionary" gives it as Abu al Qâsim Hasan bin Sharafshâh. We think it advisable to fix upon the first mentioned as the name of the poet. His father's name was probably Fakhr ud Din Ahmad, a landlord or Dehqân of Tus. Daulat Shâh Samarqandi's assertion that the father had a garden in Tus called Firdaus from which the poet took his nom de guerre is not reliable, for we shall see in course of time how the poet came across his pen name. According to Lieut. Col. P. M. Sykes, the great historian of Persia, Firdausi was born not exactly in Tus but in the village of Bâzh (now called Fâzh), near Tus, a city which was also the proud mother of the great Saljuq statesman Nizâm ul Mulk as of the greatest of Muslim theologians Imâm Ghazzâli. The date of the poet's birth is another troublesome ques-

tion. Dr. J. J. Modi in his Gujarati work on the Shah-nameh and Mr. Palmer in his article on Firdausi in the Encyclopædia Britannica put it at 941 A. D. while T. Noldeke in his "Iranian National Epic" fixes it at 935-936. It is certain he died in 1020, and we have tolerably reliable evidence that the poet was then 85 or 86 years of age. We are therefore justified in fixing the year of his birth at 934-935. Another incidental corroboration of this date comes from modern Persia—the whole country being resolved to celebrate the millenary of Firdausi's birth on an unprecedentedly magnificent scale in the course of the next few months. The future greatness of the poet, says a well-known tradition, was revealed at the time of his birth to his father in a dream when he saw his new-born offspring ascending a castle and shouting "Labbik" (Here I am) from the house-top in a voice which resounded from the remotest corners. A soothsayer appropriately interpreted the dream as foreshadowing the future fame of the child. Dreams as a form of divination are frequently associated with the names of great men: e. g. 'Othmán, the founder of the Ottoman Empire, just before his marriage dreamt that from his body arose a mighty tree which overshadowed the country, while Sultan Sabuktigin saw in a dream a tree (his own son, the great Sultan Mahmood of Ghazni) arising from his fire-place and spreading as far and wide as his eyes could reach. All the three dreams, if actually dreamt and accurately recorded, have proved remarkably true. Firdausi in his youth is said to have been fond of bathing in rivers, which once very nearly cost him his life.

Not much is known of his early years in Tus. He

was a scholar acquainted with Persian, Pehlavi and Arabic, Noldeke's statement that the poet knew no other language but Persian being entirely remote from the truth. From early life Firdausi evinced keen enthusiasm for the Iranian traditions, and we feel sure that this love was inspired in him by his father, a Dehqân, whose hereditary business it was to preserve and transmit these national legends. The family must have been converted into Islam not long ago, but the new religion sat light upon the poet, whose sympathies were all for the faith of his forefathers, their country and their culture. It was also fortunate that the poet lived in Tus, the ancient capital of Khorâsân, for if the Parsis were able to preserve their traditions and withstand the successful arms of the Arabs for a longer time, it was at Khorâsân in the East, Tabristân in the North and Fârs in the South, while Western Persia, being nearest to Arabia, was the first to fall under the subjugation and the denationalizing influence of the conquerors. Khorâsân, the cradle of the Persian Renaissance as Browne calls it, was also the home of the ancestors of those Parsis who finally came over to India for the protection of their faith. Hence Khorâsân was the centre of Parsi culture at least in those troublesome times, and Firdausi may be expected to have come across numerous Iranian legends which he loved to remember and versify from his early years. The innate tenacity of the sons of the soil prevailed in the end. The triumph of the 'Abbâsides over the Umayyâds in 749 was solely due to the Persians, who were now given a larger share in the government of their own country. Gradually there was a national revival when the



Persian language, suppressed for nearly two centuries by the conquerors, supplanted the Arabic, and old Iranian names were resumed. At last the Arab Empire like the Moghal Empire in India had become so extensive that Viceroys began to assert their independence from the central authority of the Khalifs, till the latter were reduced to mere puppets, though they continued to claim and receive a nominal allegiance from their deputies.

It was at the courts of these independent kings that the Persian language was re-born and ancient Iranian traditions were revived. Ya'qoob Laith Saffâri, the founder of a short-lived dynasty which ruled from 868 to 903, was a "saffâr" (brazier) by profession, but by his sword he carved out his way to the throne. He was the first prince of the Persian race to detach himself wholly from the Khilâfat, and though he was himself illiterate, the part he played in being the first to give a great impetus to Persian and in getting a translation of the "Khudâinâmeh" prepared through his minister Abu Mansur bin 'Abd ur Razzâq bin 'Abdullâh bin Farrukh entitles him to the deep gratitude of the Parsis, for it was on this great work or on one of its versions that the Shahnameh is based. Thus Persia began to conquer her conquerors by her intellectual superiority till the Arabs were gradually driven back by their own incapacity to the deserts from which they had advanced. The national literary movement continued to gather strength as dynasty after dynasty rose and fell, till it reached its climax under the Ghaznavides under their powerful ruler Sultan Mahmood. There being a regular mania for the preservation and collection of the Iranian legends, it is no wonder if Firdausi, the

son of a Dehqân living in the capital of a province where the movement was most conspicuous, should have been early seized with the desire to perpetuate the ancient glories of his country.

Great writers fix their goal in early life and then remain faithful to it through thick and thin. When Milton and Wordsworth did not appear keen on earning money in their youth, they were asked what they proposed doing. Both replied they wished to write something which the world would not willingly let die. Firdausi was a man of similar type and spent his early years in writing episodes from the national legends, his earliest one being on Jamshid and Zohâk. Prof. Sherâni, a great modern authority on the Shahnameh, believes that the first episode of Firdausi was rather on Bizan and Manizeh, which he wrote at the initiative of his wife. According to Prof. Sherâni in one of his Urdu articles, one night Firdausi was unable to sleep when his wife sang to him the episode of Bizan and Manizeh on condition that he should versify it next morning. The promise was kept, and from the unusually detailed description of this episode Prof. Sherâni is inclined to believe that it was the first offspring of Firdausi's genius. It must be remembered that our poet never proceeded chronologically from the beginning but tried his hand on the most interesting episodes first: then the idea of composing the Shahnameh gradually dawned on him, and he finally strung the whole in the form of an epic. This method was similar to Tennyson's who at first wrote detached stories from the Arthurian romances which were later on unified to assume the form of his "tea-table epic"—the "Idylls of the King".

Firdausi was now favoured by a rare smile of fortune. Knowing that he was a devoted admirer of the national legends, one of his friends, identified by Palmer and Noldeke with Muhammad Lashkari, presented him with a copy of the "Khudâinâmeh" or one of its numerous versions, for which the poet expresses his sincere gratitude in the beginning of the Shahnameh. Firdausi was also on the look-out for a patron, for such a vast undertaking could not be carried through without extraneous help. From the opening of the Shahnameh it is clear that Firdausi was patronised by Abu Mansur bin Muhammad, the governor of Tus, but he soon died without having rendered substantial aid to the poet. But this Abu Mansur bin Muhammad had given a valuable advice to the poet which he records in the epic:—

“Marâ guft ke in nâmeh e shehriyâr  
Agar gufte âyad ba shâhân sipâr.”

“He told me ‘if this book of kings is completed, dedicate it to kings only.’ Firdausi always bore this advice in mind till good or ill luck brought him into contact with Sultan Mahmood of Ghazni. Our poet was always afraid of two dangers—insecurity of life and poverty. He says in the commencement of his work:—

“Magar khud darangam nabâshad basi  
Babâyad sipurdan ba digar kasi:  
Wa digar ke ganjam wafâdâr neest  
Hamân ranj râ kas kharidâr neest:”

“Perhaps my life may not be long enough and I may be constrained to entrust my work to others: or perhaps wealth may be unfaithful to me, and I may find

no purchaser of (this fruit of) my toil." Firdausi now cast about once again for a patron, for:—

“Che khush guft Tusi sakhun hamchun dur  
Murabbi beyâr o murabbeh bakhur:”

“How beautifully has the poet of Tus observed in his pearl-like words—‘Secure a patron and enjoy your sweets.’” It was then that Firdausi heard of the fame of Sultan Mahmood as a great patron of letters and admirer of ancient Persian legends, and he ultimately resolved to start for Ghazni.

The first and greatest reason of his departure to Ghazni was thus the search of a distinguished patron under whose protection he may carry out his great work. He also hoped that with the help of the Sultan he would secure better authorities, both verbal and written, a hope in which he was not deceived. According to Nizâmi ‘Arudi as-Samarqandi Firdausi went to Ghazni to earn money in order to provide a suitable dowry for the marriage of his daughter. Jâmi held that Firdausi’s main object was to carry his complaint against a tyrannical tax-collector of Tus to the highest court at Ghazni. In Tus there was a tank supplied with an ill-constructed dam: during the rains the dam often broke down, and the overflowing of the water caused great inconvenience to the people. Shibli maintained that Firdausi’s aim in life was to earn sufficient money to enable him to build a suitable dam and thus render some service to his fellow-citizens. But did Firdausi go to Ghazni of his own accord or was he invited there by the Sultan? Shibli takes the latter view while Dr. J. J. Modi maintains that if

Firdausi had gone to Ghazni at the invitation of the Sultan, he would have surely mentioned it according to his habit in the Shahnameh. Whatever the case may be, the Sultan wanted a great poet to versify the Iranian legends, while Firdausi, who had already done much of this work in Tus, was on the look-out for a patron who may help him to carry it through successfully. Nature brought about a meeting of the two, and there are reasons to hold that Firdausi went to Ghazni not as an humble cultivator but as a poet of note. The great poets of Ghazni, hearing that Firdausi was on his way out, became jealous of him and apprehensive of their own position. They therefore sent him false information that the Sultan was no longer anxious to see him in his Court. Our author was now at a loss what to do, but a quarrel soon arose between the envious poets and one of them betrayed the plot in a letter to Firdausi who thereupon immediately set out for Ghazni.

Coming to the city he found three men in a garden and was much interested in their conversation for they turned out to be birds of the same poetic feather. But the three persons, wishing to get rid of the stranger in the politest way possible, told him that they associated with none but poets. On learning from Firdausi that he too had some pretensions in that direction, they deliberately hit upon the syllable "shan", which is impossible to rime in the Persian language except by three words only, and informed the new-comer that if he could give them a fourth riming line to their three, he would be admitted into their company. Thereupon the first poet 'Unsari, describing a beautiful girl, observed:—

“Chun ‘ariz e tu mâh nabuvad roshan.”

“Not even the moon is as resplendent as thy cheek.”  
The other poet ‘Asjadi continued in the same strain:—

“Mânand e rukhat gul nabuvad dar gulshan ”

“There is no rose in the garden to match with thy face.” The third poet Farrukhi then exhausted the last rime by saying:—

“Muzhgânat guzar hami kunad ze joshan ”

“Thy eyelashes pierce through the armour”. But Firdausi completely outwitted them by rejoining:—

“Mânand e sanân e Giv dar jang e Pashan ”

“Resembling the spear of Giv in the battle of Pashan,” thus producing a capital noun ending in the required rime. The poets were taken by surprise which was changed to admiration when Firdausi explained to them everything about Giv and what happened to the Iranians during Pirân's terrible night-assault at Pashan. The baffled trio now struck up a friendship with the poet of Tus, and it was through their good offices (while according to another account it was through one Mâhak) that Firdausi approached the presence of the Sultan. This poetical contest is disbelieved by Browne and Noldeke nor does Nizâmi ‘Arudi as-Samarqandi refer to it in his “Chahâr Maqâleh”, nor ‘Afi in his “Lubâb ul Albâb”. It is mentioned however by Daulatshâh Samarqandi in his “Tazkarat ush Sho‘arâ”, by Jâmi in his “Bahâristân” and by later biographers.

During the reign of the Sâmânides King Nuh II bin Mansur had entrusted the composition of the Shahnameh

as based on the "Khudâinâme" to a Zarathushtrian poet Daqiqi, who, after writing only 1000 (some say 2000) lines was murdered by his own slave. The work fell through and even the Sâmânides themselves were supplanted by the Ghaznavides, and Sultan Mahmood, after consolidating himself firmly on the throne, found time to think of the great work, the completion of which was now left to his Court-poet 'Unsari, who had already prepared the episode of Rustam and Sohrab. But since the great epic was to be entrusted to the best man available in Ghazni, the Sultan desired Firdausi to display his powers by reciting one of his episodes next day. Within twenty four hours Firdausi dashed out that spirited episode of Rustam and Ashkabus and recited it in the royal presence amidst the resounding acclamations of the courtiers. The Sultan was so pleased that he said to the poet:—"Oh stranger of Tus! You have converted my Court into Firdaus (Paradise)." Our poet thereupon paid the king the graceful compliment of adopting the word 'Firdausi' as his pen-name. Palmer, however, observes that the king gave him the title of Firdausi when the latter once improvised a verse in praise of Ayâz, the favourite slave of the Sultan. No doubt was left in any mind as to who was best fitted to carry on the Shahnameh, and the Sultan was now pleased to order Firdausi to undertake the work. 'Unsari keenly felt the insult, yet he was magnanimous enough to pay the following encomium to his successful rival:—

" Tu shâbensheh e mulk e nazm e Dari  
 Babandad bapishat kamar 'Unsari :"

"Thou art the emperor of the realm of Persian

poetry; 'Unsari stands before thee with his waist bound (like a slave).' But, as is well-known, the work that began with such fair promise for the future was finally to be clouded by the malice of detractors and the disappointment of the poet.

At this juncture it is material to decide when the poet commenced his work, for on a solution of this question depends the consideration of Firdausi's indebtedness to the Sultan. Modern research has shown beyond all doubt that the Shahnameh was not at all inspired by the Sultan but that the idea to versify certain national legends had struck Firdausi as early as 958 while Mahmood was born in 971. The poet says at the very end of the Shahnameh :—

“Bar âmad kunun qisseh e Yazdejard  
Ba mâh e Safandârmad ruz e Ard;  
“Ze Hijrat shudeh panj hashtâd bâr  
Ke guftam man in nâneh e shâhwâr:”

“The episode of Yazdejard Shehriyâr (the last Zarathushtrian king of Iran) is now over on the day of Ashishvangh of the month of Aspandârmad (i. e. on the 25th day of the 12th month of the Parsi calendar). This work on royalty was concluded by me when 80 times 5 years had passed after the Flight” (i. e. in  $80 \times 5 = 400$  A. H. or 1010 A. D.). Now Firdausi's well-known lines in his satire on the Sultan are :—

“Basi ranj burdam dar in sâl si  
‘Ajam zindeh kardam badin Pârsi.”

“I laboured excessively for 30 years and revived the



faith and nation of Persia." But the poet seems to contradict himself towards the very end of the *Shahnameh* when he says he took 35 years to write his great work. His words are:—

"Si o panj sâl az sarâ e sipanj  
 Basi ranj burdam ba ummid e ganj;  
 Chun bar båd dâdand ranj e marâ  
 Nabud hâsili si o panj e marâ:"

"I laboured excessively in the hope of gain for 35 years in this abode of 3 or 5 days (this world); when others destroyed (the fruit of) my toil, I derived no profit from my 35 (years)." But Prof. Sherâni has given a very reasonable explanation of this self-contradiction by observing that the poet actually laboured for 30 years over the *Shahnameh*, but taking into consideration the episodes of Bizan and Manizeh etc. on which he tried his hand before seriously beginning his work, he may be said to have put in 35 years over it. Hence the *Shahnameh* must have begun in Tus 30 or 35 years prior to 1010; i. e. in 980 or 975 when the Sultan was quite a child.

Let us now see when Firdausi departed for Ghazni. It is a matter of history that Sultan Sabuktigin died in 996 leaving the kingdom of Ghazni to his second son Isma'il who was defeated and deposed by his brother Mahmood in 997. Now it is not possible that Mahmood should have thought of poetry and Iranian traditions till he was secure on the throne. After the year 1000 Mahmood was, however, too busy with his numerous campaigns to think of anything else. Hence it is quite

possible that Firdausi should have gone to Ghazni between 997 and 1000. According to Dr. Edward Sachau in his Introduction to Alberuni's "India", Firdausi came to Ghazni in 998, while Prof. Sherâni thinks the poet left Tus in his 66th year, and considering 934 to be the year of his birth, it comes up exactly to 1000. But we have one more shot in our locker, thanks to Firdausi's autobiographical habits, though the reference here, it must be admitted, is rather vague. The poet himself says:—

"Sakhun râ nigh dâstam sâl beest  
Badân tâ sazâwâr e in ganj keest:"

"I preserved my work for 20 years that I may determine who best deserves this (literary) treasure." If this means that Firdausi preserved his work for 20 years in Tus, it exactly agrees with our argument that the poet worked for that period in Tus from 980 to 1000, and for 10 years in Ghazni from 1000 to 1010. We are certainly indebted to Sultan Mahmood for the love he evinced for Iranian legends and for the patronage he extended to Firdausi; yet in the face of the facts proved above it is utterly remote from the truth to assert that it was Mahmood who inspired Firdausi to write the Shahnameh, or that he supplied the bulk of the authorities for that purpose, or that but for the royal patronage the Shahnameh would never have been written. But Prof. Sherâni goes still further and says that out of the four volumes of the Shahnameh the poet wrote  $2\frac{3}{4}$  in Tus, remained only 6 years in Ghazni, writing  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the work and labouring extremely hard, and

that the rest was completed during his exile. We do not here exactly see eye to eye with the learned Professor, whose arguments diminish still more Firdausi's debt to the Sultan. However, quite enough has been shown to prove that Firdausi started his great work independently and carried it on for 20 years till he received further encouragement and the patronage he hankered after so much from the monarch of Ghazni.

Now Firdausi in Ghazni was assigned a comfortable mansion, where he worked in a capacious room adorned with pictures of war and royalty to inspire him in his work. The Sultan was kind enough to place all his authorities at the disposal of Firdausi who also derived help from several Dehqâns and Mobeds (bards and priests), though as previously observed Firdausi had already obtained from his friend Muhammad Lashkari a copy of the most authentic work he coveted—the "Khudâinameh". It was in Ghazni that the poet wrote the important episode of Rustam and Asfandiyâr, second only in pathos to that of Rustam and Sohrab. From time to time he recited his episodes to the accompaniment of lute and cymbals before the Sultan who was always anxious to reward his pains. But it was unfortunate for Firdausi that he thankfully declined to take the remuneration piecemeal but wished to have it all together as a lump sum. The Sultan thereupon promised to pay him a gold mohur for every couplet he wrote.

It is pleasant occasionally to abandon history to tread the primrose path of traditions that have been woven round the poet's name, only remembering that there is very little of history beneath it. Sir John

Malcolm in his interesting work on "Sketches of Persia" gives an anecdote that Firdausi in a dream once saw the great Rustam who was so pleased at the poet who had immortalized his deeds that he showed him the exact place where he had concealed a golden necklace. The poet kept quiet over the matter lest he might be ridiculed, but once, travelling in the retinue of the king, he came to the actual spot, when he was unable to control himself and revealed the secret to Ayâz. The golden chain was discovered and bestowed by the Sultan on Firdausi, but the latter, probably thinking of the treasure he was soon to receive, divided the prize among the court-poets.

But about the time that Firdausi settled in Ghazni, a heavy misfortune befell him—perhaps the heaviest in his long life. This was the death of his only son in whom were centred so many of his hopes. The royal patronage had filled him with lofty aspirations which for the time were extinguished by the cruel hand of death. Judging 934 to be the year of Firdausi's birth, this incident took place in 999 for as the heart-broken poet pathetically observes:—

"Marâ shast o panj o varâ si o haft  
Na pursid az in pir o tanhá baraft:"

"I am 65 years of age, he (the son) only 37: he asked not this old man but departed all alone." When a young man loses a beloved or a friend, he is inspired to record his grief in memorable verse; this is seen in the case of Dante and Tennyson who enshrined their sorrows in those noble literary monuments—"Divina

Commedia" and "In Memoriam". But a similar bereavement leaves an old man crushed and broken, and such was the case with Firdausi. After this great calamity, the glow and the rush of the Shahnameh are considerably diminished. This may also be due to another reason: after the death of Rostam, the poet could not find so great a subject to feed his powerful genius, and after the Kayânian rule the heroic or epic age of the Shahnameh terminates, what follows being but versified history, though the verse is after all the verse of Firdausi.

The court of an autocratic king is generally a hive of flatterers who eke out a miserable existence by slandering one another before the monarch. It was the misfortune of Firdausi that he incurred the displeasure of Maimandi, the Vazir of Sultan Mahmood, specially deputed by his master to look after the comforts of the poet but who proved to be the main cause of his downfall. Strange to say, some writers like Prof. Browne consider Maimandi the greatest friend and benefactor of the poet. Again there are disputes regarding the very name of the Vazir which has been usually put down as Hasan Maimandi. This is a mistake, for as Beale observes in his "Oriental Biographical Dictionary," Hasan Maimandi was the minister not of Mahmood but of his father Sabuktigin, by whom he was hanged on a false and malicious charge brought against him by his enemies. The minister of Mahmood was a son of the deceased Vazir and his name was Ahmad bin Hasan Maimandi, a foster-brother and fellow-student of the young Sultan. According to Prof. Muhammad Habib in his "Sultan Mahmood of Ghazni" this Ahmad bin Hasan

Maimandi was a great scholar and intriguer and was later on imprisoned by Sultan Mahmood in an Indian fort, whence he was liberated by Mas'oud, son of Mahmood, only to die shortly in 1033. Firdausi has written the following scathing lines on Ahmad bin Hasan Maimandi from whom he experienced nothing but unkindness:—

“ Ze Maimandi áyeen e mardi majui  
 Ze nám o nishánash makun justajui:  
 Qalam bar sar e oo bazan hamchun man  
 Ke gum bád námash ze bar anjuman: ”

“ Do not expect dictates of humanity from Maimandi: search not about his name and whereabouts: blot out his head with a pen as I do: may his name be obliterated from every congregation.” The same is the trouble about Ayáz, the favourite slave of the Sultan, whom some take to be the envious detractor of the poet while we think it advisable to consider him as his friend and well-wisher.

At last the enemies of Firdausi raised a whirlwind of falsehood and succeeded in blinding the eyes of the Sultan, who had hitherto been favourably inclined to the poet. Some of these charges were exceedingly silly, but when a strong appeal is made to fanaticism, no care is ever taken to ascertain whether the victim actually wrote a certain thing or what he meant thereby. Thus one of the most God-loving of poets was strangely accused of atheism! Firdausi has not taken the name of “ Alláh ”, for it was his principle to avoid Arabic words as far as possible, but his references to God are nevertheless numerous and truly devotional in spirit. Firdausi

was very fond of moralizing on every suitable occasion, and his didactic touch is unmistakable; yet some of his defamers accused him of materialism, while others with equal want of sense arraigned him of being a Mu'atazili or a Dehri (a seceder or dissenter), basing their objection on two noble lines of the poet which appear on the very first page of his work:—

“Ba binandegân âfrinandeh râ  
Nabini maranjân du binandeh râ:”

“With thy eyes thou canst not see the Creator; trouble not thy two eyes.” One standing charge against him was that he eulogized the kings and the prophet of the “Gabrs.” Though this was no crime and though he did it with the express permission of the Sultan, still it was viewed with extreme disapprobation by the orthodox, who long after the poet's death continued their insane onslaughts against one of the world's masterpieces that has shed perennial glory over their own country. Most of the people of Persia have a soft corner in their hearts for Hazrat 'Ali and sympathize with the misfortunes of his descendants. Firdausi was a Shi'a in the Sunni Court of the Ghaznavide Sultan, and he was supposed to have departed from the true standard of orthodoxy when he praised the noble 'Ali in the following lines:—

“Agar khuld khâhi ba digar sarâi  
Ba nazd e nabi o wasi gir jâi:  
+ + + +  
Bar in zâdam o ham bar in bugzaram  
Yaqin dân ke khâk e pai e Haidaram:”

“If you desire paradise in the next world, take your seat near the Prophet and his executor (‘Ali)..... I am born in this (Shi‘a) faith and shall pass away in this very persuasion; believe me, I am the dust of the feet of the Lion (‘Ali).”

Firdausi’s next “crime” against fanaticism was that he had praised Zarathushtra, though this he was bound to do when he came to the reign of Gushtâsp. But here Firdausi anticipated trouble and was on his guard. As the late Mr. Palanji B. Desai observes, Firdausi was shrewd enough to know where he was, and that he could not praise any prophet except Muhammad openly. He therefore hit upon a trick and pretended in his epic that the late Zarathushtrian poet Daqiqi, his predecessor in the composition of the Shahnameh, who had lived to compose only 1000 lines on the wars between Gushtâsp and Arjâsp, when the Prophet of Iran had flourished, appeared in his dream and requested him to incorporate that whole passage in the Shahnameh and thus perpetuate his memory. Now Firdausi may or may not have seen such a dream, but by this ruse he could shift the odium of praising the Prophet of the Parsis on Daqiqi who was himself a Zarathushtrian. Still the very insertion of this “offensive” passage in Firdausi’s Shahnameh was accounted a serious violation of religious propriety by the orthodox. Sometimes malice succeeds in extorting a meaning out of a passage which completely bewilders the innocent writer thereof. Firdausi in his simplicity had severe things to say about low-born people, and Sultan Mahmood was unfortunately himself the son of a slave! Again, our poet had to describe in glowing



language the long feud between Iran and Turan, and found himself compelled to pour execration upon the people of the latter country : unhappily for him the Sultan was himself a Turani and lent a too willing ear to the enemies of the poet who made capital out of this coincidence. There was one point, however, which went heavily against Firdausi—his candid sympathy with the Zarathushtrians to whom he never applies the term "Gabr" throughout his epic, and his open hatred for the Arabs which he never cared to conceal but which he often had the prudence to express through the mouths of his characters.

Nor is it easy to exonerate the poet entirely from the storm of censure that some of his lines provoked. Firdausi once observes that if the Zarathushtrians worship fire, the Arabs have for their altar a stone (the Ka'ba). Yazdejard Shehriyâr is made to call the Arabs "snake-devouring devil-faces." The poet's ill-disguised contempt for the conquerors also found vent in certain lines appearing in the letter written by Rustam bin Hurmazd, the commander-in-chief of the Sâsânian army to the Arab leader Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqâs. After rating the Arabs roundly for their "nudity", "beggary" and "shamelessness", the Persian general is made to write certain well-known lines, which are now almost tarnished with the rust of over-quotation, but which are worth citing in this connection:—

"Ze shir e shutur khurdan o susmâr  
 'Arab râ ba jâi rasid ast kâr  
 Ke takht e Kiyân râ kunand ârzu  
 Tufu bâd bar charkh e gardân tufu:"

“By the drinking of camel's milk and the eating of lizards, the Arabs have grown so presumptuous that they aspire to the throne of the Kiyânians! Oh fie! Fie on the revolving spheres.” Here Firdausi's boldness carried him too far and lay him open to the wrath of the orthodox Muslims. Prof. E. G. Browne points out in his “Persian Revolution 1905-1909” that after the restoration of the Constitution the revived paper “Habl ul matin” was suppressed and its editor Mr. Sayyad Hasan tried and imprisoned in spite of his services to the popular cause for having dared to speak slightly of the Arabs as “susmârkhur” (lizard-eaters), though it was contended that the expression had been already used by Firdausi. When in the 20th century a gentleman was punished for using a contemptuous term against the Arabs, what courage must Firdausi have displayed and what danger must he have faced when he used this expression in those fanatic times and in the Court of a Sunni king noted for his orthodoxy and religious wars! It may here be observed that Firdausi's contemporary, Abu Rihân Muhammad ibn Ahmad al Biruni has also many sharp things to say about the Arabs in his renowned work “Târikh al Hind” (known to fame as Alberuni's “India”), but that was when the author had fled to our country beyond the reach of the fanatics. Only Firdausi had the audacity or the imprudence to beard the lion in his den.

Our poet was now so pestered by these persecutions that life at last became unbearable to him. Perhaps he thought he was aging rapidly and was often apprehensive lest he may be dismissed through the machinations of his foes, or that he may die before the conclusion of

his great work. On one occasion we find the poet offering the following prayer :—

“Hami khâham as dâdgar yak khudâi  
 Ke chandân bamânam bagiti bajâi  
 Ke in nâmeḥ e shehriyârân e pish  
 Bapaiwandam az khoob guftâr e khish :  
 Az ân pas tan e bihunâr khâk râst  
 Sakhungu e jân ma’dan e pâk râst.”

“ I beg but this from the One Just God that I may live in this world only so long as to be able to weave into my elegant poetry these annals of ancient kings. After that my ignorant body may sink in the dust, while my eloquent soul will return to the Mine of Purity (God).” But now occurred an incident which made the position of the poet very precarious and strengthened the hands of his enemies. Firdausi’s fame had now spread far and wide, and other kings used to send him presents in appreciation of his work. One of these rulers was Amir Rustam Fakhr ud Daula Daylami, himself a Shi’a and not very friendly with Mahmood. This ruler sent Firdausi a thousand gold mohurs and invited him to his Court. The poet’s vile detractors magnified these matters before the Sultan who was now thoroughly prejudiced against Firdausi.

At last the Shahnameh was complete and our poet laid down the pen with a sigh of relief. His scribe was ‘Ali Daylam and his reciter was Abu Dalaf whom the grateful poet remembers on the last page of his work in the following couplet:—

“ Az in nâmeḥ az nâmdârân e shehr  
 ‘Ali Daylam o Bu Dalaf râst behr: ”

“ Among the worthies of this city ‘Ali Daylam and Abu Dalaf have their share in the composition of this work.” Prof. Sherâni does not believe that the Shahnameh was ever completed in Ghazni but that it was concluded during the poet’s exile. This seems hard to believe, for when the poet fled for dear life from the Sultan’s territory he was never safe for a long time at any place, and under such circumstances he cannot be supposed to have carried with him all his authorities. Again, unless the work was over at Ghazni, how could Firdausi expect the reward or be disappointed at the result? This shows that the Shahnameh was completed or was nearing completion in Ghazni. The Sultan was overjoyed and his generous impulse suddenly inspired him to ask Maimandi to bestow on Firdausi as much gold as an elephant could carry. But it was here that the Vazir betrayed all the malice and meanness he was capable of, and prevailed upon the Sultan not to waste riches on a mere rhymster but to send him only 60000 silver coins in return for as many couplets contained in the work. When the royal messenger arrived with the prize, Firdausi was in the bath. Realizing the difference between the promise and the performance of his royal patron, the poet was extremely disappointed; his pride was piqued, and he divided the money between the bath-keeper, the messenger and an astonished beer-seller who stood near by. Firdausi now came home and according to Palmer tore off and threw into the flames the manuscripts of thousands of verses which he had written. This statement is not

authentic nor do we know whether so many verses still remained to be incorporated in the Shahnameh, or whether Firdausi had prepared a rough draft of another poem on an allied subject. The enemies of the poet were in high jinks at his discomfiture and carried a coloured report of what had happened to the Sultan who in a rage ordered the poet to be trampled under the feet of an elephant. But the poet had the sense to fall at the Sultan's feet and crave pardon for his rash act. The Sultan was touched at the sight of the grey-headed poet lying on the ground before him and generously forgave the offence. Mr. Stanley Lane-Poole in his "Mediæval India" blames Firdausi for having rejected even the 60000 silver pieces, which sum was equivalent to £2500 or 250 times as much as Milton received for "Paradise Lost". There seems to be much of worldly wisdom in this remark, but as the Sanskrit maxim goes "Nirankusha kavaya"—the poet is uncontrolled and so was the poet of the Shahnameh. There are three defects in Firdausi's character—his constant references to money, probably accounted for by his lifelong desire to build a dam on the river at Tus; his pride however justifiable, and his irritability which created round him a host of enemies and finally succeeded in throwing him out of royal favour. The following lines written by Firdausi to his friend Badi'ud Din at Ghazni will serve to show in what high esteem the former held his own poetic attainments:—

“Che sanjad ba mizân e man 'Unsari?  
 Geyâ chun kashad pish e gulbun sari?  
 Ze bidânishi bâshad o kudaki  
 Ke râe fuzuni zanad Rudaki.”

“What can the merits of ‘Unsari weigh when compared to mine? How can the grass dare to raise its head before the rosebush? It was owing to ignorance and childishness that Rudaki presumed to assert his superiority.”

We have already noticed Firdausi’s dream in which he was entreated by Daqiqi to incorporate in the Shah-nameh the latter’s verses on King Gushtâsp and the Prophet Zarathushtra. Firdausi grudgingly complies with the request and at the conclusion of Daqiqi’s passage observes:—

“Nigeh kardam in nazm o sust âmadam;  
 Basi beyt nâtandarust âmadam.  
 Man inrâ nawishtam ke tâ shehriyâr  
 Bedânad sakhun guftan e nâbkâr.  
 +           +           +           +  
 Sakhun chun badinguneh báyadat guft,  
 Magu o makun ranj ba tab’a juft:  
 Chun band e ravân bini o ranj e tan  
 Ba kâni ke gauhar nayâbi makan;  
 Chun taba’i nadâri chun âb e ravân  
 Mabar su e in nâme e kbusravân.”

“I examined his (Daqiqi’s) verses and found them weak; many of his couplets were lacking in vitality. I, however, incorporated them in my work only in order that the Sultan may know what is worthless versification.....(Oh poet), if such is your merit in verse, you need not compose poetry and thereby associate your nature with trouble. When you find poetry a fetter to your soul and an affliction to your body, dig not the

mine from which you despair to realize the gem. When you do not possess a poetic nature as exuberant as gushing water, better abstain from all connection with the Book of Kings."

All this may be true but a poet is never at his best when he indulges in self-praise. Pride is very often the weakness of great men: we saw it in Dante and Goethe, and instead of explaining it away, we must frankly deplore its presence in our truly virtuous and magnanimous poet.

The most cogent proof the poet gave of his irascibility was his satire on the Sultan, as passionate and defiant as Johnson's Letter to the Earl of Chesterfield was restrained and dignified. This terrible invective, saturated with the bitterness born of disappointment and winged with words of high disdain, was handed over by Firdausi to the unknowing Ayáz with the request that that "letter of apology" be handed over to the Sultan after twenty days, during which time the poet effected his escape from Ghazni. When the Sultan read the satire he boiled over with indignation and sent messengers to arrest the poet, but they soon returned to tell their master that the bird had flown. Though the satire, almost as immortal as the Shahnameh itself, displays at every step the touch of a master-hand, we do not think the poet was justified in venting his scorn against his patron who had recently pardoned him for his offence. Silent submission to his destiny would have proved far more dignified than this loud ventilation of his grievance united with a spiteful attack on his patron. Besides, it is useless disputing one's claims with an autocratic king,

and the poet must have had sufficient reasons to believe that the Sultan's ears were poisoned by his enemies. Again by writing this satire Firdausi himself courted trouble in his old age and made an exhibition of his spleen to the world. But as a Persian author (apparently no advocate of the fair sex) observes, three kinds of persons cannot be argued with—women, kings and poets. The “Bhâts” or Court-poets of native states in Western India, says Mr. C. A. Kincaid in his “Outlaws of Kathiawar”, are particularly kept satisfied lest they may brand with infamy the king who ventures to disappoint them, for as Firdausi says in his invective on Mahmood:—

“Chun shâ'er baranjad baguyad hijâ  
Bamânad hijâ tâ qayâmat bajâ:”

“When a poet is offended he writes a satire which endures till the Day of Resurrection.” When Aurangzebe wanted the poet Bhukhan Bhatt to paint him as he actually was, the latter in a few devastating couplets immortalized the infamous features of the Emperor's character which are too well known to readers of Indian history. Victor Hugo once wrote on Napoleon III a violent invective, one of the fiercest in the French language, named “Napoleon le Petit”. But if an exact parallel be sought to Firdausi's satire on Sultan Mahmood it is the “Diatribes du Docteur Akakia” levelled by the venom-dropping pen of Voltaire against his whilom patron and friend Frederick the Great. The mischievous malignity with which the work is imbued reminds us of the veiled but very able attacks made by that born satirist “Junius”, whoever he was, on George III. The satires of “Peter



Pindar" (John Wolcot) on the same monarch are too vile to be considered in this connection.

It is worth while contrasting this incident in the life of Firdausi with one in the career of the English poet Edmund Spenser. It is said, though not very authentically, that Spenser once presented his poems to Queen Elizabeth who was so pleased therewith that she commanded her High Treasurer William Cecil, Lord Burleigh, to give the poet a hundred pounds. Burleigh, who was perfectly dead to all literary appeal, remonstrated that the prize was too great, at which the Queen observed:—"Then give him what is reason." But Burleigh was so busy with the affairs of state that he completely forgot or perhaps never cared to reward the poet, who, instead of flinging a fierce satire on the Elizabethan Maimandi, wrote out a very brief appeal to the Queen and presented it to her. He therein said:—

"I was promised on a time  
To have reason for my rime;  
From that time unto this season  
I received nor rime nor reason."

This gentle hint did its work and the poet was immediately rewarded with the promised amount. But Firdausi had neither the tact nor the mildness of his brother-poet of England and succeeded only in exasperating his royal master and ruining his own future prospects.

Firdausi at one time had many kind things to say about his royal patron in the usual exaggerated vein of the Court-poet. In his happy days he sang:—

"Jahândâr e Mahmood e shâh e buzurg  
 Ba âbishkhar ârad hami meesh o gurg:  
 +           +           +           +  
 Chun kuduk lab az shir e mâdar bashust  
 Ze gehwâreh Mahmood guyad nukhust:  
 +           +           +           +  
 Ba tan zhandeh peel o ba jân Jabraeel  
 Ba kaf abr e Behman ba dil rud e Neel."

"The illustrious world-conquering king Mahmood can bring the ewe and the wolf to drink from the same spring....Ever since the child washes its lips with its mother's milk, it speaks first of all the word 'Mahmood' from the cradle.....Mahmood has the body of a ferocious elephant and the soul of Gabriel; his palm is as liberal as the rain-clouds of the month of Behman, his heart as capacious as the river Nile."

It is truly painful to contrast these lines with a few taken here and there from the poet's satire wherein the low-birth of the Sultan is the main butt of his attack:—

"Agar shâh râ shâh budi pidar  
 Ba sar bar nihâdi marâ tâj e zar:  
 Agar mâdar e shâh bânu budi  
 Marâ sim o zar tâ ba zânu budi.  
 +           +           +           +  
 Chun andar tabârash buzurgi na bood  
 Nayârist nâm e buzurgân shanood.  
 +           +           +           +  
 Ze napâkzâdeh madârid umid  
 Ke zangi ba shustan nagardad safid.  
 +           +           +           +

Parastârzâdeh nayâyad bakâr  
 Agarcheh buvad zâdeh e shehriyâr: "

"If this king (Mahmood) had been born of royal blood, he would have placed a golden crown on 'my head: if he had a respectable lady for his mother, the gold and silver (lavished on me) would have reached my knee.... Since there was no greatness in his family, he could not bear to hear the annals of the great.....Do not expect anything of a base-born man, for a negro cannot be washed white.....The son of a slave can never be of any use even though his father should have ultimately come to the throne."

The whole satire is perfectly out-spoken and cruelly blights the career of Mahmood who is as much remembered as the conqueror of Somnath as the victim of Firdausi's unrelenting couplets. As the poet Jâmi has observed:—

"Guzasht shaukat e Mahmood o dar zamâneh namând  
 Juz in fisâneh ke nashnâkht qadr e Firdausi: "

"The pomp of Mahmood has passed leaving no record in his age save this that he failed to appreciate the worth of Firdausi." We are all the more against this satire for we attach importance only to merit not to birth. But in those days even among the adherents of Islam, which preaches complete equality and discards differences of birth and status, mean origin was often the subject of witty or scornful sallies, and Sultan Mahmood was himself indirectly reminded of his low birth more than once. P. M. Sykes, the historian of Persia, relates the following story:—Sultan Mahmood, in

recognition of his victories, had been the recipient of rich rewards and the distinguished titles of "Yamin ud Daulat" (Right Hand of the State) and "Amin ul Millat" (Guardian of the Faith) from the Court of the Khalif Al Qâdir Billâh. In the decree that was issued by the Khalif, Mahmood was called a "Mir", which may mean either a chief or a slave, the omission of the letter "alif" (a) in the beginning of the word being a deliberate hit at the Sultan's birth. Now "alif" also means 1000, and the Sultan was asked by an ingenious courtier to send 1000 gold coins to the Khalif and await the result. The money was accordingly sent and a fresh decree arrived in which, sure enough, the missing "alif" was restored and Mahmood was unequivocally styled "Amir" or Lord! But a different version of the story is found in Mr. John Richardson's "Dissertations on the Eastern Nations". According to this writer Sultan Mahmood was so flushed with his extensive conquests that he asked the Khalif to bestow on him some conspicuous mark of distinction. The Khalif intentionally delayed for an year because of the ancestry of Mahmood, but on being reminded of the claim he bestowed on the Sultan the ambiguous title of "Wali", which may signify a prince, a friend or a slave. The Sultan caught the implication and sent the Khalif 100,000 gold coins wishing to know if a letter had not been omitted. The Khalif then dispatched other letters-patent creating the Sultan a "Wâli" by inserting an "alif" in the original word which now came clearly to mean a sovereign independent prince!

But when we blame Firdausi for his satire we need

not be understood to hold a brief for Sultan Mahmood, notorious in history for his meanness, cruelty and avarice. Even the great physician and philosopher Bu 'Ali Sinâ was so harassed by the Sultan that he ultimately fled to the Court of the Buwide prince for protection. The renowned scientist and eclectic philosopher Abu Ribân Muhammad bin Ahmad al Biruni was similarly persecuted till he escaped to India and recorded his experiences of that country in his famous work "Târikh al Hind". As mentioned previously the Sultan had also imprisoned his great but intriguing minister Ahmad bin Hasan Maimandi in an Indian fort. We are not astonished therefore when he disappointed and ruined another great ornament of his Court—the poet Firdausi, who, it must be said, had himself and his bad temper also to blame for his miseries.

How strange is it that genius should often be wedded to adversity or misfortune! How wonderful that the greatest benefactors of the human race should pass their lives in trouble and end their days in distress! Indeed, uneasy lies the head that marks a genius. Many of the great epic poets of whom we know are not exceptions to this rule. Homer may be "a man, a committee or a name", but the usual tradition about the blind old bard is :—

"Seven wealthy towns contend for Homer dead,  
Through which the living Homer begged his bread."

Dante's exile from Florence and his various hardships are as well known to us as Milton's blindness and obscure old life when he fell on evil days and evil

tongues. Tasso was unfairly cast in a madhouse for daring to make love to the Princess Leonora d'Este of Ferrara; but the most unfortunate of all epic poets was Camoens of Portugal, smitten with the shafts of a similar hopeless affection as with the tormenting darts of his cruel destiny. Great poets, according to an Arab writer, may be compared to the big leather-bucket which goes down into the bottom of a well to fetch up water which is supplied to the trees. The garden thus smiles in Nature's plenty but the poor leather-bucket, despite all its trouble, is immediately emptied and hurled down once again to explore the dark bottom of the well and drudge and slave for others' benefit. Such are the ways of the world where "right perfection" is "wrongfully disgraced" and "needy nothing trimmed in jollity", as Shakespeare has oracularly observed. Merit shines in seclusion, eating in obscurity the bread of disappointment, while flattery and worthlessness, radiant with happy smiles, parade their insignificance in public and are welcomed and lionised in society. Among those epic poets who had been "cradled into poetry by wrong", one of the greatest was Firdausi, the very last verse of whose immortal work echoes the ingratitude of the age, though it also bears witness to the whims of a wilful monarch as well as to the poet's own ungovernable temper:—

"Kunun 'umr nazdik e hashtâd shud  
Umidam bayakbâreh barbâd shud":

"I am now nearing my 80th year; all my hopes have been entirely scattered to the winds."

Let us now follow the old and dejected poet in his exile, on which subject the late Sir Edmund Gosse has

written a noble poem. According to Nizâmi 'Arudi as-Samarqandi, Firdausi fled from Ghazni in the disguise of a dervish and hid himself for six months in the house of Isma'il the bookbinder. Finding his position insecure, he escaped thence to Tabaristân, the Mâzandarân of ancient times, a distant province to the North of Persia. Because of its position, it enjoyed considerable independence from Arab influence under its local rulers called the Sipehbuds, though this province was conquered shortly after the 'Abbâsides rose to power. Firdausi sought protection at the Court of Sipehbud Shehriyâr, a prince who claimed the blood of Yazdejard Shehriyâr in his veins, and who, according to Noldeke, was a vassal of Qâbus bin Washmagir and yet the lord of the whole of Tabaristân. Firdausi was so wroth against Sultan Mahmood that he was anxious to delete the record of his indebtedness to him from the Shabnameh which he proposed to dedicate to the Sipehbud, whose ancestors were eulogised in that work. Sipehbud thought this the surest way of inviting trouble both for himself and the poet and therefore advised the latter to keep the dedication to Mahmood intact. The ruler of Tabaristân is also said to have purchased and destroyed Firdausi's satire on Mahmood by paying him a 100 coins for each of the 100 couplets thereof. This cannot be true, for the satire or part of it, as we know, survives to remind us of the relations between Firdausi and his former patron. But now Mahmood sent a threatening letter to Sipehbud Shehriyâr to the effect that if Firdausi were to be favoured in any way, he would come over personally to Tabaristân and demolish the kingdom with an army of

elephants. The only reply that Sipehbud gave was to scrawl on the back of that epistle three letters—alif, lâm, mim. This strange and apparently meaningless reply sorely puzzled and irritated the Sultan, but a scholar from his court explained to him that alif, lâm and mim were the initial letters of the opening sentence of the 105th chapter of the Qoran which contained only 5 verses hinting at the complete defeat of Abrahâ al Arsham, the Christian Viceroy of Abyssinia, by a flock of small birds when he came to destroy the Ka'ba in 570 A. D. with an army of elephants. The implication was clear—that if ever Sultan Mahmood came to Tabaristân with his elephant corps he would fare like Abrahâ al Arsham. This story is given by Browne but finds no support with Noldeke, while others connect it with the Khalif of Baghdâd.

Anxious not to put Sipehbud to further trouble for his sake, Firdausi now fled to Baghdâd at the Court of Khalif Al Qâdar Billâh, to please whom he wrote a poem of 9000 lines on the Qoranic subject of "Yusuf o Zuleikhâ". In the preface he confesses that he was now ashamed of celebrating in the *Shahnameh* the exploits of the kings of the "unfaithful". It must be remembered that there is a limit to human patience and endurance, and that the most powerful man may break down under extremely untoward circumstances. Firdausi was now an old man, disappointed and exiled, having lost his only son and all his hopes. He was now driven from post to pillar by the wrath of the Sultan and could not continue long in any place without fear of being betrayed by his enemies. He knew that the Court of the Khalif was strictly orthodox and that Iranian traditions, condemned



in the Qoran XXXI 5, were the last thing to find favour among the people of Baghdâd. Is there any wonder that misery, exile and old age should have conspired to constrain the unfortunate poet to make such an unusual confession which he would never have thought of making under prosperous circumstances? If this attitude is unheroic so is that of Galileo, who, frightened by the tortures of the Inquisition, and only too conscious of the sad end of Giordano Bruno and Lucilio Vanini at the stake only a few years ago, dramatized a recantation of the heliocentric theory in 1633. It is comfortable to decry people from the easy-chair: it is a different thing altogether to put ourselves in their place even for a day. This confession of Firdausi condemning his own life-long work only shows how hard pressed he must have been by his unfavourable circumstances.

Such confessions are strange but not unaccountable. When Rabelais, the worthy predecessor of Swift and Voltaire, and one of the severest satirists of the Church in his "Gargantua and Pantagruel", was about to be taken to task by the clergy, he was so alarmed as to tell a plain lie that there was no hidden allegory in his work, and even addressed an humble petition to Pope Paul III, confessing his sins and expressing his willingness to join a Benedictine convent. When he failed to act up to his words and continued his stinging attacks on priest and monk, both Catholics and Protestants un-animously demanded that the book should be suppressed and its author burnt. Rabelais, who never proposed to shine in the role of a martyr, was once more thoroughly frightened, and we now find this creator of Friar John

and Prince Quaresme-prenant, of Pope-fig-land, Papimanie and the Isle Sonnante hastening to dedicate his work to Cardinal Odet de Chatillon!

If fear of persecution unmans the scholar, the imbecilities of old age sometimes lead him to recant his best theories in the development and propagation of which he may have devoted the best part of his life. Tolstoi in his "What is Art?" swept into the rubbish heap all our masterpieces of fiction including his own novels! Carlyle, one of the greatest literati of England, made the astounding confession to his biographer late in life that of all careers that of literature was the one for which he was the least suited! Ruskin, in the latest and most garrulous works of his life—"Fors Clavigera" and "Præterita", when his mind was actually getting unhinged, withdrew all his theories that he had expounded during his long life! Is it not cruel to take such confessions too literally? The sting of misery, the toils of exile and the natural fatuities of old age have to be duly considered before any weight is attached to an author's condemnation of his life-long work. Noldeke holds that Firdausi had never been to the Khalif at all but that he composed the "Yusuf o Zuleikhâ" in the Court of the Buwide king Bahâ ud Daula or his son Sultân ud Daula. Modern Muslim scholars of Northern India are now veering to the opinion that Firdausi had never been to the Court of the Khalif nor was he the author of "Yusuf o Zuleikhâ", which in their opinion is only attributed to him. We are not as yet in possession of all the facts that substantiate this theory, but, if it be proved, the timorous and uncharacteristic

confession of Firdausi, who had once the courage to stigmatize the Arabs and satirize the Sultan, will drop off as a matter of course.\*

\*It must be admitted that some months after this Essay was written I happened to read the "Yusuf o Zuleikhâ" Part I edited by Dr. Hermann Ethe. The great names of Browne and Ethe had hitherto lulled us into the false belief that the poem was Firdausi's own production: this hallucination was entirely shattered by its perusal. It has not the genuine ring, the characteristic lilt and the peculiar turn of phrase displayed by the master. Instead of sublime invocations to the Divinity that we find in Firdausi, we have here such vapidly flat lines as these, the tameness of which will only be realized by the Persian ear :—

"Ham az murdeh mar zindeh râ âfreesd,  
Ham az zindeh âward murdeh padeed,"  
"God revives the dead and destroys the living."

It must be a scurvy trick of a Muslim author to ascribe this poetic monstrosity to the name of the departed Firdausi in order to pull down his great reputation, and grieve the hearts of his Zarathushtrian admirers of all ages with the following lines which are put into the Preface to that poem :—

"Dilam sair gasht az Faridun e gurd ;  
Marâ zân che ku takht e Zohâk burd ?  
Giriftam dil az milkat e Kaiqobâd ;  
Hamân takht e Kâoos kai burd bâd ?  
... ..  
Dilam sair gasht o giriftam malâl  
Ham az Giv o Tus o ham az pur e Zâ  
... ..  
Naguyam digar dâstân e muluk,  
Dilam sair shud ze âstân e muluk  
Ke ân dâstânhâ darughast pâk  
Du sad zân nayarzad ba yak zarreh kbâk."

"My heart is cloyed with the heroic Faridun ; what is it to me that he should have captured the throne of Zohâk ? I have withdrawn my

Sultan Mahmood had begun to haunt Firdausi's destinies like a malefic planet, and he now sent an intimidating letter to the Khalif asking him not to bestow the slightest patronage or protection on the poet, who thereupon fled to Ahwáz, flattering the Governor of that place by dedicating the "Yusuf o Zuleikhâ" to him. But finding himself in trouble very soon he escaped to Kuhistân where he at last found peace, for Nâsir Lek, the Governor, was fortunately a friend of Sultan Mahmood. Firdausi's temper may be judged from the fact that even now he was about to compose a fresh satire on the Sultan but was prevented from doing so by Nâsir Lek, who also remonstrated with the monarch of Ghazni and prevailed upon him to allow the poet to go and end his days peacefully in Tus. The Sultan was now ashamed of his ingratitude and in his wrath ordered the wicked Maimandî to be trampled under the feet of elephants. This is quite untrue for, as we know, Ahmad bin Hasan

---

heart from the dominion of Kaiqobâd; how could the throne of Kâoos be carried about by the wind?...I am disgusted and wearied with Giv, Tus and the son of Zâl...I shall nevermore compose the annals of kings; I am perfectly fed up with royal courts....For these episodes are absolute lies, and two hundred of them would not be worth an atom of dust."

We have argued the possibility of great men recanting their most cherished opinions under very critical circumstances; but after reading the "Yusuf o Zuleikhâ" all doubt is dispelled about Firdausi's reputed authorship, and the poet's character is saved from the stigma of time-serving and sycophancy. The author of this poem has in several descriptions distinctly tried to challenge comparison with Firdausi's handling of similar themes, (which would be too long to discuss here), only to show the vast difference between himself and the immortal master of epic verse.

Maimandi had been consigned to prison somewhere in India and died as late as 1033 during the reign of Mas'oud, son of Mahmood. According to Daulatshâh Samarqandi, when Firdausi lay dying in Tus 4000 verses still remained to be written in the Shahnameh: they were however finished by the poet Asadi in a day and a night, which friendly act greatly pleased Firdausi in his last days. This story of Asadi's astounding literary feat (paralleled only by similar achievements of William Morris) finds no support anywhere and must be summarily dismissed. In Tus the old poet was patronized by the Governor named Husain Qateeb, who is praised in the last lines of the Shahnameh:—

“ Husain e Qateeb ast az âzâdegân  
Ke az man nakhâhad sakhun râegân :”

“ Husain Qateeb is a noble man who does not desire my verses gratis.” (Again the same old talk about money!)

Once Firdausi was passing along the streets of Tus when he heard a child at play singing lines from his own satire on Sultan Mahmood:—

“ Agar shâh râ shâh budi pidar  
Ba sar bar nihâdi marâ tâj e zar :”

“ If this king had been born of royal blood, he would have placed a golden crown on my head.” Hearing these lines, past and painful memories swarmed into the poet's head: he shrieked and fell unconscious and was carried home where he died aged about 85. This took place in A. H. 411 corresponding to A. D. 1020. The Hijri year of his death can be obtained from an

appropriate chronogram—"Miveh e Firdaus", the fruit of Paradise. But even with regard to this incident the authorities are not unanimous. According to a different account a Zarathushtrian child was once taunted by a Muslim as a fire-worshipper. Stung at these words, the child immediately appealed to an old man sitting near by: he was no other than Firdausi himself and the little boy unknowingly asked him if he knew the well known lines usually attributed to the poet:—

" Magui ke âtasbparastân budand  
Parastandeh e pâk Yazdân budand:"

"Say not they (the Zarathushtrians) were fire-worshippers; they were worshippers of the Holy God." Firdausi was overwhelmed at the question; he sank on the ground and was taken home to die.

Once Mahmood during his numerous campaigns had to pass a hostile castle. He proposed to threaten its owner in a significant way to surrender the fort or be prepared for the terrors of war. Thereupon a courtier (who according to Jâmi and Prof. Browne was the inevitable Maimandi, which is impossible,) thought of a suitable passage in the Shahnameh and requested the Sultan to send the following couplet:—

" Agar juz ba kâm e man âyad jawâb  
Man o gurz o maidân o Afrâsiyâb:"

"If I receive an answer contrary to my wishes, then I and my mace, the battlefield and Afrâsiyâb". The Sultan was pleased and inquired who could be the author of such spirited lines, when he was told they were by

Firdausi. Mahmood then relented and at once dispatched to the poet the promised reward of 60000 gold mohurs. But such was the cruel irony of fate that as the prize entered by the one gate of Tus, the poet's funeral passed out of the other. This noble poet-patriot of Persia was destined to do and die, not to reap rewards. The Sultan's tardy repentance is the subject of a poem by H. Heine, one of the greatest of German lyrists. Firdausi had left behind him a daughter to whom the prize was now offered, but she proved to be as self-respecting as her father and declined the reward, for which her parent had toiled in vain. The money was probably spent on the construction of an inn in Tus\*; according to others, a dam was built out of it as was Firdausi's original intention. But neither the dam nor the inn nor the poet's grave nor Tus itself has survived the tooth of Time or the fury of man; only the Shahnameh endures as a memorial of Iran's past.

It might have been supposed that death had relieved the poet of his troubles, but that was not to be in the case of a man who had dared to eulogize the "unfaithful". For this reason the orthodox Shaikh of Tus, Abu

---

\*On this point Baisanqarkhan's Preface has betrayed several writers on Firdausi into a grievous blunder. According to that Preface, the famous poet and ethicist, Nâsir Khusrav, writes in his "Safar Nâmeh" (Book of Travels) that he had actually seen a newly-erected inn in Tus in 1047—only 27 years after Firdausi's death—and was told by the people that it was raised to commemorate his name out of the belated gift of the Sultan. Now one may go through the "Safar Nâmeh" without noticing the least reference either to Tus or its immortal poet. How such a glaring discrepancy happened to creep into the Preface of Baisanqarkhan must remain a mystery.

Qásim Gurgáni felt himself justified in refusing to perform the last rites or admit the remains of Firdausi into the graveyard of Muslims. The poet was thereupon buried in his own garden just outside the city limits. Nizâmi 'Arudi as-Samarqandi had actually visited the spot in 1116 A. D. and hence this statement can admit of no doubt. Admirers of Firdausi however have no reason to grieve over this further outburst of fanatic fury, for the poet was at heart a Zarathushtrian and would not have liked very much to repose in the company of Muslims, for whose ancestors he has evinced a whole-hearted contempt. It was again fit and proper that Firdausi should be buried in a garden, for his very name "Firdaus" means a garden (of paradise). Nor is it very annoying to us that the Shaikh of Tus failed to discharge his duty by refusing to say the last prayers over the poet. Firdausi did not need them, since Parsis for all these centuries have always offered benedictions for the repose of his soul, and are now thinking of remembering his "Fravashi" (spirit) in the list of their departed worthies. But the Shaikh is reported to have seen Firdausi in his dream, reclining in paradise, clad in resplendent robes with a crown on his head. On asking how the panegyrist of the "unfaithful" could rise so high, Firdausi replied that he owed his eminence to a few lines he had composed in praise of God. These lines, which can never be read even for the thousandth time without a perceptible inward devotional quiver, but which lose their charm entirely in translation, are as follows:—

"Sitâyash kunam Izad e pâk râ  
Ke guyâ o binâ kunad khâk râ:



Ba muri dehad mâlesh e narr e sher  
 Kunad passheh bar peel e jangi diler:  
 Jahân-râ bulandi o pasti tui  
 Nadânâm chehi ar cheh hasti tui:"

"I praise the Holy God who endows with speech and sight the dust (of which human beings are created). Thou, Oh Lord, makest even the ant prevail over the powerful lion; even the gnat triumphs by Thy will over the formidable elephant. Thou art the (cause of the) exaltation and degradation of the world; I know not what Thou art, though I realize that Thou dost exist."

As objection was raised to the admission of Firdausi's remains in a Muslim graveyard, the fanatics also mustered strong to protest similarly when the dead body of Hâfiz was brought for burial, but on this occasion a timely "istakhâreh" (sortilege) from the poet's own divân (collected works) saved the situation, and Hâfiz rests in peace in company of his coreligionists. His tomb is in no danger of being tampered with, for it is regarded with semi-religious reverence and people frequent it very often, particularly for purposes of divination. But Sa'di had proved much less fortunate. Prof. Browne in his very interesting work "An Year Amongst the Persians," recording his travels in 1887-88, observes that just because Sa'di was a Sunni, a fanatical Mujtahid (high-priest) of Shiraz destroyed the tomb-stone originally erected over the poet's grave. It was only in the 19th century that the present stone was set up on Sa'di's resting place by a charitably-inclined officer. Mr. F. B. Bradley-Birt in his "Through Persia", written in 1909, has reproduced an illustration of Sa'di's tomb, situated

2 miles north of Shiráz, and described by the author as "a veritable rose-bower in the midst of the barren plain". Where intolerance prevails no shade of religious opinion can provide safety for long. During the Sunni regime the Shi'as and their monuments had a bad time, and when it was the turn for the Shi'as to come to power, they paid the Sunnis back in the same coin, to the eternal detriment of the country's interests.

Some of the Persian kings and governors were such vain fools that they pulled down the finest works of art erected by their forefathers in the hope of perpetuating their own memories by the construction of monuments, which of course shared the same fate at the hands of their successors. Sykes observes that the remains of 'Omar Khayyám were not allowed to rest in his own tomb, for the only reason that he was a Sunni. Nay, according to Ella C. Sykes in her work on "Persia and its People," even the sacred city of Mashad, only 15 miles to the North East of Tus, and containing the tomb of the great saint Imám Razá, the 8th of the 12 Imáms, had been despoiled of its jewellery, gold work and rare manuscripts because of the change of fanatic rulers. When the tombs of some of Persia's greatest poets and saints are not immune from the outrages of orthodoxy, how can we ever expect the monument of Firdausi, who had immortalized the deeds of the "unfaithful", to survive to our own days? Besides Tus was thoroughly sacked and blotted out from the map of Persia in 1220 by that human pest, Changiz Khan, and it is at present supplanted by Mashad as the capital of Khorásán, just as Teherán has taken the place of the

ancient city of Rai. We are however surprised to read in the memoirs of the great Berber traveller Ibn Batuta, the Muslim Marco Polo, that he actually visited Tus, which he considered one of the largest cities in Khorâsân. It is passing strange that he should have found the city in a prosperous condition between 1325 and 1354, when it was destroyed about a century ago by the Mongols. The solution of this riddle may be found in a valuable work, "The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate" by Mr. G. Le Strange, who, on the authority of the great "Geographical Dictionary" of Yâqoot, observes that the name Tus, after the destruction of that city by the Mongols, was more generally used to denote the surrounding district where there were over a thousand flourishing villages. This would serve to show that Ibn Batuta could never have seen the actual Tus, once consisting of the twin cities of At-Tabarân and Nuqân, but only the surrounding flourishing villages.

In the last half of the 19th century, says Ella C. Sykes, a Governor of Khorâsân happening to be well-inclined to men of letters, desired to raise a fitting monument over the resting place of Firdausi. The exact spot was revealed to a Sayyad in a dream, and the Governor commenced a dome which he never completed and which is now a mere mass of rubble. Such being the conditions in Persia it is impossible to find the tomb of Firdausi and difficult even to trace its probable site. But why trouble about his grave when he is still alive? Firdausi himself was not a believer in monuments of stone and brick but in the lasting importance of his own epic. In his satire he writes those well known lines :—

"Binâhâ e âbâd gardad kharâb  
 Ze bârân o az tâbish e âftâb:  
 Pai afgandam az nazm e kâkh e buland  
 Ke az bâd o bârân nayâbad gazand;"

"The most prosperous edifices will one day fall into ruins by the ravages of rain and sunshine: I have therefore constructed a palace of poetry which may remain immune from the severities of the weather." It is enough that his palace of poetry, the *Shahnameh*, is still amongst us. Firdausi is dead; long live Firdausi.

But, thank God, the days of intolerance seem to be over. Ever since H. I. M. Raza Shah Pehlavi ascended the throne of Persia on 16th December 1925, the sleep of centuries has been disturbed, superstition and fanaticism have surrendered their age-long usurpation to the claims of reason and education, and our dear old fatherland, freed from the blighting effects of foreign domination, and flourishing under the ægis of a benevolent regime, has once more been able to raise its head among the nations. Persia has seen another Renaissance in the reign of Raza Shah Pehlavi greater and more pronounced than that which took place under the 'Abbâsides, for at present both the ruler and the ruled openly co-operate in the success of the movement. It is out of place here to notice the various features of this national revival: one only need be mentioned—the honour Persia proposes doing to the memory of her illustrious son Firdausi, who played the greatest part in creating and feeding the flame of nationalism in the hearts of his countrymen. Iran has now started an official movement on a magnificent scale to

show her gratitude to one who has served to keep her whole in the midst of her direst misfortunes. Taking advantage of the millenary of Firdausi's birth, which falls according to their calculation on the 12th October 1934, Persia will raise a grand marble monument which is estimated to cost lacs of rupees in the neighbourhood of Mashad on a spot which may in all probability be taken to indicate the last resting-place of Firdausi at Tus. The opening ceremony will be performed by H. I. M. Raza Shah, the worthiest representative of revived Iran paying a suitable homage to Firdausi, the ablest expounder and sustainer of the culture of his country. A Committee for the preservation of ancient relics called the "Anjuman e Âthâr e Milli" has been formed to carry out the work and funds for the purpose are said to flow voluntarily from the nation. To facilitate the work still further a national lottery is to be issued under the patronage of the King and his prime minister Âqâ Farughi. The journalists of Iran are stirring up the people to show their enthusiasm in this truly national cause. The Persians have so far overcome their hatred for idols, inspired doubtless by the Qoran which tolerates no exception in this direction, that according to the late Mr. G. K. Nariman in his "Persia and Parsis", a project is afoot to raise a suitable statue to Firdausi and erect it in the Parliament-square at the capital city of Teherân. It is the work of the sculptor Kamâl ul Mulk and it is gratifying to note that the "Iran League" of Bombay has contributed very handsomely to the scheme. Another suitable tribute to the greatness of Firdausi is the proposed establishment of a big library in his name at Teherân.

Thus after a millennium has Iran awakened to make amends for the insult, indignity and exile suffered by one of her greatest sons, the honouring of whose memory has now become almost a religious duty of every patriotic son of the soil. But more enduring than bronze or marble are the love and veneration spontaneously and incessantly bestowed on the poet for all these years by every true countryman of Persia, both its present inhabitants as well as the Parsis of India. Firdausi could foresee the success of his work and he was conscious of the service he had rendered his country and his people, whose traditions and culture have been commemorated by him in his imperishable verse. Firdausi himself says towards the end of the Shahnameh:—

“Har ân kas ke dârad hoosh o râe o deen  
Pas az marg bar man kunad âfreen:”

“He that is endowed with sense, judgment and a religious mind will after my death pronounce an ‘âfreen’ (well done) on my work.” And, indeed, when we remember with what single-minded purpose and inflexible resolution he pursued his object and ultimately succeeded in breathing the soul of nationalism in a dying community; when we realize how manfully he fought his way through the most depressing circumstances to his distant ideal; and when we are absorbed or thrilled, stirred or charmed, saddened or maddened as we flow on the miraculous wings of his mighty lines, we feel that one word alone often passes our lips in praise of the poet, and that is “âfreen”—well done.

