

THE VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY.

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I.

TWO things seem to me to distinguish our philosophy in the West from the philosophy of India, especially in its golden age. Without disrespect one may say of Western Philosophy that it has always held a somewhat subordinate and secondary position; it has leaned for support against some other teaching or science or study, drawing its color therefrom. This is true even of Plato, great and august though he be; for Plato's philosophy is entangled amid dialectics, and rests thereon, so that a learned Hellenist has said that the heart of Plato's teaching is Socrates, and the glory of Socrates is to have revealed the scientific nature of a definition.

In the early Church, and on through the Middle Ages, philosophy leaned upon theology, and was deeply tinged with theologic coloring. Philosophy did not for itself seek out the heart of the mystery, but accepted as firmly fixed and established, what theology gave it. The schoolmen and the whole scholastic system illustrate this; and their work now suffers from the very relation which once gave it power and popularity.

Then came the great age of Bacon and Newton; the age of experiment and induction. And philosophy straightway began to lean on mathematics and physics. The rationalist systems of England and France, as for instance the Voltairean view and that of the Encyclopedists, see the universe through the spectacles of physics.

So it went on for two centuries, till a great man arose, as great perhaps, as Newton himself, and, like Newton, a gentle and child-like heart, a singularly lovable and winning spirit. His star rose, and the philosophers straightway began to swear into the word of Charles Darwin. Everything was biologized, and seen in the light of evolutionary natural history. Most of our modern philosophic thinking is soaked with Darwinism; the conclusions of Darwin

are taken as the axioms of philosophy, even now, when many of these conclusions are beginning to wear the air of heresy to the latest biologist. He is a brave philosopher at the present hour, who will dare to hold as questionable the Darwinian materialistic view, and will boldly declare that all great matters are still to be sought out and examined.

In India, it is, and in the golden age it was even more strikingly otherwise. There philosophy, Vidya, wisdom, stood boldly on its own feet, and begged support and countenance from no fashionable science or belief.

In India, all things led up to philosophy, to wisdom. Old India recognized six great schools of thought. Of these, the Vaisheshika, or atomic, led up to logic or Nyaya, which had a distinctly transcendental color. In the same way, the Sankhya or rational system was but the forerunner, making straight the way for Yoga, devotionism. And finally, theology, the Purva Mimansa of the Rig Veda, opened up the mind and heart for Uttara Mimansa, the Vedanta itself.

So all castes and occupations led up to the high occupation of the sage and mystic. Artisan and farmer were ruled by the warriors, who, with the Brahmans, possessed the mystic tradition. Amongst warriors and priests, he was greatest who gave up all things for wisdom, for philosophy. And so with the traditional course of life, as it was held before all the twice-born: those who, born the first time to the natural world, were born again to the pursuit of wisdom through initiation. First came the age of pupilage; then the adolescent for five and twenty years lived as a householder, a citizen and father; then came complete renunciation, and all the remaining years were given to philosophy, to wisdom and the search for the divine. To that all roads led. All studies were the preparation for it; all orders and ages of men acknowledged its supremacy. Philosophy was not a recreation for the student; it was the supreme end of life.

II.

The other difference between Western and Eastern philosophy is even more fundamental. Western philosophy, almost without exception, draws all its conclusions from our waking consciousness, and treats other modes of consciousness either as non-existent, or as mere vagaries and reflections, almost as morbid conditions of bodily life. The most methodical study of these states to-day is made in France, and is there a branch of the study of nerve-disease.

It is the great business of certain physicians, and is a department of pathology.

Good old Locke, in his matter of fact British way, used to say that when a man slept, he was as little conscious, whether of pleasure or pain, as was the bed or the mattress; and until the pathologists took the matter up, there it rested with all Locke's limitations on its head. Even among the researchers into things psychic, there is almost universally an unconscious conviction that the visible world is the solid fact, with which all psychic novelties must be made to square. Every one of us Western folk, if we are pushed, will admit that we believe, not so much in the communion of saints, as in the solid universe of matter, which geologist and chemist tell us of, and we bank on its reality, so to speak, in the practical conduct of our lives. To judge by our acts, we assuredly believe that "when the brains are out, the man is dead"; apparitions of Banquo to the contrary notwithstanding.

Yet through all this tacit materialism runs a warp of something quite different; something which for a generation or more, since Darwin ceased to be a startling novelty, has been slipping into the popular consciousness; something which makes the Indian position much more intelligible. Almost imperceptibly, we are beginning genuinely to believe in other modes of consciousness, besides that waking state which, to Locke, was all in all. We are feeling our way through a mass of contradictory data concerning the trance states of mediums, clairvoyance, telepathy and the like; and if all goes well, we may presently reach the point at which the Indian wisdom began.

In antique India they studied science. They had certain sound conclusions in astronomy; they had pushed far in geometry and mathematics, and even to-day, we are using the numerical system of India, though we speak of the "Arabic" figures, giving credit to the Arab traders who brought them to the West. The most sordid money-grubber cannot add up his dollars and cents without being indebted to ancient India for the figures in his account book. They had even a very suggestive evolutionary theory in some things forshadowing Laplace and Darwin.

But the followers of the higher way, the seekers after wisdom, made no great concern of these preliminary matters; they pushed on boldly towards the great Beyond. And one might say that they held the visible world as useful chiefly for its imagery, making it yield symbols to express the world ordinarily deemed invisible.

III.

Waking consciousness, so far from being the whole matter with the sages of India, is held to be merely the region outside the threshold. The sun is for them a good symbol of the spirit; the moon is a handy image for the changing mind; the atmosphere, with its storms and lightnings, does well to represent the emotional realm; fire typifies vitality, the rivers and seas are the tides of life. But the real world lies beyond and must be sought with other eyes.

They do not, however, find this reality in the world of dreams; though of that world they have many wise things so say.

There are many good things concerning dreams in the older Upanishads. Two of them may well be quoted. The first is in the fourth answer, in the Upanishad of the Questions, where, speaking of the mind in sleep, the master says: "So this bright one in dream enjoys greatness. The seen, as seen he beholds again. What was heard, as heard he hears again. And what was enjoyed by the other powers, he enjoys again by the other powers. The seen and the unseen, heard and unheard, enjoyed and unenjoyed, real and unreal, he sees it all; as all he sees it." That is a very simple and direct way of saying that the impressions and mind-pictures received in waking, become the objects of consciousness once again during sleep. The mind once more surveys them; they are once more reviewed, and paraded before the consciousness.

Much more vivid and picturesque is a passage in the fourth part of the longest of the old Upanishads, the Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad: "When the spirit of man enters into rest, drawing his material from this all-containing world, felling the wood himself, and himself building the dwelling, the spirit of man enters into dream, through his own shining, through his own light. Thus does the spirit of man become his own light. There are no chariots there, nor steeds for chariots, nor roadways. The spirit of man makes himself chariots, steeds for chariots and roadways. Nor are any delights there, nor joys and rejoicings. The spirit of man makes for himself delights and joys and rejoicings. There are no lotus ponds there, nor lakes and rivers. The spirit of man makes for himself lotus ponds, lakes and rivers. For the spirit of man is creator." A little further on, we read: "They also say that dream is a province of waking. For whatever he sees while awake, the same he sees in dream."

So far, this is all plain sailing. The mind makes images of objects of waking consciousness; and then, in dream, looks over

its color-photograph collection, so to speak. Shankara uses almost the same image. He says that mind-images are "like colored pictures painted on canvas," and that, in dream, we review our canvases. All this throws a very valuable reflex light on our understanding of waking life. We see that our consciousness of the material world, through the five senses, makes up only a part of our waking life; that another, and vastly important part, is made up of mind-images, pictures made by the mind from material objects, which the mind then views directly as a separate and new realm of objects, with which it can deal directly, and with very momentous results.

One is at once led to ask the question: where are these mind-images printed, and on what material? A question easier asked than answered. It is the fashion to assume that pictures are printed in the tissue of the brain; but that is pure hypothesis, as no one has ever seen them there, and it is by no means probable that any one ever will. It is quite likely that every impression passing over the nerves through the brain leaves some change in molecular structure, as a record of its presence, and this is true in a large general way. It is certain, for instance, that the hands of a musician are altered in their molecular structure by constant practice on a given instrument, so that one may say, and truly say, that every piece of music he has ever played has left its imprint in his fingers. So, one may imagine, every dinner we have eaten has left its record in other organs, in a kind of sub-conscious gastronomic memory. Yet it is difficult to believe that the molecular tissue of the brain is the real treasure-house of the mind, subtle and wonderful organ though the brain be. And, as we said, the whole thing is a pure hypothesis. What we do know for certain is, that our mind-images are exact duplicates in form and color, in movement even, of their originals; and that they wear better than any part of our bodily structure, those of early childhood coming out with wonderful vividness even in the closing years of a long life, after every particle of the body has been changed scores of times, by natural waste and renewal. We know our mind-images directly, as mind-images, and there strictly speaking the matter ends.

One might write a treatise on their relation to reason and imagination; showing how general notions are gained by overlaying one mind-image on another, until a composite photograph is formed; thus, laying our pictures of red apples, green apples, yellow apples, and brown apples one on another, we get a general composite picture, which is none of these colors, or is all of them, and so comes our notion of an apple in the abstract. So with the imagination; we

do unconsciously what Praxiteles is reputed to have done; we take the face of one, the shoulders of another, the body of a third, the legs of a fourth, and thus make up an ideal figure. Or we add the wings of birds or butterflies to the bodies of boys and girls, and so fill the air with angels. It is all a matter of blended mind-images, which, as Shankara says, are like pictures painted on canvas, and which we can paint pretty much as we please.

IV.

Now comes a fascinating question. Granted that each one of us has our collection of color-photographs and phonograph-records, our picture-galleries of mind-images, is it possible for us to peep into each others' rooms, to see each others' pictures? There is an immense amount of evidence showing that it is. For one who wishes to take up the a b c of the matter, there is a series of diagrams in the earliest volumes of the Society for Psychic Research, which should put the question to rest. There are scores of figures actually drawn by one person who was looking into the mind-gallery of another, and their mistakes are as illuminating as their successes. Any one who wishes, may look the matter up.

But in general, we are all convinced that telepathy is possible; that impressions in one mind can be, and constantly are transferred to other minds; and of this, clairvoyance is only a more advanced form. So that not only can we ourselves review our picture-galleries of mind-images, but other people can, under certain conditions, peep at them also, seeing with more or less distinctness the images in our minds. This fact makes it still harder to believe that these images are in the tissue of the brain, and greatly inclines us to believe that they are in some sense printed in the ether, and on a different plane from the physical brain and the nervous system. It is a fact that we can print millions of mind-pictures in our galleries, and yet have each one perfect in color, form, and every detail. Or, let us count up the number of words in the mind of a good linguist, with all their shades of meaning and feeling; and it looks as if we needed a more sensitive and subtle medium than physical matter for our record.

Let us suppose, then, for argument's sake, that these mind-images are in the ether; that we have printed, more or less distinctly, more or less vividly, endless pictures of scenes which have passed before our bodily eyes; that we have selected and blended these pictures, so as to make a whole new world of derived images, not only of things seen, but of things heard, or perceived by the other

senses. These images, these etheric pictures, are, according to the Upanishad passages we have quoted, the objects of our dream-consciousness, which the mind once more reviews, when the body is asleep. The Upanishads go on, very consistently, to suppose that we are possessed of an etheric body which, during dream, is the vesture of the mind; in which the mind dwells, so to say, while the body is unconscious.

As to the possibility of other people peeping at our mind-images, the older Vedanta books admit it, but do not enlarge on it. That is done amply in the Buddhist suttas, where the whole theory of magical powers is practically built on this hypothesis. Patanjali also goes into the matter thoroughly, in his Yoga Sutras. Thought-transference, telepathy, clairvoyance and clairaudience are clearly recognized, and all are seen to depend on the power to see not only our own mind-images, but the mind-images of others, at a distance as well as nearby; and it is recognized that this power, like any other power of the mind, can be cultivated and developed.

If we accept the Indian idea of the mind's etheric body, of like texture with the mind-images, their theory of dreams becomes clear and illuminating. When the body sinks to sleep, the consciousness is withdrawn from it, and transferred to the mind-body. The mind-body is surrounded by the images printed in the mind's picture-gallery, during waking; and these pictures the mind then reviews, glancing from one to another, without any very obvious order or guiding thought.

Yet this disorder of the mind-images is not peculiar to dreams. A day-dream is just as disconnected, as cheerfully irresponsible. I have always thought that our waking reveries seem more ordered only because we are surrounded by ordered furniture or ordered nature; and that we attribute to the pictures an order really belonging to the frame. Let the mind run on for three minutes, and see if you can then trace back the steps it has taken. The result will shed a flood of light on the stage-management of dreams. In truth, unless the will orders and guides them, the mind-images have it pretty much their own way, floating before the inner sight in admired disorder.

v.

It is only after we pass through the region of dreams, that we come to the real home of Indian wisdom. Here is a pretty image, from the longest of the old Upanishads, immediately preceding the passage already quoted: "This spirit of man wanders through both worlds, yet remains unchanged. He seems only to be wrapt in

imaginings. He seems only to revel in delights. When he enters into rest, the spirit of man rises above this world and all things subject to death. . . . The spirit of man has two dwelling-places: both this world, and the other world. The borderland between them is the third, the land of dreams. While he lingers in the borderland, the spirit of man beholds both his dwellings: both this world and the other world," and it is with the consciousness of that other world, beyond the borderland of dreams that we are now concerned. In that third consciousness, say the old Indian books, dwell the answers to our darkest riddles, the words of our most hopeless enigmas.

Of the quality of that third consciousness, the old Indian scriptures say many things worthy of consideration. Let us begin with one of the simplest, from the fourth answer, in the Upanishad of the Questions: "When he is wrapt by the radiance, the bright one, mind, no longer dreams dreams. Then within him that bliss arises. And, dear, as the birds come to the tree to rest, so all this comes to rest in the higher self."

There is a fine archaic simplicity about this, which is very impressive. Here is another passage, of richer and warmer color: "As a great fish swims along one bank of the river, and then along the other bank, first the eastern bank and then the western, so the spirit of man moves through both worlds, the waking world and the dream world. Then, as a falcon or an eagle, flying to and fro in the open sky, and growing weary, folds his wings and sinks to rest, so of a truth the spirit of man hastens to that world where, finding rest, he desires no desire and dreams no dream. And whatever he has dreamed, as that he was slain or oppressed, crushed by an elephant or fallen into an abyss, or whatever fear he beheld in the waking world, he knows now that it was from unwisdom. Like a god, like a king, he knows he is the All. This is his highest world. This is his highest joy.

"He has passed beyond all evil. This is his fearless form. And as one who is wrapt in the arms of the beloved, knows nought of what is without or within, so the spirit of man wrapt round by the soul of inspiration, knows nought of what is without or within. This is his perfect being. He has won his desire. The soul is his desire. He is beyond desire. He has left sorrow behind."

It is difficult indeed in the records of Western philosophy to find any understanding of that third state of consciousness, in the region beyond the borderland of dreams. Yet there are one or two hints of it. Socrates, speaking to his judges of the death to which they have just condemned him, declares that any one, thinking of

some night when he sank so deeply into sleep as to dream no dreams at all, if he compare the bliss of that night with the best day or night of his life, will prefer that night of dreamlessness; and this not merely in the case of a private person, but even of the great king of Persia himself. If death be like this, he says, then death is a wonderful gain.

Thoreau again says certain wonderful things about the inspiration, the young breath of life, that sometimes lingers round us in the morning, bringing a clear wisdom, as of another world. And this comes close to the Indian teaching; for the Upanishads declare that, in the silence of dreamless sleep, the spirit of man does verily enter into the spiritual All, returning thence refreshed for another mortal day. And this not merely in the case of sages or saints, but, to invert the phrase of Socrates, in the case even of private persons, of humble and despised folk, of sinners and fools. The passage in the Sanskrit is well worth repeating. In this realm beyond the borderland of dreams "the father is father no more; nor the mother a mother; the thief is a thief no more; nor the murderer a murderer; nor the outcast an outcast; nor the baseborn, baseborn; the pilgrim is a pilgrim no longer, nor the saint a saint. For the spirit of man is not followed by good, he is not followed by evil. He has crossed over all the sorrows of the heart."

For the Indian sages, this third consciousness beyond the borderland is not merely a deeper sleep; it is rather the real awakening, a spiritual vision, in which the soul grows aware of spiritual things. They speak clearly of the mode of this consciousness, saying that the fivefold power of perception which, in waking, enters into the five senses, in dreamless sleep is once more withdrawn and unified into a single power, the vision of the soul, the faculty of inspiration. Just as the mind is able to withdraw itself from observation of the physical world, and to fix itself on the finer world of mind-images, which are the field of intellectual and imaginative life; so by a further raising of consciousness, the soul is able to pass beyond the world of mind-images, to the realm of divine principles which lies above them, and which has presided over the creation and ordering of the mind-images, in forms of beauty and truth.

VI.

Here, perhaps, we get a clue to the mystery. We are all very well aware that our mind-images, in the dreams of day and night alike, wander before the vision of the mind in aimless, purposeless multitudes, infinitely rich, infinitely varied, in infinite disorder. Thou-

sands and tens of thousands of pictures are there, and they float before us as little united in subject as the pictures hanging in some great gallery, from the hands of many masters, working in successive centuries, under different skies. Here a landscape, there a magnate, and next to them a crucifixion; then a view of trees, or some children at play, or a young girl's head. So with our mind-galleries, with the difference that now the spectator is at rest, and the pictures move. Yet nothing is more certain than that we can control these vagrant pictures; we can arrest one, and hold it before the mind's vision; can call up another that resembles it, and compare the two, seeing likenesses and differences. We can search with strong effort for some missing picture, which we nevertheless know is hid somewhere in the corners of the gallery, and can at last bring it up, just as one brings out an engraving from amongst many others in a portfolio. And this we do, with a certain purpose, under a consciously felt ruling power. We are propelled by the search for truth, by the sense of beauty, by the feeling of humanity. We marshal the mind-images on which science is built, and through the sense of truth draw forth general principles from a thousand imaged facts. So we create forms of beauty, under the impulsion of a power already in the mind, or working behind the mind. And among all the wealth of our mind-images, there are none of such moment as those of human beings, from whose association we finally gather the concept of human life as a whole, of unified humanity. But this we do, again under the impulsion of an inner power, the principle of charity, of humane love, which broods over all our thoughts of human beings, and slowly drives away the animal heritage, the thoughts of desire and hate. These ruling powers we are constantly conscious of; we use them perpetually, yet without discerning their full significance, perhaps. For in the view of Indian wisdom, these overruling principles are the apparitions of that spiritual realm which the soul wakes to, in dreamless sleep. Just as in waking life the world of mind-images is about us, coming between our inner vision and the outer world; so this finer spiritual world infuses itself into the mental world of the mind-images, controlling, transforming, arranging, illumining. And just as amongst thinkers and artists, he is eminent who, withdrawing his vision from the outer physical world, can most clearly behold the mind-images which make up the material of thought and feeling, of art and science; so amongst men he is to be accounted a saint and a sage who can raise his consciousness still further, so that it is filled and infused with the principles of that higher world beyond

the realm of dreams, that "light beyond the darkness," as another Indian scripture has it.

VII.

The Indian scriptures hold that we have access to these more refined worlds in two ways. There is, first, the broad and natural road, so to speak, that all men tread, and all creatures: the way of sleep, which all pass over day by day. Their inner selves enter into the hidden world of life, and refresh themselves there for another day's toil and weariness; but they come back dazzled with daylight, and forgetting their vision. Day by day they enter into the eternal, and know it not, as the rivers enter the ocean, and know it not. We all dream, but few of us remember our dreams. We all pass into the dreamless world, but still fewer of us bring back any consciousness of it. Our minds are too thronged with thoughts of this outer world, for those fine impresses to find a place.

This is the broad, general way. There is another, as yet trodden by few, but which all shall one day tread. Just as all dream, while but few dream wisely by day, and so dreaming become scientists and poets; so though all enter nightly into the inner world, few remember enough to find their way back again by daylight. Few "cease to dream dreams and desire desires," so that in them "that bliss" may arise. Yet these few are the sages and spiritual leaders of our race. And from that rare vision they draw the teachings of immortality and eternal life which for ages have brooded over our mortal humanity. They draw their teaching, say the Indian books, not at all from logic or reasoning, but from the direct experience of the soul in the world beyond dreams, and in that world alone can their teachings be verified.

Good morals consist in driving out the animal passions from our minds, and letting the higher potencies rule them from above; by so doing, we perfect ourselves in science, in art, in humanity; by so doing, we awake that consciousness in us, which is directly cognizant of spiritual essences, which has immediate experience of our immortality. The effort to do this, in the Eastern view, is genuine philosophy; and in the measure that immortality is superior to mortality is this effort superior to all other tasks and works in the world. "He who knows is therefore full of peace, lord of himself; he has ceased from false gods, he is full of endurance, he intends his will. . . . When all desires that were hid in the heart are let go, the mortal becomes immortal, and reaches the eternal."