







INDIAN PHILOSOPHY
AND
MODERN CULTURE

By
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TO

V. SUBRAMANYA IYER

Formerly Registrar, Mysore University, India.

VENERABLE SIR,

This thesis is dedicated to you with much affection and much respect in remembrance of the jewelled time we spent among silent jungle-covered hills far from the haunts of men.

There you unfolded to me the higher wisdom of your land, expounded its most ancient books and explained its most imperishable philosophy. I was indeed fortunate to have the privilege of your instruction, for you yourself were an initiate in the esoteric tradition of the great Sankara.

The contact with your razor-keen mind sharpened my own until I perceived the folly and futility of those spiritual and intellectual illusions which men everywhere hug fondly to themselves.

In these pages I yield gladly to your request that the West be reminded of the close parallels between the findings of its best modern thinkers and the still more profound findings of India's early sages. I have also touched on your favourite theme and shown how our latest discoveries merely begin to confirm the oldest discoveries of India's antiquity: that the soul of the world is ONE, a sublime Unity wherein the differences and antagonisms of Orient and Occident disappear, and wherein all science, religion and philosophy find their final reconciliation.

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PART I

INDIAN MONISM AND WESTERN THOUGHT

PART I

THE comparatively recent appointment of Sir S. Radhakrishnan to the newly founded Spalding Chair of Eastern Philosophy and Religions at Oxford University stands in symbolic relation to our time as illustrating a trend which is creeping, for the most part silently and unnoticed, across the Western world. Out of the once-slumbering land of India there comes this gifted man to teach its one-time conquerors the ancient lore and wisdom of his own people.

Now, like some compensatory adjustment by the obscure forces of evolution, we are witnessing in the West the appearance of an at present thin but slowly deepening current of interest in those very thoughts and ideas which the young men of India are to-day doing their best to reject as inadequate to

their needs and which constitute the faith and religious traditions of their forefathers. Like the psycho-analyst's contention that a repressed force will reappear in another form and through an outlet other than its normal one, one might advance the contention that the beliefs and ideas which are being repressed in the soul of the East are reappearing in the soul of the West.

For more than a century, ever since Macaulay, after joining the Government at Calcutta, drew up his famous *Memorandum* that was to become the basis of India's modern educational system, there was imposed upon the young men an instruction along lines that was completely out of keeping with the traditional education of their country's dusty past. The result has been that nowadays we witness the spectacle of a hybrid generation in India which has become Westernized from top to bottom, which lives, moves, acts, dresses, and talks like most young Europeans, but which at heart struggles vainly to reconcile its own

inherent traditions with an alien culture of which it has assimilated as yet only the more outward and obvious forms. The students in the college halls of Calcutta, Bombay, and a half-dozen other places laugh openly at the wisdom of their ancient sages, but are nevertheless inwardly uneasy. Undoubtedly, the efflux of time is needed to bring this evolutionary development, so obviously in their own best interest as it is, into harmony with their inner character.

I have frequently mused on the irony of this twentieth century, when the fall in American mass-produced cotton prices and the slump in Australian wheat quotations to prices lower than those of Indian hand-laboured productions caused havoc and distress to many villages. When silver, too, fell in value, the Indian villager, who has always kept his savings in silver coin or ornament, found they were now worth less than half their former value, while at the same time he received only one-third of the former prices for his crops. This

international seesaw is symptomatic of the steady falsification of Kipling's couplet :

"East is East and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet."

If world trends mean anything at all, do they not mean that we are moving towards a realization of the cultural oneness of mankind? The knowledge which is being spread by book and mouth, by wireless and cinema, is becoming a common knowledge in which all men may share. It is therefore in the fitness of things that a distinguished Indian like Sir S. Radhakrishnan should have been appointed as the first Oriental to teach at England's most famous and most ancient seat of learning. Surely we have nothing to fear and nothing to lose by such frank interchange of ideas. The result can only be better understanding of those who happen to be born in the Eastern hemisphere of our globe, and especially of their best minds, an understanding which should inevitably lead to more mutual good-will.

And in a world full of strife and misunderstanding of which many of us are becoming increasingly aware, the growth of good-will is no little thing.

Since that fateful day when the year 1600 made its last diurnal movement and witnessed the foundation of the first English Company to trade with the East under a Royal charter received from the hands of Queen Elizabeth, British trade and British arms have been the heralds who have prepared the path for the spread of Western ideas in the East on a scale never envisaged by the Portuguese and French intruders whom they eventually displaced. For England not only gave India manufactured goods and internal security, but also gave her later the system of public instruction under which the whole of the younger school-going generation is to-day growing up.

The interfusion of the peoples of both hemispheres in the domain of culture increases with the years. We have learned to live down our early contempt for races once

thought to be barbarians, and we have learned to value and even to respect some of the spiritual and philosophical explorations of the brown and yellow races. Tennyson's vision of a world peopled by a humanity able to live like one great family in amity, tolerance and understanding is unhappily very far off, but this is not to say that world movements may not imperceptibly force us to its accomplishment. Alexander dreamt of this ultimate fate of the human race and attempted to mingle the cultures of many Eastern and Western races in the newly established city which was named after him. His efforts bore fruit for a time and flourished well, and if we cannot trace any continuance, it is because he was premature and undoubtedly ages before his time. These things, when they do come about, will come about naturally, not by any artificial forcing, but by that silent, slow, and steady growth which is evidenced in the flower.

When I lived in Benares for a while, staying in a monastery in order to get a deeper insight

into the mind of its inhabitants, I had many discussions with those learned Brahmin pundits¹ who, in Matthew Arnold's lines :

"In patient deep disdain,
Let the legions thunder past,
And plunged in thought again."

I could not help being somewhat amused by their ready assumption of religious and philosophic superiority over the Western thinkers. Apparently they knew next to nothing of the history of the inner life of Europe during past ages. They did not know that there were analogues for many of their own doctrines and geniuses in the annals of European culture. They did not know that as long ago as 302 B.C. it was reported by Megasthenes, the Greek envoy to the court of Indian king Chandragupta Maurya, that "In many points the teaching of the Brahmins agrees with that of the Greeks, for instance, that the world has a

¹ The name *pundit* literally means a learned man who is well acquainted with the sacred and philosophical books written in the Sanskrit language.

beginning and an end in time, and that its shape is spherical ; that the Deity who is its Governor and Maker interpenetrates the whole ; that besides the four elements there is a fifth substance from which the heavens and stars are made. About the soul their teaching shows parallels to the Greek doctrines, and on many other matters." The world of these pundits was circumscribed by their ancient scrolls and out-of-date sanctities.

But a similar parochialism in our own attitude towards the thoughts and faiths of Asia's highest thinkers and holiest men can no longer be justified in this day and age of world-communion. Norman Douglas once ironically declared that : "Curry is India's greatest contribution to mankind," whilst Macaulay flung all the ancient lore of India on the scrap-heap, remarking with disgust that it was a miserable collection of crude puerilities and fantastic superstitions. Was he altogether right ? It is perfectly true that these repulsive features do exist, but justice

demands that we also acknowledge the co-existence, side by side with them, of sounder materials. For Indian culture is fruitful in the domain of psychology, philosophy, and religion, so fruitful that there are few doctrines which appeared out of original Western sources that have not already been anticipated and developed in a primitive manner in India. This need not surprise us altogether when we remember two facts. First, that the Hindus belong to the same Aryan race out of which the European and modern American peoples have sprung. Second, that the climate of India, in its effect upon human nature, surpasses in importance all other local or geographical influences. A fiercely hot and depressingly humid country whose climate causes everyone to shun physical effort, led man naturally to search for part of his satisfaction in contemplative thought and inward life. Several of the advances in modern Western psychology are practically duplicating in their discoveries ideas which already exist, albeit

in a much cruder and less scientific form, in the ancient systems. Quite a number of Oriental ideas have been adopted independently by our own thinkers in some similar or transformed shape, and expressed in a manner that suits our own time and outlook.

India once gave us her silks, and to-day she still gives us her tea, spices, and precious stones. But she has also given us a thin trickle of literature and ideas, mainly at first through the enterprising efforts of inquisitive Western scholars, and with Sir S. Radhakrishnan's appointment, no less than with the founding of the Spalding Chair, we may regard the value of these thoughts and this culture as having been definitely recognized and triumphantly established.

Since the gates of Oriental learning were first opened to those Western students who followed in the tracks of Western armies, a part of its scriptures and literary gems has been eagerly collected and translated into European tongues. Yet those who know

the inner life of India to-day know also that among the untouched lore lies many a book that is filled with rare psychological insight or imbued with profound spiritual inspiration. Indian expounders of native theories speak indeed with the accents of antiquity, but their ideas, when stripped of their garb, are sometimes queerly familiar. It would appear that the human mind moves in circles and comes upon the same age-old ideas in its orbit.

We should therefore welcome whatever may emerge from Asiatic culture as being scientifically sound and philosophically true, even though the methods of modern investigation were not employed in arriving at these notions.

It is my object to open up the curiosity of the thoughtful Occidental mind by exploring ancient Indian texts and comparing excerpts or thoughts from them with parallel passages or ideas from the writings of representative modern Western thinkers; philosophic, scientific, and literary. The term "modern"

is used here in a broad and comparative sense to indicate the period beginning with the latter half of the seventeenth century and continuing to our own times.

I have had an exceptional opportunity to equip myself for the subject, for, in addition to several years' travel and research throughout India, I have been a personal friend and private pupil of Pundit Subramanya Iyer, who combines in his own person the fullness of the best European and Indian knowledge. Pundit Iyer is a former Professor of Modern Science and Mathematics on the one hand, whilst on the other he spent his early manhood studying in the Sringeri Monastery, the most ancient and most respected institution of philosophical and religious learning in South-West India. Such are his intellectual attainments that Sir S. Radhakrishnan was also at one time his personal pupil, while to-day the Pundit occupies the post of Reader in Ancient Hindu Philosophy to His Highness the Maharajah of Mysore.

We of the West owe a debt to that much-maligned man, Warren Hastings, because he was the first European to initiate the study of Sanskrit and the Hindu sacred and philosophic books. It was through his inspiration that Sir William Jones gave us an English rendering of *Sakuntala*, the finest of native dramas, and that Charles, Wilkins published the first translation of the Hindu's most famous short classic, the *Bhagavad Gita*. In 1786, when he was staying in Benares, he sat down to write a preface to the first English edition of this book, under whose spiritual influence he had fallen.

We also owe something to another pioneer, the brave Frenchman, Anquetil du Perron, whose knowledge of Persian enabled him to translate a Mughal version of some *Upanishads* into Latin in 1775. This same Latin translation, whose difficult style itself needed construing, gave Schopenhauer his first knowledge of the Hindu philosophy, which influenced his own teachings to a marked degree.

Since then, and particularly during the past seventy years, European and American translators have been slowly unearthing the most accessible of Indian works for our benefit. To-day many of the principal philosophic religious and literary texts exist in English, French, and German versions. The devoted labours of our Western scholars deserve grateful thanks and due credit, and one hesitates to accept criticism of them, but I have often heard Hindu learned men remark that full justice has not been done to the original writings in many cases. Some of the Sanskrit philosophic terms, for instance, have no proper English equivalents and the attempt to supply the latter has sometimes ended in interpretative disaster. It would appear to be a consensus of opinion among the Hindu pundits that periphrastic expressions should preferably be used in these cases in order to arrive at a right translation.

Our study naturally begins with *The Vedas*, which are the oldest literature of India and which constitute the highest

authority with the Hindus in matters religious and philosophic. Their origin is half lost in the mist of antiquity and no precise proven dates can yet be assigned to them. The Indians have habitually practised such an indifference to time that their chronicles are singularly lacking in this respect. However, leading Occidental scholars critically place these scriptures as being at least three hundred years older than the oldest book of our Bible. And they certainly are pre-Buddhistic, as even Buddha, in his discourses, refers to them as ancient authorities, which means that they could scarcely be less than three thousand years old.

There are more than one hundred known books of *The Vedas* comprised in the two main divisions, called "Mantras" and "Brahmanas." The former is merely a collection of spells, magical invocations, and religious hymns and rituals. There is an unbridgeable gap between the picture they present of a universe manipulated by a host of invisible minor deities, goddesses, and

spirits, and the view of the world which holds sway among educated Western people. This is the major portion of *The Vedas*, and has little interest or value for us. But the second portion contains twelve books which bear the name *Upanishads*, and which contain the ethical, metaphysical, and philosophical culture of the Hindus expressed in highly condensed, if unsystematic, phraseology. As such they have always received the greatest respect and reverence from the intellectual classes, and have formed the basis of most of the systematic treatises which have since appeared.

The *Upanishads*, therefore, should engage our attention first.

In the *Katho Upanishad* we read :

“THAT is the Real Unity . . . all the worlds are held in it, there is nothing which transcends it. As the one energy pervading the universe appears in so many forms in the variety of objects, so the Inner Self of everything, always a unity, appears to take on so many forms but for ever transcends them.”

Here we find an idea which reappears in many other passages of these books, although rarely so boldly and so plainly, the idea of the monistic basis of the universe. It is reiterated again and again that the ultimate reality behind the diverse forms of the material world is an undivided unity, a single Force which is the very essence of created existence.

In the *Chandogya Upanishad* the same thought of the oneness of things is brought out more picturesquely in the form of a dialogue between a wise man and his son :

“Fetch me from thence a fruit of the Nyagrodha tree.”

“Here is one, sir.”

“Break it.”

“It is broken, sir.”

“What do you see there?”

“These seeds, almost infinitesimal.”

“Break one of them!”

“It is broken, sir.”

“What do you see there?”

“Not anything, sir.”

The father said: “My son, that subtle

essence which you do not perceive there, of that very essence this great Nyagrodha tree exists. Believe it, my son. That which is the subtle essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self."

The wise man then points out to the son various other natural objects in succession and brings home the same lesson, of the unity of the life which is concealed in the universe.

A third book, the *Svetasvatar Upanishad*, presents the same idea in poetical form :

"To the Supreme which is in fire, and which is in water;
To the Supreme which has suffused itself through all the world;
To the Supreme which is in summer plants and in medicinal herbs;
To that Supreme be adoration, adoration!"

This verse reveals the fact that the ancient Hindu philosophers identified the ultimate reality hidden behind Matter with God Himself, with the Infinite Spirit who manifests Himself in the visible creation. The highest Being is regarded as the secret

substratum of everything that the five senses can contact, and without it nothing would be able to exist. Says the *Chandogya Upanishad* :

"The One Self is the support of the whole universe which, but for it, would be nowhere."

It is particularly interesting to note that the Upanishadic authors claim that God did not say "I shall create," but rather, "I shall become," thus leaving their readers no option but to view all things as being, somehow, manifestations of the divine. For the same book pictures God as *willing* ;

"I shall become many, I shall manifest myself in many forms,"

whilst another book specifically states :

"He himself became the visible and the invisible universe."

Some striking similes are given in the *Mundako Upanishad* to explain how this was possible :

"The wise understand that THAT exists everywhere beyond sight, beyond grasp,

without form . . . eternal, all-pervading, ever-unchangeable, the source of all things. As a spider spins out his web from within himself and draws it in at pleasure; or as herbs grow out of the earth; or as hairs grow out of the living man, so, indeed, does evolve the Kosmos from the ever-immutable One."

Another simile appears also in this connection in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* :

"As small sparks come forth from fire, thus do all bodies, all worlds, all beings, come forth from the One."

The same book contains further passages which help to elucidate other aspects of this teaching, thus :

"There are two forms of universal reality, the material and the immaterial, the definite and indefinite."

And still more boldly :

"On perceiving the true nature of the visible world, there remains the invisible world or universal soul."

The first quotation may be amplified by a

phrase from the *Maitrayana Upanishad*, which asserts that,

"the material is deceptive, the immaterial is true. That which is true is the One."

Scattered here and there throughout the pages of other *Upanishads*, we read similar statements of which the most representative are the following four sentences :

"There is absolutely no difference in ultimate reality between one thing and another in the entire universe."

"One and the same divine soul is concealed within all things, pervades all things and is the real soul within all things."

"To him who sees the unity of all things, there is no ignorance."

"The whole universe ought to be conceived as being pervaded by the one reality of God."

Thus the *Upanishads* speak with dual voice, portraying the highest philosophic truth as the Infinite Unity and the highest religious reality as the Hidden God who is the world-soul.

If now we leave these remarkable works and turn to some other books of *The Vedas* which, although not specifically named *Upanishads*, yet contain philosophic material whilst possessing the advantage of more orderly and systematic arrangement, we find a similar vein of teaching.

The *Ashtavakra Samhita* uses a metaphor which makes an immediate and strong impression on the mind :

“As cloth when analysed is found to be nothing but thread, even so this universe, properly considered, is nothing but the One.”

The same ancient text returns later to this theme and uses language that seems to belong to a modern laboratory :

“Look upon the modifications of the elements as nothing in reality but the primary elements themselves.”

A third quotation cannot be resisted for it has been copied and re-copied continuously

by numerous Hindu authors of the post-Vedic period :

“As the same all-pervading Space is both inside and outside a jar, even so the eternal all-pervading single Reality exists in all things.”

This line of research may fittingly be closed by opening the pages of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is perhaps the best-known in America and Europe of the translated Hindu classics, and which still maintains an unrivalled popularity among the literate classes of India. Containing, as it does, the mental quintessence and successful synthesis of the various systems of religion and philosophy, it offers a unique epitome of the high culture of prehistoric India. The following half-dozen different sentences from the *Bhagavad Gita* unite in making the same declaration of an unseen Reality and Unity which dwells behind nature.

“The whole variety of existences rests in the One, and is an evolution from the One alone.”

"Undivided yet remaining divided, as it were, in existences, supporter of all beings, is That."

"With hands and feet everywhere, That exists enveloping all."

When this primal matter-transcending Reality and universal divine energy is given a mouthpiece by the author of the book and personified by the god Krishna, the latter is made to say :

"My self is the bearer of all existences."

"That which is the seed of all being also am I. There is no being that can exist without me."

"All this world is pervaded by Me in My unmanifested form."

The doctrine which has been presented in these excerpts constitutes the keystone in the entire arch of the earliest Indian philosophy. Not till the Buddhistic period were any attempts made to overthrow it. Let us see

how far it appealed to some modern "wise men" of our Western world, living so many centuries later, when it sprang up quite independently in their own minds. The statements of philosophers and scientists will best be introduced by quotations from a few purely literary men.

Tennyson, one-time Poet Laureate of England, sings :

"The sun, the moon, the stars, the hills and the plains,
Are not these, O Soul, the vision of Him who reigns?
The ear of man cannot hear, and the eye of man cannot see;
But if we could see and hear this vision—were it not He?"

Thomas Carlyle, in *Sartor Resartus*, cries :

"What is Nature?" . . . "Ha! why do I not name thee GOD? art thou not the 'Living Garment of God?' O Heavens, is it, in very deed, HE, then, that ever speaks through thee; that lives and loves in thee, that lives and loves in me? . . . like soft streamings of celestial music to my too-exasperated heart came that

Evangel. The Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres; but godlike and my Father's!"

Elsewhere in the same book Carlyle exclaims :

"Detached, separated! I say that there is no such separation, nothing hitherto was ever stranded, cast aside; but all, were it only a withered leaf, works together with all, is borne forward on the bottomless, shoreless flood of Action, and lives through perpetual metamorphoses. The withered leaf is not dead and lost, there are Forces in it and around it, though working in inverse order, else how could it rot? . . . Rightly viewed no meanest object is insignificant: all objects are as windows, through which the philosophic eye looks into infinitude itself."

In the last lines he rises to passionate heights in his assertion of the same theory which fascinated the first Hindu thinkers :

"Creation," says one, "lies before us, like a glorious Rainbow; but the Sun that made it lies behind us, hidden from us. Then, in that strange Dream, how we clutch at shadows as

if they were substances; and sleep deepest while fancying ourselves most awake! . . . O Heaven, it is mysterious, it is awful to consider that we not only carry each future Ghost within him; but are in very deed, Ghosts! These limbs, whence had we them; this story Force; this life-blood with its burning Passion? They are dust and shadow; a Shadow system gathered round our Me; wherein through some moments of years, the Divine Essence is to be revealed in Flesh."

When intuitive men of letters like Tennyson and Carlyle have had such thoughts, we may well expect to find their like in the writing of Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose Transcendentalism earned him the appellation of "the Boston Brahmin." Even so early as the age of nineteen he wrote in his *Journal* the following expression of his youthful monistic faith :

"I know nothing more fit to conclude the remarks which have been made in the last pages than certain fine pagan strains:
 . . . Of dew bespangled leaves and blossoms bright,

Hence! vanish from my sight,
 Delusive pictures, unsubstantial shows,
 My soul absorbed, one only Being knows,
 Of all perceptions, one abundant source,
 Hence every object, every moment flows,
 Suns hence derive their force.
 Hence planets learn their course;
 But suns and fading worlds I view no more,
 God only I perceive, God only I adore!"

Later, when his faith has become full-blown and mature, he states definitely in that magnificent piece of prose, the essay on *The Oversoul* :

"We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree, but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul."

At the age of sixty-three he held even more firmly to this doctrine and set down in his *Journal* for the year 1866 :

"Supreme good is to be attained through science; namely, by the perception of the real from the unreal, setting aside matter, and qualities and affections or emotions, and persons

and actions, as illusions and thus arriving at the contemplation of the one eternal Life and Cause, and a perpetual approach and assimilation to Him."

Reading through Emerson's other writings and essays, we find several passages which insist, as vehemently as the Hindu texts previously quoted, on the subordinate character of the visible material creation. The two which follow are sufficiently representative to be copied :

"Nature is a mutable cloud, which is always and never the same. Through the bruteness and toughness of matter, a subtle spirit bends all things to its own will. The world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man. It is *a remoter and inferior incarnation of God*, a projection of God into the unconscious."

"But when following the invisible steps of thought, we come to inquire, Whence is matter? and where to? Many truths arise to us out of the recesses of consciousness. We learn that the highest is present to the soul of man, that the universal essence which is not wisdom, or love, or beauty, or power; but all in one, and

each entirely, is that for which all things exist, and that by which they are; that spirit creates; that behind nature, throughout nature's spirit is present."

We may now plunge into comparative consideration of the philosophers proper, beginning with Benedictus Spinoza, who was called by Renan "the greatest Jew of modern times." Spinoza's main doctrine has been ably condensed and set forth by Lewes in the *History of Philosophy* as follows :

"The great reality of all existence is substance. Not substance in the gross and popular sense of body or matter, but that which is *substans*—which is standing under all phenomena supporting and giving them reality." Descartes had assumed a duality, a God and a real world created by God. Spinoza reduced this duality to an all-embracing unity. "The absolute existence—this substance (call it what you will) is God. From Him all individual concrete existences arise. All that exists, exists in and by God; and can only thus be conceived. . . . He recognizes God as the fountain of Life; he sees in the Universe

nothing but the manifestation of God; the Finite rests upon the bosom of the Infinite; the inconceivable variety resolves itself into unity. There is but one reality, and that is God."

During the next century the celebrated German, G. W. F. Hegel, gave voice to similar ideas :

"Nature is the extreme self-alienation of spirit, in which it yet remains one with itself."

And again :

"The reality is the universal, which goes out of itself, particularises itself, opposes itself to itself."

Herbert Spencer, the ardent protagonist of the evolutionary philosophy, described the universe, in his classic book *First Principles*, as being a mode of manifestation of what he called "an Actuality lying behind Appearances," and also as "the unknown Reality underlying matter and force."

The monistic view of Nature has hitherto been mostly a matter of speculation, belief,

and opinion, but thirty years ago Professor J. Arthur Thomson, in his *Introduction to Science*, could express the prediction that "modern work (on the atom) is suggesting that there may be a common basis for matter of all kinds." The most recent discoveries and experiments of the modern laboratory have lent this view scientific plausibility. This stage has been reached through the great advances made in our knowledge of atomic structure. When the atom, once the solid foundation of materialistic doctrines, was found to be resolvable into congeries of whirling electrons and matter itself scientifically disappeared into electrical energy, the first steps were taken. Our crude material substances have dissolved into mists of subtle atoms and subtler electrons, protons, and deuterons. Within the last few years the developments of what is termed "nuclear chemistry" have formed in the mind of advancing physicists definite impressions of the transformability, the convertibility, and the amenability to conquest of chemical

elements which were once regarded as invincible.

Twentieth-century laboratories have begun to confirm the tremendous idea that there is one universal substance which forms the basis of our entire material universe. Radioactive phenomena constituted the first key to this discovery. A further key was fashioned when the nuclei of hydrogen and helium were shot into the nuclei of other atoms and the dream of transmuting basic elements was at last realized. More recently, matter, as represented by the electron, has been converted into light, as represented by the photon, and vice versa.

The work of physicists like Curie, Rutherford, Fermi, Cockcroft, Chadwick, Anderson, and Millikan has brought us to the practical and proven scientific principle that the inner structure of matter is reducible to a single fundamental substance, an essential and immortal energy which is the "life" of the myriad forms that make up our universe.

If, as now seems likely, modern develop-

ments in the laboratory will vindicate the theory of a single element underlying all the visible and different manifestations of material Nature, we shall have to grant that the assertions of the Hindu philosophers on this point, made thousands of years ago, are not worthless primitive beliefs but results of the insight practised by keenly perceptive and concentrated minds. Superstition has been, of course, widespread and fantastic in most parts of the Orient, but its extent is noticeably decreasing. Most Asiatic peasants still look upon life much as most European peasants did in our own medieval period. They still see the punishing hand of God in a pestilence whose cause we see to be dirty surroundings; they still spend much time and energy and even money to placate the unheeding deities of Rain where we would spend our time and energy in creating a system of irrigation canals. Nevertheless, India has cradled every type of creed. There is a faith for the illiterate, credulous, and superstitious poor, and a faith for the

cultured, thoughtful philosopher. The fact that the hidden and underlying unity of Nature was a cardinal doctrine among men of the latter kind is worthy of note. However, the vital difference of approach exists that whereas these ancients laid their doctrines down without detailed explanations, without giving their "whys" and "wherefores," we of the West are arriving at them through a detailed step-by-step process. Our scientists are moving to these conclusions by a series of experiments and investigations which prove and demonstrate the correctness of their views. They endeavour to satisfy man's reasonable desire to understand the true workings of the universe. If ancient and Eastern people were satisfied with mere assertion, we moderns are not. Science itself owes its very existence to the growth of this modern outlook.

The ancient Hindus took their philosophic statements in the nature of a revelation from on high, as issuing forth from their seers as a result of personal self-experience in the

spiritual domain. Our Western scientists have no such experience, and if they are approaching similar conclusions, it is because they are working their way from the profoundest depths of this material world up to its farthest frontier where the ions elude them and vanish into mystery. It is not a question of which method of approach is superior to the other ; it is rather a matter for self-congratulation that, on some of the most important topics, the wisest men of the ancient East and the modern West, starting from totally different premises, are beginning to arrive at precisely the same conclusions. It is on such a basis, therefore, that we may establish our hopes for an ultimate exchange of ideas, experiments, and experiences in a freer and franker way between East and West which shall help mankind to establish the truth about this universe wherein it dwells. Let us admit that no culture is a true one or a complete one which ignores the existence of the peak systems of Indian thought, but let us also remember that no intelligent

Westerner is likely to accept in its entirety the astonishing *mélange* of lofty ethics and low customs, subtle wisdom, and superstitious ideas, profound thought and priestly barbarism, which a traveller from the Occident finds in India.

PART II

INDIAN IDEALIST METAPHYSICS AND
WESTERN CULTURE

PART II

IF the extraordinary conception of an ultimate unitary world-ground may possibly be confirmed in our own epoch by prosaic laboratory work, what does astonish the present-day reader is that it should be found phrased with finely philosophical precision in the Indian texts amid a mass of puerile trivialities and obvious superstitions.

The second grand assertion of ancient Indian philosophy can hardly have any such destiny as experimental proof. This doctrine declares human cognition of the entire manifold universe to be illusionary in character. The vast multitude of tangible objects and tangible creatures which we so plainly witness around us were said to be the product of the constructive imagination of the One Hidden Self. Man and his material environments were but finite dreams passing through the mind of the Infinite Dreamer. Consequently

all that we know of the world is nothing more or less than a series of ideas held in our consciousness. Thus we arrive at a completely idealistic metaphysics which, because of its very nature, must apparently remain for ever purely speculative and beyond the scope of the finest instruments which can be devised to prove or disprove. Nevertheless the strangeness and unfamiliarity of the doctrine fascinated the Indian mind to an amazing extent. That this early foreshadowing of modern idealistic philosophy was not merely a worthless superstition is evidenced by the fact that some brilliant minds of the West have been equally fascinated and perplexed.

This doctrine, curiously enough, hardly rears its head in *The Vedas* but appears with strong bold outlines in post-Vedic books such as *The Yoga Vasishtha*, in the Buddhist philosophical scriptures, and in the numerous writings of Shankara, the father of the grandest Hindu philosophical revival of ancient times.

The earliest Vedic mention is in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, where the following lines occur :

“Now one should know that Nature is illusion,
And that the Mighty Lord is the illusion-
maker.”

In the *Mandukya Upanishad*, we read :

(a) “The different objects cognised in dreams are illusory. For the same reason the objects seen in the waking state are illusory. The nature of objects is the same in the waking state and dream.”

(b) “In dream, also, what is imagined within by the mind is illusory and what is cognised outside appears to be real. But (in truth) both these are known to be unreal. Similarly in the waking state, also, what is imagined within by the mind is illusory ; and what is experienced outside appears to be real. But in fact both should rationally be held to be unreal.”

(c) “The Self, with his mind turned outwards variously imagines the diverse objects. The Self again with his mind turned within imagines in his mind various ideas.”

(d) "Those that exist within the mind (as subjective ideas) and are known as the unmanifested, as well as those that exist without in a manifested form as perceived objects—all are mere imaginations, the difference lying only in the sense-organs."

The *Aitareya Upanishad* says :

"Creatures, plants, horses, cows, men, elephants, whatsoever breathes, whether moving or flying and, in addition, whatsoever is immovable—all this is led by mind and is supported on mind. Mind is the final reality."

The basis of this doctrine is that things cannot exist independently of the perceiver's mind, that the entire phenomenal world of experience is a creation *within* the perceiving mind, as is a dream, and hence, from the highest metaphysical standpoint, an idea or mental appearance.

The author of *The Yoga Vasishtha* presents the teaching in another way, asserting that the world is relative to the mind and must therefore be mental in character if the

possibility of its being known is to be achieved. He writes :

(a) "The subject cannot be aware of the object unless they are related. And there cannot exist any relation between two heterogeneous things. Relation implies identity, for it cannot be possible between two utterly different objects. The cognition of the object by the subject therefore establishes their substantial identity. If they were utterly different from each other, knowledge would not have been possible; the subject would ever remain unaware of the object as a stone of the taste of sugar."

(b) "The whole world is merely ideal. It does not exist except in thought. It arises and exists in the mind. The whole universe is the expansion of the mind. It is a huge dream arisen within the mind. It is imagination alone that has assumed the forms of time, space and movement."

(c) "The reality of things consists in their being thought. The objective world is potentially inherent in the subject, as seeds of a lotus exist in the flower, as oil in sesamum seeds. All objects are related to the subject

from which they proceed. They appear to be different from it, but are not so in reality. The world experience is nothing in reality but a dream."

(d) "No individual is aware of anything but his own ideas. In every individual separately has arisen the experience of the world in the same way that soldiers, while dreaming, experience their own battle-fields, each within his own mind, and quite distinct from that of another."

(e) "The idea of space is relative to the activity of the mind, as it is observed that even a little space, say of the size of a cow's foot-print, can give us the impression of an extent of several miles during the play of imagination, dream and mental flight."

In a small head, it may be added to explain the meaning of Vasishtha, an infinite world of dreams with its immeasurable extension can be experienced and is actually experienced by all of us.

It is interesting to read the allusions to time in the same book :

"The reality of time also consists in imagination. As there is no real extension of space, so there is no duration of time apart from the activity of the mind. One night of a tormented creature passes as an age, whereas it is experienced as a moment in the merriment of the happy. If within a moment one could imagine the whole cycle of the world's existence, the moment would actually be experienced as a full world-period, and vice versa, a whole æon can be experienced as a moment through imagination."

If the universe is nothing but a series of thought-forms, mental illusions, which pass through the mind of man, the question arises whether the latter is really and ultimately responsible for their creation. The author of *Yoga Vasishtha* realizes that such a solipsism is difficult to maintain and so lends his support to the Upanishadic assertion that "the Mighty Lord," God, is the true illusion-maker, and that the idea of the created world is put into our minds by the Divine One. He says :

"The objective world continues to be the

same as it was imagined by the Lord of creatures at the beginning of creation. The world is the imagination of the Lord. It becomes as He thinks it to be. The inherent nature of objects like earth, snow, fire, etc., continues to be the same as it was imagined by the Creator."

In developing this theme later, he makes the curious statement that :

"There is no difference between realism and idealism, for everything is ultimately of the nature of thought. The world idea arises in every individual mind in the same manner as it arose in the beginning in the mind of the Creator. The Cosmic imagination is the original impulse which is initiated and represented in all minds. We know each other and share the world-experience in common with others, on account of there being represented or reflected in each individual the same cosmic order of ideas which is imagined in the Cosmic consciousness. Individuals know each other by mutual representation in each other's consciousness. So in every individual everything is represented in the same fashion as in the Cosmic Mind."

The following sentence from *Ashtavakra Samhita*, a work already mentioned in another connection, is also pertinent to our inquiry :

"In me the limitless ocean, diverse waves of worlds are produced forthwith on the rising of the wind of the mind."

In *Sarvadarsan Samgraha* we read :

"What is of the nature of consciousness is indeed indivisible, but by those whose understanding is confused it seems to be, as it were, differentiated into the perceived object, the perceiving subject and the perception itself. . . . There exists in reality only one thing and that is of the nature of the intelligent principle of consciousness, and its oneness is not destroyed by the varied character of its manifestations."

Prakasananda, in his *Vedanta-Muktavali*, teaches the same :

"As the world of dreams, which is really nothing but cognition, appears in consciousness under diverse forms of cognition and cognised objects, so too is the world of waking consciousness of things animate and inanimate.

In the self alone all the world, whose being is but perception, takes its rise, and persists, and perishes over and over again."

We may turn to another book, the *Manasollasa*, by Suresvaracarya, an early Indian thinker noted for his bold advocacy of metaphysical idealism. Even the high gods of the Hindu pantheon are not sacrosanct to him. He writes :

"As in dream so in the waking state, the world is the construction of the mind. . . . Down from the deities to the lowest being, all creatures are the display of imagination."

It is when we arrive at Buddhist literature that we find a similar and wholesale rejection of the pantheistic theory of Divine Ideation mentioned in the earlier quotations. Since the Buddhists would not admit the existence of God in their cosmology, or of any eternal abiding spiritual Self hidden behind the world phenomena, they were left with no alternative but to ascribe the world to human consciousness alone. Matter was made the

mere phantasmal play of man's mind. But generally Buddha discouraged the asking of ultimate questions, and sought to encourage those only dealing with ethics and psychology, so that the development of the metaphysical side of his doctrine was carried out by his followers.

The *Lankavatara Sutra* says :

(a) "Mind exists; not the objects perceptible by sight. Through objects visually cognised, mind manifests itself in the body in one's objects of enjoyment, residence, and so on."

(b) "By appearance is meant that which reveals itself to the senses and to the discriminating-mind and is perceived as form, sound, odour, taste, and touch. Out of these appearances ideas are formed, such as clay, water, jar, etc., by which one says; this is such and such a thing and is not other—this is name. When appearances are contrasted and names compared, as when we say: this is an elephant, this is a horse, a cart, a pedestrian, a man, a woman, or, this is mind and what belongs to it—the things thus named are said to be discriminated. As these discriminations come to

be seen as mutually conditioning, as empty of self-substance, as unborn, and thus come to be seen as they truly are, that is, as manifestations of the mind itself—this is right-knowledge. By it the wise cease to regard appearances and names as realities. . . . Appearance-knowledge belongs to the ignorant and simple-minded . . . who are frightened at the thought of being unborn. . . . Perfect-knowledge belongs to the world of the Buddhas who recognize that all things are but manifestations of mind; who clearly understand the emptiness, the unbornness, the egolessness of all things. . . . When appearances and names are put away and all discrimination ceases, that which remains is the true and essential nature of things and, as nothing can be predicated as to the nature of essence, it is called the 'Suchness' of reality. This universal, undifferentiated, inscrutable, 'Suchness' is the only reality."

(c) "Then Mahamati spoke to the Buddha, saying: 'You speak of the erroneous views of the philosophers, will you please tell us of them, that we may be on our guard against them?' The Buddha replied, saying: 'Mahamati, the error in these erroneous teachings that are generally held by the philosophers lies in this:

they do not recognize that the objective world rises from the mind itself; they do not understand that the whole mind-system also rises from the mind itself; but depending upon these manifestations of the mind as being real they go on discriminating them, like the simple-minded ones that they are, cherishing the dualism of this and that, of being and non-being, ignorant of the fact that there is but one common Essence. On the contrary, my teaching is based upon the recognition that the objective world, like a vision, is a manifestation of the mind itself.' "

The *Surangama Sutra*, an important Sanskrit work, reports the Buddha speaking as follows :

"All conceptions of phenomena are nothing but activities of the mind,"

whilst Ananda, his favourite pupil, says to him :

"I have constantly learned from the instruction of my Lord and from the teaching of all four classes of thy disciples that all the existences of phenomena are simply the manifestation of the mind itself."

Asvagosha, who lived nineteen hundred years ago and was one of the leaders of the Mahayana Buddhist philosophical school, writes in his chief book, the *Mahayana Sraddhotpada* :

“Independent of that which perceives there is no surrounding world.”

Bhartrihari expresses a similar view in his *Vakya Padiya* :

“The heavens, the earth, the sun, the oceans, the rivers and the compass-points—all are portions of the mind existing outside.”

One of the celebrated ancient commentators on the *Upanishads* was Gaudapada, reputed to be the teacher of the teacher of Shankara, the man who bears the most famous post-Buddhistic philosophical name. He was an uncompromising idealist, as the following excerpts from his chief commentary, the *Karika*, will show :

(a) “This perceived world of duality, characterized by the subject-object relationship, is verily an act of the mind.”

(b) “As in dream the mind acts through illusion presenting the appearance of duality (itself and the dream environment), so also in the waking state the mind acts through illusion, presenting the appearance of duality (itself and the waking environment).”

(c) “Consciousness which appears to be born or to move or to take the form of matter, is really ever unborn, immovable and free from the character of materiality; it is non-dual.”

(d) “All these dual objects, comprising everything that is movable and immovable, perceived by the mind are mind alone. For duality is never experienced when the mind ceases to act.”

(e) “Those objects that are in the subtle condition within, as well as those that are manifest without in the gross condition, are all mere imagination, the difference being only in the means of cognition.”

The “subtle” objects referred to in the last paragraph are ideas, the “gross” ones are physical, both being known by the mind—directly in the first case and mediately through sense-organs in the second case.

Finally, we arrive at the works of Shankara himself who, according to a learned modern critic, Sir Charles Eliot, "holds the first place in Indian philosophy." For Shankara refused to content himself with mere subjectivism in his metaphysical outlook, but attempted to combine idealism and monism into a harmonious unity. This extraordinary man began to teach, travel, and write whilst yet a youth and left more than a hundred works behind when he died in the Himalaya Mountains at the age of thirty-two. His influence upon Hindu culture was extremely dominant at one time and, moreover, was nation-wide in its scope.

Shankara introduced into Indian metaphysical literature a simile which thereafter became widely used. He pictured a man walking in the jungle in the dim light after sunset and becoming startled and fearful as he sees a coiled snake in his path. In reality, the object which frightened him was nothing but a piece of coiled rope. The mistake was entirely due to the man's imagination, the

mental form of the snake being superimposed upon the real object, the rope. In the same way, explained Shankara, the man who does not stop to investigate the real philosophical nature of the world is deceived by his first impressions and accepts his idea of it for actuality.

In one of his *Commentaries*, Shankara enlarges on the same theme :

"The proposition to be established is the illusoriness of objects that *are perceived* in the waking state. 'Being perceived' is the ground for the inference. They are like the objects that *are perceived* in dream; that is the illustration (for the inference). As the objects perceived to exist in dream are illusory, so also are the objects perceived in the waking state. The common feature of 'being perceived' is the relation between the illustration given and the proposition taken for consideration. Therefore the illusoriness is admitted of objects that are perceived to exist in the waking state. The objects perceived to exist in the dream are different (when noted from the waking condition) from those perceived in the waking state in respect of their being perceived in a limited

space within the body. The fact of being seen and the consequent illusoriness are common to both."

However, he makes it clear in later passages of the *Viveka Chudamani* that he is not advocating an empty subjectivism. The world-illusion may be but a mental appearance, but something exists which gave rise to this appearance. That "something" he posits as the hidden World-Soul, a single spiritual reality which is the real Self of the universe.

"For when all delusions of the understanding are cast away without remainder, then the whole universe, perceived as innumerable forms through unwisdom, becomes the Eternal Reality only. The earthen jar, though it be moulded from earth, is not separate from the earth, since it is essentially earth. The form of the jar has no independent existence. What then is the jar? A name, built up as an appearance. The independent existence of the earthen jar cannot be perceived by anyone apart from the earth from which it is made; therefore the jar is built up as an

appearance; the earth, of which it essentially consists, is the reality."

An attempt to parallel these Oriental ideas and those of Western thinkers may now be instituted. On the purely literary side we may quote Shakespeare's famous line that

"we are such stuff as dreams are made of."

Nearer our own time is Emerson, who wrote the following verse :

"Illusion works impenetrable,
Weaving webs innumerable,
Her gay pictures never fail,
Crowds each other, veil on veil,
Charmer who will be believed
By man who thirsts to be deceived."

Among Emerson's *Essays* we find another passage on the subject of self-created mental illusions :

"Do you see that kitten chasing so prettily her own tail? If you could look with her eyes, you might see her surrounded with hundreds of figures performing complex dramas, with tragic and comic issues, long conversations,

many characters, many ups and downs of fate; and meantime it is only puss and her tail. How long before our masquerade will end its noise of tambourines, laughter, and shouting, and we shall find it was a solitary performance?"

Carlyle plainly adopts a subjectivist interpretation of the world when he writes in *Sartor Resartus* that space and time are no realities, but "the deepest of all illusory appearances." He further says:

"This so solid-seeming world after all, is but an air image over Me, the only reality; and nature with its thousandfold productions and destruction, but the reflex of our inward force, the phantasy of our dream. . . . All visible things are emblems; what thou seest is not there on its own account; strictly taken is not there at all. Matter exists only spiritually and to represent some Idea, and *body* it forth. . . . Who am I? What is the ME? A Voice, a Motion, an Appearance; some embodied, visualized Idea in the Eternal Mind? Thus we are arrived at the most momentous problem of the Clothes philosophy, as, indeed, of all philosophies; the key to which is the master-key of all mysteries. . . . Has not a deeper

meditation taught certain of every climate and age, that the where and when, so mysteriously inseparable from all our thoughts, are but superficial terrestrial adhesions to thought; that the seer may discern them where they mount up out of the celestial EVERYWHERE and FOREVER. Have not all nations conceived their God as omnipresent and eternal, as existing in a universal HERE, an everlasting NOW? Think well, thou too wilt find that space is but a mode of our human sense, so likewise time; there is no space, no time. We are—we know not what; light-sparkles floating in the æther of Deity."

In the field of philosophy proper, there are several illustrious names of those who have favourably evaluated the conception of absolute Idealism, or at least found it worthy of their most serious consideration. Professor George Patrick even asserts in *The World and Its Meaning*: "To write the history of Idealism would be almost to write the history of philosophy, so many of the world's great thinkers have been Idealists." Thus, on the very first page of Descartes' celebrated book,

the *Meditations*, we find a passage which could almost have been written by one of those thoughtful Indians who lived two to three thousand years ago. Descartes says :

“When I consider the matter carefully, I do not find a single characteristic by means of which I can certainly determine whether I am awake or whether I dream. The visions of a dream and the experiences of my waking state are so much alike that I am completely puzzled, and I do not really know that I am not dreaming at this moment.”

It might be said, indeed, that every new philosophical development is really a new effort to interpret the fact of experience. This was clearly grasped by the Indians themselves, for Shankara began his *magnum opus*, the *Sariraka Bhashya*, with an analysis of what he termed “our phenomenal experience.” Even a realist like John Locke followed Descartes in accepting the importance of interpreting experience and conceded the point that the secondary qualities of material objects, such as colour, sound,

taste, and smell, did not really belong to the objects, but were subjective, existing only in the mind.

The most outstanding and most uncompromising Idealist of modern times was surely Bishop Berkeley, the brilliant Irishman who adorned the eighteenth century. He writes, in *The Principles of Human Knowledge*:

(a) “The table I write on, I say, exists, that is I see and feel it, and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I were in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. There was an odour, that is, it was smelled; there was a sound, that is to say, it was heard; a colour or a figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all that I can understand by these and like expressions. For as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse* is *percipi*, nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them ”

(b) “It is an opinion strangely prevailing

amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects, have an existence, natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding. But, with how great an assurance and acquiescence soever this principle may be entertained in the world, yet whoever shall find in his heart to call it in question may, if I mistake not, perceive it to involve a manifest contradiction. For what are the aforementioned objects but the things we perceive by sense? and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations?"

Berkeley then proceeds to claim that the universal creation being mental, must have been brought into being within the mind of a Cosmic Thinker, thus strangely echoing a passage already quoted from the Indian *Yoga Vasishtha*. He continues :

"And is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these (ideas or sensations), or any combination of them, should exist unperceived? . . . Some truths there are so near and obvious to the mind that a man need only open his eyes to see them. Such I take this important one

to be, viz., that all the choir of heaven and the furniture of the earth, in a word, all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any substance without a mind; that their being is to be perceived or known; that consequently so long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind, or that of any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all, or subsist in the mind of some Eternal Spirit: it being perfectly unintelligible and involving all the absurdity of abstraction to attribute any single part of them an existence independent of a spirit. (To be convinced of which, the reader need only reflect, and try to separate in his own thoughts the *being* of a sensible thing from its *being perceived*.)"

This doctrine that the world is something perceived and hence an appearance to the perceiving mind, was acutely and laboriously developed by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant made the problem of the possibility of knowledge a primal one in the realm of metaphysical inquiry, and attempted to solve the question of the conditions of knowledge by the critical rather than

the empirical method. In this procedure he acted exactly like Shankara, who anticipated him on other points. Both, however, agree that the critical intellect ought not to set itself up as the container of reality, and that when it does so it loses its power to perceive truth and becomes instead, in Kant's words, "a faculty of illusion."

Kant revolutionized Western complacency about the character of our experience, for he revealed the creative character of the mind's contribution and showed that experience is a synthetic knowledge *a priori* fashioned from integration bounds derived from the mind itself. His great analysis of the structure of the human cognitive mechanism resulted in a demonstration of its limitations inasmuch as whatever becomes an object of knowledge is subjectively enveloped in the forms of space, time, and causality.

"But what originates these perceptions—what changes the mind from its prior to its present state? *Something*, external and extrinsic, changes it. What is this something?

What it *is*, in itself, we can never know: because to know it would bring it under the forms and conditions of the mind, i.e., would constitute it a phenomenon—unknown, therefore, but not denied—this *ens*—this something is; and this Kant calls Noumenon." (Lewes: *History of Philosophy*.)

The world which runs on in time, extends in space, and is governed by causation, is a world of mental appearance only, not a world of real being. Reality is for ever hidden to us because of the ever-presence of these mental limitations.

The chief book written by Immanuel Kant is the *Critique of Pure Reason*; it is intricate and lengthy in argument, puzzling and unfamiliar in terminology, hence not a quotable book.

"Kant's greatest merit is the distinction of the phenomenon from the ultimate reality," declared his brilliant follower, Arthur Schopenhauer, who in his own turn developed the same theme in the vigorous volumes of *The World as Will*

and *Idea*. Herein the German thinker says :

(a) "He to whom men and all things have not at times appeared as mere phantoms or illusions has no capacity for philosophy. . . ."

(b) "It seems natural to desire to remodel or vitalize this imperfect world of sense and every-day reality, just because so much of it is phenomenal and nugatory and illusory."

(c) "'The world is my idea'—this is a truth which holds good for everything that lives and knows, though man alone can bring it into reflective and abstract consciousness. If he really does this, he has attained to philosophical wisdom. It then becomes clear and certain to him that what he knows is not a sun and an earth, but only an eye that sees a sun, a hand that feels an earth; that the world which surrounds him is there only as idea, i.e. only in relation to something else, the consciousness, which is himself. . . ."

(d) "All that exists for knowledge, and therefore this whole world, is only object in relation to subject, perception of a perceiver, in a world, idea. This is obviously true of the past and

the future, as well as of the present, of what is farthest off, as of what is near; for it is true of time and space themselves, in which alone these distinctions rise. All that in any way belongs or can belong to the world is inevitably thus conditioned through the subject, and exists only for the subject. The world is idea."

Coming to more recent times, we find echoes of the familiar Hindu comparisons of the dream and waking worlds in the writings of modern philosophers like F. H. Bradley, E. Douglas Fawcett, Dr. F. C. Schiller, and Lord Bertrand Russell.

Bradley writes, in *Appearance and Reality* :

(a) "the contention that our waking world is the one real order of things will not stand against criticism. Quit the position of an on-looker on yourself, and imagine your own self in dream, and that while you dream you can recall but little of your waking state. But suppose also that from what you can recall you judge that your waking state was more distracted and more narrow, would you not be right if you set down your waking state as less rational and real? And if you went on further

to embrace your dream as the sole true reality, would you not, if reasoning badly, be reasoning still on the principle so widely accepted?"

(b) "How far are we justified when we regard such states as dream and madness as irrational and take their deliverance as unreal? Such a conclusion is *ex parte*. It rests on the mere assumption that our waking world has a sole or superior reality."

Dr. Schiller writes in the *Hibbert Journal* for October, 1904 :

"There are few subjects which philosophers have more persistently forborne to work out, not to say neglected, than the philosophic import of dreams. . . . Dream-experience suggests a definite doubt of the ultimateness of our present waking life, and a definite possibility or worlds of higher reality. . . . Of the evil and irrationality that oppress us not a little may be due to our not yet having found a way to dissipate the spell of a cosmic nightmare which besets us. . . . The exclusive reality of waking experience is not a primary fact. . . . The notion of an independent external world

and independent other persons has indisputably worked and philosophic arguments are impotent against it."

In *Studies in Humanism*, Dr. Schiller continues his comparisons between waking and dreaming, and concludes :

"No fundamental difference in character between the two can be established."

Finally, in *Riddle of the Sphinx*, he presents the problem thus :

"While it lasts . . . a dream has all the characteristics of reality. So with our present life: it seems real and rational, because we are yet asleep, because the eyes of the soul are not yet opened to pierce the veil of illusion. . . . It (dream) is real, while it lasts, so is our world. . . . When we awake, both cease to be true. . . . And both, moreover, may be seen through by reflection, just as we are sometimes so struck by the monstrous incongruity of our dreams, that, even as we dream, we are conscious that we dream, so philosophy arouses us to a consciousness that the phenomenal is not the real."

Fawcett writes of the waking condition as follows in *The World as Imagination* :

"There is nothing present to perception which could not be duplicated exactly in a merely dreaming experience. . . . There is nothing present in any domain which you perceive normally, which could not be duplicated in a merely solipsistic dream."

Lord Bertrand Russell, in his *Outlines of Philosophy*, has lucidly explained how the problem of perception has become more obscure than ever :

(a) "What passes for knowledge suffers from three defects: (1) cocksureness, (2) vagueness, (3) self-contradiction. Naive common-sense supposes that they (common objects, chairs, trees, etc.) are what they appear to be, but that is impossible since they do not appear exactly alike to any two simultaneous observers. If we are going to admit that the object is not what we see, we can no longer feel the same assurance that there is an object. . . . Now physics says that a table or a chair is 'really' an incredibly vast system of electrons and protons in rapid motion with empty space in between.

But the scientist being but a man cannot more than anybody else see these *electrons* and *protons*. He sees only certain patches of colour; but he has a learned explanation 'Light-waves start from the electrons (or, more probably, are reflected by them from a source of light), reach the eye, have a series of effects upon the rods and cones, the optic nerve and the brain, and finally produce a sensation.' But he has never seen anything more than the patches of colour; and the physical and physiological processes leading to sensation, on his own showing, lie essentially and for ever outside experience."

(b) "In waking life we are critical of the interpretative hypotheses that occur to us, and therefore do not make such wild mistakes as in dreams. But the creative as opposed to the critical mechanism is the same in waking life as it is in dreams. . . . All adaptation to environment acquired during the life of an individual might be regarded as learning to dream, dreams that succeed rather than dreams that fail. The dreams we have when we are asleep usually end in a surprise; the dreams we have in waking life are less apt to do so . . . one might say that a person properly adapted to

his environment is one whose dreams never end in the sort of surprise that would wake him up. In that case he will think that his dreams are objective reality. But if modern physics is to be believed, the dreams we call waking perceptions have only a very little more resemblance to objective reality than the fantastic dreams of sleep. They have some truth, but only just so much as is required to make them useful."

Lord Russell's work forms a natural link between that of the philosophers and that of the scientists, and thus we may now fitly ascertain what the latter have to say of the points under examination. One of the greatest nineteenth-century scientists was Thomas Henry Huxley, and the following quotations from Vol. VI, of his *Collected Essays* serve to show how much ancient Indian philosophy anticipated modern Western thought.

(a) "To sum up. If the materialist affirms that the universe and all its phenomena are resolvable into matter and motion, Berkeley replied, True; but what you call matter and

motion are known to us only as forms of consciousness; their being is to be conceived or known; and the existence of a state of consciousness, apart from a thinking mind, is a contradiction in terms. I conceive that this reasoning is irrefragable. And therefore, if I were obliged to choose between absolute materialism and absolute idealism, I should feel compelled to accept the latter alternative. Indeed, upon this point Locke does, practically, go as far in the direction of idealism as Berkeley, when he admits that 'the simple ideas we receive from sensation and reflection are the boundaries of our thoughts, beyond which the mind, whatever efforts it would make, is not able to advance one jot.'"

(b) "For example, I get the ideas of co-existence, of number, of distance, and of relative place or direction. But all these ideas are ideas of relations, and may be said to imply the existence of something which perceives those relations. If a tactile sensation is a state of the mind, and if the localization of that sensation is an act of the mind, how is it conceivable that a relation between two localized sensations should exist apart from the mind? Thus it seems clear that the existence of some,

at any rate, of Locke's primary qualities of matter, such as number and extension, apart from mind, is as utterly unthinkable as the existence of colour and sound under like circumstances. Will the others—namely, figure, motion and rest, and solidity—withstand a similar criticism? I think not. For all these, like the foregoing, are perceptions by the mind of the relations of two or more sensations to one another. If distance and place are inconceivable, in the absence of the mind of which they are ideas, the independent existence of figure, which is the limitation of distance, and of motion, which is change of place, must be equally inconceivable."

(c) "The key to all philosophy lies in the clear apprehension of Berkeley's problem—which is neither more nor less than one of the shapes of the greatest of all questions, 'What are the limits of our faculties?' And it is worth any amount of trouble to comprehend the exact nature of the argument by which Berkeley arrived at his results, and to know by one's own knowledge the great truth which he discovered—that the honest and rigorous following up of the argument which leads us to 'materialism,' inevitably carries us beyond it."

(d) "Now let us consider an ordinary sensation. Let the point of the pin be gently rested upon the skin, and I become aware of a feeling, or condition of consciousness, quite different from the former—the sensation of what I call 'touch.' Nevertheless this touch is plainly just as much in myself as the pain was. I cannot for a moment conceive this something which I call touch as existing apart from myself, or a being capable of the same feelings as myself. And the same reasoning applies to all the other simple sensations. A moment's reflection is sufficient to convince one that the smell, and the taste, and the yellowness, of which we become aware when an orange is smelt, tasted, and seen, are as completely states of our consciousness as is the pain which arises if the orange happens to be too sour. Nor is it less clear that every sound is a state of the consciousness of him who hears it. If the universe contained only blind and deaf beings, it is impossible for us to imagine but that darkness and silence should reign everywhere. It is undoubtedly true, then, of all the simple sensations that, as Berkeley says, their '*esse is percipi*'—their being is to be 'perceived or known.' But that which perceives, or knows,

is termed mind or spirit; and therefore the knowledge which the senses give us is, after all, a knowledge of spiritual phenomena."

We may continue the foregoing with what a great physicist of our own century has written :

"All through the physical world runs that unknown content, which must surely be the stuff of our consciousness. Here is a hint of aspects deep within the world of physics, and yet unattainable by the methods of physics. And, moreover, we have found that where science has progressed the furthest, the mind has but regained from Nature that which the mind has put into Nature." (Sir Arthur Eddington: *Time, Space and Gravitation*.)

Professor Levy, in *The Universe of Science*, in almost Kantian words, declares that "the underlying reality of the universe is never perceived. A mere appearance is experienced so that what the mind pictures is not reality but its superficial structure."

Professor Karl Pearson says in his acutely critical work, *The Grammar of Science* :

(a) "The reader who comes to these problems for the first time may feel inclined to assert that if this world of sense-impressions is the world of scientific knowledge, then science is dealing with a world of shadows and not of real substances."

(b) "There is no better exercise for the mind than to endeavour to reduce the perceptions we have of external things to the simple sense-impressions by which we know them. The arbitrary distinction between outside and inside ourselves is then clearly seen to be merely one of everyday practical convenience. Take a needle; we say it is thin, bright, pointed, and so forth. What are these properties but a group of sense-impressions relating to form and colour associated with conceptions drawn from past sense-impressions? Their immediate source is the activity of certain optic nerves. These sense-impressions form for us the *reality* of the needle. Nevertheless they and the resulting construct are projected outside ourselves, and *supposed* to reside in an external thing, the needle. Now by mischance we run the needle into our finger; another nerve is excited and an unpleasant sense-impression arises. This on the other hand we term, 'in

ourselves,' and do not project into the needle. Yet the colour and form which constitute for us the needle are just as much sense-impressions within us as the pain produced by its prick. The distinction between ourselves and the outside world is thus only an arbitrary, if a practically convenient, division between one type of sense-impression and another. The group of sense-impressions forming what I term *myself* is only a small subdivision of the vast world of sense-impressions. . . . Obviously the distinction is only a practical one."

Charles P. Steinmetz, famous for his research work in electrical invention, in a reported address delivered before the Unitarian Church at Schenectady, U.S.A., did not hesitate to accept the Idealistic theory. He said :

"All our sense-perceptions are limited by, and attached to, the conceptions of time and space. Time and space are . . . conceptions in which our minds clothe the sense-perceptions. Modern physics has come to the same conclusion in the relativity theory, that absolute space and absolute time have no existence,

but time and space exist only as far as things or events fill them; that is, they are forms of perception."

Finally, we come to *The Mysterious Universe*, written by one of our most brilliant living astronomers. Therein Sir James Jeans quotes approvingly a passage from Bishop Berkeley postulating the Idealistic world-conception, and adds :

"Modern science seems to me to lead, by a very different road, to a not altogether dissimilar conclusion. Biology, studying the connection between the earlier links of the chain, A, B, C, D, seems to be moving towards the conclusion that these are all of the same general nature. This is occasionally stated in the specific form that, as biologists believe C, D to be mechanical and material, A, B must also be mechanical and material, but apparently there would be at least equal warrant for stating it in the form that as A, B are mental, C, D must also be mental. Physical science, troubling little about C, D proceeds directly to the far end of the chain; its business is to study the workings of X, Y, Z. And, as it seems to me, its conclusions suggest

that the end links of the chain, whether we go to the cosmos as a whole or to the innermost structure of the atom, are of the same nature as A, B—of the nature of pure thought; we are led to the conclusions of Berkeley, but we reach them from the other end. Because of this, we come upon the last of Berkeley's three alternatives first, and the others appear unimportant by comparison. It does not matter whether objects 'exist in my mind, or that of any other created spirit' or not; their objectivity arises from their subsisting 'in the mind of some Eternal Spirit.' "

Elsewhere in the same book, Sir James writes :

"The Universe can be best pictured as consisting of pure thought, the thought of what, for want of a wider word, we must describe as a mathematical thinker."

He concludes significantly :

"This concept of the universe as a world of pure thought throws a new light on many of the situations we have encountered in our survey of modern physics."

With these lines this search for parallels must come to an end. However controversial these ideas must necessarily, by their very nature, be to-day and perhaps forever, when discussed by materialistic minds, however seemingly valueless outside the little world of those who seek to discuss truth for its own sake, nevertheless this brief survey may help to show that the human mind has explored the same paths in both Orient and Occident, amid the shadows of antiquity and under the bright glare of modernity.

If there is any contribution to be made to our quest of truth by Eastern thought, whether ancient or modern, the most practical, I believe, would be the idea that until there is, in addition to the existing lines of laboratory research, a re-orientation of our own search from its objective phase to a purely subjective one, the *realization* of the highest truth, as opposed to its mere intellectual discernment, will continue to elude us. For let us not forget that even the Western scientist who postulates a spiritual

basis for the universe has done nothing more than perform an intellectual operation ; he has not come into personal contact with that spiritual basis as the ancient Asiatic thinkers asserted that he could. But can man really transcend the intellect ? The wisest men of the East have always declared that he can.

<Whilst Western psychologists carry out most of their experiments upon other persons, the proponents and exponents of Indian systems are expected, and do, carry out their experiments upon themselves first and foremost. And because man is a key to the universe, because the mind of man is somehow linked with the Mind behind creation, the way to understanding of the universe must finally embrace the thorough understanding of the mystery behind man.>

THE END





