THE CHIEF SCRIPTURE OF INDIA

(THE BHAGAVAD-GITA)

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AND ITS RELATION TO
PRESENT EVENTS

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To

THE POWER

Who already has united the realms of Britain and India,
and will, in the fulness of His own time, in bonds
of common faith and fellowship, further
"incorporate and make them one."

PREFACE

THE following essay has been written for reasons that appear therein. It will, I hope, serve as an introduction for English readers to the *Bhagavad Gita*, and to questions arising out of the British connexion with India, and the relation of Hindu thought to ours. As the general reader is apt to be deterred by Eastern philosophical technicalities and nomenclature, I have avoided using these almost entirely.

Of some half-dozen English translations of the *Gita*, the following are specially recommended for study (the rendering by Mr K. Telang in Prof. Max Müller's edition of the *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. viii., being inaccessible to the

general reader):—those by Mr J. Davies (Kegan Paul, Trench & Trubner), and by Dr L. D. Barnett (Dent's Temple Classics), both prose versions containing excellent explanatory introductions and notes; and Sir Edwin Arnold's poetical rendering, *The Song Celestial* (Kegan Paul & Co.), which may usefully be read in conjunction with either of the two former. The last-named edition I have used for quotation purposes in this essay, and express my acknowledgments accordingly. It may be objected that it is a less literal rendering of the original than those in prose. On comparing the two, I have found it not unfaithful, and certainly more enthusiastic and spirited. Sir Edwin Arnold's poetical genius, his profound knowledge of, and sympathy with, Eastern thought, and his deep religious fervour, have combined to furnish forth a version that is a credit at once to the original and to English poetry. A diamond flashes the more for being polished, and in the case

of this jewel of Indian thought, the translator's refining is no greater, probably less, than would be observable on comparing a literal version of, say, the Prophecies of Isaiah with the magnificent rendering made by their translators in the Authorised Version of the Bible.

For those entirely unacquainted with Eastern thought, Prof. Max Müller's able and popular Royal Institution Lectures on *The Vedanta Philosophy* (Collected Works, vol. xvi., Longmans) are strongly recommended; and Mr H. Fielding's *Soul of a People* and *The Hearts of Men* (Hurst & Blackett), though speaking of Buddhism rather than Brahmanism, give an excellent account, based upon personal experience, of the religious atmosphere pervading the Indian Empire to-day. W. L. W.

HUDDERSFIELD, *Nov.* 1905.

The Bhagavad Gita

> "Other sheep have I which are not of this fold; them also must I bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd." *St John*, x. 16.

To introduce, perhaps for the first time, and make clear to Western minds, a work which is the climax at once of the religion, the philosophy, and the poetry of an Eastern people, is a difficult task, and one necessitating some preliminary exposition. Otherwise it would resemble setting an Oriental schoolboy to learn English by studying *Hamlet* or some other classic of our tongue. The difference between Anglo-Saxon and Asiatic manners and methods

of thought is notoriously so pronounced, that few of us ever try to find points in common between the two, and the divergencies between them are assumed as a matter of course to be almost irreconcilable. That "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," has become almost a truism with us British, whose prejudices—in our own favour—are proverbial, whose insularity of thought has in many respects often proved to be in inverse ratio to our power of national physical expansion and colonising, and whose self-satisfaction is a not illegitimate cause of reproach to other and less happily favoured nations. I would be the first to call shame upon any man who traduces the country of his birth. Especially to be reprobated is that Englishman who maligns or disparages his own inheritance, failing to see in the history of his nation that, despite all her faults and errors, she has been a favoured instrument in the hands of an all-governing

Providence for developing and civilising other portions of the world, for extending liberty and generally promoting the material and spiritual welfare of man. And he who loves her best will be the most conscious of her faults, and, recognising and trying to repair them, will endeavour to the best of his ability to make her still further and more effectually an instrument for good.

To us British has been entrusted, for the time being, the possession and future destiny of the vast territory and the nearly three hundred million souls constituting the Indian Empire. To the eyes of other nations, to the eyes of thousands of thinking Indians themselves, the very fact of the British rule, conducted as it is by a handful of civil servants and another handful of British troops, is a miracle—a miracle which cannot be accounted for by any process of reasoning founded on experience. Sir John Seeley has said of the fact, "We are in the hands of Provi-

dence; which is greater than all statesmanship." A high-placed Indian official recently told me of his having to entertain a distinguished and powerful native Prince who happened to be passing through the town in which my informant was quartered. After lunch the Prince was asked if he cared to be shown the sights of the place, which was full of antiquities and objects of architectural and other interest. All he wished to be taken to, all that he cared to gratify his imagination with, was the British barracks; and there, taking with him his escort of native troops of magnificent physique, he passed the afternoon contemplating the mystery of the presence and power in India of the British rule, which at that moment and that particular place, to our shame be it said, chanced to be represented by half-a-dozen white-faced, red-coated striplings doing punishment drill on the parade-ground for drunkenness.

For what purpose has India been en-

trusted to us? To say for military purposes and commercial exploitation is to give an insufficient answer; those are but incidents, not the ultimate object, of the trust. The philosophical student of events sees a larger end in view than those, and that larger end I hope to make clear before this essay closes. For the moment, I will adumbrate my meaning by an illustration. It is a well-known fact that when the great highway between the East and West, the Suez Canal, was cut, the sea-level of the two oceans that lie upon either side the isthmus became altered and adjusted. That fact of physical geography, then, typifies and foreshadows the bringing into equilibrium of two oceans of thought—the ultimate fusion of the religious and philosophical thought of Asia with that of Europe.

It is not for one moment to be supposed that we Westerns, even with our Christian churches and our magnificent science, possess on that account a monopoly either

of religious truth or of knowledge of nature. As regards natural science, India can show us depths of knowledge ascertained by the sagacity and speculative thought of her philosophers of upwards of two thousand years ago, which are being gradually confirmed, but have not yet been transcended even by the amazing developments in experimental and applied science in our own day and country. While, as to religion, be the merits or demerits of the great faiths of the East what they may, we may rest well assured—nay, by the very terms of our own Scriptures we are bound to believe—that through the long centuries the multitudinous generations of the gorgeous East have had "a law unto themselves" sufficient to their needs; that they have not been left without some adequate witness of the self-same Providence whom we ourselves acknowledge. We may be very certain, as is written by the poet of *Hiawatha*,

that in all ages
Every human heart is human;
That the feeble hands and helpless,
Stretching blindly in the darkness,
Touch God's right hand in that darkness
And are lifted up and strengthened.

In the Hindu Scriptures the *Bhagavad Gita* holds a place similar to that which the Gospel according to St John does in ours. It resembles the Fourth Gospel in some points of its teaching, as well as in the facts that it is the climax of a theological system, and that in it various antecedent layers of thought are combined and blended into a more or less new and perfect whole. To understand the Fourth Gospel of our own New Testament, we must go far back into the past and know something of the origins which contributed to and made its composition possible. For it is the crown and flower of the Judaic religion which arose two thousand years previously and slowly developed amid all the chequered career of Israel, growing from crude, imper-

fectly conceived, and materialistic notions of God and His relations with man into ideas sublimely spiritual and ennobling, until the way was eventually made possible for that great event of nineteen hundred years ago, which was still further to reveal the Divine to man, and man to himself, and upon which, as we Christians believe, the hope of the whole world hangs. The story of that supreme event was recorded synoptically in the first three Gospels of our New Testament—those simple statements of fact, mingled doubtless to some extent with legend, written by men of more or less simplicity of thought but of different and easily distinguishable individuality. But, when we come to the Fourth Gospel, we find what hitherto has been recorded as history has undergone a change. It has been transmuted in the mental alembic of a far more perspicacious, subtle, and spiritually-minded author into a work of quite another and a loftier category. Extrinsic events have become idealised and invested

with intrinsic significance; plain historical facts are transformed into spiritualities; theological doctrine has been deduced from recent occurrences; and, added to all this, the author, whose mind is steeped in the noble secular philosophy of Greece and Alexandria, has treated his subject in the light of the best learning of his day, and so has produced one of the sublimest works that ever issued from the pen of man.

So also is it with the *Bhagavad Gita*. To consider it appreciatively we must go back to origins and see how it too came to be evolved; otherwise, to approach it directly, without such preliminary enquiry, tends to the misunderstanding of its meaning and the underestimating of its worth.

Of the present population of India (approaching three hundred millions), seventy per cent. are Hindus by religion; the remainder consists of Mohammedans (twenty per cent.), Buddhists (three per cent.), leaving six per cent. for the Sikh, Christian, Jain, and Parsee faiths. Hinduism, then,

has by far the preponderating number of devotees, and it is of their Scriptures that the *Gita* is one. Their earliest Scriptures, the most elementary and primitive in teaching also, date from some three thousand five hundred years ago, and are known as the Vedas, or Collections of Hymns, of which there are four—the Rig-Veda (or Veda of praise), the Sama-, the Yajur-, and Athar-Vedas, books of rites, magic and sacrificial ceremonial. Except as documents of historical interest they are of no value to us; they are the productions of a race as yet in infancy and struggling in the dark to express its religious emotions. Viewed with our eyes they are often immoral and debasing. They are based largely on the worship of Nature. The sky, the sun, the elements, the river, the wind, fire,—all these are deified and worshipped, as primitive man, the world over, has been wont to deify and worship them. With the progress and enlightenment which time brings with it, the ideas

and teaching of the Vedas seem to have lost value and to have dropped out of account, at least among the better instructed people, about the year 500 B.C., after having been in use for nearly a thousand years; and though still treated as the foundation and support of their religion—as we treat the Old Testament as the foundation of the New—they became virtually obsolete. More advanced treatises came to be written:—Brahmanas, or Treatises on the Hymns; Aranyakas, or Forest-Treatises, composed for the ascetics who generally dwelt in retirement in the woods; and finally the Upanishads, a word implying "Conferences under the Trees." It is upon the Upanishads, dating from about 500 B.C., and the chief of which are works of surpassing moral grandeur, that the various systems of Indian religion and philosophy have been based. One of these systems, the greatest and most far-reaching, is known as the Vedanta philosophy[1]—*i.e.*, the *Veda-anta*, the end, or culmination, of

[1] Formulated in the ninth century A.D.

the Vedas. For with Hindus, religion, science, and philosophy are not differentiated subjects as, unfortunately, they have been made with us; they are aspects of one and the same thing. And the *Bhagavad Gita* is an expression of, or rather a distillation from, some of these ultimate religio-philosophical systems which, in turn, sprang out of the primeval Vedas, although the former, strange to say, are subversive of, and often in direct conflict with, the latter, and this for a very natural reason. For the Hindu Scriptures have evolved from a primitive state to one of maturity, just as the ideas of a man evolve largely from those of a child. And so it is to be observed, their teaching of religion to the individual man has wisely been adjusted to his own personal stages of growth and mental development. This is a feature peculiar to Hinduism, and one which Max Müller has well described and extolled:—"It was recognised in India from very early times that the religion of a man cannot be, and ought not to be, the

same as that of a child; and, again, that with the growth of the mind the religious ideas of an old man must differ from those of an active man of the world. It is useless to attempt to deny such facts. We know them all from the time when we first emerge from the happy unconsciousness of a child's faith, and have to struggle with important facts that press upon us from all sides—from history, from science, and from a knowledge of the world and of ourselves. After recovering from these struggles, a man generally takes his stand on certain convictions which he believes that he can honestly hold and honestly defend. There are certain questions which he thinks are settled once for all and never to be opened again; there are certain arguments to which he will not even listen, because, though he has no answer to them, he does not mean to yield to them. But, when the evening of life draws near and softens the lights and shadows of conflicting opinions, when to agree with the spirit of

truth within becomes far dearer to a man than to agree with the majority of the world without, these old questions appeal to him once more like long-forgotten friends; he learns to bear with those from whom formerly he differed; and while he is willing to part with all that is non-essential—and most religious differences seem to arise from non-essentials—he clings all the more firmly to the few strong and solid planks that are left to carry him into the harbour, no longer very distant from his sight. It is hardly credible how completely all other religions have overlooked these simple facts, how they have tried to force on the old and wise the food that was meant for babes, and how they have thereby alienated and lost their best and strongest friends. It is therefore a lesson, all the more worth learning from history, that one religion at least, and one of the most ancient, most powerful, and most widely-spread religions, has recognised this fact without the slightest hesita-

tion."[1] And so in the prime of its national manhood, some five hundred years before our era, the greater Scriptures of India were written for its mature and aged men. They have been added to since and refined upon from time to time, notably by the work we are about to consider, which dates from as late, possibly, as three hundred years after Christ. Thanks to the subsidy granted for the purpose by the British Government, and to the labours and studies of many scholars, and especially of those under the capable presidency of the late Prof. Max Müller, these *Sacred Books of the East* are being made known to us; and the genius of the East, from which proverbially light has always come, is being brought home to us, that what of good there is in it may mingle with and leaven our own, even as Western ideas are blending with and leavening those of the great Empire in the Orient that has been com-

[1] *Vedanta Philosophy*, Coll. Works, vol. xvi. pp. 16–18.

mitted to our rule. And it is well that we, in the rush and hurry of our modern life, in the midst of its materialism and worship of gold, of its lusting after all those external and temporal things which, when attained, profit a man nothing if in the long run he lose his own soul,—it is well that we should pause for a moment and consider the appeal that comes to us from minds that, untroubled by the pressure and excitement that we experience, and whose environment was such that the struggle for physical existence was easy, could meditate upon the deeper problems of life which are often forgotten and obscured amid the surface-froth and business of a commercial nation. Among us not much time is given to thought about religion; it has become almost "bad form" for a man to talk of it. "But there in the East it is not so. . . . Only there can man be alone. Only there in the limitless silence of the desert, in the unending forests, can you live and forget all other men, and yourself almost, and be

alone with Him who is God. You want but little, no house to shelter you, no fire, but very little food and drink and clothes. You do not feel that restless desire to do something, born of cold winds and skies. Your roof by day is the palm or tamarind; by night you watch the stars wheeling over your head. There is no one to commune with but Nature; and if you love her as she should be loved, if you woo her as she should be wooed, if you can send out your soul to lose itself with her in the wonders of the infinite, then shall you hear the music of the stars. Thus has all religion come from the land of the sun; *light* is the fount of *faith*. Never till you have been to the East can you know what faith is. Have we not religion, nay religions, in the North? Yes, but not as they have there. Do we not believe in the West? Yes, but not as they believe. Faith lies there in the great distances, in the dawn, the noon, the sunset, in the holiness of the dark. It has sunk into the heart of man. Consider;

what do you see when you land anywhere in the East? what strikes you most? what is most prominent, not in the landscape, but in the people? It is their religion. . . . In the West we have never known what real religion is. We have it not ourselves, and so we cannot recognise and honour it in others. . . . Only those jeer who do not know, and the Christians of the West jeer at the faiths of the East, at the simple natural religion of the people, because they know not what religion of the heart can be."[1]

What, then, are the religious beliefs of these teeming fellow-citizens of ours in the Indian Empire? It must be confessed that, at the present day, Hinduism as a religious system is in a somewhat chaotic state. There is no Church in the Western sense of a corporate organised community. On the other hand, there is a great congeries of creeds more or less in conflict

[1] H. Fielding's *The Hearts of Men*, pp. 56–57. Hurst & Blackett, 1901.

with each other, and more or less advanced or debased. Religious systems have their stages of integration and disintegration, no less than animal and vegetable organisms. The beliefs which found their first expression in the primal Vedas, which ripened to maturity in the Upanishads, and developed still further with the intellectual growth of the people into great and complex systems of religio-philosophy, have, in point of their expansion and segregation, their analogy in those formulated by the Jewish and extended by the Christian Church; which, too, has in the course of time become subdivided into almost innumerable sects, divided upon points of doctrine and government, but retaining a centre and basis of faith common to them all. In speaking, then, of the chief tenets of Hinduism, I allude to the faith as it seems to have been, and to be, at its best; as it was, and is, at its highest pitch of attainment; as it may be regarded in its ideal and most representative stage; as, in short,

it is revealed to us in the *Bhagavad Gita* itself, without reference to any *nuances* of sectarian opinion to which it may be subject. It inculcates the following beliefs:—

1. It believes in one God, who, under the name Brahma, is the source and life of all things material and spiritual; who is self-existent and also subsistent everywhere and in everything, without whom nothing is, or can be, that has been made. In the evolution of the faith, this idea of God as Unity has grown up, as it did among the Judaic people, from a condition of polytheism. Slowly and gradually with the passage of time, the innumerable minor deities and tutelary spirits worshipped by the infant race became ignored or subordinated, until only three supreme divinities were recognised—Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu, the creative, the destructive and reproductive, and the preservative principles of Deity; and this Trinity, too, in turn became merged in the one supreme Brahma

who is to be worshipped as Unity, yet, even as in the Christian Trinity, is none the less to be regarded in His other co-eternal and co-equal aspects.

2. Nature, the objective Universe, the world of effects, is the Shadow, the out-breathed and objectified thought of God. Being temporal, subject to continual flux and change, it is not a reality, save relatively,—that is, it is real for the time being to us who now live in it and come into contact with it through temporal sense-faculties; but regarded from a plane that is higher than that in which the senses function—namely, from that of the transcendent mind—it is unreal because impermanent, and illusory because it veils the eternal realities underlying it, of which it is but the temporary symbol. The very essence of the Hindu creed is that "the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." To be able to appreciate at their true value the claims of the visible world around

us, and at the same time to be able to mistrust the evidence of the senses, is the very first lesson to be learned in Hindu philosophy.

3. The eternity of the soul, or rather the spirit, of man (for the two are accurately differentiated), is another root doctrine. With Hindus there is no problem of human immortality as there has been, and is, with us. To their keen psychological insight doubt upon the point is impossible, for God and the Soul are the only two fundamental and eternal realities. Man with them, as the word's Aryan derivative implies, is a *manas*, a mind, a spark of the imperishable Eternal Mind; his animal body is but a temporary vehicle in which it is necessary to focus and develop that spark. Every soul is a part of Brahma's soul, individuated by its connection with a bodily form. From Brahma it came, to Him it will at length return. For He *is* in all things; a ray from His spirit is imprisoned in every particle of organic and inorganic

Nature, if, indeed, there be anything that can be thought of as inorganic. He underlies the force which builds the crystals of the granite, and the star-fronds of the snow-flake; He is the power that lies behind the blushing of the rose, that shapes the curves of leaf and tendril, and designs the petals of every flower; He is latent in the instinct of the brute; He is the force which, in the heart of man, vibrates through the dense sheaths of flesh and sense as, aspiring to whatever is high and good and beautiful, he seeks to rejoin the parent source from which he sprang. For all Nature is but something maturing, a becomingness. The secret force within its every atom is a part of the imprisoned consciousness of God, seeking, under the constraining influence of eternal laws, and by the process which Western races have only recently begun to learn to think of as evolution, to purify and strengthen itself as it passes through finite Nature to infinite Being to regain its pristine level. Therefore the rule is written

upon the tablets of the heart of these Eastern men—a rule that speaks to them in tones far more imperious than does to us the eighth commandment of the Mosaic lawgiver, which *we* interpret as applicable only to human murder,—

> Kill not—for pity's sake, and lest thou slay
> The meanest thing upon its upward way.[1]

But while Western thought may so far follow and approve that of the East, the latter, with its deep penetration, probes into depths unknown to ours, and asserts canons of doctrine, based not on superstition, but on profound philosophical reasoning, which seem strange, repugnant even, to our notions and prejudices. Western religion knows but of two lives for us—one on earth and one to come. Not so the East. Not in one brief spasm of earth-life can the soul achieve that purity and proficiency which shall make it fit for eternal union

[1] *Light of Asia*, Bk. viii. One of the most repulsive features of our manners to all Brahmanists and Buddhists is the wanton slaughter of animals and birds for "sport."

with the Divine. The great faiths of the East know no hell, in the Western sense; or none save that temporary one which a man may make for himself, and from which he can free himself, if so he wills, reverses the order of his desires, and "turns again home." It knows only heaven, or union with the Supreme; and to that heaven shall each one come, at length, after many days, after many lives on earth of gradual and continuous probationary progress. Like a light that shines through many successive globes is, in their belief, the human spirit. It passes, upon bodily decay, into the unseen; is retained there for a shorter or longer period of rest, according to its inherent qualities of attraction or repulsion; and thence, by the force of inviolate cosmic law, is drawn down again into the whirlpool of this world's life to acquire new experience and further refinement; and so on, again and again, until it escapes the wheel of rebirth, and, as it were, "becomes a pillar

in the temple of God, and goes no more out." [1] For it is eternal and indestructible.

> Never the spirit was born, the spirit shall cease to be never,
> Never was time it was not; end and beginning are dreams.
> Birthless and deathless and changeless remaineth the spirit for ever;
> Death hath not touched it at all, dead though the house of it seems. [2]

Upon this doctrine of re-birth and a succession of lives hangs another great law —that of Karma, the law of conservation of *moral* energy (the counterpart of the law, established by Western science, of the conservation of *physical* energy), the rule of eternal justice which prescribes that as a man sows so shall he reap, and that as he reaps so has he already sown. A man's condition in this life is what he has made it in previous lives. If he be given to evil, it is because he was evil before and has not

[1] Rev. iii. 12. [2] *Gita*, ii. 20.

yet set about to redeem himself. If he is charitable, sympathetic, upright, it is because he has cultivated those virtues in the past, and they have become the habit of his soul. It lies within the power of each of us to determine what manner of man we shall henceforth be. "Thus not only is a man the sum of his passions, his acts, and his thoughts in past time, but he is in his daily life determining his future, what sort of man he shall be. Every act, every thought, has its effect, not only upon the outer world, but upon the inner soul. If you follow after good, every good act is a beautiful touch to your own soul. . . . A man has a soul, and it passes from life to life, as a traveller from inn to inn, till at length it is ended in heaven. But not till he has attained heaven in his heart will he attain heaven in reality." [1] These two fundamental doctrines, then, are essential to the understanding of any Eastern religious

[1] H. Fielding, *Soul of a People*, pp. 48, 327 (Hurst & Blackett).

work; and though they do not square with Christian thought as at present expressed, and though I am not concerned here either to defend or to refute them, the warning may be given that he is an unwise man, however pious, however ardent may be his own Christian faith, who ridicules, or dismisses as improbable, unthinkable, or immoral, beliefs which are the result of the matured judgment of the most gifted, perspicacious, and, withal, most profoundly devout philosophical thinkers upon the great problems of God and of human life that the world can show. Nor let it be forgotten that, at the present day, an evergrowing number of Western minds is becoming persuaded, for philosophical reasons, in favour of this teaching, which, it may be remarked, underlies Wordsworth's famous ode, *On Intimations of Immortality*, and which held good with many of the philosophers of the early Christian Church, among whom the great Origen himself was of the opinion that it

was "more in conformity with reason to believe that every soul is introduced into a body according to its deserts and former actions,"[1] rather than to suppose a fresh soul created for every child born into the world.

4. The last cardinal belief to be mentioned is that in *Avatāras*. An *Avatāra* is an Incarnation of Deity, a blending of the Divine Soul with a human one. There have been many such in the East. It is recognised that humanity is a weak, erring, helpless creature, which in its process of evolutionary development is bound constantly to go wrong. Evil, with it, is ever getting the upper hand; vices stunt and impoverish the heart; the senses and the pride of intellect cloud and extinguish the faculties of the spirit; and though from time to time, in this part of the world or that, a little progress be made or a little more light be won, yet it is soon stifled and obscured by the luxurious overgrowth of human pride, passions, and lust. Then it

[1] *Con. Celsum.* i. 32.

is that, from time to time, the pitying and patient-waiting Lord of the Universe appears in human guise.

> I come, and go, and come. . . . When Righteousness
> Declines . . . . when Wickedness
> Is strong, I rise from age to age and take
> Visible shape, and move a man with men,
> Succouring the good, thrusting the evil back,
> And setting Virtue on her seat again.[1]

Many such Incarnations are known to the long memory of the ancient East. The chief, for Hindus, is Krishna, the Divine Man of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Saviour of India. So firmly founded is the belief in these divine manifestations, so watchful of and deeply penetrative into the silent workings of the world's life and progress outside even the frontiers of India, were in the past the seers of the great religion I speak of, that, in order to verify an event which their own speculations had foreshadowed, there once journeyed across the Indus, following the star of intuition that shone within

[1] *Gita*, iv. 7, 8.

them, a little pilgrimage of reverent worshippers of Brahma, bearing with them the emblems of sovereignty, wisdom, and power, to lay down those prophetic symbols as homage to One who, though born in a stable in distant Bethlehem, was infinitely the greatest of all the Avatāras, and is destined, in time,—and the fulness of His time is not yet,—to become the Saviour and Master not only of the West, but of India and all other the Kingdoms of this world.

With this preliminary exposition in mind then, we may approach the study of the *Bhagavad Gita* itself; the "Divine Lay," as the term may be rendered; the "Song Celestial," as one of its ablest translators (Sir Edwin Arnold) has it. How came it to be written?

It is a poem within a larger poem. Far back in the primeval history of India there occurred a colossal dynastic struggle—a conflict which became the subject of national heroic lays that ultimately found

re-expression in a great national epic poem called the *Maha-bharata*; just as the legends of the Trojan War became perpetuated in the Homeric epos, and the myths of the Teutonic heroes were enshrined in the *Nibelungen Lied*. Indeed it is not unlikely that the Indian poems, with their records of the dual conflict between celestial powers and human forces, suggested or influenced the composition of the majestic Greek poem, constructed as it is, though with finer art, upon lines not unlike the Indian. Into the history or merits of this great conflict, the issue of which decided the subsequent fate and government of India, we need not concern ourselves. Only this need be said in passing. The term Maha-bharata implies "the great Brothers" who formed one of the parties to the dynastic struggle. And it is not without interest to note,—perhaps the thoughtful will find considerable significance in the connotation,—that the destiny of the vast historic race whose national epic

is so named has come, in these latter days, to be entrusted to another race living in these far-off islands called Great Britain—a name which, etymologically, has precisely the same origin and meaning as Maha-bharata, and means the race of the Great Brothers. To coincidence or intelligent purpose—is this due? Future developments of the world's events will doubtless show. For the present it may be recorded that, upon the fact being discerned by Hindus themselves after the Great Mutiny of 1855 had been quelled, it played no small part in reconciling their subtle and sagacious minds to their incorporation into the British Empire.

The *Maha-bharata*, in its epic form, a reproduction of earlier lays and versified traditions of the events it celebrates, was written in about the fifth century B.C., but for some centuries afterwards continued to be added to, or transformed in parts, by subsequent writers who endeavoured to bring its teachings into line with later

developments of thought, and to show forth ancient events in the light of more advanced religious and ethical knowledge. At some time, whether before the commencement of the Christian era, or, as the weight of opinion now seems to be, perhaps as late as the third century A.D., a writer composed the poem known as the *Bhagavad Gita*. He set himself to relate a single imaginary episode in the great drama, but he invested it with such a wealth of his own profound and luminous religious and philosophical thought, that thenceforth it became not only the chief and best-loved Scripture for people of his own faith, but also one of the sublimest masterpieces of religious literature ever composed. The writer, familiar with and steeped in his native Scriptures, legends, and philosophy, drew from them the material for this new work. Taking from here a fact of history, from there an ancient national tradition, culling a truth now from one of the ancient Vedas or Forest-books, and now from one

of the more modern Upanishads, drawing the cream from some of the rival systems of the most advanced and approved philosophical thought of his time, he blended all these ingredients in the crucible of his own masterly and deeply spiritual genius, and poured them forth again, fused and transmuted, into this superb "Song," which ever since has been recognised as the high-water mark of the religious thought of India. Who was he who wrote this poem? None knows. Either the author has been forgotten, or, as is perhaps more likely, preferred to remain nameless and unremembered, content to sink his own personality in the presence of his sacred and stupendous theme. The work was inscribed in Sanskrit, *Sanctum Scriptum*; and Holy Writ, indeed, the poem is.

It commences in a place, and at a moment of the great dynastic struggle referred to, that is reminiscent of a familiar stage-direction in the historical plays of our own Shakespeare — "an open plain

between two armies," for it was at Hastinapur, a city in the plain surrounding the modern Delhi, that the final issue of the strife was joined and decided. Drawn up in front of one of the contending armies is the war-chariot of Prince Arjuna, a son of the blind King Dhritarashtra, whose dynasty is being assailed. With the prince in the chariot, in the capacity of charioteer —a position in those days of honour and confidence—is his bosom-friend and adviser, Sri Krishna, a man in all externals like unto ourselves, yet in whose person is infused and incarnate the emanated wisdom and radiance of the Supreme Power — that emanation Whose name in our theology is the Logos, and Whose mysterious manifestation in human form we speak of as the Word-made-flesh. These three personages, with Sanjaya, an attendant of the prince, are, save the blind king, the only persons of the drama.

"Tell me," asks the old blind king of

the attendant, Sanjaya, "what happened; what you saw, at the moment when the chariot was standing on the plain between the two armies, just ere battle was joined!"

And Sanjaya answers, describing the two conflicting forces, the leaders on either side, and the great arrays of troops among which kinsmen were found to be opposing kinsmen, and friends friends; for in this dire strife, as in our own civil wars, almost every man's hand seemed to be turned against his brother's. And, he adds, seeing this fact, observing that even were the issue of the fight to be favourable to his own side, the Prince Arjuna was suddenly smitten with great despondency and cared not for victory upon such terms. Even should victory be ours, of what avail dominion and peace, wealth and glory, if they are to be earned only at the cost of destroying the tribes and their customs, of profaning the rites of religion, of the destruction of so many lives, of the

slaughter of one's nearest and dearest? Their blood will be ever upon our heads even though they be prepared to spill ours, and sin will cleave to us in that, even in a righteous cause, we have broken the eternal law which says to us "Thou shalt do *no* murder!" Two wrongs make nothing right. Retribution, individual and national, will pursue us for our sin. It were better that our enemies slay us than we them. Saying thus, the prince flung away his arms and fell down in the chariot overwhelmed with grief and perplexity.

But to his self-strictures the Lord Krishna answered, bidding him be of good cheer and take up his bow and fight. And here, having only just commenced, the action of the poem, save for one terrific episode presently to be mentioned, comes to an end. The rest is the dialogue that ensued between the two occupants of the chariot, Krishna and Arjuna.

So far, apparently, then, we have sim-

plicity itself. Yes; but it is the simplicity of that supreme art which, beneath the plain surface and obvious meaning that a child may understand, conceals profundities of significance to be appreciated only by deeper-discerning minds. The great religious teachers of the world, in their wisdom, speak ever in metaphor. Their doctrine is so spoken that infants and sages alike may learn, and learn something different, from it. It has "shallows in which a child may wade, and deeps into which giants may plunge." There are few, if any, minds that comprehend to their full extent some of the parables of the New Testament; so profound, so far-reaching and *cosmic*, is their import. And in this simple episode in the chariot of Arjuna the true significance underlying the surface description must be deciphered ere we can hope to grasp the meaning of what is yet to follow. For the deep insight of this Eastern author had learned to see that all things and events about him, the entire

visible world itself, are but symbols of spiritual realities hidden from our senses, and so in this poem he purposely employs prosaic, and apparently unambiguous, fact, only that it may symbolise the deeper truth he wishes to express.

The battlefield of Hastinapur, then, is man's battlefield of life. Powers and forces are around him, seeing which he well may quail; to his mind arise doubts and questionings that may well cause him to be despondent. Even the struggle for physical existence is sharp; moral and intellectual difficulties often are sharper still. But his God is ever with him in the chariot; ready, waiting to drive him into the fray, and bidding him in his moments of despair to do his duty, to "take up his bow and fight."

That is the primary interpretation of the author's parable. But there is another, a profounder meaning even than this. The whole scene with all its stage-properties, the horsed chariot and battlefield, the array

of foes, the despondent prince, the Divine Companion and Comforter who rides with him and directs his way, are all intended as an allegory of *individual man*; they typify his own personal constitution, his body with its senses, his intellect and reason, his soul and his immortal spirit. Each man of us stands on the battle-plain of life in his chariot of mortal flesh drawn by the horses of his sense-faculties;—those horses which may be controlled and intelligently guided by his reason, or which he may suffer to make away and carry him to destruction. Around and within him is a world of difficulties and foes, physical obstacles without and spiritual perils within, from passions, lusts, pride, hate, and all uncharitableness; the flesh always lusting against the spirit, the spirit straining to subdue the flesh. Is it the lot of his life that his higher faculties are to fight and utterly destroy his lower nature? Is he not to indulge those organs of flesh and intellect and sense, to give rein to the propensities

of his physical body and mental faculties, but rather to subordinate and, if need be, exterminate them? If so, why was he endowed with them? And if he cry out, as Arjuna did, "Better to die than to fight against what is part of my very self; better be killed by, than kill part of, my own nature"; if he exclaim, as did another and a later writer, "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?"—then still there remains within him the "God in the car." The voice of conscience, the voice of the divine principle within the deep recesses of his being, re-echoing the voice of the Supreme Himself of Whom it is a part, speaks to him in his hour of misery and says, as it were, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. Arise; take up your bow and fight."

This, then, the spiritual conflict that arises within each one of us—unhappy we, if it does not—is the real theme underlying the external sense of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

And it is of the result of this supreme conflict that the blind king asks to be informed. What a delicate, beautiful touch is here! The blind king, type of blind humanity, asking for the light of divine revelation upon the deep problems of life, of the soul, of man, and of what is higher than man.

"Take up your bow and fight!" [1] answers Krishna, driver of Arjuna's chariot, and emblem of the divine, guiding principle within us all. You grieve unwisely; you cannot kill or be killed, for you and your kinsmen are all immortal spirits, and though the body be slain in the performance of your obvious duties in life, you and they alike are in essence indestructible and will continue ever to live on. Shrink from, or decline to perform, your allotted and obvious duty, you will earn disgrace that is worse than death. But, beyond that, you can never be actionless by shunning action. Life, whether the worldly life or the inner life of the soul, is motion, action.

[1] Cf. Eph. vi. 12-17.

You may do something "to help the rolling wheels of this great world," or stand silent and let them roll over *you*. But action must go on.

> Therefore arise, brace
> Thine arm for conflict, nerve thy heart to meet—
> As things alike to thee—pleasure or pain,
> Profit or ruin, victory or defeat;
> So minded, gird thee to the fight, for so
> Thou shalt not sin.[1]

The doctrine of this book inculcates throughout the necessity of never shirking life and the duty that lies nearest. It assumes that man is not master of the circumstances which surround him,—Providence, not he, is responsible for them,—and the station in life to which Providence, or, if you will, the cosmic Power, has been pleased to call a man, is a position he must never on any account desert. Come good or ill, wealth or poverty, health or disease, go through with your duty always regardless of results. Motive is everything, consequence nothing. In the whole universe

[1] *Gita*, ii. 37, 38.

there is nothing of which you can say, it is *mine*. You, with your faculties and possessions, are but an instrument in the hands of a higher power—a pawn in the cosmic game. Fulfil action then, but pay no heed to the fruits of action whether they mean for you profit or pain. If they mean worldly profit, it is only given you in trust to do good to others; if pain, an inscrutable law means it for your own good. Thus this virile teaching of the *Gita* is intended for the man of action and affairs; it is a rebuke to all weak-hearts who shrink from the world; to all recluses and ascetics who seek to evade responsibility by undue self-mortification and by withdrawal from the world of action into the quiet of the cloister.

> He that abstains
> To help the rolling wheels of this great world,
> Glutting his idle sense, lives a lost life
> Shameful and vain. Existing for himself,
> Self-concentrated, serving self alone,
> No part hath he in aught.[1]

[1] *Gita*, iii. 16, 17. The tendency of modern thought is well expressed in the following words:—"Man need fear

So far, as regards a man's rule of conduct, his actions or "works." But action in the world is not all. A man still has to lead a private, an inner life. He is *in* the world; but he should not be *of* it. While performing his daily outward task, he still should cultivate his soul and keep himself unspotted from the world. But how is he to do this? Most of us recognise the abstract truth of such teaching; few of us know how to obey it, and this almost always from want of knowledge of ourselves. We do not discern, we are not much taught in the West to discriminate between, the real and the illusory, the temporal and the eternal. Education is nearly wholly utilitarian. Life is conducted on more or less confused and haphazard lines; we "muddle through" it as best we may. But Eastern

nothing. There is nothing to run away from. Cowardice is now out of fashion (asceticism was cowardice). We now propose to face the whole of life, pursue it through to the end, and find all there is in it, and all for the glory of God."—H. W. Dresser, *Power of Silence* (Putnams), p. 346.

minds, ages ago, thought out, and thought out correctly, problems which we younger races with our modern science are only now beginning to attack. In Browning's words,[1] these thinkers of India "intended to get to God," to learn something of the Power that rules the universe, of His relations to man, and of the methods to be employed in entering into touch with Him. And they saw clearly, and embodied their perceptions in their two chief systems of philosophy (the *Sankhya* and the *Yoga*), that there were two methods of doing so. One was by science or head-knowledge, by perceiving God in Nature; the other by mystical religious communion with the Supreme Spirit, or heart-wisdom. They saw that both roads led to the same goal; but one was an intellectual road; the other, one that engaged the moral feeling and spiritual faculties of man. These two separate systems long existed side by side, each

[1] *Johannes Agricola in Meditation.*

having its own devotees. But it was the glory of the author of the *Bhagavad Gita* to blend the two into one, to marry science to religion, and to inculcate the combination of intellectual power with the intuition of the heart, so that the whole man—body, mind, and spirit—might be perfected. And thus, when Arjuna asks Krishna to expound the rules of life and conduct, he is taught that knowledge is good,—it will teach you to discriminate between the real and the unreal, between good and evil,—and right action is good; but the cultivation of the divine principle within, the orientation of the individual will to the Divine Will, is best, and the inspirer of both knowledge and action.

The right act
Is less, far less, than the right thinking mind.
Seek refuge in thy soul; have there thy heaven....
Govern thy heart! Constrain th' entangled sense,
Resist the false, soft sinfulness which saps
Knowledge and judgment! Yea! the world is strong,
But what discerns it stronger, and the mind
Strongest; and high o'er all the ruling Soul.

Wherefore, perceiving Him who reigns supreme,
Put forth full force of Soul in thy own soul!
Fight! vanquish foes and doubts, dear Hero! slay
What haunts thee in fond shapes and would betray.[1]

Then is it that Krishna speaks of Himself as the Logos, the indwelling principle in all things, "without which nothing has been made that is made." And He has appeared in incarnate form to reveal man to himself, to show that He subsists in all matter and all life, and that man, by cultivating the divine principle, which dwells within him concealed beneath the folds of flesh and the faculties of sense, may transcend the physical world while still in it, and bring himself into communion with the all-enfolding God, and find peace among the whirlpools and shifting sands of the material plane. This is the great Indian method of *Yoga* (a word implying union or yoke), a system of spiritual development by means of rigorous physical repression, with which may be contrasted

[1] *Gita*, iii. 38–42.

(and possibly was intended to be contrasted) that inculcated in the familiar words of our own Gospel, "Take *My* yoke upon you and learn of *Me*; for My yoke is *easy*, and My burden is light, and you shall find rest unto your souls."

The *Gita* may be divided into three parts of six books each. The first six are devoted to the exposition of the principles of knowledge, the use and practical application of science and religion. They emphasise the need and utility of both, but the predominant note struck, and ever struck and insisted on throughout the work, is the demand for personal religion; not doctrinal priest-made theology and ceremonial, — even over-reliance on the letter of Scripture is expressly warned against, — but direct contact and at-one-ment of the soul with the Spirit of Truth. We cannot all learn science and philosophy; and if we did, and did no more, our unaided intellects would often lead us

astray. But it is in the province of all to be pure in heart, and to keep the mind open, expectant and responsive to the inspiration of the Supreme Spirit which is around and in us all.

Whoso thus
Discerneth Me in all, and all in Me,
I never let him go; nor looseneth he
Hold upon Me; but dwell he where he may
What'er his life, in Me he dwells and lives,
Because he knows and worships Me who dwell
In all which lives, and cleaves to Me in all.[1]

The second six books pass on to speak of the nature of God Himself; to tell how He has come to create the world and all matter and life, which are but manifestations of His thought. He sublies all things, else could they not exist at all; they hang on Him as a row of pearls upon a string. The world of Nature, even the very *qualities* of the material world, are His; the silver of the moon, the gold of the sun, the smell of the rain-washed earth, the holiness of souls, the wisdom of the

[1] *Gita*, vi. 30–32.

wise, the intellect of the informed, the splendour of the splendid,—all are manifestations of Him, and, as such, may be discerned by the mind which approaches in spirit and in truth. He is a God that hides Himself behind a magic veil of shows, "yet they who worship Me pierce it and pass beyond." The "Real Presence" *is* in all things. "Raise the stone and there thou shalt find Me; cleave the wood and there am I." [1] Every act done with good motive, and done for the Highest, is a Sacrament. But He is not known to evildoers and the foolish who are cheated by the outside show of things.

> Four sorts of mortals know Me; he who weeps,
> Arjuna; and the man who yearns to know;
> And he who toils to help; and he who sits
> Certain of Me, enlightened. .
> All four are good, and seek Me; but Mine own,
> The true of heart and faithful, stayed on Me,
> Taking Me as their utmost blessedness,—
> They are not "Mine," but I,—even I Myself.[2]

[1] *Logia Jesu* (1897), 5.
[2] *Gita*, vii. 16–18. Cf. John xvii. 10, 11, 21, 23.

And there follows a magnificent revelation of pre-Christian Christianity. Krishna, speaking of Himself as the manifestation of Deity, refers to men of other faiths, to less advanced religions. Though they be labouring in the dark and worshipping idols or false Gods, not having received the full light of revelation, still He observes and accepts the homage of them all. The idolater, the low-caste, the pariah; "*Whosoever* cometh is in no wise cast out"; "'Tis I who give them faith"; "All the shrines flame unto Me"; for is He not Himself the impulse and inspirer of all worship, even if it be misdirected? And He speaks in these tender and surpassingly beautiful words:—

I am the Sacrifice! I am the Prayer. . . .
Nay, and of hearts which follow other Gods
In simple faith, their prayers arise to Me,
O Kunti's son, though they pray wrongfully.
For I am the Receiver and the Lord
Of every sacrifice. . . .
And whoso loveth Me, cometh to Me.
Whoso shall offer Me in faith and love

A leaf, a flower, a fruit, water poured forth,[1]
That offering I accept, lovingly made. . . .
I am alike for all. . . . What is made is Mine.
But them that worship Me with love, I love.
They are in Me and I in them.[2]

Gradually, as Krishna unfolds the mystery of His own divinity, we are led up to the central episode of the poem. There is, I think, but one other such incident recorded in any literature, and even that is very meagrely related by the Christian Evangelists. Perhaps intentionally they left it for our imagination to conceive, rather than suffered it to be prejudiced by a feeble verbal description. I mean, of course, the incident of the Transfiguration, —that transcendent event which produced such an overwhelming effect upon the minds of its few witnesses, one of whom long afterwards still spoke in amazement and with bated breath of what happened upon that night "when they were with Him on the holy mount."[3] Here, in the

[1] Cf. Matt. x. 42. [2] *Gita*, ix. 23–30.
[3] II Pet. i. 17–18.

Gita, the language of the poem gradually gathers force; a statelier metre is employed, as at length the Prince Arjuna prays the Lord Krishna to show Himself in the fulness of His Divine Nature. But mortal eyes are not fitted for such a vision; and so, as the prophet Elisha once caused the eyes of his servant to be opened and become capable of seeing the invisible powers that surrounded and protected them,[1] so Krishna opens the sensorium of Arjuna's soul and bids him behold. Suddenly, in a blaze of supernal glory, the Deity is revealed. The whole panorama of heaven and earth is seen engulfed and moving within the flaming radiance of the divine nature. The universe, in all its hugeness and diversity, is perceived as blended into, and constituting the body of, God. The celestial powers are singing the "Sanctus" amid the stars and rainbows of heaven; the unseen powers of Nature, the souls of all the quick and all

[1] II Kings, vi. 17.

the dead, are visibly garnered and husbanded within the compass of their Creator and Sustainer's form. Worlds and systems of worlds are created from and disappear into it. Time past and time to come are merged in one eternal present. The cataclysms of Nature, wars and strivings, all the good and evil of life, are seen to be fulfilling their appointed course within the selfsame sphere. Uncountable souls, fashioned out of the life of the Supreme, appear in this world of forms and time, and are drawn back again into the devouring vortex whence they sprang. The terrific and incomprehensible splendour of the divine spectacle, upon which no mortal man has looked, grows and waxes, until, from sheer inability to behold it longer, Arjuna cries out in agony and prays that the glory may depart from him, that his power of vision may be withdrawn, and that he may be again as he was ere his soul's eyes were opened. So the vision vanishes, and in the chariot there are left the two men only,

the God-man and his disciple, the prince, who now has learned the lesson the whole poem is designed to teach—that all things rest in, and are controlled by, the hands of the Supreme Power; that they are manifestations of Him; that the material world is a shadow, and the spiritual world the one true reality; that human life is indestructible and part of the divine life; that its true home is in the bosom of its Maker, who is waiting for it to become perfect that He may receive it back into Himself.

How is weak and frail humanity to attain that perfection that shall enable it to escape the "wheel of re-birth" and the limitations of this physical world, "which is the place of pain"? This is the question Arjuna raises when the vision has been withdrawn. And the answer is, by the constant contemplation of the eternal in the midst of the temporal; by the turning away from the things of the flesh and embracing the things of the spirit; by the

performance of duty irrespective of its results; by charity of thought and deed, and compassion for all men; by self-conquest and utter self-renunciation, the complete reversal and extinction of all that pertains to one's lower and selfish nature. It is a hard path, says Krishna, to travel; few can tread it; sooner or later, in this or some subsequent incarnation, *all* must tread it; but whosoever does everything as not for himself but for the Highest, and as an instrument of the Highest,

Renouncing self for Me; full of Me, fixed
To serve only the Highest, night and day
Musing on Me—him will I swiftly lift
Forth from life's ocean of distress and death,
Whose soul clings fast to Me. Cling thou to Me!
Clasp Me with heart and mind! So shalt thou dwell
Surely with Me on high. But if thy thought
Droops from such height; if thou be'st weak to set
Body and soul upon Me constantly,
Despair not! Give me lower service! Seek
To reach Me, worshipping with steadfast will;
And if thou canst not worship steadfastly,
Work for Me; toil in works pleasing to Me!
For he that laboureth right for love of Me
Shall finally attain. But if in this

Thy weak heart fails, bring Me thy failure! find
Refuge in Me! let fruits of labour go,
Renouncing hope for Me, with lowliest heart,
So shalt thou come; for though to know is more
Than diligence, yet worship better is
Than knowing, and renouncing better still.
Near to renunciation—very near
Dwelleth Eternal Peace.[1]

I confess I know not where in English or any other literature, except in our own Fourth Gospel, to find anything to match this ineffable passage, these words so convincingly divine. Merely as literature it is superb, a fitting body of speech for the transcendently beautiful spirit of sacred truth enshrined in them. The appeal for the surrender of the human soul, with its *crescendo* moving in an order inverse to the degree of surrender asked for, until the lowest type of worship becomes as exalted as the highest, and its culmination in the sublime paradoxes, "Bring Me thy failure" and "Renouncing

[1] *Gita*, xii. 6–12.

hope for Me,"[1] is a supreme triumph of thought and expression, to be compared only with some such passage as the "She hath done what she could" of the Christian Master. Our chief of critics, Matthew Arnold, was wont to say that the climax of Shakespeare's literary art was reached in the last speech of the dying Hamlet to his friend Horatio, containing the phrase

Absent thee from felicity awhile,

with its striking juxtaposition of antithetical ideas. But, in my judgment, not even our great Shakespeare or Milton themselves surpassed, if ever they equalled, the magnificent lines in which the nameless author of the *Bhagavad Gita* uttered what the heart of Divinity conceivably might

[1] The profound truth of this phrase will be apparent chiefly to those familiar with the experiences of the great Christian mystics—*e.g.*, St John of the Cross, Behmen, Molinos, and Mdme. Guyon.

speak when addressing Himself in human words to the heart of man.

Of the third part, the last six books, of the poem, I propose to say but little. They treat chiefly of details of metaphysical and ethical questions — matters upon which the Eastern mind is peculiarly prone and trained to refine, but which can hardly be dealt with in a general outline of the work like the present. To appreciate it, moreover, requires some little acquaintance with Oriental philosophy generally; and consideration of the problems dealt with is suited rather to examination in the study than in the present pages. After dealing with these matters, one last passionate outburst of pleading from Krishna to Arjuna brings the poem almost to its close. It is the final appeal to the soul to leave aside the letter, the ceremonial, the outward forms of religion, and to seek and become at-oned with the Supreme alone. Krishna calls it "the royal secret."

Nay, but once more
Take My last word; My utmost meaning have!
Precious thou art to Me; right well-beloved!
Listen; I tell thee for thy comfort this;
Give Me thy heart! adore Me! serve Me! cling
In faith and love and reverence to Me!
And let go those
Rites and writ duties! Fly to Me alone!
Make Me thy single refuge! I will free
Thy soul from all its sins! Be of good cheer![1]

And with this the poem ends, giving way to the action of the epic of which it was written to form a part. The prince, persuaded and nerved by what has been revealed to him, exclaims:—

Trouble and ignorance are gone! The Light
Hath come unto me by Thy favour, Lord!
Now am I fixed! my doubt is fled away!
According to Thy word, so will I do.

He takes up his bow and drives into the fight.

And we too, moved by this marvellous piece of speculation about God, the soul, and the universe, may well take up our bows, and amid the illusory, the evan-

[1] *Gita*, xviii. 64–66.

escent, and the temporal, fight with head and heart for the real, the true, and the eternal. For that, to whatever country or creed we belong, is the end and purpose of life; and towards that end, it seems to me, is directed the whole drift of modern science and the present fermentation of thought in regard to religious belief and scriptural criticism. And, in the light of these present-day events, the publication of translations of these Indian Scriptures, and the new methods of regarding truth which they afford us, is a fact of considerable significance. Our social life, our scientific and religious thought, are undergoing transition. The ice of tradition and prejudice is cracking in all directions in preparation for a new revelation of truth, and for the conflux of many streams of thought that hitherto have run in separate channels; —of which I will say more in a moment.

Why, it may be asked, has not the high doctrine we have been considering redeemed India? Why has her religious

thought in large measure sunk from such lofty ideals and degenerated into a number of conflicting and often debased systems? Why has it not broken down and extirpated the system of caste, which in India forms such an insurmountable obstacle to social progress, to ethical advance, and to human brotherhood? In answer, let us first observe that nineteen centuries of Christendom have not converted Europe into a paradise. But, to my view, time has been required in both East and West to allow certain seedlings of thought and knowledge and religion to germinate, to mature, and spread their roots and tentacles far and wide, until a stage of growth is reached from which a general, simultaneous, and world-wide advance is possible throughout the whole area of human interests. And, in my judgment, that stage has been reached; the time is at hand. A great man, a great teacher, the exponent of a great idea, always delivers it long before he or his message are appre-

ciated or even understood. But his influence never ceases to radiate; his message, "like a circle in the water, which never ceaseth to enlarge itself," is continually spreading and, as it spreads, revealing fresh aspects of truth. As it has been with the Christian Gospel, so also is it with this gospel of Krishna. There are so many points in common between the two, that we shall be unwise not to consider how far they are in harmony, and how much each can learn from the other in matters about which, at present, they differ or are ignorant. I do not for a moment suggest that Christians are likely to accept Hinduism as their faith—(I am arguing for the contrary proposition)—but I see so much Christianity in Hinduism at its best, that I see the chance of each learning something from the other, and foresee the chance of both ultimately becoming blended under a common Head to whom both can give allegiance. "For well-nigh two thousand years the *Bhagavad Gita* has swayed

with ever-growing power the mind and heart of India. Millions have heard it, read it, taught it, and found in it largest hope for the soul's God-ward striving. And their belief has not been utterly vain, for the *Gita* has a gospel to deliver, telling of a consecration of life's every work to the selfless service of God, and an Infinite Love that at every place and every time pours forth its illimitable grace to all that seek after it."[1] To which I may add that innumerable minds in Europe and America have felt the beauty, and been swayed by the power, of this same Scripture of the distant East, and that not a few men and women in our midst to-day, who, struggling to emancipate themselves from "rites and writ duties" and the dead formalism of conventional orthodoxy, have lost their Christian faith and become agnostic in the crisis of religious thought

[1] Introduction to Dr Barnett's edition of the *Gita* (Dent's Temple Classics).

through which we have been passing, have found it again, and found it higher and stronger, through coming upon the *spirit* of truth that burns within this little, priceless book.

The very natural questions arise—Was this work composed before or after the Christian era? and, if after, was its composition influenced by Christian thought? There is some difference of view among those best qualified to judge as to the date of the work. The weight of opinion seems to favour the view that it was the product of about the third century A.D. In support of this view there are, besides the internal evidence, traditions that Christ Himself visited India, and that St Thomas visited the East upon an evangelising mission and became "the Apostle of India." On the other hand, the Hindu translator of the work for the official series of *Sacred Books of the East*, argues that it is of pre-Christian date. The problem, however interesting, is, I think, not urgent. Such

studies as I have been able to make of the great religions, and of human psychological processes, lead me to the conviction that this work may have been produced quite independently of influence from, or contact with, Christian doctrine. It is, I think, quite possible that it has proceeded from a non-Christian mind entirely upon its own merits, and is the natural inevitable product of the evolution of religious and philosophical thought conducted through centuries upon such lofty and penetrating lines as has been the case with that of India. Ultimate religious truth is one; the human heart in all ages is the same. Probe down deeply enough into the human soul, which, as Tertullian said, is "naturally Christian"; seek into the mysteries of life and nature as far as the mind can penetrate; give the heart free rein to its own intuitions; and there is, and can be, for different races and nations of men, only one ultimate prize awaiting discovery. If we believe in a common parent Power for the whole world,

call we Him God or Brahma; if we accept the unity of all mankind, regarding all races and colours of men as essentially brothers (*brahtaras*, as the Sanskrit term is, or children of Brahma), there can be but one ultimate goal of truth for all, by whatever devious roads and forms of religion they may reach it. Some day, in the inevitable course of the world's evolution, they will all form "one fold under one shepherd."

To show this, then, has been my motive in writing the present essay. If further argument be needed, look at the signs of the times, and at the way in which events are developing. The world is filling up. There remain no more continents to discover; we know the extent and limitations of our dwelling place. Knowledge latterly has been increasing by leaps and bounds. All the races of the world may share it, and, thanks to modern developments of science, have been brought into close and immediate touch with one another. The time has come for a closer union of all

races, for the greater development of the latent potencies of humanity as a whole, for the formulation of common ideals whereby to regulate life and conduct, so that there may be universal peace upon earth and goodwill among men, without which no progress is possible. On either flank of the great Euro-Asian continent lies an island power, and to each of them,—their recently accomplished alliance is a happy augury and significant fact,—has been committed the task of teaching liberty and unfurling the flag of civilisation to other nations interposed between them. One of these powers is Christian. The prevailing creed of the other is Buddhism, which is an offshoot from Brahmanism, as Protestantism is an offshoot from the Roman Church. But the welcome and encouraging announcement has recently been made through the Professor of Religious Philosophy at Tokio,[1] that Buddhists are prepared to recognise their own religion

[1] M. Anesaki, *Hibbert Journal*, October 1905.

and Christianity as one; that, on studying the lives and doctrine of the two greatest religious teachers of the world, they can see Christ in Buddha and Buddha in Christ. Now, in the very centre of the great continent through which the combined influence and ideals of Britain and Japan must henceforth radiate, lies India, whose highest religious thought, as I have already shown, is so obviously akin to Christianity, and which holds many fundamental beliefs in common with Buddhism. Thus, at these three strategic points, the ground is already prepared for the up-growth and dissemination, from seeds already long since sown, of a common faith under a common Divinity, Who may be discerned to have manifested Himself at different epochs, according to the needs of the peoples and the conditions of the times, in the persons of the great Avataras — Krishna and Christ.[1] Missionary and

[1] Buddha is regarded in the East not as an Incarnation of Deity, but as a type of humanity perfected by obedience to the doctrines taught in the Indian Scriptures.

proselytising work has been, and is to-day, the characteristic of both Buddhism and Christianity. There is no need to disparage or neglect it, due regard being paid (as often it is not) to the claims to respect of other faiths. But the conversion of the world to a common faith will not be accomplished by missionaries alone.[1] The forces that some day, and I think a not far distant day, will mould the kingdoms of the world and bring them into line under a comprehensive, enlarged, and ennobled Christianity, are already existent within the great creeds of the world themselves, and under the sure guidance of Providence will be seen to unfold and manifest themselves, when the due time comes, without much help from us. Western religious and scientific thought, at the present time, are in the melting-pot, and Orientals know it. Presently something will emerge which will be capable

[1] See "The Failure of Missions in India," by Dr Josiah Oldfield, *Hibbert Journal*, 1902–3, p. 486, for the reasons at present preventing the reconciliation of Christianity and Hinduism.

of blending and finding acceptance with the minds of Hindus; the more cultured of whom, let it not be forgotten, are far more familiar with the Bible and Western philosophy than are we with the sublime teaching of their own Scriptures.

It is, then, not from mere fancifulness that, in concluding this all too brief and elementary introduction to the *Bhagavad Gita*, and in indicating the significance that attaches to its growing popularity in the West to-day, I invoke for those who hear or read it, and also for myself, the moving and beautiful benediction which at the end of the poem the Lord Krishna speaks to those who reverently impart and receive its message:—

> Hide, the holy Krishna saith,
> This from him that hath no faith . .
> But wherever 'mid the flock
> Of My lovers one shall teach
> This divinest, wisest speech . . . .
> Unto Brahma cometh he.
> Nay, and nowhere shall ye find
> Any man of all mankind

Doing dearer deed for Me;
Nor shall any dearer be
In my earth. Yea, furthermore,
Whoso reads this converse o'er
Held by us upon the plain,
Pondering piously and fain,
He hath paid Me sacrifice.
(Krishna speaketh in this wise).

If the task of giving forth this slight introduction to one of the noblest of the Scriptures of the East, and calling attention to its relation to Western thought of the present day, is, as that Scripture itself states, an act of sacrifice to the Power that moulds the faiths and destinies of nations, it is one that is and ought to be cheerfully, yet humbly, offered. It may, I hope, stimulate other minds, and so help to advance the coming of events in the world's progress which to me appear to be inevitable and full of blessing to mankind. If, in any measure, I succeed in my desire, it is well. If I fail,—is it not well also? For I can take refuge in the bidding of Him who inspired this wonderful work, and

"Bring Him my failure."