

KARMA &  
REDEMPTION  
A.G.HOGG



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# KARMA AND REDEMPTION

*AN ESSAY TOWARD THE  
INTERPRETATION OF HINDUISM  
AND THE RE-STATEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY*

A. G. HOGG

*With an Introduction*

BY

ERIC J. SHARPE



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## INTRODUCTION

WHEN a book written more than sixty years ago is reprinted, it is usually for one of two reasons: either because it occupies an important place in the history of its subject, or because there are those who believe that it may still have something of value to contribute to present-day discussion. A. G. Hogg's *Karma and Redemption*, first published in book form in 1909, is being reissued for both these reasons, but before I say more about them, a few words are necessary about its author and about the circumstances which led him to write on this subject.

Alfred George Hogg (1875-1954) was a Scottish educational missionary who served the Madras Christian College from the time of his appointment in 1902 until his retirement in 1938, first as Professor of Philosophy and after 1928 as Principal. He was in many ways an unusual missionary, not least because his formal training had been almost entirely in the field of philosophy; he came to India, in fact, as a lay teacher of philosophy, and was not ordained (into the ministry of the United Free Church of Scotland) until some years later. With characteristic modesty he always regarded himself as no more than an amateur theologian, though this was certainly not the view of those who knew his considerable theological gifts.

Hogg, born in Egypt of missionary parents, was educated in Edinburgh, at George Watson's College and

the University of Edinburgh, where he read philosophy under Professor Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison (1856-1931). Pringle-Pattison is not now remembered as a greatly original thinker; but he was a notably successful teacher of philosophy who insisted on independent thought on the part of his pupils. He trained a remarkable number of future professors of philosophy, and thus came to exercise a profound, if indirect, influence on the development of British philosophy. His dominant interest was the correlation of philosophical ideas with the data of religious experience, and he tried to reconcile the best that religion required with the best thinking that philosophy could offer.

There are numerous echoes of Pringle-Pattison in Hogg's work. Pringle-Pattison was an idealist, in that he held that man's knowledge of the universe must be true and valid, and that there is nothing in the universe which is essentially unknowable (even though there may be a great deal in it which is unknown). Philosophy he once called ' . . . a war against abstractions, against stopping too soon, against treating parts as wholes, against isolating parts from their connections'. If philosophy, then, is an attempt to understand the world in which we live in its essential wholeness, clearly philosophical thinking is a matter of the most profound importance, and part of the serious business of every man's life. Hogg (as his students soon discovered) shared this view, although he recognized that there may be a great gulf fixed between the ideal and the actual, in philosophy as in all else.

'Theoretically, indeed (wrote Hogg), the claim of philosophy to be the final arbiter of truth is absolute

and cannot be directly gainsaid. For in theory philosophy is simply the effort to think quite clearly and critically—to let no assumptions pass without question and to be content with nothing less than a completely intelligible account of the whole of experience. By its very definition, therefore, a perfect philosophy would give the fairest and truest possible interpretation of religious experience as well as of all other experience, and if religious belief ventured to interpret religious experience differently from such a perfect philosophy, its interpretation must be wrong. However, although in theory the authority of philosophy is thus absolute, in practice it is the most difficult of all intellectual disciplines to carry out perfectly.

Elsewhere Hogg wrote that the philosophical ideal which motivated him was

' . . . the ideal of dragging into the light of full consciousness every inherited and unconscious pre-supposition, and letting none pass muster till it had been examined and found legitimate.'

Another debt owed by Hogg to Pringle-Pattison was in the field of religion. Although Pringle-Pattison had been brought up in an orthodox Christian milieu, his own mature personal faith was broadly theistic, rather than explicitly orthodox, and his pupils were taught along these general lines. As a student, Hogg had found difficulty in reconciling philosophical reasoning with the authoritative claims of Christian orthodoxy, since these claims had to be weighed and examined like all others. In the process, he passed through a profound spiritual crisis, from which he was finally extricated

largely through the influence of that school of Christian theology associated with the name of the German theologian Albrecht Ritschl, mediated to him by his close friend David S. Cairns. I do not have space to discuss this episode in detail here, save to say that he was liberated from dependence on the absolute and unquestioned authority of either Scripture or Church into free commitment to Jesus Christ. In his own words (written some years later):

'In Jesus I have met a man in the deliverances of whose knowledge of God, I, at long last, find I cannot help putting more trust than in my own intuitions of, or reasonings about, God. He has so conquered my mind that henceforth I am sure that if any reasoning, mine or another's, conflicts with His intuition of God, the reasoning must be in error and He must be right. Further, in His earthly activity I have met in operation a confident purpose to redeem and transfigure myself and others and the universe in general; and I find that I can put my trust in the success of this His purpose, and apart from this will of Jesus to save me I know of no other sufficient hope for my soul. Finally, I find that the submission of my mind to that of Jesus and trust in His redeeming purpose, so far from narrowing and deadening my life, as any kind of fanaticism ought to do, broadens my life and releases my spiritual energies. Of this experience I can think of no other rationalisation than the hypothesis that in Jesus the man I meet God Himself.'

The first of these convictions—that of the imperative necessity of philosophical reasoning—made Hogg a

philosopher and educationalist. The second—that of the absolute claim of Jesus upon his own and others' allegiance—made him a missionary.

*Karma and Redemption* was the first of Hogg's four books to be published. Its five chapters were originally written as separate articles in the *Madras Christian College Magazine* during 1904 and 1905, and the book itself appeared, as I have said, in 1909. At that time, Hogg, newly arrived in India, was deeply concerned with the problems arising out of the fact of human suffering and the existence of evil in the world. The problem was particularly acute in that the young Hindus he was teaching were apt to claim that the doctrine of Karma provided a better solution to the problem of unmerited suffering than anything the Christian Gospel could offer. Their answer was that all suffering is merited, by virtue of one's suffering in a previous existence, and that the problem is therefore unreal. Were this solution to be accepted, however, it would make nonsense of the Christian claim that Jesus in some way bore the suffering of mankind, since it would make the idea of vicarious suffering impossible. Every man must in other words suffer the precise consequences of his own misdeeds, neither more nor less.

The examination of the rival answers to this problem gave Hogg the opportunity of doing two things. First, of subjecting the Hindu view of Karma and the Christian view of Redemption to the most rigorous philosophical analysis. And secondly, of attempting to restate the Christian position in such a way as to emphasize its relevance to the Indian situation. In 1904

he had written (in a letter): 'I feel that if Christianity is to conquer India the old doctrines must go first and new ones—like the old and yet Indian in colour—must take their place.' *Karma and Redemption* was his first extended attempt to formulate such 'new' doctrines.

The genesis of Hogg's book is not without interest. In the August, 1904 issue of the *Madras Christian College Magazine* there had appeared an article from the pen of S. Subrahmanya Sastri entitled 'Hindu Philosophy', in which it was claimed that '... the doctrines of Karma and the transmigration of souls, which are the highest sanctions of Hindu morality, are also the cardinal principles of Hindu philosophy'. Sastri also claimed that the sense of just recompense for all one's deeds, whether good or evil, was the highest conceivable principle of morality, since it abolished any necessity for explaining away the mystery of unmerited suffering. These were no small claims; but they were in every way representative of the claims being advanced on behalf of Hinduism, and against Christianity, in these years.

Hogg was prompted to reply, and in the following month's issue of the *Madras Christian College Magazine* he published an article entitled 'Mr. Subrahmanya Sastri on Hindu Philosophy', in which he first expressed his appreciation of the generally critical spirit in which the previous article had been written. But he had serious criticisms to make nevertheless. The first of these concerned Sastri's over-eagerness to emphasize resemblances between Hindu and Western philosophy. 'Why is it,' asked Hogg, 'that in drawing comparisons between Hindu and European philosophy he is so often

willing to accentuate superficial parallelisms and ignore fundamental contrasts?' He felt that nothing was to be gained by minimizing the differences between East and West; a great deal might be gained, on the other hand, by trying to understand them. And in this process of understanding, realism and critical acumen are absolutely necessary; it is as essential to see what Hinduism is not, as to see what it is. This is not just a matter of pouring cold water on individual enthusiasm: 'No one would desire to depreciate Hindu philosophy, were its flatterers only discriminating.' It is possible that at this point, Hogg also had in mind certain of the Theosophists, such as Annie Besant, for whom the Hindu tradition could do, and contain, no wrong. But he was emphatically not concerned with mere polemics.

The basic problem was a serious one for the Christian, and especially for the Christian philosopher. Allowing that, as Sastri was claiming, the doctrines of Karma and transmigration were 'the cardinal principles of Hindu philosophy', was it also true to claim that they provided an all-sufficient motivation for ethical action? Hogg's contention was that they did not, and could not do so. Nor did they provide such a clear and cogent solution of the problem of suffering as some of their defenders were attempting to maintain.

In this preliminary article there were three points in particular which Hogg brought out for comment and criticism. The first was the Hindu assumption that the world, partaking as it does of *māyā*, must be denied and transcended, and that the task of philosophy is to point the way to such a transcendence of the

are still, at any time, worthy of the name must be one and the same'. But—and this is an important reservation—he still considers the differences between 'the intellectual beliefs by which men preserve this common spirit of faith' to be 'an immensely important matter'.

Here we are introduced for the first time to the distinction between *faith* and *beliefs* which was such an important constituent element in Hogg's theology. Faith is immediate and existential: a living trust in God, a living relationship with God and a desire for intelligent fellowship with God. Beliefs are those intellectual expressions to which men resort in order to express the implications and consequences of their faith, to protect their faith, to perpetuate their faith and to attempt to communicate their faith. As such, they are constantly liable to change. Indeed, they *must* change if the underlying faith is to live; particularly so, if faith is to be transplanted, as Christianity had been transplanted, from one part of the world to another. If they do not change, but are adhered to blindly, faith may decline into superstition and the beliefs themselves may become obstacles to faith.

The subtitle of *Karma and Redemption* is 'An Essay toward the Interpretation of Hinduism and the Restatement of Christianity'. Both aspects are important, and both are to be understood in terms of the above distinction between faith and beliefs. Hogg's purpose was, amid all the more obvious contrasts between Christianity and Hinduism in the area of beliefs, to find one fundamental contrast capable of illuminating other contrasts; and having done that, to examine both sides of the contrast, to state both fully and

fairly, and to draw whatever conclusions might suggest themselves.

Hogg believed that the area of thought covered by the Hindu idea of Karma and the Christian doctrine of Redemption provided such a point of departure. But these doctrines (or beliefs) were merely symbolical of a much deeper conflict of principle. The crux, he maintained, was to be found at the very roots of man's view of the universe. Put in the form of a question: Is the universe judicial, or is it moral? 'The question between Hindu and Christian, therefore, is not whether God is just or unjust, but whether the purpose of the present order is judicial or moral.' If God is 'imperturbable self-sufficiency', then an order like Karma, which insists (or appears to insist) on mechanical retribution—a judicial system without a personal judge—is understandable; but if God be conceived of as Love, then some degree of personal intervention in the present order is not only understandable, but necessary:

'The Christian does not need to prove the world to be perfect before he can venture to call it God's world. He only needs to show it to be a world such that infinite Love can express itself therein. He does not require to prove that evil is totally absent; he only requires to show that divine Love, having created the possibility of sonship by the grant of human freedom, can joyfully triumph by self-sacrifice over the evil to which human wills give birth.'

I began by saying that there are two reasons for the reprinting of *Karma and Redemption*. The first of these is historical. This book occupies a place all its own in the history of Christian thought in India; in my

judgment it is one of the most powerful and original works of Christian theology ever to have been written by a working missionary. If proof of this be needed, one may perhaps compare it with other 'comparative' works written by missionaries at the same time, far too many of which are characterized by an overfondness for polemics, a superficiality of judgment, and the endless reiteration of dogmatic formulæ. Hogg's book goes to the philosophical and theological heart of things, refusing to be satisfied either by apparent contrasts or by apparent resemblances between Christian and Hindu ideas. *Karma and Redemption* was important, too, in helping to shape the thought of Commission IV at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910.

But this book should not be read only for antiquarian reasons. Inevitably there are passages in it which are dated, but re-reading its massive argument, one is struck time and time again by its relevance to present-day debate. If there is to be an effective dialogue between Hindu and Christian thinkers in India, such dialogue will not be served by refusing to face up to the real differences in thought and outlook which characterize the two sides. Impatient polemics are worse than useless; but at the other extreme, to call the Hindu an anonymous Christian, or the Christian a crypto-Hindu, is to do profound injustice to both. To seize upon apparent resemblances in thought and practice, and to proceed upon the assumption that here is common ground, without subjecting them to proper scrutiny, will in the long run be self-defeating. Hogg's way was to subject Christian and Hindu thought alike

to the most rigorous and searching criticism, with a view to ascertaining genuine, relevant and vital points of contrast, and with a view to posing a challenge to all concerned, Christians as well as Hindus.

The last two sentences of *Karma and Redemption* are deserving of the most serious consideration by all who are in any way concerned with the future of Christian thought in India. 'Educated India,' writes Hogg, 'declares that she will never become Christian; and certainly she will never definitely embrace Christianity until Christian doctrines have been recast in a less alien mould. If this essay, even by its failures, impels any one to begin for himself the task of reconstruction, the author will feel amply rewarded.' This, surely, is one of the contemporary concerns of dialogue. But there is all the difference in the world between reshaping Christian thought entirely on the basis of Hindu premises (as some are urging us to do) and reshaping Christian thought with reference to important Hindu ideas, yet refusing to abandon that which makes the Christian Gospel unique—the centrality of the historical person of Jesus Christ. It is this latter path that Hogg bids us tread.

There is one other point which I should like to make in conclusion. It has often been objected that Christian thought in the West has been far too Western: that it has seldom or never taken into account the spiritual heritage of the East when formulating its intellectual position. A. G. Hogg was a Western philosopher and theologian: philosophically an idealist, theologically (in some sense at least) a 'Ritschlian'. His encounter with the Hindu doctrines of Karma and transmigration,

however, turned his thinking into paths which none of his gifted contemporaries had ever trodden. In this sense, *Karma and Redemption* is a work, not of Christian apologetics for India merely, but of universal Christian theology. It should never have been allowed to drift into oblivion, and its reappearance is a Christian publishing event of great importance.

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ERIC J. SHARPE.

## PREFACE

IF any Hindus honour this little essay with their attention its author would like to say to them at the outset that he accepts one belief which is very common to-day in India, but accepts it at the same time with a reservation. The belief is that the innermost faith of all religions which are still, at any time, worthy of the name must be one and the same. The reservation is that he considers the divergences between the intellectual beliefs by which men seek to preserve this common spirit of faith to be nevertheless an immensely important matter.

It seems to him that the secret spring of real living religion anywhere can be nothing but a simplicity of assurance that the supreme religious Reality is humanly satisfying, or in the words of the Christian apostle that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. *Nothing but* such an assurance has he said? Why such an assurance is just everything. It is the joy of life, it vanquishes death—this message from the living heart of religion that God is light and in Him is nothing of the dark. No message less tremendous than this seems worth erecting into a religion. No faith less glorious than this is big enough to live upon. Yet, if the fact be so—if all religions in the days of their healthy vitality have been at one in this inner faith or confidence, why have they been so much at variance in their beliefs? The reason is this. No people or race can think

trustfully of God as a Being wholly 'light,' wholly satisfying, if they find this world which has its being in or through Him unsatisfying and darkened with undeserved calamity. Such an experience perplexes men, and must make impossible any trust in God unless they learn to think about Him and His relation to the world in some way which will show its sorrows to be blessings in disguise and will make life satisfying again. Such a way of thinking is a religious belief, a belief *about* God, rendering possible faith or trust *in* God. And obviously the beliefs by which peoples or races learn to protect their faith in God must be at least as different as are the problems that darken their life and perplex their thought.

Variety in the doctrinal tenets of different religions is thus quite an intelligible phenomenon, and within proper limits a sign of healthy vitality. In fact, it may appear to many that the explanation just offered of the relation between faith and belief fully justifies the common assumption that differences of creed do not matter. Yet this is a superficial view: it is so for two reasons. The human soul needs something more than to be able to trust God; it craves also to have intelligent fellowship with Him. This it cannot have except in so far as it is able to think about life and conduct in the same way that God does. And for this it is necessary that its beliefs about the nature of God and His relation to the world be true ones. That is the first reason. The second is that if a people's religious beliefs about God are not perfectly true it will some day outgrow them. They will cease to lighten the

shadows of life and to explain its problems; nay more, if still adhered to, the beliefs which once helped to make faith possible will now become stumbling-blocks making real trust in God and utter devotion to Him difficult or even impossible. When any religion comes to such a pass the duty of the true man of faith is boldly to surrender the old beliefs and to seek for new and truer ones. But for a people wedded to its creed this is a heroic task, and a less arduous course is apt to be followed. Either the old beliefs are blindly held to and the religion declines from a faith into a superstition; or else a more complicated development may take place. The old beliefs have now become obstacles to faith, darkening life with new shadows and creating new perplexities. New theories may, therefore, be elaborated which, while admitting the old beliefs to be true, seem to throw light upon the shadows and to explain the perplexities. In this way the religion is saved from the degradation of its beliefs into mere superstitions which can nourish no living trust in God; but at the same time it is prevented from rising to a higher level of more intelligent fellowship with the Being on whom its faith still reposes.

These preliminary observations should be sufficient to set in a clear light the double purpose which runs through the pages of the present essay. In the first place, the essay is the endeavour of a Christian, to whom the beliefs of even the higher Hinduism appear strange and rather dismal, to win his way to a more sympathetic point of view which may enable him to understand how to Hindus these beliefs

can be a real gospel, helping them to a trustful surrender of their wills to the Supreme Being. He finds this point of view in the hypothesis that the theory of Karma and transmigration, although originally a religious belief which helped to explain life and make trust in God possible, became subsequently a stumbling-block to faith and cast a shadow over existence; and that thereupon the more spiritual sons of India, instead of boldly surrendering the out-grown theory, found relief by accepting the esoteric teaching of the Upanishads that the whole Karma-ridden system was phenomenal only, hiding rather than revealing the satisfying Divinity. In the second place, the essay endeavours to show, by careful analysis of the Karma-transmigration theory, that it would have been better for India if she had surrendered her belief in terrestrial re-incarnations and had modified her idea of Karma; at the same time an interpretation is presented of the significance of the person and life of Jesus which makes it evident that Christianity really offers to set faith free from the feeling which in India has been its great problem—the feeling of the weariness of life and the unjustifiableness of unmerited suffering.

The essay originally appeared in the form of a series of articles in the pages of the *Madras Christian College Magazine*, 1904-1905. Its re-publication, with the courteous permission of the editor, is due solely to desires expressed in several quarters that the articles should be made more conveniently accessible. These desires seem to justify the hope that, however uncertain may be the value of the central hypothesis of the

essay, the line of inquiry which it opens up may prove stimulating and suggestive to many. Advantage has been taken of the opportunity of revision afforded by re-publication, but the changes made, although in one or two cases not unimportant, are few in number and do not alter the main structure of the argument. To assist the reader in tracing the connexion between the necessarily wide ramifications of the discussion a full analytical table of contents has been provided, as well as a marginal analysis.

*Madras Christian College,*  
*July 13th, 1909.*

A. G. HOCC.

## ANALYTICAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I. THE CONCEPTION OF KARMA ...	1

Hinduism and Christianity display a bewildering medley of aspects of resemblance and contrast. In spite of the discordant internal variety visible in the doctrines and practices of both religions, it is permissible to treat Christianity and the higher Hinduism as unities, and to ask which of their points of divergence is fundamental and affords the key to an understanding of the others. This key is not to be found in pantheistic tendency, nor in intellectualism, nor in innate repugnance to the idea of intrusions of the Deity into history; but it may reasonably be looked for in the difference of horizon and outlook resulting from the presence in India, and the absence from Christendom, of belief in Karma and transmigration. This belief owes its continued hold mainly to the plausible solution it offers of the problem of suffering. It is ethically commendable for its emphasis on the necessity of expiation, its denial of 'salvation by works,' and its insistence on individual retribution. If the Christian critic thinks that these advantages are counterbalanced by serious ethical defects, he ought in fairness to consider whether the higher Hinduism is not itself, from beginning to end, an implicit criticism of Karma.

CHAPTER II. INFLUENCE ON THE HIGHER HINDUISM ... ..	19
--------------------------------------------------------	----

Christian and Hindu agree that the Karma-transmigration system is unreal *metaphysically*, although the latter believes that it is nevertheless phenomenally actual. Would it not be more natural for him to push his dissatisfaction with the system a step

further and to call in question its phenomenal as well as its noumenal existence? But is the Hindu after all really dissatisfied with the Karma-transmigration system? Is his denial of its metaphysical reality ultimately connected with an inability to find moral or religious contentment in the system, and is it therefore equivalent to an implicit criticism of the Karma-transmigration idea? On two grounds we may answer, 'yes': (1) on historical grounds; since it is difficult to explain how the inheritors of the joyous Aryan faith could ever have found in a message of release from phenomenal life a welcome gospel, unless something had first crept in to destroy their joy in life; and no sufficient influence of this sort is discoverable but that of the popularly invented Karma-transmigration belief; (2) on grounds yielded by the analysis of Indian religious thought; for systems so different as the Advaita-Vedānta, the Sāṅkhya philosophy, and the Śaiva Siddhānta all betray an exaggeratedly individualistic impulse which looks like a reaction from the fatalism of the Karma-system; and the Bhagavadgītā teaches an ethic of unmotivated willing, which looks like a reaction from the selfishness of the Karmic maxim of practising virtue in order to acquire merit.

CHAPTER III. CRITICISM OF THE CONCEPTION ...	41
----------------------------------------------	----

Why should we not boldly call in question the whole conception of a law of Karma? It is incapable of scientific demonstration, is inconsistent with natural law, and empties history of all social interest. If it be replied that the law of Karma is an indispensable moral postulate, the answer is that, on the contrary, it is ethically defective. Although excellent in its emphasis upon the intrinsic connexion between sin and punishment it hinders the profounder developments of the guilt-consciousness. For by its principle that the purpose of every birth is requital, it makes the dispensing of judgment not simply a presupposition but the chief end of Divine Providence; and no man can feel it either an absolute duty to cooperate with, or an infinite sin to rebel against, such a Divine end as this. Even when set in the light of the higher Hindu teaching, the Karma-transmigration system still remains an obstacle in the way of the deepest conceptions of guilt. Granting, however, that the law of Karma is both scientifically indefensible and

ethically inadequate, can we still cling to belief in it as indispensable for the solution of the **problem** of suffering? No, for it is not indispensable **except upon** the assumption already criticized, viz., that the **chief purpose** of Divine providence is requital. Christianity, being committed to a more inspiring view of the Divine purpose in history, feels unmerited suffering not an injustice but a **privilege**.

#### CHAPTER IV. THE MEANING OF HISTORY ... 67

It is not only **Hindulism** but metaphysical thought generally that is tempted to **deny real significance** to history. Christian thought might well have fallen into the same snare but for the fact that **Christianity is essentially the gospel of an event**—the coming of Christ. The advance of revelation consists in successive answers to **progressive religious problems**; so too in the case of Christianity. **By His life and His claims** Jesus created a religious problem which constantly develops new phases, but ever requires the same type of solution, viz., one that, whatever the terms employed, recognizes in Jesus 'God manifest in the flesh'. Now if, like the early disciples, Christians generally are led to this estimate of Jesus, then, like Paul and the author of *Hebrews*, they must feel committed to a religious interpretation of history. For the God 'manifest,' in Jesus is an active God and a universal Father. But if God be active, then providence is a reality; and if God be universal Father, then the aim of His providence throughout all history must have been not requital but to draw men into fellowship with Himself in the voluntary service of the absolute good.

#### CHAPTER V. LOVE AND EVIL ... 88

Jesus' revelation of God as active Love removes the theoretical difficulty of admitting the reality of moral evil, and affords a direct explanation of the origin of natural evil and unmerited suffering. Thus we arrive at a revised law of Karma, according to which the fruit of deeds is not an individual but a social burden, and is modifiable by the attitude and the conduct of one and all. The natural tendency of evil Karma is cumulative, and its drift is

towards the absolute ruin of humanity. But by entailing unmerited suffering, it provides love with an opportunity of supreme self-expression potent to reclaim the wrong-doer. The transcendent instance of love sharing undeservedly in the Karma of sin is Jesus; and when the eyes of men are opened to the fact that this Sufferer is no ordinary man but God incarnated for the purpose of winning them to goodness, the spectacle of His life becomes charged with a power of regeneration for humanity. Such a view of redemption through Christ, however, cannot be accepted as a full and complete account of the reaction of Divine love against sin. Anselm's theory of Atonement, although intrinsically unsatisfactory and in certain respects out of harmony with the spirit of the New Testament, expresses a true Christian instinct, viz., the feeling that a holy Deity's ability to forgive is a perplexing fact. The theoretical solution of the perplexity lies in the difference between the laws of the political State and the laws of the Divine order. When we comprehend this difference we realize how much lies behind forgiveness; we realize that the reaction of Divine love against sin does not consist merely in this, that out of pity God adopts the expedient of sharing the Karma of humanity as a promising means of checking the drift toward ruin; but even more in this, that in the face of sin God cannot but sacrifice Himself to the uttermost in the struggle to abolish sinfulness.

## CHAPTER I

### THE CONCEPTION OF KARMA

Thou mad'st me Thine; did'st fiery poison eat, pitying poor souls,  
That I might Thine ambrosia taste—I, meanest one!

MANIKKA-VASAGAR.

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace  
given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of  
Christ. PAUL.

OF the two quotations given above the one has  
Siva for its subject—Siva the black-throated, smeared  
with ashes, decked with a necklace of  
bones and skulls; in the other the sub-  
ject of praise is Jesus of Nazareth, whom Christian art has loved to paint as a meek and  
sad-faced sufferer. Nevertheless, the two utterances  
breathe the same passionateness of lowly devotion and  
spring from hearts marvelling at the same thought  
of a Divine self-sacrifice. How paradoxical it seems  
that the two figures should awaken emotions at all  
similar! Historically regarded, indeed, the paradox may  
seem to melt away. We have only to talk learnedly  
about 'syncretism,' and to explain that the higher  
gods of India have borrowed many features from the

Like, yet  
deeply unlike

aboriginal cults. Then it becomes intelligible that the gruesome insignia, inherited by Siva from some dread, forgotten demon, should have been so thoroughly transformed by later symbolic interpretation that the Saivite poet saw in them the emblems of nothing but grace and virtue. Nevertheless, for a deeper reflection such explanations, however useful, do not diminish the marvel. The Christian must needs marvel, wondering that God has been able by such means to reveal Himself. Beholding so spiritual a faith as Manikka-Vasagar's he will approach the study of the higher Hinduism with reverence, and will ask himself in all seriousness whether his own faith does really penetrate more deeply into the heart of truth, and if it does so, then in what respect. In the pages which follow I wish to inquire whether, amid the many obvious contrasts between Hinduism and Christianity, it is possible to light upon one that is fundamental, and having found it to penetrate to its secret source.

It may be objected that such an inquiry is meaningless because, whether or no Christianity have sufficient

Not creeds but  
atmospheres

unity to be made the subject of a comparison of this kind, Hinduism at any rate is too much of a conglomerate of incompatible beliefs. There is much force in this objection. Complex historical growths like Christianity and Hinduism can only be historically understood; for them formulæ are idle, and in their development the most fundamental of contrasts are apt to change or disappear. Nevertheless I think that in a portion, at least, of the religious development of India there is sufficient unity to warrant a search for its underlying

presuppositions. When the utmost has been admitted concerning the multiplicity of Hindu sects and the diversity of Christian Churches, there is still a meaning, however elusive, in the words Hinduism and Christianity. Even if we limit our attention to the present stage of development we are still aware that, as contrasted with each other, Hinduism and Christianity are something more than aggregates of ill-assorted groups. Each of the two manifests its characteristic spiritual atmosphere. It may be that numerous similar beliefs are capable of taking root and growing up under both atmospheres, and yet the fact remains that each atmosphere has a special type of growths to which it is favourable. In regard to the present, then, such a comparison as has been suggested would not seem out of place. Among the growths, however, which the present atmosphere of both faiths has permitted one of the most noticeable is an effort to assimilate the past. Christian theology is trying to renew its vigour by a new understanding of its origins, and educated India is rendering to its ancient religious philosophies a homage which, if so far mainly passive, may be the promise of an intellectual revival. Is this homage to India's past only the sentimental product of a narrow patriotism, or does it mean that the Hindu religious atmosphere of to-day is akin to that in which the orthodox philosophies were able to flourish? Even if I am mistaken in supposing that a certain affinity subsists, an effort to determine the predominant constituent of the earlier atmosphere may be of use in leading those who are seeking a gospel in the past to pause and consider.

Although the considerations just urged may rebut the objection that it is meaningless to search among the contrasts between classical Hinduism (if the phrase may be permitted) and Christianity for one which shall be the most fundamental, they do not make the search easy. Distinctions, apparently fundamental, catch the eye at once, but too often they come short of being clues to the variations of plan and structure. For example, one could hardly desire a more vital contrast than that between the Paramātman of Hindu speculation and the personal 'Father' of the New Testament. Yet, while this contrast may be very much to the point in a comparison of Advaitism with primitive Christianity, there are other developments on which it can shed little light. One would be loth to deny to the medieval mystics of Europe the title of Christian and yet their thought has often been pantheistic in its tendency; between these and the many Vedāntists who maintain that the supreme reality cannot be impersonal the contrast almost disappears.

Again, if one lays the finger upon the ingrained intellectualism of Hindu theology, this seems to constitute a line of demarcation sufficiently obvious and fundamental. Could there seem a wider gulf than that between the saying of Jesus to Nicodemus (John iii, 3)—'Except a man be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God,' and the words of Kṛishṇa to Arjuna<sup>1</sup>—'Even if you are the most sinful of all sinful men,

Root-difference  
not in meta-  
physics

Nor in  
intellectualism

<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavadgītā*, TELANG'S version, p. 62.

you will cross over all trespasses by means of the boat of knowledge alone?' Nevertheless, on a better understanding the contrast is seen to be accompanied by an element of resemblance; so much so that Deussen<sup>1</sup> draws express attention to the parallelism between the Christian doctrine of salvation by faith and the Vedāntic one of redemption through knowledge. For this 'knowledge' does not mean scientific knowledge, acquired by the amassing of facts and the analysis of phenomena. On the contrary, it is an inner vision to which worldly wisdom may be more of an impediment than an aid; it cannot be won by self-assertive toil, for it is nothing less than the dissolution of the merely phenomenal by the eternal *real*. Compare, in the Kena-Upanishad (II, 3-4), the following portion of the pupil's answer when the teacher challenges him as to whether he professes to know Brahman: 'It is not understood by those who understand it, it is understood by those who do not understand it. It is thought to be known (as if) by awakening, and (then) we obtain immortality indeed.'<sup>2</sup> For teaching such as this 'intellectualism' is a misleading epithet; and even if such a characterization contains a certain element of truth, one has to remember that the 'way of knowledge' is only one phase of Hinduism. There is little intellectualism in the outburst of the Śaivite saint which heads this chapter, or in the lyric from which it is taken;

<sup>1</sup> In his *System des Vedānta*, p. 433: 'Redemption [Erlösung] is accomplished not through any kind of work, nor yet through moral reformation, but only through knowledge (like the Christian redemption through faith alone, *sola fide*, which faith approximates very closely to the metaphysical knowledge here spoken of).'

<sup>2</sup> MAX MULLER'S version.

and the Bhagavadgītā, though so much more theological in its motive, is able in one place<sup>1</sup> to speak as follows: 'Knowledge is better than continuous meditation; concentration is esteemed higher than knowledge; and the abandonment of fruit of action than concentration. In an interesting address delivered by Mr. H. N. Apte and subsequently published, in which the Advaita interpretation of the Gītā is briefly expounded, the speaker compares the essential teaching of that classic to Kant's rigorous assertion of 'duty for duty's sake'. If this comparison can be fairly pressed home it will follow, of course, that the ethical teaching of the Gītā is, from a theoretical standpoint, as indefensible as Kant's. But at least it will be far enough from intellectualism and it will strike, even as Kant's teaching does, an answering chord in Christian sentiment. Indeed, there are in the Gītā many suggestions of ideal aspirations which, but for their foreign conceptual cast, might almost become Christian mottoes. 'He is wise among men,' says Kṛishṇa, 'he is possessed of devotion, and performs all actions, who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction. . . . Forsaking all attachment to the fruit of action, always contented, dependent on none, he does nothing at all, though he engages in action.'<sup>2</sup> Here the phraseology used implies a theoretical standpoint which to the Christian seems radically defective, but the aspiration suggested is one with which he can heartily sympathize. The ideal is that of an escape from the bondage of finitude even while engaging in finite action. In Pauline phrase

<sup>1</sup> TELANG'S version, pp. 100-101.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 60.

it is that of learning 'the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want' (Phil. vi, 12). Again, we find in the Gītā teaching which recalls the grand words of the *Fourth Gospel* about the eternal life which begins even now. 'This,' Jesus said, 'is life eternal that they should know Thee, the only true God, and him whom Thou didst send' (John xvii, 3). Similarly Kṛishṇa says: 'Actions defile me not. I have no attachment to the fruit of actions. *He who knows me thus is not tied down by actions.*'<sup>1</sup> The Christian believer knows of a life 'hid with Christ in God' (Col. iii, 3), and Kṛishṇa, speaking of action performed 'for the purpose of the sacrifice,' says: 'Brahman is the oblation; with Brahman (as a sacrificial instrument) it is offered up; Brahman is in the fire; and by Brahman it is thrown; and Brahman, too, is the goal to which he proceeds who meditates on Brahman in the action.'<sup>2</sup>

Clearly it is impossible to seek in intellectualism the constitutive difference between the higher Hinduism and Christianity. Whatever intellectualistic bias may be visible in the former is a derivative characteristic calling for explanation and not a fundamental source of divergence. May it be that the point of most essential contrast lies in the use which either faith makes of historical events? Certainly Christianity in its principal phases has ascribed to particular historical events a uniqueness of importance, no real parallel to which can be found in Hinduism. It is equally clear that this elevation of the

Nor in use of history

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61.

historical would accord but ill with the general tendency of Hindu philosophical thought. Yet to infer from these admissions that there is in the typical Hindu consciousness an ingrained repugnance to the idea of any exceptional entrance of the Divine into history, and to find in this repugnance the most essential distinction between Hindu and Christian religious feeling, would be a rash proceeding. One cannot think of the religious use which the Hindu mind has made of the semi-legendary material of the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata without suspecting that a very important reason why the historical element is not still more fundamental in Hindu religion is simply the absence from Indian history of a sufficiently tragic and universally inspiring figure. If Manikka-Vasagar was able, in the couplet quoted above, to extract such pathos from a grotesque myth about Śiva, what might he not have accomplished had he known of an Indian patriot with pretensions as arresting, and sorrows as profound as those of Jesus? However there is, I think, one respect in which the use of historical does constitute a most fundamental difference between Hinduism and Christianity. This does not consist in any reluctance of Hindu thought to make a religious interpretation of particular historical events or personalities but in its comparative failure to conceive of any such thing as genuine history. It has hardly any idea of real development or of a world-purpose. On the other hand, Christianity was born amid expectations which logically implied a world-history, and by the recent deepening of the concept of history under the influence of the idea of evolution it seems to me that Christians have been put in a position

to work out a reformulation of their faith which will show more clearly than ever before that dependence on a religious interpretation of history is no mere accident of its origin but belongs to its essential nature.

I shall return to this point again; meantime it is clear that neither aversion from according religious value to historical events, nor intellectualistic bias, nor pantheistic thought constitutes a universally traceable contrast between Hinduism and Christianity.

Perhaps in the mood of the Karma-belief

If the search for such a contrast is to be rewarded with success, it will be necessary to turn to aspects of religious thought which come closer to personal interests. Nowadays every student of the history of religion will confess, in words at least, that religion is in the broadest sense a practical, rather than a speculative, activity of the self. Accordingly it is in the doctrines most nearly related to practice that one should expect to find the distinctive characteristics of any religious atmosphere manifested most unmistakably. It is for this reason that I have selected the ideas of Karma and the way of release for special analysis. In the period of Indian religious development which is under investigation the conception of Karma is common property and is certainly not the special possession of particular sects. It shapes the problem for which the various religious philosophies seek a solution. It is thus as universal a characteristic of the religious atmosphere as can be looked for. But it is also a vital one; where Karma is believed in the conception must colour the horizon of daily life. Moreover the ideas which have prevailed concerning the way of release from Karma, however various,

possess important affinities. Hence there seems ground for hoping that an analysis of the ideas of Karma and the way of release, and a comparison of the Christian conception of Redemption therewith, will lead to the discovery of elements of resemblance and contrast between Hinduism and Christianity which all must acknowledge to be vital.

Over the historical origin of the conception of Karma and of the belief in transmigration of which it is the complement there is no need to linger.

Karma and the  
problem of  
suffering

The idea of transmigration has appeared in many parts of the world, and probably arises through the mutual reactions of

a dominant ethical religion on the one hand and the decaying totemism of aboriginal races on the other.<sup>1</sup> However, the conditions which sustain an idea in popular acceptance are frequently very different from those which originated it, and it seems probable that a most potent cause of the long-continued ascendancy in India of the belief in transmigration and Karma has been the apparent solution thereby afforded of the problem of suffering. Not only is this solution, by the nature of the case, incapable of experimental disproof but, until tested by a philosophical analysis of ethical presuppositions, it appears to provide a very plausible reconciliation of the facts of life with the claims of abstract justice. For this reason it is eminently fitted to satisfy popular logic which loves hard and fast distinctions. For example, consider how well it would accord with the standpoint assigned by the author of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. F. B. JEVONS'S *Introduction to the History of Religion*, Chap. XXII.

the book of *Job* both to Job and to his comforters. Both Job and his comforters proceed upon the same presupposition, namely that God ought to accord temporal prosperity to every man of upright life. Since Job, on the contrary, has been overwhelmed with unheard-of disaster, both find themselves in a difficulty. Job is tempted to infer that God is unjust; the comforters infer that Job has been committing sin. The writer of the prologue to the poem, being convinced that both these inferences are mistaken, meets the difficulty by suggesting an exception to the presupposition on which the conflicting inferences rest. How much more effective would be the Hindu solution! 'Job,' the believer in Karma would say, 'is right in protesting his uprightness (i.e. in his present life); the comforters are right in holding that Job must have sinned (i.e. in a previous birth); both are right in presupposing that merit must be rewarded by prosperity and that misfortune implies guilt.'

It is evident at once that logic such as this is well fitted to appear to, and to live long in, the popular mind. However, if one is to take at all seriously the current fashion of praising every-thing Indian, it would appear that the conception of Karma appeals also to persons who would resent being grouped with 'the popular mind'. Now I think that there is indeed room here for a reasonable measure of patriotic admiration. The persistence of the theory of Karma and transmigration is a great tribute to the power of ideas. The theory bravely recognizes the actual disproportionment of suffering to present relative merit, postulates nevertheless a real

Boldness of the  
theory

moral order, and on the strength of these two positions dares to proclaim a gigantic hypothesis as sober fact. Its boldness alone would suffice to awaken admiration, but in certain respects it has real moral value as well. Nevertheless along with so much that commands respect there go what must seem to the Christian to be serious deficiencies, and both for him and for the Hindu *laudator temporis acti* few tasks can be more instructive than a sober examination of the whole conception.

What precisely is the thought for which the word 'Karma' is a convenient label? Deussen offers a statement of it which is so admirably clear and concise that it is worth translating. His exposition, of course, is concerned only with the views of Sankaracharya, but it will form a convenient starting point. 'The idea,' he says,<sup>1</sup> 'is this, that life, in quality as well as in quantity, is the accurately meted and altogether fitting expiation of the deeds of previous existence. This expiation takes place through *bhokṛitvam* and *karṣṇitvam* (enjoying and acting) where the latter is again inevitably converted into deeds which must be expiated anew in a subsequent existence, so that the clock-work of requital in running down always winds itself up again; and so on in perpetuity—unless there comes upon the scene the universal knowledge which, as will be seen, does not rest upon merit but breaks its way into existence without connexion therewith, to dissolve it utterly, to burn up the seed of deeds and thus to render a continuance of the transmigration impossible for ever after. However,

<sup>1</sup> *System des Vedānta*, pp. 381-2.

knowledge cannot arrest *the present* existence, because the latter is conditioned by the deeds in an earlier birth. Their seed, having already sprung up, has escaped the general destruction and demands to be completely requited. Death cannot supervene so long as a remnant of deeds from previous existence is left, but whenever this is exhausted life must go out like a lamp when the oil has been consumed. Upon death those who have not attained knowledge are conducted by fantastic ways to requital in realms beyond, and are then brought back into new forms of existence. Those who have attained knowledge are merged in identity with Brahman—forthwith, if it be the higher knowledge, or, if it be the lower, by the roundabout road of the *Devayāna* or way of the gods.' This quotation deals with the way of release as well as with that conception of the implications of action which is concentrated in the word 'Karma'. It will be well, however, to begin by confining attention to the conception of Karma itself.

First of all I wish to emphasize its merits. I have already noted the negative merit that it does not attempt to deny the fact that in this world no accurate proportionment is visible between a man's merits and his lot in life. Of more positive recommendations which the theory offers the following seem the most important: (1) the strength of its emphasis upon the idea of expiation; (2) its assertion that the soul cannot expiate its demerit by works of merit; (3) its insistence upon personal punishment.

(1) In the idea that no man can escape his *karma* there lies an assertion, so far as the phenomenal

Merits of the  
idea

world is concerned, of the absolute necessity of an expiation of evil. Now, while reservations may be required as to the persons who must bear the expiation, I cannot think that any system of thought which denies the necessity of some expiation can do justice to the moral consciousness. If moral goodness is the grandest thing known to man, then wickedness must be the most grievous and dread-compelling of facts. It must have a momentous influence upon man's relation to the system of reality, and this the idea of Karma implies. Modern Hindus may speak slightly of sin as mere imperfection, and as will be evident there is in the idea of Karma a certain basis for this view; but there is ground for a deeper view also. A man's imperfection is declared to have for him an issue that is momentous; it plunges him remorselessly in the weary *samsāra*. Certainly, while one emphasizes the consequences of sin, it is necessary to reflect that it is not its consequences alone that make it evil. Sin does not need to *bring* a curse, for it is itself a curse. Nevertheless it does bring a curse. That it sometimes does so is plain matter of fact. That its universal tendency is to bring a curse is equally certain to those who believe in, and realise what is meant by, a moral universe.

(2) The second of the above-mentioned merits of the doctrine of Karma is that it affirms the impossibility of expiating demerit by merit—an affirmation in which the Protestant believer in salvation by faith alone can very heartily join. In Sankara's system at least this

No salvation by works

of expiating demerit by merit—an affirmation in which the Protestant believer in salvation by faith alone can very

heartily join. In Sankara's system at least this

impossibility is quite unmistakable. Good works as well as evil must be individually required, and instead of leading to that release from *samsāra* which corresponds to 'salvation,' involve a man further therein. Sankara recognizes, indeed, that certain practices are useful in preparing the way for the advent of that knowledge which brings release, but this is due to their being, so to speak, a good spiritual gymnastic and not to any merit which they may bestow.<sup>1</sup> I do not know how far the Hindu sources are unanimous in declaring that it is impossible by good works to annul the effect of bad. For example, if we turn to the Śaiva Siddhānta we find in the *Śiva-prakāśam* the following explicit statements: 'Twofold actions (merits and sins) are from deed, thought, and word. One of these is not destroyed by another. The participation of the fruit is not to be avoided by thee.'<sup>2</sup> The very next verse, indeed, goes on to say that in the Vaidiga-Śaiva system one way of cancelling deeds by deeds is admitted, namely, by paying for expiatory rites, but such an exception is hardly to the point here. On the other hand in the Tiru-arul-payan (Chap. VI) the guru answers the question when Śiva will appear as a Guru by saying: 'When the vast mass of twofold deeds is balanced, the "Energy" of the King shall exert its power.' Here the idea of merits and sins counterbalancing each other is expressly put

<sup>1</sup> Cf. DEUSSEN, *ibid.* p. 512.

<sup>2</sup> From a passage translated by Dr. Pope in the introduction to the eleventh chapter of his *Naladiyar*. My other quotations from Tamil works are from Dr. Pope's *Tiruvāsagam* or from the copious translations in the Introduction to that work.

forward, yet in such a way as to imply that the efficient cause of salvation is not this balancing, but the gracious energy of Siva. For my purpose, however, it is not necessary to insist that Hindu ideas about Karma always exclude 'salvation by works;' it is enough that such an exclusion is to be found. The Protestant Christian arrives at the same exclusion by a different line of reasoning. How can good actions, he asks, which it would have been his duty to have practised even had he never sinned, ever expiate bad actions?

(3) The third commendable element in the conception of Karma is the insistence upon personal punishment. In its real intention, at any rate, the doctrine teaches that the individual self must expiate its individual deeds. 'As amongst a thousand cows a calf knows its mother, so the deed done before finds out its doer.' One may suspect, indeed, that although the intention of the doctrine is thus to emphasize personal responsibility, its real influence must be somewhat different. Since the sorrows and joys of this life are said to be an expiation of an unremembered past, and present acts are to be requited in an unknown future embodiment, one feels that the punishment is not really personal. Still the intention of the doctrine is clear enough, and in spite of certain forms of popular Christian teaching I think that this intention constitutes another point of affinity. Christianity certainly does not declare that the consequences of a man's sin are borne by himself alone; but it does teach that those consequences will affect him personally, and that

The culprit  
suffers

to emphasize personal responsibility,  
its real influence must be somewhat

not even the forgiven sinner will have entire impunity. 'We must all be made manifest before the judgement-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad' (II Cor. v. 10).

Over against these points of agreement between Christian thought and Hindu teaching about Karma there require to be set certain important criticisms. Of these the most serious are the moral criticisms, but before urging them it is only fair to ask whether the higher Hinduism does not itself constitute an implicit criticism of the idea of Karma—one, moreover, which has some claims to be regarded as a moral criticism. This suggestion may appear paradoxical yet it is a very natural inference from the facts. The whole burden of the deeper Hindu teaching is concerned with setting forth a way of release. Now this does not mean merely a way whereby a man may be released from his own *karma*. That by itself would not imply any such criticism. It would be quite intelligible that a man might acquiesce in the justice and propriety of a system based upon the exact requital of deeds, and yet might desire at the same time to escape the requital of his own deeds. Hindu teaching is something much deeper and more spiritual than this. It declares that there can be no exception to the system of requital, but that it is possible for a man to obtain a release which consists in escaping out of that system altogether. What the truly spiritual Hindu desires is to break free entirely from a system founded upon

Yet the Chris-  
tian criticizes

So does the  
Hindu

merit and demerit. Now is this desire of the spiritual man a moral one or not? If it is a moral desire then the system from which such a man desires to escape must be something less than morally satisfying. The Hindu cannot have it both ways at once but must face the alternatives. *Either* the system based upon Karma is morally satisfying, and the desire to be released from it is immoral or non-moral; *or* the release which comes from union with the Supreme (as that is variously conceived) is the only morally satisfying condition, and the system based upon Karma is morally unsatisfying. From the standpoint of the Advaita-Vedānta the correct alternative is the former. To know that 'that am I' is to have risen into an ideal life in which morality is transcended as well as everything else. However, it is indifferent to my argument which alternative is selected. The point is that, whether the Hindu considers the system based upon Karma to be a moral system or a system imperfectly moral, when he sets up as the spiritual man's ideal a release from that system he, in effect, passes criticism upon it. In part the question is one of words. If a moral system be defined as one based upon merit, then I too wish to transcend morality. Hindu and Christian are at one in criticizing the idea of Karma, but the criticisms implied in their respective standpoints differ most instructively. It will be advantageous, therefore, before taking up the principal criticisms that suggest themselves from the Christian point of view to devote a chapter to a consideration of the significance of the way of release which Indian sages have proclaimed.

## CHAPTER II

### INFLUENCE ON THE HIGHER HINDUISM

All external things were formed that the soul might know itself and be free.

KAPILA.

Though all these had witness borne them through their faith, yet they obtained not the promise: since God had something better in view for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

*The Epistle to the Hebrews.*

In the preceding chapter the line of thought pursued led up to the assertion that Christianity and the higher Hinduism are at one in criticizing the conception of life as a system determined by Karma. In this point of harmony one may find an encouragement to hope that Christian and Hindu have yet much to learn from each other, and may ultimately be united in a faith wide enough to satisfy both. However, if this future and more perfect agreement is to be reached, it is necessary that present points of difference as well as of agreement should be clearly understood. Emphasis has already been laid on certain elements in the conception of Karma which have their parallels in Christian thought, and on the fact that in the conception as a whole, and taken as it stands, Hindu thought has no more been able to rest

than Christian thought would be. But does agreement stop short here? Certainly in the *kind* of criticism passed by each on the conception of earthly life as rigidly governed by the principle of recompense for merit and demerit, Christianity and Hinduism part company. The former denies the conception altogether. The latter, while unable to rest in it, has nevertheless consistently admitted that within the phenomenal realm the conception is valid. That is to say, it has declared that the principle of an exact recompense yields a true interpretation of the facts of ordinary life; there is accorded to it, as Locke might have said, a reality 'as great as our happiness or misery'. Moreover the divergence which here reveals itself between the two faiths is a crucial one; it constitutes a contrast so fundamental—if the contention of these pages is true—that by its aid many of the other outstanding differences can be explained. Still, while admitting all this, one may cherish the opinion that beneath the strikingly contrasted forms of doctrinal conception there runs a secret current of common aspiration. The Hindu believes in a phenomenal system dominated by Karma, but longs to escape from it. The Christian denies the existence of such a system, and believes himself to be already living

Criticism or  
rejection—  
which?

in a nobler and freer world. Surely a divergence like this cannot constitute a barrier which reverent thought should find permanently impassable! To end the separation, what is needed? That the Hindu should develop his dissatisfaction to its logical result in a denial of the Karma-system; that the Christian should

transform his often too easy satisfaction with life into something deeper; is not this all? And yet this 'all' is no small undertaking. For the Hindu it would involve an entire abandonment of the general direction of past Hindu thinking, although not an abandonment of its spirit. For the Christian it would mean a closer reproduction of the spirit of the Christian origins and a new effort to think out the meaning of his spiritual inheritance with the aid of the culture of a widened world.

'But has Hindu thought ever displayed any dissatisfaction with the Karma-system *as such*?' That is the question which rudely interrupts this pleasant dream. 'Hindu thought may have consistently sought to transcend the phenomenal world, and phenomenal life may be determined by Karma; but it does not follow that the dissatisfaction with the phenomenal, betrayed by the constant effort to transcend it, has been due to belief in this determining principle. If the time-honoured Hindu aspiration after a release from the phenomenal became the dominant mood of India *because* the belief in Karma cast a shadow over life, then certainly that longing for release would constitute an implicit criticism of the conception of Karma itself—a criticism which, when rendered explicit, might perhaps lead logically to denial. But is there any evidence to show that the Hindu aspiration after release has had any connexion with the belief in Karma?'

But is there even  
criticism?

Two answers to this question may be attempted—the one historical, the other analytical:—

(1) The process of the development of thought in India is still so slightly understood that the historical

answer must partake largely of the nature of surmise. Between the period of the composition of the older

Whence came  
Karma-belief?

Vedic hymns and the time of Kapila or of Gautama Buddha there stretches an interval at the end of which the joyous

faith of the early poetry is discovered to have given place to a pessimistic estimate of phenomenal life and to a yearning for release from its thrall. Somewhere within the same interval the belief in Karma and transmigration, absent from the Vedic hymns, was elaborated and became thoroughly established. Now, of these two changes the latter cannot be explained by the former. Had the idea of Karma with its

Not from  
pessimism

correlates sprung out of a reflective pessimism, it would have been the speculation of the few. On the con-

trary, it breaks upon our vision, at the end of that interval, as a universal belief. So axiomatic, indeed, had the idea become that even Gautama seems never to have questioned its truth, although his efforts to leave room for the conception within his own system nearly brought the latter to logical ruin. It seems impossible, then, to derive the belief in Karma and transmigration from the pessimism of philosophic minds. On the contrary its roots can be sought with much more plausibility (as Mr. F. B. Jevons has shown) in a popular moral faith, strong if not very deep—a faith with which pessimism has no essential connexion. But if the dogma in question cannot have had its source in pessimism, it seems, on the other hand, not impossible that the growth of Indian pessimism was largely fostered by the dogma. Certainly,

some explanation of the rise and persistence of the peculiar pessimism of India is very much needed.

The common explanation by reference to climatic conditions is hardly convincing, and at the best does not carry

Whence came  
pessimism?

one very far. A depressing climate may dull the faculties, and produce despondent weariness or else a lazy carelessness; but these were not the qualities of the philosophers of

From climate?

India. On the contrary one recognizes in them the keenest intelligence and most soaring aspirations. In fact, if one were to seek in climatic conditions alone an explanation of the peculiar trend of Indian thought, one would quickly be at a loss to account for the under-current of daring optimism which flows beneath its superficial pessimism and gives evidence of an unbroken confidence of spirit. Hindu sages are not at war with the system of reality, but are so convinced that an access to the satisfying Infinite lies open to the human spirit, that the unsatisfying character of finite life in no way outrages their sense of right. To this statement Buddhism, at least in its original form, doubtless constitutes an exception, but it is an exception which adds strength to the case. Gautama's teaching failed to maintain its hold, or to retain its purity, just because it involved a sceptical philosophy, the thorough pessimism of which was alien to the Indian temperament. Of a thorough-going pessimism the natural fruit is not the patient resignation so typical of India, but a spirit of revolt and even of licence. Gautama's gospel was essentially a revolt of the nobler kind; it was the cry of the free moral

spirit that, if it could not win freedom in the satisfaction of desire, nought could prevent it from winning that freedom by spurning all desire and bursting thereby the chains of perverse reality. That is not the typical language of India. For Hindu thought reality is not perverse. Only the phenomenal is so; and with a courageous optimism of his own the Hindu adds that the phenomenal does not matter.

What a strange mingling of optimism and pessimism is here! It is as though a race, naturally hopeful, had been compelled by some

From social  
changes?

strange destiny to accept a gloomy view of daily life and had found a needed compensation in a transcendental optimism. Whence came that strange compulsion? It was not felt in early Vedic times and must have been a later experience. Yet if we scan the reconstructions which scholars are giving us of the social conditions of pre-Buddhistic and Buddhistic India, we can find there no traces of a social misery sufficient to darken the whole earthly horizon. On the contrary the period seems to have been one of much social and economic well-being. Whence came the world-weariness then? It must have been born of a spiritual hunger. Some of the spiritual meaning and inspiration of the early time had gone out of life. Doubtless the causes of this were very numerous. With the settlement in villages and towns the old democratic spirit of the invading clans had given place gradually to class-feeling. 'The pride of race had put an impassable barrier between the Āryans and the conquered

aborigines; the pride of birth had built up another between the chiefs or nobles and the mass of the Āryan people. The superstitious fears of all yielded to the priesthood an unquestioned and profitable supremacy.' With the disappearance of the old democratic spirit which made each householder king and priest in his own family, sacrifices lost entirely the significance of being national or tribal ceremonies, and became mere magic rites performed by the Brahmans for the benefit of any individual who could afford to pay for them. 'The inspiring wars against the enemies of the Āryan people, the infidel deniers of the Āryan gods, had given place to a succession of internecine feuds between the chiefs of neighbouring clans.'<sup>1</sup> For all the deeper spirits the result of developments like these must have been not, indeed, to make daily life miserable but to rob it of its power to inspire. However, one may question whether, even by their combined influence, these changes could have sufficed to give birth to so universal an acceptance by the thoughtful of a pessimistic estimate of life as apparently came to prevail. To produce such a result some other factor must also have been at work, either independently or by way of intensifying the influences mentioned. Now the conception of Karma and transmigration must have been well calculated to intensify those influences. This conception had sprung up independently, and evidently at an early stage in the development. It probably arose

Chiefly from  
Karma-belief

<sup>1</sup> Cf. PROF. RHYS DAVIDS, *Buddhism*, p. 23.

through a syncretistic fusion of Āryan moral ideas with decaying aboriginal beliefs, and in its earlier growth it had doubtless helped to give a religious sanction to the ordinary moral instincts. But as the conception was gradually developed to its logical consequences by reflective thought, it must have greatly intensified the soul-hunger of all who had already begun to find life uninspiring and unsatisfying. By this conception the horizon of ordinary life was extended far beyond birth and the grave, and everything that was petty and unspiritual about life was exhibited in just as great abundance beyond those barriers as within them. Life was thereby indefinitely extended in its range without being transformed in its character. Now if the features of social life above-mentioned—the growing rigidity of caste-distinctions, the absence of a common national interest and enthusiasm, and the materiality and grossness of the prevalent popular religion—were already fettering individuality and depriving the deeper spirits of any channels of activity wide enough to satisfy and inspire, the thought of an extension of such a life by limitless repetitions must have threatened to strangle individuality at once. An eternity reproducing, under whatever modifications, the essential pettinesses of an untransfigured present was an idea in which the spiritual mind of India could never have rested. No wonder that, side by side with the perfecting of the conception of Karma and transmigration, there grew up a pessimistic mood which gave a ready hearing to philosophies offering a way of escape from all finite existence

whatever.<sup>1</sup> That solution, or one other, was the only path open to Indian faith if it was to maintain, in however changed a form, the optimism of its earliest days. The other path was to call in question the validity of the idea of Karma altogether. Since India did not choose to take this latter path, she had to tread the former.

(2) Such might be the historical answer to the question whether the time-honoured Hindu endeavour to transcend phenomenal conditions has anything to do with the conception of Karma and consequently implies a criticism of that conception. By the nature of the case this answer draws so largely on the historical imagination that it must rank as a speculation, plausible or otherwise. Unfortunately the other line along which an answer seems possible presents difficulties of its own. This is the analytical answer and consists in setting forth the criticisms of the Karma-system which seem upon examination to be implicitly contained in the Hindu gospel of release from phenomenal existence. Obviously such an undertaking is difficult for the very reason that these criticisms are implicit only. The truth of the idea of Karma seems to have appeared so axiomatic to Indian thinkers that they were never

<sup>1</sup> One might be tempted to go a step further and to imagine that the doctrine of emancipation owed not merely its popularity but its origin to the influences described, but the weighty authority of Deussen is against any such suggestion. He declares that union with the *ātman* was recognized as an end of endeavour and longing 'before anything was yet known of transmigration, but only of a renewed death in the other world'. (*Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 342). For Deussen's account of the rise of the transmigration idea see the note at the end of this chapter.

impelled to a systematic examination of its nature and of its presuppositions. Nevertheless the difficulty is not quite invincible. Release from all phenomenal conditions has not been

Emancipation  
keenly desired

in India what it would be apt to be in Europe—a mere metaphysical speculation; it has been a genuine object of longing. Now if the ideal thus ardently aspired for is distinguished by the absence of certain important conditions characteristic of life as determined by Karma, one may plausibly infer that the absence of those conditions constituted part of the charm of the ideal. Such an inference would not be very safe, if the ideal in question were a more concrete one. It would be absurd, for example, to argue that part of the attractiveness of the Christian's 'heaven' was due to the absence therefrom of all marrying and giving in marriage. In the case of the Christian heaven the idea is comparatively so rich in content, that the absence of one or another feature of earthly life may be merely incidental and may in no way determine the attractiveness of the ideal. In the case of the Hindu ideal of release, on the other hand, if one were to refuse to seek the source

of its attractive power in those conditions which it excludes, one would be logically prevented from seeking it anywhere else. Just because the higher knowledge is a state which absolutely transcends ordinary conception, one cannot legitimately endeavour to form a positive idea of its nature; it can be described only by negatives. If it nevertheless has power to attract human longing, this implies that what it excludes

This is  
significant

is what man yearns to be rid of. In other words explicit exclusion is in this case implicit criticism. If then any of the features which the idea of Karma bestows on human life are clearly and emphatically declared to be absent from the ideal state, one may discern in this fact an important indication that in these respects the deeper Hindu mind found the Karma-system, in itself and as such, spiritually unsatisfying.

Now it appears to me that two most important symptoms of such dissatisfaction are not very far to seek. They are the atomistic universalism of Hindu religious theory and the ascetic rigorism of Hindu ethical thought. The importance of these characteristics in the present connexion lies in the fact that they seem explicable as reactions against prominent features of the Karma system. If one looks at that system by itself and apart from any hypothesis of a possible way of release, one's attention is at once arrested by two influences which it seems calculated to exercise. It seems calculated, on the one hand, to repress the nobler of the individualistic instincts of man and on the other hand, to foster a narrow and selfish type of individualism. Against the former influence the peculiarly atomistic universalism of Hindu religious theory is a natural reaction, while Hindu ethical rigorism seems an equally natural reaction against the latter.

Two results of  
Karma-belief

How does the former influence, the influence repressive of individualism, arise? Let me answer in the words of a text-book, published by the Board of Trustees of the Central Hindu College, Benares: 'We are always

making new *karma*, and experiencing what we have made in the past. We are obliged to act now in the conditions we have created in our past; we have only the opportunity of obtaining the objects then desired; of using the capacities then created; of living in the circumstances then made.<sup>1</sup> In a word, by the conception of Karma emphasis is laid on the idea of *destiny* in a way calculated to crush the indispensable individualistic qualities of personal aspiration and enterprise. Now I do not wish to read any unfair meaning into these words of the text-book. I quite agree with the author that fatalism is not a logical, but an illogical, consequence of a thoroughgoing determinism. As he says: 'The living Jīvātmā, that then desired, thought and acted, [and thereby created the *karma*,] is still the same powerful agent as he then was, and can put out his powers within the limits he has made, can modify and slowly change them, and create better conditions for the future.' It is not the idea of destiny in every form that I would criticize, for 'providence' itself is a variant of the same idea. My point is that the particular form of the idea of destiny, which the Karma-system involves *when it is considered apart from any way of release*, is one calculated to crush the spirit. Certainly the Jīvātmā, by the *karma* he is now producing, can 'create better conditions for the future,' but it is for a future beyond the present embodiment. For the present life a man's possibilities of good fortune or

<sup>1</sup> *Sānātana Dharma*, p. 115.

ill-fortune are unalterably determined—determined, too, not by a benignant 'providence' but by a Karma-force dispensing mechanical justice. What any man is immediately concerned with is only the *prārabdha karma* which 'cannot be changed; it must be exhausted by being experienced'. He is under the dominance of past lives and has 'only the opportunity of obtaining the objects then desired; of using the capacities then created; of living in the circumstances then made'. Is not such a doctrine calculated to drive a man in upon himself in a despair which may become rebellious unless some hope of a way of release come to transform it into a resigned patience? It may be true that the destiny represented in the Karma-concept is 'a self-made destiny, imposed from within, and therefore a destiny that is continually being remade by its make'. But, as against the ages during which the destiny has been in the making, the best efforts which the present conscious subject can put forth to remake and transform it must be puny and, in their combined effect, insignificant. So it comes about that the predominant impression made by the doctrine of Karma, taken by itself, is that the conscious individual is in the grasp of a power greater than himself, a power which, heedless of his wishes, is working out the burden of an immemorial past. It is little wonder that, in its practical results, the belief in Karma should so often lead to a fatalistic temper of mind.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 118.

Now what attitude has the best religious thought of India taken up towards this aspect of the Karma-system? As has been noted it does not venture on the radical course of condemning the whole conception as a relic of the childhood of thought. It follows, instead, a subtler plan. Within the phenomenal realm it admits the conception to be valid, but for those who seek a higher truth it has set forth a gospel which, in its rejection of the idea of the subjection of the individual, goes further even than Christianity. This gospel appears in its extremist form in the Advaita-Vedānta. There it is taught that every soul is—not a part of, nor a modification of, but—simply identical with Brahman. That is its real nature, and therefore all the paraphernalia of a separate self subjected to an alien universe is mere phenomenon and an affair of nought. The phenomenal self may be in bondage; the real self is free. And, in the second place and as a corollary to this doctrine of transcendental freedom, there comes a transfiguration of the idea of the phenomenal Karma itself. That is converted at a stroke from a mechanism of abstract justice into a process of grace. The compulsory consuming of the just fruits of deeds is now not to be regarded as an end in itself but as the kindly ordinance of a supreme Lord, who will ultimately lead each individual soul to release from phenomenal bondage. That portion of a soul's *karma* which is sufficiently congruous to be worked out in one physical body is selected by the Devas who rule this department of nature, and a suitable physical body is built for it, and placed with the parents, nation, country,

Reaction against  
fatalism

In the Advaita-  
Vedānta

race and general surroundings, necessary for the exhaustion of that *karma*'<sup>1</sup>. It is the lower Brahman as *Īsvara* 'by whose sanction the soul-migrations are determined and by whose grace (*prasāda, anugraha*) the saving knowledge is conditioned; he ordains for the soul both its work and its suffering, although he takes into consideration, in so doing, the works of the previous births, and makes the fate of the new life proceed out of them, precisely as rain produces a plant out of its seed and in conformity with its nature'<sup>2</sup>. This teaching about the lower Brahman is, of course, presented as something less than the highest truth. It is intended for those who cannot attain to that supreme insight for which the whole phenomenal system becomes veritably a thing of nought. Still the grace of the personal *Īsvara* is quite as real a factor as the Karma-force with its remorseless justice; both are real upon the phenomenal plane. Now this thorough transformation of the grim fatalism which would have been characteristic of the Karma-concept, had it been left to stand by itself, seems exceedingly suggestive. The Vedāntic gospel cannot be accepted, indeed, as satisfying vindication of the claims of the individual spirit, for the identity with the supreme which it accords to every soul as its inalienable birthright, is affirmed at the cost of sacrificing all that makes true individuality. Still, this very extravagance of the solution propounded shows all the more clearly that the problem was felt to be a pressing one, and that Hindu thought was no more able than Christian thought would be, to rest in the bare

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> DEUSSEN, *System des Vedānta*, pp. 493-4.

Karma-concept. In reaction from the idea of a finite self crushed under the might of an immemorial, self-made destiny, it went to the extreme of affirming that each individual is himself the Absolute, and that for every man all his suffering has no other significance than that of being the means whereby he may some day come to know himself. To such an extreme of individualistic universalism Christianity has never ventured to go. It has never admitted that man suffers only for his own sake, and from the assertion that all men will attain salvation typical Christian thought has ever shrunk back.

The development which has just been considered is not confined to Vedāntic thinkers. If even the Vedānta can be considered as, in part, a reaction from the fatalism of the unsupplemented dogma of Karma, the individualism of the Sāṅkhya system is much more obvious. Each individual *puruṣa* exists for himself alone, and the whole evolution of the universe is called in that he may attain the freedom of insight. 'It is that the soul may be able to contemplate Nature, and to become entirely separated from it, that the union of both is made, as of the halt and the blind, and through that (union) the universe is formed.' 'Thus this (development of being), formed from Nature (*prakṛiti*), from the great principle (*buddhi*, intellect) down to specific beings, is for the deliverance of each individual soul. This action (*ārambha*, effort) is for another, as if for itself (Nature).'<sup>1</sup> Even in the Śaiva Siddhānta, in spite of its many

affinities with Christianity, the same exaggerated individualistic note is heard. In this system, indeed, the individualistic reaction is more successful than in the Advaita-Vedānta, since the escape from bondage which it holds out to all comes through a union with the supreme in which individuality is in a measure retained. 'If they become one, both disappear; if they remain two, there is no fruition; therefore there is union and non-union' (*Tiruaruḷ-payan*, 75).<sup>1</sup> Still the individual souls, although they have this common destiny of a real eternity of bliss, seem meanwhile to have no essential connexion with one another. Each of them consumes nothing but the fruit of his own deeds and travels towards salvation along the path allotted to himself, through more numerous or fewer embodiments. 'Through His infinite compassion towards souls, for which they can render Him no return, [Śiva] ever performs without performance, the acts of creation, protection, destruction, veiling and dispensing grace' (*Periya Purāṇam*).<sup>2</sup> That is to say, the recurrent cycles of creation and destruction are carried out by Śiva purely for the sake of the 'flock' of uncreated or eternal souls, in order that they may individually be enabled to consume the equally eternal 'host of unoriginated deeds, merits, and demerits' with which all are burdened, and may individually attain to union with Himself. Since this union, when attained, is—according to Dr. Pope—final and irrevocable, it is possible that 'the time shall arrive when all embodied lives

In the Śaiva  
Siddhānta

<sup>1</sup> *Sāṅkhya Kārikā*, 21, 56. DAVIES'S version.

<sup>1</sup> POPE'S *Tiruvāṣagam*, p. lvii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. lxxiii.

have obtained release, and then the worlds will for ever cease and Siva be all in all<sup>1</sup>. Meanwhile, so long as any soul has still fruit of deeds to consume, the æons of creation and destruction must go on. It is a grand conception, for it means that Siva 'willeth not that any should perish'. And yet, by exaggerating its individualism and ignoring the fact that no man bears only his own burden, the Saiva Siddhānta misses one great secret of Christian inspiration.

Perhaps enough has now been said to win a hearing for the suggestion that the higher Hinduism in its most important forms, including even the pantheistic, betrays an exaggeratedly individualistic impulse which is best explained as a reaction against the tendency of the Karma-concept to repress individuality. If this be admitted then Hinduism is in implicit agreement with Christianity in one important criticism of the Karma-system. However, this is not the only implicit criticism of which the higher Hinduism seems to give evidence. It was pointed out above that, when the Karma-system was considered by itself apart from hypotheses of a way of release, it tended not only to repress the nobler individualistic instincts but to encourage the baser. According to it the only destiny which a man can modify is his own. He can by meritorious deeds win for himself a happier lot in a future embodiment, but he cannot alter another man's destiny either for good or for ill. Thus even virtue finds a selfish motive laid ready to its hand.

Meaning of this  
reaction

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18.

That this is a real weakness of the Karma-concept is evidenced by the fact that the Benares text-book previously quoted is at pains to discuss a closely related objection. One of the mistakes that are sometimes made as to Karma is, we are told, 'that which leads a person to say respecting a sufferer: "He is suffering his *karma*; if I help him I may be interfering with his *karma*."' Those who thus speak forget that each man is an agent of the *karma* of others, as well as an experiencer of his own. If we are able to help a man, it is the proof that the *karma* under which he was suffering is exhausted, and that we are the agents of his *karma* in bringing him relief. If we refuse to carry the *karmic* relief, we make bad *karma* for ourselves, shutting ourselves out from future help, and some one else will have the good *karma* of carrying the relief and so ensuring for himself aid in a future difficulty<sup>1</sup>. This quotation brings out very clearly the point I wish to make. Belief in Karma should not prevent a man from carrying help to others. He ought, indeed, to be glad to be an agent of the good *karma* of another. But the utmost that he is able to do is to become an agent of *an already determined destiny* of pleasure or pain. He cannot alter that destiny in the least. But the ability to become the agent of a predetermined destiny can hardly awaken much altruistic enthusiasm. What really stirs a man is not this but the ability to decide the undecided, and to throw his personal weight into the scales of fate. Now

Karma and  
selfishness

<sup>1</sup> *Sanātana Dharma*, p. 118.

according to the above statement of the text-book, the only destiny which hangs in the balance is the helper's own. If he assists the distressed he will make for himself good *karma*; if not he will make bad. Should he then feel more interest in the thought of bettering his own destiny by the kindly act than in that of becoming thereby the agent of another man's predetermined share of happiness, one must confess that such a result is only natural. In this way belief in Karma must tend to cause beneficence itself to grow selfish in its motive, and if that be the case with even this altruistic virtue what shall be said of the others? Such a view robs life of its social inspiration. A man is thereby shut in with his own destiny and deprived of anything more than an apparent influence upon the real well-being of his fellows. And by the correlative dogma of transmigration this cramping of his proper powers is extended into a limitless future. No wonder that the deeper spirits of ancient India felt such a life not to be worth living! No wonder that they projected hypotheses of a way of release! And shall we venture to imagine that their dissatisfaction was in no degree a moral dissatisfaction, implying a moral criticism of the weary Karma-ridden *samsāra*? Since good deeds as well as bad help to plunge a man in this unsatisfying ocean of phenomenal life there may be some justification for such an idea. Yet that the case should be wholly so is intrinsically improbable. Surely it should be possible to find in the higher teaching which developed by reaction against the unmodified Karma-system some evidence that the reaction was in part a moral one.

Reaction against  
egoism

I have already suggested that the looked-for evidence may be found in the rigorism or asceticism of Hindu ethical thought. By this I do not mean merely the time-honoured Hindu veneration for ascetic practices. Such asceticism is often prompted by the desire to amass merit and is, therefore, as narrowly self-centred as the Karma-system itself. I refer rather to the ascetic rigorism of such a work as the *Bhagavadgītā* which inculcates the repression not so much of sensuous indulgence as of desire of every sort. From beginning to end that great work condemns what, according to the unmodified Karma-system, can be the only rational motive of all conduct—attachment to the fruit of action. 'That action is called good,' says the *Gītā*, 'which is prescribed, which is devoid of attachment, which is not done from (motives of) affection or aversion, (and which is done) by one not wishing for the fruit.'<sup>1</sup> Teaching like this is certainly an exaggeration. It is vain to attempt to eradicate all desires, and a motive-less life is empty and worthless. It is grand to do duty for duty's sake only when duty is the framework of a life of social attachment and free devotion. Nevertheless in its very exaggeration this teaching is significant. It indicates a revolt against the selfish view of virtue which is all that a system of exact requital for personal merit and demerit can logically find room for. It shows that, implicitly at least, Hindu thought has committed itself to a moral criticism of the conception of Karma.

In the  
*Bhagavadgita*

<sup>1</sup> TELANG'S version, p. 124.

With this result the argument of this chapter reaches its conclusion. Quite obviously it has laboured under the disadvantage of being largely a speculation, suggested but not demonstrated. Our next step Its purpose has been to show that Christian thought and Hindu thought do not lie so far apart as at first sight appears. What the former denies outright the latter criticizes, at least implicitly. Fortunately the truth of the argument upon which the next chapter will enter does not depend upon the soundness of this contention and is not based upon guesses about a long-vanished past. In attempting to call in question the doctrine of Karma the appeal must be to something near at hand—to facts of common knowledge and the inner light of conscience.

NOTE—In his *Philosophy of the Upanishads* Deussen gives a different account of the origin of the transmigration-idea from that assumed above, and it may be well to append here a summary of his discussion of the question. He rejects the suggestion of an animistic origin of the idea of transmigration, on the ground that the latter rests upon the idea of recompense, whereas animistic conceptions of soul-migration have no such motive. Proceeding, he shows how the idea of recompense after death, already present in the *Rig Veda* and further elaborated in the *Atharva* hymns and the *Brāhmaṇas*, is in the *Upanishads* transferred for the first time into the present. He finds the origin of the genuine transmigration idea in *Bṛih.* 3-4, and here he bids us observe that its motive is plainly the explanation of 'the great moral difference of character, existing from birth'. Lastly, there follows a retrograde step which gives the doctrine its final form. Orthodoxy was unwilling to deny the older ideas of recompense in heavens and hells, and therefore, combining the new with the old, stultified itself by teaching a duplicated retribution. Such is Deussen's account; but it is necessary to point out that the fact of the transmigration idea having been adopted into the *Upanishad* on purely philosophical grounds in no way excludes the possibility of its having originated in a much more popular manner. Certainly it is no mere product of animistic thought alone, for the reason which Deussen assigns. But the existence side by side, in the same country, of animistic notions and of moral conceptions of retribution after death—and Deussen admits the presence of both—constitutes precisely the conditions calculated to lead semi-popular religious reflection to invent the idea of transmigration.

## CHAPTER III

### CRITICISM OF THE CONCEPTION

Like fishes going against a current of water, the acts of a past life are flung back on the actor.

*Mahābhārata.*

Rabbi, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind? Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

*The Gospel according to St. John.*

IN what has been already written reasons have been alleged for holding that the doctrines which make up the higher Hinduism were developed partly by way of reaction against certain aspects or consequences of the belief in Karma; or—if that be too strong a statement—at least that they owed the strong hold they took of the Indian mind to the escape they offered from the pessimism which that belief is calculated to engender. If this was the case it follows that these doctrines may be regarded as indicating a critical attitude on the part of Indian thinkers towards the Karma-system. It was a criticism which did not go the length of directly calling in question the scheme of Karma and transmigration itself. It was content instead to transform the significance of the conception by placing it in a setting of far-reaching speculative theory. As a result of that setting the conception of Karma

becomes less repressive of the nobler individualistic instincts of man. Moréover a degree of relief is provided against the tendency of Karma-system to engender a selfish type of morality; for the possibility of release from its thrall leads men to aspire after a nobler kind of virtue, not motived by the desire to obtain merit; and even if Hindu ethical theory strangely describes that virtue as destitute of *all* 'attachment,' the virtue itself may be nobler than the theory.

If this is a sound view of the process of development of Hindu thought, it at once reveals a point of contact between Hinduism and Christianity. For although the Christian is compelled at the very outset to discard the general scheme of Karma and transmigration, and although by this radical step he commits himself to a line of thought very different from that which the Hindu has traced, still both find themselves at one in a critical attitude towards any attempt to treat the Karma-concept as a representation of ultimate truth. Is not the Hindu treatment of the scheme of Karma and transmigration, however, dangerously far-fetched as compared with the simple Christian attitude of rejection? After all, what evidence is there that phenomenal life is governed by the rigid law of Karma?

In the conception of the law of Karma two elements stand out distinctly. The first is that every man's peculiar lot is the fruit of his conduct in a previous, unremembered soul-embodiment. The second is that an exact proportion subsists between the extent of a man's previous merit or demerit and the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the fruit he

Rejection  
simpler

Law of Karma

has to consume. From the nature of the case the former element in the conception is one for which no scientific evidence can be forthcoming. Even if certain persons claim to remember their previous embodiments, this is not scientific evidence, for its correspondence with fact cannot be tested. It may be thought that with regard to the second element in the conception of Karma the position is different. The idea that a constant proportion must obtain between the heinousness of an offence and the unpleasantness of its fruit, may seem to involve nothing more serious than an extension to the moral realm of the law of cause and effect prevailing in the natural. This is not the case however. In the natural realm itself it is only on the assumption of the elimination of disturbing influences that the principle that like causes must produce like effects can be called a law of nature. Now the conception of Karma implies, not merely that there is a necessary connexion between action and fruit, but also that no disturbing influence has power to destroy the exact proportion between merit and requital which the Karmic law requires. We are to suppose that human deeds are seeds which belong to no botanic genus; they are immune against soil and weather. The sterility of other men's evil lives cannot diminish the gracious harvest of a good deed, nor can the sunshine of other men's goodness burn up the young ear that has sprung from a seed of evil. Seeds of so wondrous a growth are not of this world. The law of Karma may be true or it may be false, but it certainly is no mere extension of the laws of the physical realm.

No scientific  
evidence

No analogy  
in Nature

The truth is that the lessons of experience and scientific knowledge all point the other way. So far from being determinate the consequences of deeds are proverbially indeterminate and difficult of calculation. Everything depends upon the object affected. Cut a fabric and the gash will remain; cut a finger and it may heal. Do a deed in one environment and the consequences will be trivial; do it in another and they may be momentous. The whole evolution theory of modern science depends upon the recognition of this truth. The influence of the factors composing one and the same environment extinguishes one species but preserves another, and through the multiplex working of action and reaction there results a higher development which none of the agents intended. Good may come out of evil, or evil out of good, through the transformation of consequence by the might of a developing environment. Of the supreme significance of this truth Hindu thought about Karma takes no cognizance, and an interesting consequence of this omission is the Hindu lack of interest in history. For if the law of Karma be true history is shown of its deepest meaning. Real history does not consist of a mere sequence of events, but it sets forth that sequence as a genuine development. It shows that the actions of individuals are charged with a meaning which not only goes beyond the individual's conscious horizon but is pregnant with issues that determine the lot of other individuals. No one to whom this conception of history has become a living thought can fail to realize its intense moral

Contradicted  
by evolution

Robs history  
of meaning

interest. It enables every man to say to himself: 'My actions are charged with an influence which may affect for good or ill the lot of other individuals. Their freedom, their comfort and culture, their moral and spiritual elevation may be helped by my heroism or hindered by my folly. I am, in my measure, the arbiter of their destiny.' Now up to a certain point the believer in Karma can speak in similar fashion. He, too, can feel that his conduct is an agent in preparing the manner of lives which are to be lived by present and future generations. But the resemblance stops short here. He helps to make ready the manner of lives that can be lived and their mixture of pleasure and pain, but in no essential point can he hope to determine the destiny of even a single individual. For each individual in the coming generation as well as in the present his own *karma* has already determined what sort of life-experience he must have, and what measure of pleasure and pain. The actor on the present stage can only provide the means by which this already determined *karma* may fulfil itself. He cannot work to win for the men to come a nobler destiny than his own has been. As regards other men all he can do is to help to turn for them the measured wheel of life. If he injures others, he is enabled to do this only because in a previous life they acted so as to deserve such an injury. Had he not injured them they must have received a corresponding amount of pain in some other way. On the other hand if he benefits others the achievement is equally empty. Such a view as this robs life of half its meaning. Real history

Frustrates the  
will to serve

disappears and all that is left is the chance pattern resulting from the interweaving of countless separate destinies. It is a pattern which may interest the curious, but it has no life nor any universal meaning. Surely this is a paradoxical result! It is a necessary inference from the law of Karma, but it cannot be inferred from the mere principle of cause and effect. Not in spite of that principle, but through its means, what is done *can* be undone. In life, so far as it comes within the horizon of observation, merited consequences *can* oftentimes be escaped. What has been done is undone by being *counter-acted*. Even human wisdom can undo a great many things.<sup>1</sup> And if human wisdom can counteract and, by transforming, nullify the natural evil consequences of many deeds, much more may the divine purpose which is working itself out in the evolution of the universe, make for righteousness and forgiveness, in spite of evil deeds of men of which the natural consequence would be universal ruin. It is not then from life as it shows itself to human observation—not from the natural laws visible in the phenomenal world—that the Karma-concept can be derived. If the fruits of deeds are un-deviatingly meted it must be through an ordinance of the supreme *Īsvara*, or through action on the part of 'the *Devas* who rule this department of nature,' interfering with the natural tendency towards the

Interrupts  
natural law

<sup>1</sup> To a certain extent the principle of the transformation of consequence is recognized by the Benares text-book, when it points out that *Vartamāna Karma* may be destroyed in the current life (*Sanātana Dharma*, p. 121).

transformation of consequences. Of such supernatural interference, however, we can have no scientific evidence, and this absence of evidence is the point I am now urging. The Karma-concept, in its second aspect quite as much as in its first, is one of which no person can hope to offer a scientific demonstration.

It does not directly follow, however, that the conception is untrue. Religious and moral doctrines are always incapable of the kind of demonstration looked for in questions of physical science, and whatever may have been the origin of the conception of Karma, it certainly now holds its place because of its supposed moral value. Nevertheless it has not been wasted labour to inquire whether any scientific evidence is forthcoming in support of the conception. If there had been such evidence, many persons might have been willing to shut their eyes to moral deficiencies in the doctrine of Karma, and to assume in pious faith that, somehow, it must be right, however unsatisfying it might appear. On the other hand, if there is no evidence in support of the doctrine, apart from its supposed fitness to explain moral difficulties, one will be impelled to examine into its moral sufficiency all the more narrowly.

Is it morally  
satisfying?

As a moral doctrine the conception of Karma renders two services; it provides a theory of punishment, and it offers an explanation of the apparent inequalities of man's lot in life. In its former aspect, as a theory of punishment, it emphasizes one truth to which Christian theologians have, perhaps, devoted insufficient attention. This truth is that offence and penalty must stand in a vital

Act and fruit  
a unity

relation to each other so as to make up one indissoluble link in the order of things; they must be capable of being regarded as phases of one and the same spiritual phenomenon. Now this feature of punishment is emphasized by the use of the word *Karma*, 'action'. As the Benares text-book observes, this word should 'remind us that what is called the consequence of an action is really not a separate thing but is a part of the action, and cannot be divided from it. The consequence [of an action] is that part of the action which belongs to the future, and is as much a part of it as the part done in the present'.<sup>1</sup> This idea is all important for an intelligible theory of punishment, and must be retained, whatever other elements of the Karma-concept may be discarded. It is quite separable from those other elements; indeed it may benefit by the separation, for when penalty is postponed till a succeeding embodiment, and officiating Devas have to be called in to arrange its incidence, the link of indissoluble unity between action and penalty is worn thin to the breaking point.

From the idea of a necessary and indissoluble link between an offence and its penalty there logically follows a total exclusion of all arbitrariness in the measure of the penalty. If the penalty is the fruit of the sin, then, had the sin been different while the spiritual environment remained the same, the punitive fruit would have been different; being a necessary product of the total situation, it cannot be arbitrary. Now is the Hindu doctrine of

Arbitrariness  
excluded

Karma faithful to this logical consequence of its own insistence on a bond between deed and penalty as close as that between seed and fruit? Does it entirely rule out arbitrariness? At first sight it may seem to do so. The idea of an exactly measured penalty belongs to the very essence of the conception of Karma. In fact it is only through this characteristic that Karma seems to provide a solution to the problem of the inequalities of human suffering. One man suffers much and another little, because in previous embodiments one has been guilty of much and the other of little. Clearly then the Hindu doctrine of Karma rules out all arbitrariness in the application of the standard of punishment to different offences. All are tried by the same measure. Nevertheless, it is possible that, while there is no arbitrariness in applying the standard, the standard of measurement itself may be arbitrarily chosen. What principle determines the ratio employed in the impartial adjudication of penalty? Apparently it is a necessary presupposition of the Karma-system that no sin ever deserves more than a finite penalty; that every punishment, however severe, is bearable, so that the soul survives it and the transmigration-process is not brought to an absolute halt. But is this true? Does no sin ever merit an infinite penalty? Most earthly kingdoms treat certain crimes as deserving a punishment which, so far as this world goes, is infinite, and surely sins cannot deserve less from God than they do from earthly majesty. Even if capital punishment on earth be a mistake, can we venture to say that a spiritual 'capital punishment' is never deserved from Heaven? Nay, would it not be

Is sin always  
finite?

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 108.

nearer the truth to say that *all* sin deserves an infinite penalty? Is there not a suspicion of arbitrariness here, even in the beautifully symmetrical doctrine of Karma itself? On what principle is it decided that the standard of punishment must be finite?

A comparison with Christianity will help to make clear the point I am urging. Like Hinduism, orthodox Christianity accepts the idea of the native and unconditional immortality of the soul, save that it does not follow

Contrast of  
views

out the idea to what seems its very natural corollary, namely, pre-existence. Accepting this idea orthodox Christian thought finds itself as unable as Hindu thought would be to teach that the soul of the sinner will die. At the same time Christians have learned from Jesus, however imperfectly, the lesson of the awful heinousness of sin, and their thought cannot rest in any smaller admission than that sin deserves an infinite penalty. The combination of these two conceptions of the indestructibility of the soul and of the infiniteness of the penalty deserved leads by logical necessity to the painful doctrine that the impenitent are punished by an existence of suffering prolonged through infinite time. It would not serve the purpose of the present argument to enter upon either a defence or a criticism of this doctrine. What it does concern us to note is the significance of the fact that Christian orthodoxy has seen no way of escape from the doctrine, and that even those Christian thinkers who, in this point, diverge from orthodoxy do not question the infinite demerit of sin. There are Christians who believe in an extended opportunity of repentance after death and who anticipate that

all men will ultimately be saved, but even they do not doubt that an infinite doom is what sin, in its own proper nature, *deserves*. And in a similar spirit upholders of the theory of conditional immortality—the theory which denies that the soul possesses a native immortality and which interprets the ‘second death’ as a literal death or dissolution of the soul—have advocated it on the ground that such spiritual death is a punishment more truly infinite than an endlessness of misery can ever be. It may be fairly claimed then that Christian thought, with something like unanimity, accepts the apostolic declaration that ‘the wages of sin is death’ at least in this sense, that potentially sin merits a mysterious infinite penalty. Now Hinduism has just as uniformly avoided this position. Its teaching implies that under no conditions do the deserts of sin become infinite. Such a divergence of belief is so noteworthy that one cannot refrain from inquiring into its significance. Which of the contrasted views is the more truly moral? We have seen that no scientific evidence can be adduced in support of the doctrine of Karma and transmigration, and that the doctrine depends for acceptance upon its moral sufficiency alone. Is it then in this point *adequately* moral? From what source springs its implication of the necessary finitude of moral penalty?

If we could trace back the Hindu view far enough, we should probably find that, like the Christian, it originated in a distinctly moral estimate of life. So long as the idea of transmigration was primarily a doctrine of reward and punishment awarded in *future* embodiments, it implied that the divine powers were sufficiently

Expiation first  
a presupposition

interested in human goodness or badness to see that it got its deserts, and thereby it encouraged a truly moral view of the present life. It emphasized the necessity of endeavouring to attain the ordinary ends of life in a moral manner, and at the same time it permitted those ends to retain their due measure of importance. To ethical reflection such a view of life may not seem very profound. Nevertheless it is a morally healthy view, for it makes the present world, with its commonplace joys and sorrows, something more than a stage on which eternal verities may act out their several parts. It makes it a place of real decision where prizes are lost or won. On the other hand, when we consider the transmigration-scheme as developed into its full import by aid of the Karma-concept, we find that it has exchanged its primary moral significance for one that is mainly judicial. Not only is the future to be

Later the purpose of existence

the requital of the present, but the present is the requital of the past. The joys and sorrows of this present life do not hang in the balance; they are already judicially apportioned and decreed. Judgement, instead of being a presupposition of the moral order, has become its primary business. Now this may look at first sight like a noble exaltation of justice, but it is one which robs justice of its meaning. An expiation which in being carried through heaps up, of necessity, new *karma* to be expiated is an ordinance essentially meaningless. It would not be thus meaningless if expiation were capable of being considered an end in itself; then its endlessness would constitute no difficulty. The boundless *samsāra* would then be an ocean, not

of bliss perhaps, but at least of moral contentment. Immoral men might long for release, but those that were truly moral would lie 'passive and still before the awful Throne'. They would live through the long Cycles of births, if not 'motionless,' like the soul of Gerontius, at least 'happy in their pain'. But that is not Hindu feeling; and so in spite of the Karma-doctrine Hindu thought confesses that expiation is not an end in itself. Either it must serve some further purpose, or else there must be a way of release from a burden so intolerably meaningless. That is true logic. The Hindu gospel must be, of necessity, a gospel of release from phenomenal existence, if the whole business of such existence be expiation; for expiation can be no end in itself. Judgement is certainly a presupposition of any world-order that is full of moral purpose; to be just is a feature of every moral end. But mere justice by itself is like an attribute with no substance in which to inhere; judgement for the sake of judgement is like a prison-system without any State. Now, of course, the Karma-system is not this impossible phantom of mere 'justice-in-itself'. Men bring into it their own purposes; they conquer or they fail; the divine powers supply the judgement. The judicial character of life is exaggerated, but it is not conceived to be its whole content. Yet just in this exaggeration of the judicial function of the world-order lies that weakness of the Karma-system which explains its finite estimate of moral deserts. It leaves no room for any real union between the individual purposes of men and the universal purpose or meaning of

Cannot inspire enthusiasm

existence. From the individual's point of view life may be full of cherished purposes; from the universal point of view it has no purpose except one which cannot stand alone as a sufficient purpose or be an end in itself—the expiation of Karma. Between the individual's purposes in life and the universal purpose of expiation the only relation possible is that either of chance coincidence or of the frustration of the former by the latter. The universal purpose, namely expiation, cannot possibly be looked upon by the individual as a grand infinite design in which all his finite purposes are consummated and satisfied. Thus the universal purpose and the individual purpose must, under the unsupplemented Karma-system, stand apart. Man cannot surrender himself to be the vehicle of a cosmic purpose commanding his loyalty by its infinite power to satisfy; he cannot do so because the pure Karma-system exhibits no such purpose. And since there is no infinite purpose to which man is impelled by every worthy instinct of his being to

surrender himself, neither is there any such infinite and all-worthy purpose against which he may rebel. If he cannot concentrate all his longing upon the service of a world-purpose of infinite goodness, neither can he commit a revolt of infinite badness. No infinite penalty can be deserved, because there can be no infinite guilt.

We have thus found an answer to the question why Hindu thought, unlike Christian thought, is able to teach that the penalty of sin is finite. This answer shows us that, after all it was unfair to suggest as was done above, that the choice of a

finite standard of penalty was a flaw in the symmetry of the Karma-concept. The finiteness of the standard is really not arbitrary but logical. It is due to no inconsistency of thought but to the moral insufficiency of the Karma-system when considered apart from the doctrines of a way of release. So considered it fails to leave room for an infinite divine purpose in history such as man might ally himself with, and it substitutes for a moral order a mere judicial system. On the other hand, when we allow the Karma-system to lie in the transfiguring light cast upon it by the higher Hindu teaching, the charge we bring against it must be somewhat different. In such a system as the Śaiva Siddhānta especially, and more or less unmistakably in the other systems also, the consumption of *karma* is not treated as an end in itself, but as a necessary step in the realization of a truly infinite good. Life thus becomes charged with a universal purpose which is not irrelevant to the purposes of the individual but which may be regarded as their true consummation. The individual might well surrender himself with joy to the gracious cosmic purpose of an expiation ending in salvation. He might well feel that surrender to that purpose was nothing less than the service of an infinite good, and that resistance to that purpose was an act of infinite badness and merited an infinite penalty. That would be for him only a logical inference from his faith in the gospel of release. Why, then, does the higher Hinduism not draw this inference? Why does it not teach that sin may merit an infinite penalty?

Room for  
deeper view

Surely there is a real inconsistency here—a real weakness of moral teaching. And yet it is a very natural failure. It is an inconsistency forced upon the higher Hinduism, because in all its forms it has begun by assuming the system of Karma and transmigration, and in that system there is no room for an infinite penalty. The succession of embodiments would come to a halt if sin could bring upon the soul an infinite and final ruin. The doctrine of Karma fits beautifully into a system which recognizes no purpose in life other than expiation, but there is no room for it in a universe the purpose of which is moral, not judicial.

Christian thought is free from the incubus of the Karma-system, and therefore it is able to do adequate justice to the deepest human consciousness of guilt. In its teaching the moral order does not disappear behind a judicial system. No religion accentuates the judgement of God more than does Christianity, and yet it is simple truth to say that the exercise of God's judicial functions is thought of as incidental to His purposes of grace. The divine purpose in creation is the 'Kingdom' and not the Judgement-seat. It is perhaps true that certain forms of Christian teaching have tended to over-emphasize the judicial idea. For example, it is one of the difficulties of the idea of the eternal existence of the damned, and of the Calvinistic theory of predestination, that they make punishment look like an essential constituent, and not an incidental consequence, of God's purpose in creation. But while that may be a tendency of these views, it is certainly not their

intention. All Christians agree that the purpose of creation was a purpose of grace; and it is just because it was a purpose of grace that sin, as rebellion against that purpose, acquires its infinite heinousness. The Christian believes the universe to be a moral one in the sense of being a universe whose purpose is the evolution of a morally perfect humanity. But if it be so then in so far as any man commits himself to a sinful end, he defies the purpose for which his being was given him, and thereby he forfeits all right to retain the gift. He deserves to lose the spiritual existence which God called into being for ends so different; he deserves the death or the ruin of his soul—whatever such phrases may mean. There is no need to press this point unduly. Not all Christians will be certain that each single sin deserves an infinite penalty. Sinful acts are greatly mixed with thoughtlessness, and to that extent they do not seem to involve absolute rebellion against the divine purpose, since the implied self-identification with an evil end is not fully deliberate. What is here urged is simply that sin as such—sin in so far as it has become actually what it is potentially—must, from the Christian standpoint, deserve an infinite penalty. The man who realises his sin in the light of a revolt against the infinite purpose of grace, for the service of which his being was given, feels that he merits punishment without measure; that he deserves the crushing ruin of all his spiritual interests; that his just reward would be to experience the infinite 'wrath of God'. Christianity has never taught that a soul must inevitably experience the infinite

Infinite good-will of Creator

Makes rebellion infinitely bad

ruin which it merits, but without the belief that such a doom is what the sinful soul deserves in the sight of God and man, the unique moral power of Christianity would disappear. It would disappear not because that power is nurtured upon moral terrors, but because with the surrender of belief in the infinite guilt of sin must go the surrender of that conviction of an infinite purpose in creation and in history, which is the grand secret of moral enthusiasm.

We have now examined at some length the moral sufficiency of the doctrine of Karma in one of its two main aspects, namely, as a theory of punishment. It has been shown that, while its representation of all punishment as a consumption of the fruits of evil-doing lays commendable emphasis upon an essential characteristic of genuine punishment, its estimate of those punitive fruits as necessarily finite fails to do justice to the deepest form of the human consciousness of guilt. For a purposeful moral order it substitutes a purposeless judicial system which can stir the moral consciousness neither to its profoundest self-humiliation nor to its loftiest moral enthusiasm; and not even the transfiguration of the Karma-system attempted by the higher Hindu teaching has availed to free it wholly of this weakness.

It is time now to turn to the second main aspect of the doctrine of Karma, namely, the solution which it offers of the problem presented by the inequalities of the human lot in life. Briefly the problem is this: how can God be just when he deals out the joys and sorrows of life so unequally? And the answer offered by the doctrine of Karma is equally brief

First  
conclusion

Second question

and very simple. It is this: a just God cannot dispense unmerited suffering; nevertheless the sufferings allotted to individuals do not correspond to the deserts accumulated by each in the present life; therefore they must correspond to deserts accumulated in previous embodiments.

There can be no doubt that it is through the apparent solution thus offered to the problem of the inequalities of the human lot, Hindu view that the doctrine of Karma now exercises its strongest hold over popular Hindu thought; and perhaps this is not surprising. What is certainly surprising, however, is that the higher thought of India should have so long acquiesced in the doctrine. No country in the whole world has shown itself more able than India to condemn the joys and sorrows of ordinary life; and yet this grandly ascetic India must bring in a gigantic hypothesis of transmigration for fear of having to admit that the Supreme Being has distributed these worthless joys and sorrows with anything but perfect equality! That this should have been the real purpose for which the doctrine was invented is hardly credible. The real truth, doubtless, is that the hypothesis was not invented for this purpose, but that the hypothesis of transmigration is older than the problem of which it is now supposed to be the solution.

Are staunch Hindus really prepared to admit that their own faith is less courageous than Christianity in face of disappointment and suffering? Is it really to pass for true Hindu teaching that evils like these are so dreadful that an unmerited experience of them is a moral impossibility? If so then Christianity is indeed a braver faith. For

Christian view

what does Christianity teach? So far from considering unmerited suffering a moral outrage, the Christian holds that it has been the grand prerogative of God, and of God alone, to suffer absolutely without having deserved to suffer, and that the divinest privilege to which a man can attain is to be permitted to suffer evils which another has deserved more directly than himself. Christianity teaches that unmerited suffering is not an outrage and an injustice; that it is, on the contrary, a privilege and an honour.

What is the source of this striking contrast between Christianity and Hinduism? Its source is to be found

The real issue in a fact already emphasized, namely, that Christianity represents phenomenal life as a moral order, while the doctrine of Karma represents it as a judicial system. If phenomenal life is a judicial system then certainly the lot assigned to every man ought to be proportionate to his merit, and the proper function of divine providence will be to see that it is so proportioned. In that case any failure in the proportionment would imply that God was unjust. Consequently *if* phenomenal life is a judicial system—in other words, *if* the purpose of phenomenal existence is requital—then the only way to escape charging God with injustice, is to adopt the hypothesis of transmigration. On the other hand, if phenomenal life is *not* a judicial system, if its purpose is *not* requital, then there is no reason whatever for adopting that hypothesis.

Does Christianity, then, deny that justice is an attribute of God? By no means. It only denies that *judgement* is His present purpose. There is an

important difference between being just and dispensing judgement. Christianity affirms that God is just in all His doings, in this life as well as in the life beyond, but it denies that the ruling purpose of divine providence is to dispense judgement. A good man is not unjust if he refrains from rewarding evil-doers according to their deserts. It is only in the judge that such conduct would be injustice; and in his case it would be injustice only because it is his business to dispense judgement. Now, Christianity teaches that God's purpose in creating the present order was not to dispense judgement but to educate a race of beings into likeness to Himself. Therefore the function of divine providence in the present life is not to requite, but to reveal the character of God to men in such a way as to win their love, their service, and their imitation. So we find that Jesus able to point out, as part of the perfection of the character of God, the fact that He *does not* deal with men according to their merits. 'He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust' (Matt. v. 45). If in any minor degree He has instituted a certain correspondence between a man's experiences and his deserts, this is to be regarded as an educational expedient—a method which, out of His infinite mercy, God adopts in order to train such a man on moral discernment. It is part of that process of self-revelation which is the purpose of divine providence, but it in no way obscures the fact that, on the whole, God's dealings with men are not measured by their deserts.

Justice and  
judgement

Christianity teaches that God is just, but it does not assume that the determining principle of His dealings with men is judicial. Now if the assumption be set aside that God's purpose in directing earthly life is to dispense judgment what does His justice, i.e., His just-ness, involve? It implies in the first place that God will impute neither praise nor blame except as either is deserved. There is no moral necessity, however, that along with commendation there shall go reward, or along with blame penalty. Goodness and badness are their own true rewards. Goodness deserves commendation, but it cannot with justice demand also reward *except from one who has made it his business to recompense goodness*. Similarly it is only from one who has made it his business to recompense badness that wrong-doing can with justice demand punishment as well as blame. Hinduism assumes without proof, and in the teeth of the evidence offered by the prosperity of evil-doers, that the business of divine providence in the present order is to recompense goodness and badness. Christianity denies this assumption. The question between Hindu and Christian, therefore, is not whether God is just or unjust, but whether the purpose of the present order is judicial or moral.

The justice of God, i.e., His just-ness, implies, in the second place, that He will apportion His boons to men not in accordance with impulses of mere favouritism but upon some uniform principle. What will that principle be? Justice does not require that the principle shall be that of equality of pleasure. The principle must,

Must virtue  
be paid?

Favouritism  
excluded

of course, be a good one, but all that justice requires is that, whatever be the good principle chosen, it shall be applied without partiality. Believers in the strict Karma-system will hold that the principle followed is that of proportioning happiness to merit. Christians believe that they know of a better principle. The question between them, therefore, is not of God's justice but of the principle which He with perfect justice carries out.

Now what according to Christian teaching, is this principle? It is the principle of subordinating the whole phenomenal system to the one grand purpose of offering to every soul <sup>God's purpose in providence</sup> coming into life one and the same eternal boon—the boon of a fellowship with God in the voluntary service of absolute good. That this is precisely the Christian view may not be obvious at first sight, and it may be desirable in the next chapter to give reasons for holding that such is really the way in which modern thought is called upon to formulate the essential significance of the original Christian gospel. Meantime one or two explanations are necessary. According to the representation just given, Christianity accepts the fact of historical development. Although it believes that there are infinite possibilities before the human soul, it does not try to explain away the crudeness of human origins. Whatever the reason may be the fact certainly is that God's creation grows from less to more. God does not create full-grown sons but He creates the possibility of sonship; He brings into being spirits who may or may not accept the offered relation of fellowship with Himself. This

crudeness of beginnings and this uncertainty as regards individual destiny are the plain lessons of history, and Christianity accepts them. In another respect also the Christian principle, as represented above, is in harmony with the idea of history. History shows that the lot of the individual cannot be understood apart from the conduct and the experiences of the generations that have gone before; and if we develop the idea of history into the deeper concept of a purposeful evolution, we may add that we cannot understand the lot of the individual apart from the thought of a grander destiny of the race for which it is preparing the way. Now the Christian principle as represented above accepts this position, but so supplements it as to conserve the claims of the individual. It implies that the consummate boon of a fellowship with God in the service of absolute good is offered to each individual soul, but that the way in which it is offered is conditioned by the purpose of offering the same boon to all, and of realising upon earth the 'Kingdom of God'. To some a service of the good is offered which involves much pain and tribulation. To others a service is offered which leads them through sunny paths. There is no thought of merit here, but solely of what the service of the good requires—that grand fellowship in service beside which every earthly joy or sorrow fades into insignificance. This principle of the subordination of every human lot to the service of a grand end, which is at once the infinite purpose of God and the *summum bonum* for man, is the principle in the light of which Christian thought regards all pain and sorrow. Regarded in

Christianity  
and history

Christianity  
respect also the Christian principle, as  
represented above, is in harmony with

this light they are transfigured into privileges. The Christian believes that, when the service of the 'Kingdom of God' requires it the Heavenly Father will not unjustly deny to any man the honour of unmerited suffering, nor when the same service permits it unjustly refuse to any the joy of life's unmerited favours. Life transfigured with such a meaning is surely an honour which the most ambitious might receive with trembling gratitude. When Jesus was challenged to say whether a man born blind had received so dark a lot for his own sins or for the sins of his parents He replied that neither was the case. It was enough for the man to realize that through this infliction and its miraculous removal opportunity had been given for 'the works of God' to be 'made manifest in Him'. To Jesus' mind the honour of being made the vehicle of God's self-manifestation to his fellowmen and to himself was a privilege which converted the man's apparent calamity into a blessing. That is the Christian spirit.

Suffering a  
privilege

The Hindu may very naturally reflect that this idea of a grand world-purpose running through all pain and sorrow is a mere speculation. The most tempting reply is a *tu quoque*. The Hindu idea that the purpose explaining all the diversities of the human lot is expiation is equally a speculation. If the purpose really is expiation then we can see that it involves pain and suffering. Similarly it will be shown later that if the purpose really is the realization of the Kingdom of God this too involves pain and suffering. If then either hypothesis is true we may see

Is this but  
guessing?

a reason for the apparent inequalities of the human lot. Nevertheless it is impossible to give scientific proof of either hypothesis; both remain speculations. *Tu quoque* however is never a satisfying answer. A more positive reply consists in pointing out, as has been partly done above, that the hypothesis of the rigid law of Karma is more at variance with the standpoint of modern science than the Christian hypothesis of a world-consummation slowly begot through universal travail-pains. In particular it may be added that modern philosophical ethics has done much to substantiate the position that the fundamental postulate of morality is not law and punishment, as the Karma-concept suggests, but the power of a moral ideal. The best answer to the objection, however, is to admit that the Christian idea of an infinite world-purpose, to the free service of which all men are invited, is indeed intellectually a tremendous speculation. From so daring a thought men might well have shrunk. But upon Christians there has shone forth in the face of Christ so wondrous a vision of a condescending divine infinitude of love that of one thing they are sure. If their thought of this calling of man to share in the infinite purpose of God is in any degree mistaken it cannot be through its daring that it errs; it can only err through measuring too meanly the love of 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MEANING OF HISTORY

Whensoever, O descendant of Bharata! piety languishes, and impiety is in the ascendant, I create myself.

*Bhagavadgītā.*

When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son.

PAUL.

THROUGHOUT the preceding chapters there has been emerging with increasing emphasis one fundamental distinction between Christianity and Hinduism. Christianity it has been asserted is essentially a religion of history; it tells of a process of gradual achievement through the consummation of which there is rendered possible, in 'the fulness of the time,' a perfected 'Kingdom of God'. Hinduism on the other hand has been shown to be a religion for which history as such—history as the development of a community or of communities, and ultimately of the whole human race regarded as a unity—possesses no particular interest. As was noted at the outset this does not mean that Hindu faith refuses to have anything to do with historical events. Popular Hinduism will admit that the divine may enter the plane of history by an incarnation 'whensoever' such incursion may seem desirable. Nor does

the statement mean even that Hindu thought will have nothing to do with the ideas of development and of world-process. On the contrary it does make an important use of these ideas. Nevertheless the world-process of which it speaks is cyclic, and the development is development of the individual soul through successive embodiments towards fitness for ultimate release. The idea of history as the development of a nation as such, or of the race as such, towards a divinely purposed goal which is the goal of the nation, or the race, regarded as a whole and not merely as an aggregate of individuals, is an idea of which typical Hindu religious thought has made no use. For this individualism of Hindu thought abundant reason has been already suggested. During the early stages of Indian speculation, indeed, the absence of the idea of history scarcely demands explanation, for the birth of that idea is hardly to be expected until reflection reaches its maturity. But the way for its advent was definitely barred when once the conception of Karma established its mastery. The conception of Karma resolves the living social tissue of the historical community into an externally woven web of innumerable individual destinies. History becomes only, or at least mainly, a means of expiation for individuals, and daily life is robbed of its social inspiration. The duties of citizen and of householder cannot glow with the unselfish hope of a brighter day to be earned by the generations that pass for the generation that is to come. Under such conditions it is no wonder if all deeper spirits seek refuge in the life of reason, and if reason busies itself not with the study of the finite, not

with scientific inquiry and historical research, but with yearning contemplation of an Infinite which cares for none of these things. The Hindu bias towards intellectualism and against history ceases to be a problem when one ascribes it to the influence of the doctrine of Karma.

What are we to say, now, regarding the Christian interest in the historical? Is this also a problem, although of an opposite kind? Or does it seem only natural that a great religion should have reared its doctrines upon the basis of a particular interpretation of historical facts? Probably most thoughtful Hindus feel, like the late Justice Ranade,<sup>1</sup> that this dependence on history constitutes a weakness in Christianity. If so they by no means stand alone, for this feeling has its root in a phase of philosophic reflection which has been abundantly exemplified in the West. To the philosophic mind with its demand for immutable verity the realm of the historical is apt to present peculiar difficulty. This is due to something more than the mazy complexity of all historical development and the residuum of apparently fortuitous incident which every historical theory has to tolerate. The real source of difficulty is the element of change and growth necessarily implied in the very nature of historical process. What room can immutable verity leave for change? How can the real *grow*? How can the Infinite enter the plane of finite history without thereby becoming finite? How can the soul be brought into a true religious

History and metaphysics

<sup>1</sup> Cf. his lecture on *The Philosophy of Theism*.

relationship to the Infinite through any historical mediation? It is the old metaphysical problem of the relations of Being and Becoming, of the time-less and the temporal, and any attempt such as Christianity makes to interpret historical phenomena as adequate manifestations of the Eternal, necessarily raises that problem in an acute form. There is no need to insist on the difficulty of this problem, for by Indian thinkers the difficulty has been not only recognized but exaggerated. In fact the difficulty which needs to be emphasized in this country is the converse one which arises when the reality of time and of historical change is denied, and the finite is declared incapable of adequately manifesting the Infinite. The great philosophical lesson, which the majority of thoughtful Hindus have as yet failed to master, is the emptiness of the 'thing-in-itself'—the meaninglessness of an Infinite that remains concealed. Absolute immanence differs only verbally from absolute transcendence. Where shall the Infinite reveal itself unless in the finite? How can immutability be manifested except amid change? Questions like these arise whenever an incompatibility of the Infinite with the finite is asserted, and they constitute a problem quite as difficult as that raised by the Christian idea of an adequate manifestation of the Eternal within the temporal. However, it may be admitted that the former problem though of equal difficulty is much less obvious than the latter. In India since the rejection of Buddhism it has not received sufficient attention, and although in Europe the Kantian philosophy and its sequel have left no one any excuse for failing to

recognize the mistake of looking for the Infinite and the real anywhere else than in the finite and the phenomenal, still the recognition is far from universal even there. Everywhere thought is naturally prone to convert abstractions into realities, to substitute the pale products of reflection for the living wealth of fact. We see this in the tendency to regard laws of nature as forces instead of as mere analyses of change. In the ethical sphere a similar tendency reveals itself repeatedly in the conception of a faculty of reason at war with sense. Most notable of all is the free course given to this tendency of thought in the Vedāntic conception of Brahman with its corollary that the supreme reality can be reached only by abstraction from the living and impressive wealth of sensible experience. If then thought is so naturally prone to ascribe to the abstract and time-less conceptions of its own fashioning the reality which belongs only to the living and the changing, how comes it that Christian theology has escaped this snare? Why has Christian thought been faithful to the idea of real history?

The answer is that Christian thought has not wholly escaped the snare. It has not been altogether faithful to the historical standpoint. It too has been tempted to substitute for the idea of a God *in His universe*,<sup>1</sup> self-devoted to what is, in some real sense, a process of achievement, the empty abstraction of a contemplative

Christianity  
and history

<sup>1</sup> I use this word here to signify the whole range of what can to God be objective, however much more it may contain than the universe known to man.

Deity. It too has been tempted to convert real history into a purposeless exemplification of eternal verities. Nevertheless while Christian thought has never been free from this temptation there has always been an obstacle in the way of its yielding. It has been prevented by something more than the philosophical difficulties which such yielding would involve. It has been prevented by the fact of Christ. For just as the whole course of development of Indian thought has been determined by the problems created by the dogma of Karma and transmigration, so the whole history of Christian theology has been determined by the problems created by the personality of Jesus. Just as the belief in Karma has prevented Hindu thought from doing justice to the idea of history so faith in Christ has compelled Christian theology, sometimes in spite of itself, to make account of history.

Every religious system comes into being as an answer to a religious problem and exhibits an evolution not altogether unlike that of a scientific hypothesis. Certainly there are differences between the manner of advance of scientific thought and of religious insight, but these differences are not always equally present nor are they of the first importance. The really important difference is in the nature of the problems to which the scientific hypothesis and the religious doctrine are respectively the answers. The latter is a problem which touches a man on every side of his nature, instead of being mainly a problem of the intellect. It is a problem which only the spiritual

man can feel and into which he is led by the very intensity of his consciousness of God. The problem is heaven-sent in the fullest sense of the words. And when the flash of insight comes which illumines the difficulty and banishes its oppressive gloom it is recognized as a message from on high. In the case of those great creative ideas which have effected a new beginning in the religious evolution of a race the individual, whom God has led into the depths of the problem in order that upon him the solution may break, knows that he has been in the very presence of the Infinite. Just as the problem pressed him on every side of his nature so the solution sets free every energy of his being. He knows that he has seen God and learned truth, and he goes forth full of a message of uplifting for his fellows. Other men among his contemporaries have felt, or learn to feel, his problem in their own measure, and he and they recognize the solution to be what it truly is—a revelation from God, a point of view to which God has led the way, and which enables them to penetrate through the clouds of the intellectual and moral sky into the clear sunshine of God's presence. But another age comes darkened with intellectual and moral clouds of a different cast, and for it the old view-point opens no divine vision. The religious problem has changed, and what had been truly a revelation is no longer such; if retained as a dogma it is a burden to faith and not a help. God is seeking to lead men to a new standpoint where there may burst on them a freer insight, and sometimes they refuse, and always they are slow, to follow.

Such seems to be the normal process of religious evolution wherever there has been real advance.

Each step forward is a revelation and yet no revelation is final. And in a way this analysis applies to the Christian revelation also. There too there was a beginning, a grand creative idea; and there too there has been and will be change. Nevertheless in the case of Christianity there is a difference. It is a difference which every one who accepts the gospel records as even moderately trustworthy must recognize to a certain extent, but which the Christian will consider permanent and all-important. The relation of Jesus to the religion which He originated differs from that of any other founder known to history. If Jesus grew as Luke's gospel declares in wisdom as well as in stature, his inner life must have had its own religious problems and its own solutions. We get glimpses into those problems occasionally, as for example in the narrative of the temptation in the wilderness. The accounts also of the night in Gethsemane and of the experience on the cross make us feel that we are in the presence of one wrestling with an inner problem of personal religion. For the most part, however, we have but a fragmentary and most uncertain understanding of the inner problems of Jesus' life; if the Christian estimate of Him be right not the fullest information would enable us to comprehend them

perfectly. For the unique thing about this religious reformer is that the religion which He founded is not, and apparently was not meant by Him to be, a direct

Evolution of  
Christianity

Distinctive  
feature

reproduction of His own religious consciousness. The religious problem to which Christianity in its every form is an offered solution is not the problem which Jesus had to solve for Himself, but is a problem which He created and knew that He was creating. 'What think we of Christ?'—that is the question which Jesus' whole training of His disciples constantly forced them to put to themselves, and which the world has been asking itself ever since. And if that is the problem to which Christianity is an answer one of two things is certain. Either Jesus was a finite personality, in which case the world will some day sufficiently understand Him and turn its attention to other issues, and Christianity as a religion will die or become unrecognizably transformed; or else Jesus is an infinite personality, in which case the world will ever find in Him a religious problem of baffling but transcendent interest. If this latter alternative be the true one then Christianity must differ from other revelations in being at once final and progressive. It must be final, because the point of view attained by the man who recognizes in Jesus 'God manifest in the flesh' will, on this supposition, be absolutely true. It must also be progressive, because with the advance of society, of scientific knowledge and philosophic reflection, the unexhausted problem of this infinite personality will ever be opening out into new aspects and fresh perplexities.

So far at any rate as the past is concerned, it seems to me difficult to escape the conclusion that the great formative problem determining the line of

development of Christian thought, has been that created by the dominating, perplexing personality of Jesus.

The enigma  
of the Christ

It would of course be affectation to deny that Christianity has faced and attempted to solve other problems besides.

In fact Jesus gained His first acceptance not as an innovator but as the fulfiller of the Jewish faith. The Jews had found in their expectation of a Messianic Kingdom a solution of the pressing religious problem created for them by the contradiction between their disastrous national history and their assurance of being God's chosen people. And although from the very first Jesus was to some extent an enigma, yet those who accepted Him did so not because He puzzled them but because they thought they recognized in Him the expected Messiah. That is to say, they accepted Him to begin with as the resolver of their perplexed and yearning expectancy. But the singular feature about Jesus is that the men who thus accepted

Interpretation  
progressive

Him were unable to stand still in their manner of acceptance. If Jesus was the resolver of the disciples' original expect-

ant perplexity He was quite as much the creator of new perplexities. If He seemed at first to be the consummation of their own reading of Jewish national history He subsequently forced them to read that history in a very new way. If He was at first accepted as 'the Christ of God' He was regarded, before many decades had passed, as 'the Word, made flesh,' and finally as 'God the Son'. A further striking fact about this process of development is that it proceeded in a way so contrary to the natural trend of Jewish speculation.

That would be an utterly perplexing circumstance were it not that we know something about Jesus, and can feel that in His person a great new fact had entered the horizon of Christian experience, forcing the pace of thought and causing old conceptions and problems to give place to new with a rapidity that would be otherwise unintelligible. The apotheosis of Christ is a process which is unparalleled in history. 'The apotheosis of the Buddha,' says a thoughtful writer, 'is no real parallel. That did not begin until long after he was away; it arose on Pantheistic soil; it had every encouragement from the environment. But in the case of Apostolic Christianity we can see the process begin at once without any gap as soon as Christ is away, and going on right against the very genius of Judaism, breaking up the strongest monotheism that the world has ever known.' Clearly the impelling force in such a process did not reside in the antecedent conditions. It is not the problems which Jesus found awaiting Him, but the problems which His unique personality created, that have been the determining factors in the development of Christian thought.

Jesus was, even to those disciples who had known Him in the flesh, a revelation of God transcending anything that they had known before. They felt that, in this Jesus with whom they had talked as man to man, the infinite Will of God had entered the world, charged with a purpose beyond their dreams. Is it any wonder then that Christianity was from the first a religion telling of a historical work of God within the bounds of time, and that this historical note never wholly vanishes from the

Disciples'  
impressions

utterances of those who have caught in any measure the original inspiration? How shall one describe the spell which Jesus laid upon the men who came within the range of His influence? To analyse the impression produced by a great personality is always immensely difficult. Not merely are words clumsy tools for that purpose, but the delicate shades of the impression to be analysed are too subtle even for thought itself to seize and fix. The task, however, is one which must be attempted, and it has been not unworthily undertaken by the gifted pen of the writer last quoted.<sup>1</sup> In what sense, he asks, did the original disciples believe that Jesus was divine? Plainly this was at first only in a very dim, half-conscious, rudimentary and uncertain way. It was purely by way of intuition and not by way of dogma. The great spiritual truths rise always like the sun through the mist, or rather it is the mist of lingering sleep that clouds the morning eyes of the soul. But dim as was the first consciousness of the Apostles that God was in Christ, their tone is quite unmistakable. The way in which they speak of Him, especially after the Resurrection, is qualitatively quite distinct from the way in which men talk even of the best of men. It is not simply a question of proof texts, it is a question of *accent*, of spiritual attitude revealed by many things besides explicit sayings. They speak of Jesus with religious awe. They quote Old Testament sayings about Jehovah and without hesitation apply them to Jesus. They represent "the great Intelligences fair" as casting their crowns before Him. They speak of "the throne of God

<sup>1</sup> REV. D. S. CAIRNS, M.A. (NOW PROF. D. S. CAIRNS, D.D.) in *The Contemporary Review*, October, 1904.

and of the Lamb." There is in their spirits a cast and temper of thought which speedily finds even the Messianic idea wholly inadequate to their estimate of Jesus. It is difficult to define and specify this first Christian consciousness. It is religion as yet and not theology, and when we are dealing with religious intuitions we must use symbol and picture and analogy rather than definition. Human nature is a harp of many strings. The glory and beauty of nature can set some of these chords vibrating, but they cannot awaken the chords of Love, for these need the touch of Humanity. But Humanity cannot awaken those higher notes which sound only when the heart recognizes the presence of God. But explain it as we may Jesus was able to touch those strings and call forth that heavenly melody. . . . To the disciples Jesus was at first perhaps simply man. But as their knowledge of Him widened and deepened and cleared, the very endeavour to understand Him, to make a unity of their thoughts about Him, led them on towards conclusions that caused the spirit to thrill with awe and wonder and yet with joy. They became aware of something mysterious and transcendent in Him, something which was to the human lineaments of the Character what the Thought is to the Word. Behind and through Jesus they discerned—God, and that vision it is which causes the strange thrill and glow of their later writings.

To have known God entering the world; to have beheld Him coming not to dazzle men with a vision of beauty but to *work*, to live an entirely human life and to lay down that life, as He Himself said, 'as a

ransom for many; to find that He came not for the sake of a chosen few, but that He had taken on Himself a burden which cost Him the uttermost sacrifice, for the sake of the whole ugly pagan world which the disciples knew only too well—what a flood of new meaning this experience, with the convictions it gradually forced on them, must have brought into the disciples' lives! The experience could have only one sufficient interpretation. It meant that the old and persistent Hebrew conviction that God was a God who fulfilled Himself through historical events was thoroughly sound. But it meant more than this. It meant that the human history through which God was to fulfil Himself was grander than the grandest visions of the grandest Hebrew prophets. And so we find that an immediate result of the rise of the new faith is a new reading of history. Paul works out an interpretation of the past in which the Mosaic dispensation, the boast of Jewish pride, is reduced to the level of a single step in an age-long Divine work whereby men were first educated to the point of feeling their need for a salvation provided from above, and then that salvation was won for them by the stainless endurance unto death, and the consequent triumphant resurrection, of the heaven-sent 'second Adam'. In the same spirit the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* finds the real value of the ancient Jewish ritual to lie only in its symbolism of that which was to follow.

The note which rang out thus early in the utterances of Christian thought has never since been wholly silent.

God come  
to rescue

Christianity  
historical

Always the work of Christ on earth has figured as a cosmical crisis, in which there was really at stake an issue of supreme interest alike to God and to mankind. At times this conception may have been strangely at variance with other tendencies of Christian theology, and yet it has succeeded in maintaining itself. Sometimes the metaphysical has nearly driven out the historical and ethical. All the human interest and earthly detail of Christ's life has then dropped out of the theologian's sight, and his attention has been concentrated on the metaphysical idea of Deity becoming incarnate, or of Deity dying on the cross. Nevertheless, while the theologian's interest has too often turned purely on the metaphysical implications of the one idea or the other, he has always been compelled to admit that the idea became fact—that at a definite time and place it became actual—that on the plane of the temporal and finite the infinitely momentous was really enacted. The admission thus maintained amid all the intellectual inducements to conceive Deity as eternally imperturbable has its ultimate root in one decisive fact. In Jesus Christians come to know God not as mere reposeful Intelligence but as essentially Will. All things may be possible to Him, but that end which He above all desires—the winning of the free devotion of man—is not possible to Him without infinite self-sacrifice. To achieve it is a divine *work*, a work worthy of Infinitude.

To what task then is modern Christian thought summoned? It is summoned to the task of thinking out afresh the meaning of that original revelation in Christ, not by any means

A Gospel of  
an event

Inferences

ignoring the great work of past theology but avoiding its errors. If we are to do this successfully we must begin by recognizing quite frankly the fundamental characteristics of God as He has made Himself an object of knowledge to us in Christ.

In the first place we must frankly recognize that the God revealed in Christ is a God who is *putting forth effort* to save man, to lift man up into the highest possible relationship to Himself. He is a God whose 'kingdom' has not yet fully come, and all His children are exhorted to strive for its realization. Such a conception may strike us as incompatible with our philosophical presuppositions about the nature of the Infinite. Yet, if on that account we refuse to admit it, our theology will be not an exposition of the meaning of the revelation of God in Jesus but a denial thereof. We must revise and continue to revise our philosophical preconceptions until the solution is discovered. It is worthy of note that this revision of preconceptions is a task which is being forced on modern philosophy by other influences as well as by the Christian revelation. Modern evolutionary science is a standing challenge to philosophy to find a place for teleology in its ultimate view of reality. Already in Hegel's hands philosophy had made an attempt to do justice to the idea of real growth; but something more radical is needed, and the latest departure in philosophical thinking—most conveniently designated Pragmatism—is, even if it fails to establish itself, at least evidence that such an attempt is demanded in the interests of philosophy itself, and not merely by the faith of those to whom God has been revealed in Christ.

In any case, and whatever may be the next step that metaphysicians may take, it surely cannot be denied that as revealed in Christ God is One who in some respect realizes Himself through a historical process. Jesus did not deny the subordination of all things to God; on the contrary He affirmed it with telling emphasis. 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered' (Matt. 10:29-30). Nevertheless He tells with equal emphasis of a 'kingdom of God' in a higher sense, a more perfect sovereignty based on child-like faith; and this is a sovereignty but slowly accomplished; it is founded and brought to perfection against the resistance of human unbelief. This thought is the very kernel of the revelation of God in Jesus; and if we venture to construct doctrines of individual predestination and of a Trinity, in order that we may safeguard that absoluteness and self-sufficiency of the Divine nature which our thought may seem to demand, we must at least ask ourselves if this is the kind of absoluteness to which the revelation of God in Christ bears witness.

The second element in that revelation which we must frankly recognize if our theology is to be truly Christian is that in Christ we have a revelation of God as striving for the salvation of man without limitation of race or time. It is superfluous to offer proof of this fact. Jesus' freedom from nationalistic exclusiveness is transparent to the unprejudiced reader of the Gospels, and His conception of Himself as universal judge shows that He considered His work to have significance

Father  
universal

even for the generations that had preceded Him. The point which does require notice is what is involved in this universality of the divine purpose of grace. We have already seen that the recognition of this universality impelled Paul and the author of *Hebrews* to construct a new interpretation of preceding history. In neither case is the interpretation one which we can nowadays accept without modification, for in two respects the information on which it was based was defective. It would be absurd to hold that we have yet attained a perfect understanding of the course of development of Hebrew religion, but we know enough to see that even in the case of the Jewish faith the real facts differed in important respects from the traditional data, of which these writers set themselves to seek a Christian interpretation. In the second place, in

regard to the facts of non-Jewish religious development we are now in an entirely altered position. The great Apostle to the Gentiles had no knowledge of other religions beyond what he gathered from his experience of the corrupt Roman world. Had he lived in our day, and had he been brought into contact with the greater non-Christian religions, we may be sure that he would have given us a most pregnant interpretation of their relation to Christianity and of their place in the divine economy of grace. As it is he offers us a most suggestive interpretation of the only great non-Christian religion known to him, namely, the Pharisaic Judaism of his day, and of the traditional story of God's dealings with the race before the time of Moses. In both he discerns incomplete revelations whereby

Paul's 'philosophy of religion'

God was preparing the way for perfect revelation in Christ. Our duty is to attempt, with our feebleness of spiritual insight, the task to which Paul and the author of *Hebrews* would have set themselves had they lived now.

Epistle to the Hebrews

The latter writer, through his study of the Hebrew records and his comparison of the fuller Christian faith therewith, reaches the principle that the common element in all true faith is its consciousness of a supersensible realm. 'Faith is to be confident of what we hope for, to be convinced of what we do not see' (Heb. 11:1, Moffatt's translation). The uniqueness of Christianity is, in his view, that therein alone is there provided a perfect revelation of that supersensible realm, of the existence of which all faith is conscious. The faithful of pre-Christian (and even pre-Jewish) times were conscious of the reality of things not seen as yet, but they never had clear knowledge of those things. The Jewish patriarchs knew of an earthly promised land, of a promised rest from all enemies, of a visible tabernacle and rites of purification; but these were merely symbols, shadows of the good things to come and not the very image of the things. Being shadows they could not satisfy, and at each fulfilment the faithful looked expectantly beyond. And why was it that these faithful ones were granted only imperfect knowledge and incomplete attainment? To this question too the same writer has found his answer. 'Though all these had witness borne them through their faith, yet they obtained not the promise: since God had something better in view for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect' (Heb. 11:39, 40, Moffatt's translation).

The 'something better' thus slowly prepared for is, in this writer's view, finally brought to pass through Christ, 'the leader and the perfecter of the faith' (Heb. 12:2). His consciousness of things invisible was not mediated by shadows and symbols, for in Him there first appears in its consummated development that spirit of faith, of which the essence was found in earlier saints.

Thus we find that in this *Epistle* there is provided a theory of religious evolution which within its own range is complete. The greatness of the goal to be reached is made to explain the slowness of its attainment; it was because God had provided 'something better' that earlier generations did not attain the promises. The same purpose of grace explains both the imperfection of their privileges and the greater privileges that followed. Now the same compulsion which lay upon the author of *Hebrews* to work out this interpretation of the past compels us to extend the interpretation. Although actual Judaism was corrupt he knew that in the Jewish religion there had really been the essence of faith 'giving substance to things hoped for and proving things not seen'. That knowledge, which he possessed in regard to the Jewish religion and its antecedents alone, we of the present day possess in regard to other religions besides. We know of their actual corruptions, but we also know that in their origin and in portions of their history there was a 'giving substance to things hoped for' and a 'proving of things not seen'. In some of their heroes we can discern even at this distance men 'of whom the world was not worthy' (Heb. 11:38). Therefore, if we would be true to the revelation of God's

The task  
inevitable

unlimited grace in Christ we must believe and, so far as our insight serves us, try to show that God's dealings with men in all times and places have been governed by the effort to prepare the way for the perfect revelation of Himself in Christ. Everywhere God has been revealing Himself to men, and seeking to lead them into fuller knowledge of Himself and into fellowship with Him in the free service of the good which that knowledge brings. Men have been slow to respond to the Divine prompting, and the revelation of which they have been susceptible has for the most part been sadly imperfect. Promising beginnings have ended in superstition and corruption. Nevertheless this fact does not prove that God has not been seeking everywhere to lead men on towards a perfect revelation of Himself. If God is really revealed in Christ then He must be truly a God of history, and His historical working must always and everywhere have had for its motive such a revelation of Himself as would raise men to freedom of fellowship and service. Thus there was ground for the assertion made at the close of the last chapter, that on the Christian view the universal principle of divine providence is that of 'subordinating the whole phenomenal system to the one grand purpose of offering to every soul coming into life one and the same eternal boon—the boon of a fellowship with God in the voluntary service of absolute good'. That is implied in the unlimited love of God revealed in Christ. It remains to show that this principle involves and satisfactorily explains the fact of unmerited suffering, and that it sheds a welcome light on the Christian faith in a redemption achieved through Christ.

## CHAPTER V

## LOVE AND EVIL

God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him. He that believeth on Him is not judged; he that believeth not hath been judged already. . . . And this is the judgement, that the light is come into the world; and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.

*The Gospel according to St. John (R. V.)*

IF Christians are to be true to the revelation of God offered them in Christ there lies on them the task—so it has been contended above—of interpreting all human history as the vehicle of God's unremitting endeavour to reveal Himself to each individual of every race and nation. To know God is no easy thing; under the best conditions such knowledge must be a gradual growth, and in this matter above all the truth holds good that 'to him that hath shall be given'. What it was which the Jewish race had that made it possible for so much to be given them, is a question which perhaps we may never be able to answer quite satisfactorily. Yet it is easy to see that the early Hebrew faith in a national God, by its very imperfections and the problems to which these gave rise, provided a

The revelation  
in Christ

stimulus impelling the spiritually responsive to tread that particular path of religious thought and aspiration which prepared the way for Christ. What was given to the Jews is now the property of the world. All of us either have or may attain to the vision of God in Christ. Having so much we may have yet more given us—a fuller apprehension of Christ, and of God in Him. The task of these concluding pages is to consider some further implications of the great fact of which Jesus convinces us; the fact, namely, that the supreme purpose of God throughout the phenomenal system known to us has been and is to 'bring many sons unto glory,' to draw men into a fellowship with His own life which will make sin and death an eternal impossibility. We have to see that this gracious purpose involves the possibility of unmerited and substitutionary suffering; that it involves also the possibility of merited ruin to individual souls, for though 'God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world,' yet the perfecting of God's self-revelation must bring to its maturity either the surrender of those who love or the rebellion of the impenitent.

In studying these implications of the revelation of God in Christ we shall be led to make use of that conception of punishment as the fruit or the self-fulfilment of wrong-doing, the insistence on which has been the distinctive merit of Hindu ethical thought. However, while in this matter the Christian may take a lesson from the Hindu, it is necessary to recognize that in the more fundamental matter of the conception of the divine nature no compromise is possible. If we acquiesce in

A moral  
infinite

the endeavour, so typical of Hinduism and of much European thought, to conceive infinitude as consisting in imperturbable self-sufficiency, then no solution of the problem of evil is possible other than the desperate expedient of declaring that evil is unreal—unmistakably existent indeed for human consciousness but non-existent for supreme or divine consciousness. But imperturbableness of this kind is not characteristic of the Father revealed in Jesus. His infinitude is a moral infinitude. He is infinite not because He is undisturbed by evil but because He is *willing* to be infinitely disturbed by evil. His freedom is the freedom of love. The man who loves can remain happy and satisfied amid the most painful and arduous activities, provided that these latter are an expression of his love. While he may ardently desire unlimited changes in the arrangement of the world he knows, he would nevertheless refuse to exchange that world for any other in which his loved one had no place. He can find the most adverse world a happy one so long as it leaves him the power to express his love in activity. If then God can be conceived as Love, there is no impossibility in admitting that the world may be very full of evil. As revealed in Jesus God so infinitely transcends impatient, fretful man that He asks for no freedom save the freedom victoriously to express His purity of love—that He seeks exemption from no disappointment whatever, provided that such disappointment is either directly occasioned by man, or indirectly involved in man's existence; because free acceptance of disappointments so occasioned is a means to the expression of His love. This Christian conception of God undoubtedly

has difficulties of its own but it escapes the impassable obstacles which prevent the Vedāntin from acknowledging the reality and worth of the phenomenal. The Christian does not need to prove the world to be perfect before he can venture to call it God's world. He only needs to show it to be a world such that infinite Love can express itself therein. He does not require to prove that evil is totally absent; he only requires to show that divine Love having created the possibility of sonship by the grant of human freedom can joyfully triumph by self-sacrifice over the evil to which human wills give birth.

Of the logical consequences involved in the conception of God to which the Christian is led when he acknowledges Him in Christ, the first is the possibility of unmerited suffering. According to the Christian conception, as expounded above, the whole phenomenal system has for its object the development in man of a life of fellowship with God in the service of the absolute good. It is therefore a system designed to subserve this fellowship. From that intention it derives its whole character. In every detail of its design nature must be a fit instrument of childlike endeavour in the service of the good—an environment plastic to any will that leans at each step on the Father and follows His purposes only. But if this be so then the very perfection of its adjustment to this Divine intention must prevent it from successfully serving other and incompatible purposes. The case is similar even with the comparatively simple mechanisms of human

Love and evil

Unmerited  
suffering

contrivance. The more delicately calculated they are the more certain is any abuse of them to result in mischief. Consider for example that piece of mechanism which we call the steamship. The steamship is not the most complicated mechanism designed by man, and it is certainly a very poor symbol of God's intricate universe; yet the lives of men are at stake in the proper management of a vessel, and in that respect the analogy is worth drawing. From the very circumstance that the steamship is accurately designed for the good purpose of enabling the competent navigator to laugh at the miles of ocean and to conquer the warring elements, it results that great power of mischief is put into the hands of any ignorant person who meddles therewith. The evil consequences are truly the penalty of his act, because they follow not by accident but from the very nature of his act. He has tried to use a mechanism in a way contrary to its design. Further, the penalty need not fall on him alone but may involve every one of the ship's company. So it is with God's great phenomenal universe. It is far from being wholly mechanical; and yet as a system accurately adopted to one type of purpose—namely to be the instrument of men who serve the good in fellowship with God—it cannot but bear fruits of defeat and extensive catastrophe when men try to use it in self-willed independence and for purposes of sin. These evil fruits it is which are the true *karma*; they are the evil action completing itself. And the important point to observe is that this tendency of the action to complete itself in painful catastrophe is a revelation of the

The true Karma

goodness of God; it is the result and the proof of the fact that God designed the phenomenal system to be an instrument suited to human wills bent on child-like service of the good. Out of God's goodness, therefore, comes this punishment of sin, and it falls not on the guilty alone but frequently on those innocent of the particular misconduct which has occasioned the catastrophe. Such is the true law of Karma, if Karma be interpreted as many modern Hindus appear to wish simply as the idea of causality and system applied in the ethical realm.

If we are to reinterpret Karma in this way, however, a further step must be taken. The evil consequences of sin, though they fall on others besides the sinner, do not fall on all in the same way, but the nature of the effect will depend in part upon the individuality of the person affected. For the true child of God the evil consequences which the sins of others bring on him are in themselves simply misfortunes, external ills which need not destroy his soul's peace, but may be swallowed up in the joyous consciousness that they come through his Father's ordinance. At the worst they will seem to him a mystery to be accepted in patient faith; at the best, as we shall see, the pains may be gloried in as a privilege and an honour. On the other hand the case is very different with the man living in alienation from God. In his soul the evil consequences, whether they be Karmic fruits of his own misdeeds or of the misdeeds of others, become seeds bearing a new crop of evil. They provoke discontent and rebelliousness, and make the man an easy

This Karma  
indeterminate

prey to fresh temptations. Then, in turn these new misdeeds bear their own fruit of evil consequence, and with a like result. So by this law of ethical causation the natural fruit of wrong-doing is to start the sinner upon a path of progressive degradation, of which the natural end is absolute spiritual ruin.

A third step in this reinterpretation of Karma as a law of ethical causation is to recognize that the nature and effect of the evil fruits of sin upon the individual, whether personally innocent or guilty, depend not upon himself alone but upon others. By way of illustration consider Jesus' familiar parable, 'The Prodigal Son' The young man has wasted his means in prodigality and his health in licentious courses. The fruits of his deeds have begun to ripen, and he attains a mood of penitence which, however imperfect, is real so far as it goes. As he nears his parental home how much depends upon the father! The father cannot undo what has been done. He cannot revoke the ethical law of causation. Yet the way in which that law will subsequently work in his son's case depends very largely upon his action. If he refuses to forgive the son will very likely grow desperate. His penitence may vanish and his life may end in complete moral ruin. On the other hand, if the father forgives and restores the prodigal to the standing of a son, his penitence will probably become more real and profound under the ennobling, reproving influences of a good home. The wealth that is gone, is gone; the health that is impaired, is impaired; the memories of shame will still humiliate. But with energies restored by

Socially  
modifiable

forgiveness new wealth may gradually fill the place of old. With virtuous living shattered health may revive. With encouraging forbearance new character and self-respect may be raised from the ashes of old fires. Thus it appears that, when interpreted as ethical causality, the Karmic law is certainly irreversible but leaves at the same time, and for that very reason, great scope for the modification of consequences. Good *karma* cannot wipe out bad *karma*, but by its own causal efficacy it can alleviate the total result. Karmic seeds are not, any more than natural seeds, unaffected by varieties of soil and weather.

What then is the position of mankind according to this reinterpreted law of Karma? In the first place, we see evil consequences falling upon some who had no share in occasioning them, and who, sustained by a glad faith in their spiritual Father, take from these consequences no real or abiding injury. For them 'the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed,' and as we shall see this confidence of theirs is capable of a grand justification. In the second place, we see evil consequences falling upon others, both innocent and guilty, awakening in them rebelliousness and discontent, and so impelling them onward in a course of sin whereof the natural fruit is like to be spiritual death. That consummation is the infinite and merited fruit of maturity in sin, and it is a doom which can fall on the sinner alone. In the third place, we see a possibility of help for the sinner

The drift  
towards ruin

towards an escape from this final doom through the regenerating influence upon him of the conduct and bearing of others. Even the more immediate consequences of sin can be lightened by the same cause.

Out of the last of these three considerations rises the hope of a way of redemption for mankind.

From the instance provided by the parable of the Prodigal Son we have seen that even human love can help

to avert the spiritual ruin which would otherwise be the natural fruit of sin. Now the very fact that sin brings evil consequences, not upon the sinner alone but upon the guiltless, gives love the opportunity for its highest manifestations. Unmerited love is always a regenerating force; but when love has the chance of taking upon itself the penalty which another has merited, such a revelation of pure unselfishness has a doubly moving and awakening power. This opportunity the reinterpreted Karmic law assigns to each of us. We are all called upon to share in the fruits of sins not our own. From the standpoint of a self-centred individualism we might claim the right to resent this, and to be angry with the sinner. Indeed according to the orthodox Karma-concept the bare idea of such unmerited inflictions is so great an enormity that we cannot dream that God would permit them. If then the natural instinct of man is to resent unmerited inflictions all the more impressive must be the manifestation

of our love when it bears willingly the penalties to which a brother's sin has given birth. Human love, however, is a weak

Love's opportunity  
Where is the love?

instrument at best for the regeneration of a sin-stricken humanity. We are all sinners, and if we do not always deserve the precise kind of ills that fall to our lot none of us can say with any truth that he suffers more than he deserves. There is little merit in our patience—is there indeed any?—and at its tenderest our forbearance is sadly imperfect. Only a revelation of the pure love of God can regenerate mankind. Only that can totally break down the impenitent hardness of the human heart, rescuing the sinner not directly from the proximate evil consequences of sin, but from its final consummation in spiritual ruin. Let such an one as Jesus enter the world. Let Him manifest the most uncompromising abhorrence of sin, the most unfailing mercy towards the sinner, the most willing acceptance of the penalties which human sin has brought into life. Let Him grow upon the consciousness of men as He grew upon the consciousness of the first disciples—grow upon the consciousness of men as a transcendent personality, compelling from them a higher and higher estimate of Himself, until they first whisper and then declare with conviction, 'This is the Son of God, this is God manifest in the flesh.' Let them recognize that this One whom they know to be God has taken upon Himself an earthly task for the sake of rescuing them from the power of sin and from its final ruin, and of raising them to a new intimacy of divine fellowship. Let them watch the powers of an evil society massing themselves against Him because the mission He has taken upon Himself threatens

The suffering  
Son of Man

Felt to be God

their domination. Let them see the might of evil men achieving its utmost against Him. Let them behold Him who aspired to be the spiritual King of men, made instead a branded criminal, and yet so bearing Himself as to perfect His kingly authority in the very hour of its denial. Let them gaze on all this, and then must not such a vision have an infinite regenerating power? Is there any hardened heart which, having truly realized it, can remain unbroken and uninspired? If Jesus be thought of as merely man the vision is robbed of its secret of power. It can still move individuals but it will not regenerate a race. But if Jesus be One who, while truly man, compels us to confess Him as being at the same time far more than man; if our hearts

know Him to be God; then His life and death acquire an infinite depth of meaning. What must be the hatefulness of sin, we are then compelled to reflect, if God be willing to task Himself to the uttermost, simply in order to abolish its power in us? We have tolerated it easily in ourselves, but God esteems our sinfulness so dreadful a state that, although no ordinary human life could be an incarnation of the divine fulness of being, still He finds that a human life dedicated to so great an end as the abolition of sinfulness is a life in which He *can* express His whole nature—a life in which He *can* fully reveal Himself—a life in which He *can* be incarnated. Of what have we been dreaming that we have thought so lightly of sin when God thinks of it so gravely? That is the reflection driven home upon our hearts when Jesus forces on us the

conviction that He is not man only but the infinite Person of God. And a second reflection follows quickly. We talk easily of the love of God. We esteem it mere friendliness and good nature. We could not dream that God

Reveals the  
Father

was bound up in His creatures. But if Jesus be God what is this extraordinary love? If God can really incarnate or fully embody Himself in a Saviour of mankind, His love for man can be no superficial attribute of His being but must be the very essence of His nature. What then must man be? What are we? If God can be bound up in us, if a Saviour for us can be an incarnation, a complete forth-putting of Deity, we must be in our true potentialities infinitely greater than we deem. The sin which keeps us so mean and petty must be an awful thing. Our sinfulness must be an awful ruin, a catastrophe which if consummated would shake divinity itself. In thoughts

Regenerates the  
world

such as these is there not a power of redemption from the might of sin adequate to break down the impenitence of the whole human race? Can a man think thoughts so unspeakable—nay, not only think them but have them driven home upon him with all the power of reality by the enchaining, humbling love which makes its personal appeal to him in Christ, without having the might of sin broken in his heart? And can he live henceforth in the fellowship of such a love without finding that the evil consequences of sin which he still must bear, are transformed from incitements to further rebellion against the Father into inducements to

Transforms  
Karma

an ever fuller surrender? Nay, such a love when really felt can hardly fail to regenerate. In Jesus, when felt to be God but not otherwise, there is redemption for mankind. The power of ethical causation which starts from Him is able to transform all other *karma*, wherever the appeal of His love is felt.

Suffering  
transfigured

And the perception of this fact takes away the sting from unmerited suffering when it falls upon those who believe in Him, converting it instead into a privilege and an honour. We have already seen that the secret of unmerited suffering lies in the fact that the world into which sin has entered was designed to serve the ends of a good community. Even apart from the work of Christ, therefore, unmerited suffering is good in one respect, namely, as the consequence of a good purpose, or as revealing the original good-will of God. But for those who have recognized the power of Christ unmerited suffering is more than the consequence of a good purpose. It itself serves a good purpose. It gives our love its grandest opportunity of imitating Jesus' love for man and thereby leading men to Him. Our own forbearing patience in

'Epistles of  
Christ'

accepting the penalties of our brothers' sins has small redeeming power in itself, but as a commentary on the great love of Jesus there is no limit to its influence. Few men who have not the opportunity of meeting Jesus in the flesh could recognize in Him the whole presence of God, were it not for the light thrown upon Him by their fellowship with His followers. That light is faint indeed—how shamefully faint! And yet the

real nature of Jesus' purity of love so transcends ordinary conception, that it is more easily recognized through its pale reflection in His followers' glad acceptance of the unmerited ills of life than through the direct picture in the historical records. So it comes about that unmerited suffering ceases to be a cross and becomes a crown. The Christian needs no hypothesis of transmigration and accumulated demerit to reconcile him to it. He needs it no more than the soldier needs such a hypothesis who finds himself posted in the thickest of the danger. For the soldier it is enough that his country's good requires some one there; for the Christian it is enough that the kingdom of God can be furthered by his glad acceptance of suffering merited by others more directly than by himself.

Starting from the Christian estimate of Jesus and the conception of God to which that leads, and utilizing a reinterpreted version of the idea of Karma, the foregoing paragraphs have elaborated a view of a moral bondage of mankind tending towards final spiritual ruin, of a way of redemption through Christ and of the meaning and use of unmerited suffering. Is this view Christian in character?

Is this view  
Christian?

What is its relation to the orthodox Christian theory of redemption? This is a question which is well worthy of being considered, both because it will lead to a deepening of the view just set forth and because it is right to recognize that the orthodox Christian view lies open to certain merited Hindu criticisms. Orthodoxy varies so much from one century to another, and from one communion to another, that the only satisfactory answer to an inquiry after the

orthodox Christian view of redemption would be to set forth a history of the course of Christian thought on the subject. This, however, would be much too great an undertaking. Perhaps the present end will be best attained by commencing with the theory of Anselm (A.D. 1033-1109) and glancing at its relation to New Testament teaching. His conceptions, although not accepted without modifications, have until recent times dominated the thought of western Christendom to a remarkable degree, and even yet it is uncertain how far they will lose their hold.

Anselm's theory, writes Kaftan,<sup>1</sup> is as follows. Through the guilt of man the divine glory has been tarnished. Before sin can be forgiven and the original world-purpose of God (namely, the blessed destiny of man) can be realized, it is necessary that a satisfaction be rendered to God's majesty corresponding to the magnitude of the wrong. On the one hand men are in duty bound to provide this satisfaction. On the other hand they are unable to do so, because at no moment are they able to do anything beyond what is that moment's own duty.<sup>2</sup> A second reason why men cannot themselves provide the satisfaction is that the guilt of their sin is infinite (since it is sin against the infinite God) and requires a satisfaction of infinite worth. Men, however, are finite beings and have nothing of such infinite worth to offer. Only

<sup>1</sup> J. KAFTAN'S *Dogmatik*, p. 491. (*Grundriss der Theologischen Wissenschaften*.)

<sup>2</sup> i.e. at every moment it is each man's duty to serve God to his utmost, and therefore no human service of God can create a credit account to balance a debt of guilt.

the infinite God is in a position to provide a satisfaction infinite in worth. So it is men who are bound to provide this, and it is God alone who can provide the satisfaction. The dilemma the solution is that God, that is the Logos, should become man. For the provision of a satisfaction infinite in worth is a task which the God-Man is as man entitled, and as God, qualified to undertake. However, it is not by His holy life that He provides the satisfaction, for to live such a life was no more than His own personal duty as man. Much rather is it His death that has this significance. For being sinless and therefore not subject to death He died of His own free will; consequently His death was an act which He was under no personal obligation to perform. Hence it results that His death provided satisfaction for past wrong. On account of His divine nature it is a satisfaction infinite in worth. By its means the divine glory recovers, in a way compatible with divine justice what it had been deprived of by the Fall of man, and man's blessed destiny is once more rendered possible. However, this merit of Christ would benefit no one if men were to continue to commit sin afterwards as before. But Christ at the same time checks sin in that His example is effective with men; and those of whom this is true are saved through Him.

In the theory thus outlined there are elements calculated to shock any one who, like the average Hindu, approaches it from the outside. It appears to give the sense of dignity a higher moral status than the spirit of mercy. Upon closer consideration, however, this criticism is seen to be not quite fair. We have no right to infer that Anselm would

Criticisms

have approved of a *man* standing upon his dignity, and demanding compensation as a preliminary to forgiveness, after the manner that appears here to be ascribed to God. It is because God is God and not man that He is supposed to be unable to give effect to His desire to forgive until His glory has first been safeguarded. How can God be God and truly supreme in His universe if sin is simply overlooked and treated as a thing of no account? That this is the underlying motive of the Anselmic doctrine becomes still more evident in the modified form which the doctrine subsequently received. In this form the divine attribute which has to be safeguarded in the plan of redemption is represented not as glory but as justice. God is figured as the supreme Ruler and Judge; it is His function to vindicate the moral law, and therefore He cannot gratify His love by forgiveness until His justice has been satisfied by the infliction of adequate penalty. Nevertheless, even the fullest readiness to admit all that can be urged in explanation of the doctrine in question cannot blind one to a noteworthy contrast in standpoint and spirit between this emphasis on the glory and judicial dignity of God and the New Testament language about the forgiveness of the heavenly Father. For instance, it may seem a small point yet it is not without significance that the Apostle Paul habitually speaks of Christ as reconciling men to God, whereas the prevalent doctrine lays most stress on His reconciling God to men. Again, when Paul speaks of Christ dying *for* men he employs the word *hyper*, 'on behalf of'; on the other hand, the prevalent view understands Christ's death for man as a death

*instead of* men, which would be the preposition *anti*. What is the secret of this change? Does it imply a distortion, or a legitimate development, of New Testament teaching?

The key to the incompleteness and the lack of uniformity of the New Testament explanations of the redemption achieved by Christ lies in the close connexion subsisting between primitive Christian thought and Jewish Messianic expectations. The Jews regarded their national humiliations as a proof of divine displeasure, and by consequence the founding of the glorious Messianic Kingdom and forgiveness for their past sins were in their minds aspects of one and the same idea. The same close connexion remained at first a datum for Christian thought also, and accordingly forgiveness through Christ was a less puzzling problem to most minds than it came to be later on. If Jesus was the Christ or Messiah then He was also the Saviour; that was self-evident. The new Covenant relationship founded by the Messiah had been foretold to be one in which God would forgive His people's iniquity and remember their sin no more (Jer. 31: 31 ff). His death fell in with this conception and was regarded as a sacrifice by which the New Covenant had been solemnly ratified. Many of the passages in which later dogmatic interpretation has sought to find the doctrine of penal substitution inculcated do not bear that meaning at all. Though they represent Christ's death as a sacrifice it is not a sacrifice by which Jesus has *earned* or won from God the grant of a New Covenant, but it is one by which He has

sealed or ratified the New Covenant which God had already granted to men in sending Him as Messiah. The truth is that we look in vain in the New Testament for a perfectly elaborated theory of God's forgiveness through Christ. What we find is rather symbols or analogies whereby certain aspects of Christ's great work of love are emphasized. Christ died as a ransom; His body is our spiritual bread; He is the great and true High Priest. In the *Epistle to the Hebrews* we find a curious turning of the tables, whereby the Old Testament sacrifices are explained by reference to Christ's offering of Himself instead of *vice versa*. Many will claim that at any rate in Pauline teaching there rises upon our view a full-orbed theory. Certainly Paul's Pharisaic training had prepared him to find the gospel of forgiveness a very perplexing problem, requiring for its solution an important array of new conceptions. Yet even his presentation of the rationale of the Atonement has left room for considerable diversity of opinion among his interpreters. He makes 'propitiation' to be vitally connected with faith in a way which it is difficult to reconcile with any thoroughly logical application of the idea of penal substitution, and in a way which the later Church doctrine was consequently unable to reproduce.

If any proof were needed of the incompleteness and the lack of uniformity of the New Testament explanations of redemption through Christ, it would be furnished by the remarkable vagaries<sup>1</sup> of Christian

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the theory that the soul of Christ was a price paid to the devil in exchange for the souls of men. By the nature of the

thought on the subject prior to Anselm, and by the extent even of the subsequent variations. The question, therefore, arises whether amid these uncertainties there is any clue to guide us to a truly Christian view of the work of Christ. As soon as we ask this question I think we are forced to recognize that although the theory of redemption by means of substitutionary satisfaction (whether as presented by Anselm or as subsequently modified) moves in a very different atmosphere from that of the New Testament, and requires a restatement so thoroughgoing as to amount to a transformation, nevertheless the problem with which it grapples is one which in some form or other rises naturally out of the true Christian experience of God in Christ, and the answer which it offers contains elements of permanent truth.

Of these elements one at least is conserved in the view of redemption developed above by aid of the reinterpreted Karma-concept. According to that view Christ's power to redeem is due to the revelation of divine love which He gives in willingly bearing the unmerited sufferings which His earthly mission brought upon Him. As we have seen all such evils are the Karmic fruits of the sin of mankind; so far as they go they are punishment in the true sense of the term. Moreover, inasmuch as Christ's suffering by its regenerative influence rescues men from ultimate

ease, however, the devil was unable to retain his price, and had therefore good cause to rue his bargain.

Forgiveness a  
Christian  
problem

Deeper view  
wanted

spiritual ruin, it is a substitutionary punishment. By accepting a share in the common punishment of sin Christ redeems men from the ultimate punishment which must have overtaken them if they had remained unregenerate. Thus even on the limited basis of this view we can say not only that Christ's death for men was a death *on behalf of* them but also that His endurance unto death has its place in the final scheme of the world instead of their spiritual death.<sup>1</sup> However, it is not difficult to show that any one who has accepted this estimate of Christ's work cannot stop there, but is forced by this estimate itself to seek a deeper view.

According to the view just propounded Christ's work of redemption may seem only a work of regeneration prompted by pity. By a revelation of the God of love suffering for man, impenitence and its ruin are to be ended. But when this revelation of God in Jesus has established its power in the heart there must come sooner or later great searchings of spirit. In many cases indeed they come with the first dawn of that revelation. The man who recognizes in Jesus God come to save him is thereby convinced not only of the amazing love of God but of the enormity of the sin which could bring the infinite God to earth to rescue sinners. One and the same experience creates both

<sup>1</sup> This statement applies, so far as the argument has yet gone, only to those who are brought to penitence and newness of life through the influence of Christ's life and death, and therefore not to those who, living before the time of Jesus or never having heard of Him, may have been brought to penitence and to a measure of spiritual insight by other divinely provided, but less perfect, agencies.

assurance of, and amazement at, the forgiveness of sin. It is this double character of the Christian's experience which provides the clue above desiderated to the essential requirements which must be satisfied by any final Christian theory of redemption. Even if it be partly true that temporary intellectual conditions hindered some New Testament writers from feeling the full magnitude of the problem of reconciling God's forgiveness with His holiness, the problem is one phase of a perplexity which is essentially Christian in character, because it rises out of the fundamental Christian experience. An essential mark of any completed theory of redemption which is truly Christian must ever be that it does not treat forgiveness as a matter of course.

Christ cannot become to us the consummate revelation of the Father without convincing us both that God is ready to forgive us and that He is too pure to be able to tolerate wickedness. How are these two convictions

Idea of substitution

to be reconciled? The popular Christian answer is that God satisfies His love by forgiving the penitent, and that He has satisfied His justice by exacting the full punishment from Christ, who accepts it as the representative of the human race. If space permitted it would be easy to show that this answer is honey-combed with difficulties. It is a heroic effort to conserve the idea of judicial justice, but it does not really conserve that idea. The judicial idea of justice is not really conserved unless the punishment falls upon the offender himself; and if God is to be conceived after the analogy of a perfectly inflexible human judge, then the orthodox Hindu conception of Karma is much

more consistent than the idea of a substituted victim. Many persons appear to think it possible to evade this difficulty by insisting that Jesus is the representative of the human race and may, therefore, be justly visited with their punishment. But, apart from the obscurity of this conception of representation, it must be admitted that when a human judge allows a substitute to undertake an offender's penalty, this is a deviation from the inflexibility of justice and a mark of the artificiality and compromise attendant on human institutions.

The truth is that the judicial idea of justice is quite inadequate to represent the relation of God to His world. Certainly God is just, but we have seen already that justice is of many kinds. In the modern constitutional state the just judge can acquit or condemn, but he cannot remit a legally deserved penalty; the just sovereign can remit penalty, but he cannot acquit or condemn; the just private citizen has no direct say in the treatment of crime, but he can forgive or resist an infringement of his rights according to his own judgement. Now, if we are to employ

analogies from the modern state, the best analogy for God is neither the judge nor the sovereign but the private citizen. Judge and sovereign are, as such, mere public servants; it is for the sake of the citizen as citizen that the State exists. It is for the sake of the citizen's liberty of free self-expression in rationally chosen activities that justice must be maintained inviolate and majesty conserved. For his sake judge and sovereign toil at their appointed functions. So it is with God. He is the supreme end of the great universe; in

His gracious purposes all its functions find their object. It is in order that He may freely express Himself in His chosen purposes of purity and grace and wisdom that the principles of the universal order must be inviolably conserved and enforced. But what are those principles? That depends upon what is the nature of the universal order:

The modern State is a general system of order based upon private property and more or less external rights. The consequence is that the principles followed in the enforcement of that orderly system are principles to which the question of an offender's penitence or impenitence is quite irrelevant. Hence it is that among men judicial justice frequently comes into conflict with mercy. But the universal or divine order is not based upon externalities as the civil order is, and its principles need not be the same as those of the latter. In fact they cannot be. For the latter order is predominantly a system for the conservation of something which already exists, namely, civil freedom,<sup>1</sup> while the divine

<sup>1</sup> For its adequate exposition the view here summarily indicated would require a chapter to itself, but so long a digression would obscure the main issue. It may not be useless, however, to append a few sentences in explanation. The ideas, (1) that law is outraged if any crime whatever goes unpunished, (2) that punishment, even unaccompanied by reparation to the victim of a crime, restores the *status quo ante* so far as law is concerned, imply that the State is concerned only to defeat the criminal's attempt to satisfy himself by crime—concerned, therefore, only to prevent the citizen's possessions and rights from being successfully utilized for any ends but those of his own choosing; while it is wholly unconcerned in the success or failure of the citizen himself to achieve the ends for the sake of which he values his possessions and rights. In this light the State appears as a system of rights, the mere negative maintenance of which is regarded as an end in itself. It appears as an abstract, undeveloping, universal, related in an external or

order, according to our previous reading of the revelation of the will of God in Jesus, is directed to the bringing into existence of something not yet fully realized, namely, the sonship of creatures. Hence in the divine and moral order mercifulness toward all and forgiveness for the truly penitent can be and are laws, that is conditions requisite to the maintenance of the divine freedom of self-realization, whereas in the civil order they are irrelevant to law. Consequently, if we fully understood the mind and will of God we should have no difficulty in comprehending His ability to forgive. To that full insight we cannot attain, and therefore our assurance of forgiveness must always be accompanied with a sense of mystery. Yet it is possible to progress in insight.

Can we to any extent apprehend the principles of the universal order which must be maintained inviolate if God is freely to express Himself? We have already

accidental way to the citizens who happen to be its content for the time being, and who work out their individual enterprises within its shelter. The Kingdom of God, on the other hand, is a self-specifying universal. It gives itself spiritual citizens by that redemptive act of self-surrender whereby all rights of immunity from aggression are subordinated to the end of extending and perfecting the spiritual brotherhood. The death of Christ is the typical manifestation of this generative process by which the Kingdom of God grows, transforming aliens into citizens.

I would add one further remark. Although the static conception of the State which is here contrasted with the kingdom of God seems to me to be the conception implied in the existing principles of ordinary criminal justice, I cannot but regard these as a belated survival, out of keeping with modern ideas of the state as having duties in respect of education, industrial organization, prevention of pauperism, etc. Nevertheless it is precisely on the analogy of this outgrown static conception of the state that juristic theories of the Atonement rest, and do so in spite of the most significant fact that even that static conception itself found room for a sovereign prerogative of pardon.

seen that the Karmic order (as reinterpreted) does express an aspect of God's being. The inevitable sequence by which wicked acts induce evil consequences for the sinner and others, expresses the relation subsisting between sin and the divine intention of good. The penalties which thus follow from the divine universal order differ from the penalties postulated by the orthodox Hindu doctrine of Karma in that they are not rigid, but are modifiable by the penitence or impenitence of the sinner and by the conduct of others. Modified or unmodified, however, these penalties must exert their force since they are only the vital reaction of the system which God has created in order to realize that gracious purpose for mankind in which He fulfils Himself. When God forgives He need not remit penalty or revoke the Karmic law; forgiveness and remission of penalty are quite different things. The impenitent sinner desires the latter, but does not care about the former; the child of God prizes the former, and is glad to bear the penalties of sin if it will further the divine purpose of good. It is evident then that the (reinterpreted) Karmic order, the system of inevitable but modifiable punishment, not only reveals that sin is utterly opposed to the divine intention but conserves the possibility of that intention still being realized. However, it only conserves the *possibility*; the Karmic order does not itself secure the realization of the divine purpose of good in the face of human sin and impenitence, nor does it by itself provide scope for the full reaction against sin essential to the divine freedom. The Karmic fruit is the consequence of the sinful *act*. It is God's reaction

The new  
Karmic Law

against the act. But a moral nature must react also against the sinful *will*. And the only such reaction that a perfectly moral nature can feel adequate must involve the putting forth of all its potentialities in the effort to convert sinfulness into goodness. It follows that if God is freely and fully to express Himself the universal order must have at least two inviolable laws or principles. It must have the Karmic law, the law that if sin enters the phenomenal system penalty must enter too. It must also have the law of Salvation, the law that if sin enters the phenomenal system God shall be compelled with reverence be it spoken!—by all the moral forces of His nature to throw the whole infinitude of His being into the phenomenal system, that is to incarnate Himself in order to abolish sinfulness. God cannot express Himself fully in the punishment of sin; He can express Himself fully only if with the punishment goes a total forthputting of His nature in an effort to destroy sinfulness. But if this be so it follows that our earlier description of the work of Christ as a work of regenerating love was inadequate, if that love is regarded as no more than pity seeking to save man from ultimate doom. It is a work of regeneration certainly. Moreover Christ is enabled to regenerate through the opportunity of revealing His love afforded by His life of patience and sorrow, so full of the Karmic penalties of the world's sin. But His work signifies more than this. The Incarnation of God was the product of a moral necessity of the divine nature to react against sin to the extent of a complete forthputting of itself in the effort to generate human

The Law of  
Salvation

The motive of  
Incarnation

goodness afresh. If God had not incarnated Himself in Christ the grand gospel would not have been, for God would not have been the God He is.<sup>1</sup> And if Christ had not endured the Karmic lot of man with divine faithfulness even unto death, then also the grand gospel would not have been, for there would have been no infinite power of regeneration. The story of the Christ is not the story of a divine expedient; it is the revelation of the inmost necessities of the being of God. However poorly we may succeed in the effort to spell out for ourselves those necessities our knowledge of God in Christ convinces us of their existence.

It is time to bring this inquiry to its close, for its undertaking, however inadequately executed, is ended. In the opening chapter attention was called to certain elements which the Christian cannot but approve in the orthodox Hindu doctrine of Karma. The second chapter pointed out grounds for holding that, if Christian thought nevertheless rejected the doctrine considered as a whole, an implicit criticism of it was furnished by the higher Hindu thought also. The third chapter criticized the doctrine directly from a Christian standpoint. It was shown not only to be incapable of demonstration but to be morally imperfect. Even as a solution of the problem of unmerited suffering it proved to be in no degree indispensable, unless the

<sup>1</sup> And so Christ's work is, on this deeper view, a *universal* presupposition of salvation—a presupposition of the salvation even of those who lived before His days on earth, and who were brought to penitence and to a measure of fellowship with God by means of an earlier stage in that universal historical process of divine self-revelation which culminated in Jesus.

world were indeed no more than a judicial system. Christianity was able to provide an alternative solution of the problem of unmerited suffering because of its belief that the world's history is a divine process towards a goal to be realized by effort and sacrifice. The fourth chapter showed why Christianity was compelled to take this view of the world. The present chapter has pointed out how unmerited suffering follows from God's purpose in creation. Further it has suggested how the idea of Karma, when modified in accordance with the criticism in the third chapter, may be used in formulating a Christian view of redemption and forgiveness. The motive of the whole discussion has been to draw together Hindu and Christian thought on this great topic. Educated India declares that she will never become Christian; and certainly she will never definitely embrace Christianity until Christian doctrines have been recast in a less alien mould. If this essay, even by its failures, impels any one to begin for himself the task of reconstruction, its author will feel amply rewarded.