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SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA'S SYNTHESIS
OF
SCIENCE AND RELIGION

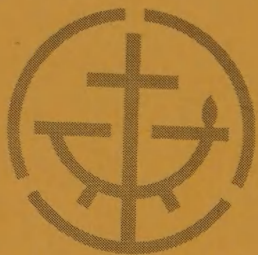
By

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA



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A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Ranganathananda is the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta. This book reproduces the text of a paper contributed by him to the session of the Parliament of Religions held at Calcutta on 4 January 1964 in connection with the concluding celebrations of the birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda. The article was published earlier in three instalments in *Prabuddha Bharata* in August, September, and October 1964. It is now being issued in book form in view of the importance of the subject.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S SYNTHESIS OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

The subjects of science and religion are getting more and more important to man in the modern age. They are two great disciplines, which, when combined harmoniously, can bring about an all-round expression of human genius. But, unfortunately, for the last few centuries, the relationship between the two has not been quite happy. In the twentieth century, however, a new approach is becoming evident, and the representative thinkers among scientists and religious people are beginning to discern a close interrelation between these two branches of human knowledge. They are slowly veering round to the point of view that science and religion can heartily embrace each other, without detriment to the cause for which

each stands, and work for the good of humanity. It is being realized more and more by both that there are elements in science that religion can adopt in order to fortify itself, and elements in religion that can deepen and strengthen science. I shall here touch upon some of these points of contact, and discuss the methods and results of both the disciplines, against the background of the unity and totality of knowledge, and in the light of the synthetic approach and vision of Swami Vivekananda, who was an outstanding spiritual and intellectual luminary of the modern age and who worked successfully to bring about this great consummation. Writes Romain Rolland about him :

‘In the two words equilibrium and synthesis, Vivekananda’s constructive genius may be summed up. He embraced all the paths of the spirit : the four *yogas* in their entirety, renunciation and service, art and science, religion and action, from the most spiritual to the most practical. . . . He was the personification of the harmony of all human energy.’ (Romain Rolland :

Life of Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta 14, Third Impression, p. 310)

THE SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINE

The civilization in which we live today is the product of the discipline of the human mind known as science. When we study science at close quarters, in the way the great scientists have applied themselves to this pursuit, we find two aspects in its discipline. The first is *pure science*, science which tries earnestly to understand the truth of experience through a dispassionate inquiry; and the second is *applied science*, in which the truths discovered by pure science flow as inventions for the technical enrichment of human life. These two, science as *lucifera* and science as *fructifera*, science as *light* and science as *fruit*, always go together. Knowledge leads to power, and power leads to control and manipulation of the forces of nature, enabling man to condition his life and environment with deliberation. Every new discovery in pure science, at some stage or other,

becomes converted into applied science, into control and manipulation of the forces of nature. And the result, as revealed in recent history, is the great saga of scientific discovery and invention resulting in the world-wide technological civilization of today. It is a most fascinating study how the human mind, disciplined in this pursuit of science, develops the capacity to wrest from nature truth after truth, hidden and jealously guarded by her, leading to our extraordinary age of nuclear science and space travel.

LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE

But, when we go deeper into this subject of science, its limitations become apparent. To illustrate: two branches of science, viz. physics, including astronomy, and biology, have given us a vast body of insights regarding the nature of the universe and man. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, physics was warped in its final judgements. It saw materialism and mechanism reigning supreme in the universe. There was then

a cock-sureness in its pronouncements ; but, in the twentieth century, an element of humility is discernible in the attitude of the great physicists of the age. In the nineteenth century, knowledge was not deep enough, and scientists looked only at the surface of things. But, along with the discovery of such facts as radio-activity and insight into the nucleus of the atom, the realization has come that there is a severe limitation placed on our knowledge regarding the truth of the external world. Science owns today that it deals only with the *appearances* of things and not with the *reality* behind these appearances. Some of the greatest of modern physicists tell us that what science has revealed of the world around us is only the outer aspect of things. Behind this *observable* universe, there is an *unobservable* universe. This is a great confession of the limitations of science and its methods. Science is dealing with phenomena revealed by the senses or by apparatuses helpful to the senses. But these senses reveal so little, and what they reveal only tells us that there are realities

behind the sense world determining it and controlling it. Science restricts itself to the understanding of the observable part of the universe and to controlling its energies for the uses of man.

A similar situation obtains in the science of biology. In the last century, it was cock-sure about its pronouncements. By a study of the different aspects of the phenomena of life it arrived at the great theory of evolution, from which it drew certain conclusions which directly led to a form of materialism that equated man with the animal, and both to a machine. Today, scientists tell us that they were not happy titles that Darwin chose for his famous books *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*. Sir Julian Huxley suggests that these could have been more appropriately titled *The Evolution of Organisms* and *The Ascent of Man*. (Sir Julian Huxley: *Evolution after Darwin*, Vol. I, The University of Chicago Press, p. 17) But then, these books appeared at a time when a fierce controversy was going on between emerging science and the entrenched

Christian dogma, and this had its impact even on the choosing of the titles of great scientific books. The science of physics with its thoroughgoing materialism and mechanistic determinism, and the science of biology with its newly discovered evolutionary theory and its domination by the general materialistic outlook of science and scientists of the age, helped to shatter nineteenth century man's faith in religion and spiritual values.

LIMITATIONS OF DOGMA-BOUND RELIGION

Added to this was the attack on religion from the great social idealists and revolutionary social thinkers like Karl Marx. It was the period of the industrial revolution. These idealists asked: If God is there in an extra-cosmic heaven, why is there so much suffering in this world, why are millions starving, and why are thousands of little children made to slave in factories and workshops for the gain of a few capitalist exploiters? This kind of inequality, this kind of oppression of man

by man in the presence of an all-powerful God, is something we cannot understand or bear. Marx, accordingly, characterized religion as the 'soul of soulless conditions, the heart of a heartless world, the opium of the people'.

The result was that, by the end of the nineteenth century, religion and faith in God and eternal verities ceased to be the ruling ideas of modern civilization; the power of religion to influence human thinking and conduct disappeared; man lost the fear of God, and more especially the fear of the devil! Religious dogma had upheld the latter more than the former as conducive to moral control of human action and belief. But the scientific spirit shattered faith in the devil and, along with it, faith in God as well. These were treated as primitive superstitions unworthy of modern civilized man. Modern science treated religion as a dangerous error in the beginning and as a harmless illusion in the end.

But the two great world wars, and the various crises—economic and political—

that followed the one and preceded the other in this twentieth century, brought about a certain chastening of the spirit of western thinkers, especially of those in the scientifically advanced countries of the West. Social thinkers became less and less cock-sure of their remedies for human ills. Even great scientists began to feel and express that science, as understood and pursued by them, was not enough. Einstein said: 'Science can denature plutonium; but it cannot denature the evil in the heart of man.' That is not its function. Most scientists agree today that science alone cannot ensure human happiness; it can only create *conditions* for his happiness; but it cannot ensure that man *shall be* happy or man *shall be* really fulfilled. That is not the function of science as understood in the positive sciences of physics, biology, etc.; it is the province of another discipline, the science of the inner nature of man, which is the true meaning of religion as understood in Indian thought.

RELIGION AND SCIENCE IN THE
VEDĀNTIC PERSPECTIVE

Modern civilization has overrated science and technology, just as the older civilizations had underrated it. There is need today to view science in its proper perspective—the perspective of total human knowledge and welfare. This is one of the several vital contributions of Swami Vivekananda to modern thought. Dealing with the complementary character of eastern contributions to religion and western contributions to science, he said in his lecture on 'My Master' delivered in New York in 1896 :

'Each of these types has its grandeur, each has its glory. The present adjustment will be the harmonizing, the mingling of these two ideals. To the oriental, the world of spirit is as real as to the occidental is the world of senses. In the spiritual, the oriental finds everything he wants or hopes for ; in it he finds all that makes life real to him. To the occidental, he is a dreamer ; to the oriental, the occidental

is a dreamer playing with ephemeral toys, and he laughs to think that grown-up men and women should make so much of a handful of matter which they will have to leave sooner or later. Each calls the other a dreamer. But the oriental ideal is as necessary for the progress of the human race as is the occidental, and I think it is more necessary. Machines never made mankind happy and never will make. He who is trying to make us believe this will claim that happiness is in the machine; but it is always in the mind. That man alone who is the lord of his mind can become happy, and none else. And what, after all, is this power of machinery? Why should a man who can send a current of electricity through a wire be called a very great man and a very intelligent man? Does not nature do a million times more than that every moment? Why not then fall down and worship nature?' (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV, p. 155, 8th edition)

THE SPIRITUAL URGES IN MODERN SCIENCE

The universe was a mystery to man in the primitive stage; it has not ceased to be so for civilized man even in this twentieth century. We find scientists like the late Sir James Jeans writing books on the scientific view of the universe with such titles as *The Mysterious Universe*. Even after all these marvellous scientific discoveries and inventions, the scientist still treats nature as profoundly mysterious. In spite of all the knowledge that he has gained, the scientist feels that he has only scratched the surface of nature, that he is yet far far away from the heart of the problem of the universe. Says Sir James Jeans in his *The New Background of Science* (p. 68):

‘Physical science set out to study a world of matter and radiation, and finds that it cannot describe or picture the nature of either, even to itself. Photons, electrons, and protons have become about as meaningless to the physicist as x , y , z are to a child on its first day of learning algebra.

The most we hope for at the moment is to discover ways of manipulating x, y, z without knowing what they are, with the result that the advance of knowledge is at present reduced to what Einstein has described as extracting one incomprehensible from another incomprehensible.'

If the mystery of the universe has eluded the scientist so much, the mystery of man has eluded him even more. The late Sir Arthur Eddington, the famous mathematician and physicist, concludes his book, *Space, Time and Gravitation* (pp. 200-1), with a pointed reference to this predicament :

'The theory of relativity has passed in review the whole subject-matter of physics. It has unified the great laws, which by the precision of their formulation and the exactness of their application have won the proud place in human knowledge which physical science holds today. And yet, in regard to the nature of things, this knowledge is only an empty shell—a form of symbols. It is knowledge of structural form, and not knowledge of content. All

through the physical world runs that unknown content which must surely be the stuff of our consciousness. Here is a hint of aspects deep within the world of physics, and yet unattainable by the methods of physics. And, moreover, we have found that where science has progressed the farthest, the mind has but regained from nature that which the mind has put into nature.

‘We have found a strange footprint on the shores of the unknown. We have devised profound theories, one after another, to account for its origin. At last, we have succeeded in reconstructing the creature that made the footprint. And lo ! it is our own.’

Man as thinker, man as observer, man as the self has left his ‘footprints on the shores of the unknown’, on the shores of the ‘not-self’ aspects of the universe. It is time that science tried to unravel this remarkable mystery of man. There seems to be a profounder mystery hidden within it than in the depths of outer space or of the atom. It is time that science turned its

attention to tackling this mystery. All other mysteries pale into insignificance by the side of this one; it holds the key to all other mysteries.

In a talk over the B.B.C. a few decades ago, Eddington posed this great question: 'What is the truth about ourselves?', and proceeded to answer: 'We may incline to various answers: We are a bit of star gone wrong. We are complicated physical machinery—puppets that strut and talk and laugh and die as the hand of time turns the handle beneath. But let us remember that there is one elementary inescapable answer: We are that which asks the question.'

We are that which asks the question. Man is primarily a subject; man cannot be reduced to objective dimensions. He is essentially the seer, the knower, the observer; he is the *dr̥k* or *sākṣin* or *kṣetrajñā*, in the language of Vedānta. Here Eddington throws a hint at 'aspects deep in the world of physics, but unattainable by the methods of physics', but containing tremendous philosophical possibilities for

advancing man's knowledge of himself and of the universe; this is obviously outside the pale of investigation by the positive sciences and their methods.

Another scientist, the late Prince Louis de Broglie, an authority on quantum theory and wave mechanics, dealt with the same subject in an article on 'The Poetry of Science', contributed some years ago to the international monthly *Mirror*. Starting with a famous quotation from Blaise Pascal: 'In space, the universe engulfs me and reduces me to a pin-point; through thought I understand the universe', de Broglie concludes: 'In that sublime pun lies the beauty, the poetry of pure science, and its high intellectual worth.'

'What am I?' Physically, I am a speck of microscopic dust in the vast immensity of the universe. But *through thought I comprehend this universe*. Man, as scientist comprehends, in a small formula given by his thought, the vast phenomena of nature, with its immensity and variety. What must be the profound mystery of man who, in one aspect, is only a pin-point

engulfed by the spatial immensity of the universe, but yet, in another aspect, is able to compress the whole of that immensity into a few formulae given by the power and penetration of his thought?

THE MYSTERY THAT IS MAN

So man has dimensions that cannot be reduced to the merely physical, the merely material. These latter are his 'not-self' aspects which enter into the constitution of his body, which obviously is just a speck of dust in that vast world of the not-self; but there is in him also something transcendental, which cannot be so reduced. He is the self; that is his primary, inalienable aspect. And if science is to progress further, it has to choose for investigation this field of the mystery of man which towers over its erstwhile study, namely, the mystery of the external universe. This is a vast field of study—the field of man's awareness, the field of his consciousness, his ego, his being the *subject* and not the *object*; science will find here a vaster and

more fascinating and rewarding field of study than in external nature. Already scientists in the West are slowly turning their attention to this great mystery, the mystery of 'Man the Unknown' in the words of Alexis Carrel, apart from that of 'Man the Known', which is the subject of the positive sciences like physics, chemistry, and biology, and behaviouristic psychology.

Man is the creator of science and technology, culture and civilization; he is also today the only possible destroyer of his civilization. Everything about him is a mystery. As Lincoln Barnett says in his study of Einstein's contributions to modern scientific thought :

'In the evolution of scientific thought, one fact has become impressively clear: there is no mystery of the physical world which does not point to a mystery beyond itself. All highroads of the intellect, all byways of theory and conjecture, lead ultimately to an abyss that human ingenuity can never span. For man is enchained by the very condition of his being, his finiteness and involvement in nature. The

further he extends his horizons, the more vividly he recognizes the fact that, as the physicist Niels Bohr puts it, "We are both spectators and actors in the great drama of existence". Man is thus his own greatest mystery. He does not understand the vast veiled universe into which he has been cast for the reason that he does not understand himself. He comprehends but little of his organic processes and even less of his unique capacity to perceive the world around him, to reason and to dream. Least of all does he understand his noblest and most mysterious faculty: the ability to transcend himself and perceive himself in the act of perception.' (*The Universe and Dr. Einstein*, pp. 126-7, Mentor edition)

THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF RELIGION

Here is the meeting-point of science and religion, as revealed by Indian thought; for religion, as expounded in Vedānta, takes up the investigation of the mystery of experience where the positive sciences leave

off. This 'Man the Unknown', man as the *subject* of experience, is its special field of investigation. Says Swami Vivekananda :

'Beyond consciousness is where the bold search. Consciousness is bound by the senses. Beyond that, beyond the senses, men must go, in order to arrive at truths of the spiritual world, and there are even now persons who succeed in going beyond the bounds of the senses. These are called *r̥sis* (seers of thought), because they come face to face with spiritual truths.' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. III, p. 253, 8th edition)

Indian thought upholds both religion and science as valid disciplines in the pursuit of truth. India endorses the view expressed by Eddington about the spiritual kinship of science and religion : 'You will understand the true spirit neither of science nor of religion unless seeking is placed in the forefront.' (*Science and the Unseen World*, p. 54)

India's thinkers never saw any contradiction between the two, unlike the scientists and theologians of the West. Such

contradiction and conflict are the result of a narrow view of both science and religion which, however, the modern West is struggling to discard. Many students of science, not to speak of laymen, have vague and rather confused notions about what science means. The same is true about religion. To the ordinary man, science means no more than the gadgets like radio or television or other material benefits conferred on mankind by scientific technology. Students of science generally identify it with the several departments of science such as physics, chemistry, etc., which they study in schools and colleges. But we have to turn to the great scientists themselves to learn what science is; and from them we learn that it is the pursuit of truth—of truth hidden in the facts of nature, in the data revealed by the senses and the data revealed by experiments. It is a sincere, critical, detached study of experience, by which confused data are reduced to meaning and orderliness and brought under control. Says Karl Pearson :

'The classification of facts, the recognition of their sequence and relative significance, is the function of science, and the habit of forming a judgement upon these facts, unbiased by personal feeling is characteristic of what may be termed the scientific frame of mind.' (*Grammar of Science*, 1900, p. 6)

Science so understood is not tied up with any particular body of facts. In the words of one of the great biologists, J. Arthur Thomson :

'Science is not wrapped up with any particular body of facts ; it is characterized as an intellectual attitude. It is not tied down to any particular methods of inquiry ; it is simply sincere critical thought, which admits conclusions only when these are based on evidence. We may get a good lesson in scientific methods from a business-man meeting some new practical problem, from a lawyer sifting evidence, or from a statesman framing a constructive bill.' (*Introduction to Science*, Home University Library, p. 58)

Objectivity and precision, both as to thought and verbal formulation, are the two important characteristics of the scientific method. Any study possessing these characteristics will be science, whatever be the field of that study. Science as such is therefore not tied down to any particular order of facts, though the various departments of science like physics or chemistry, biology or sociology, are tied down to particular orders of facts. These departments have limited scope, but science itself is *unlimited* in scope ; and these various departments, starting with the study of separate fields tend, in their advanced stages, to overstep their particular boundaries and merge into one converging scientific search, the search for the meaning of total experience. In this expansive context, the idea of a science of religion, the science of the facts of the inner world of man, as upheld in ancient Indian thought, and as expounded in the modern age by Swami Vivekananda, becomes a study of far-reaching significance.

INDIA'S VISION OF UNIVERSAL
SCIENCE-RELIGION

Religion as developed and understood in the West was, in its aims and methods and data, opposed to this spirit of rational seeking and investigation. It was taken as something finished and ready-made, which men were asked to believe—a creed or a dogma, a frozen piece of thought, which men were called upon to accept. That was why it came into fierce collision with the advancing tide of science with its spirit of free seeking and rational inquiry. In India, on the other hand, religion has always been understood to be a matter of seeking, finding, and verification, as any of the branches of science. This is a statement that will be found corroborated in the great Upaniṣads of ancient India and in the literature of Swami Vivekananda of our own times.

Tracing the recurring conflicts of science and religion in the West to the absence of this broad approach, Vivekananda said :

'We all know the theories of the cosmos according to the modern astronomers and physicists, and at the same time we all know how woefully they undermine the theology of Europe; how these scientific discoveries that are made, act as a bomb thrown at its stronghold; and we know how theologians have in all times attempted to put down these researches.' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 433, 9th edition)

When religion refuses to take the help of reason, it weakens itself. Alluding to this in the course of a lecture on 'Reason and Religion', delivered in England in 1896, Swami Vivekananda said :

'The foundations have been all undermined, and the modern man, whatever he may say in public, knows in the privacy of his heart that he can no more "believe". Believing certain things because an organized body of priests tells him to believe, believing because it is written in certain books, believing because his people like him to believe, the modern man knows to

be impossible for him. There are, of course, a number of people who seem to acquiesce in the so-called popular faith, but we also know for certain that they do not think. Their idea of belief may be better translated as "not-thinking-carelessness". (ibid., Vol. I, p. 367, 11th edition)

And pleading for the application of reason in the field of religion, he continued :

'Is religion to justify itself by the discoveries of reason through which every other science justifies itself? Are the same methods of investigation, which we apply to sciences and knowledge outside, to be applied to the science of religion? In my opinion this must be so, and I am also of opinion that the sooner it is done the better. If a religion is destroyed by such investigations, it was then all the time useless, unworthy superstition; and the sooner it goes the better. I am thoroughly convinced that its destruction would be the best thing that could happen. All that is dross will be taken off, no doubt, but the essential parts of religion will emerge triumphant out of this investigation. Not only will it

be made scientific—as scientific, at least, as any of the conclusions of physics or chemistry—but it will have greater strength, because physics or chemistry has no internal mandate to vouch for its truth, which religion has.’ (ibid., Vol. I, p. 367, 11th edition)

A study of the Upaniṣads reveals that the subject of religion was approached in ancient India in an objective, dispassionate manner; the aim of the study was to get at truth, and not to hug pleasing fancies and illusions or to idolize tribal passions and prejudices.

In several of his lectures and discourses, Swami Vivekananda has expounded the scientific approach to religion as upheld in Indian thought. In his lecture on ‘Religion and Science’, he says :

‘Experience is the only source of knowledge. In the world, religion is the only science where there is no surety, because it is not taught as a science of experience. This should not be. There is always, however, a small group of men who teach religion from experience. They are called

mystics, and these mystics in every religion speak the same tongue and teach the same truth. This is the real science of religion. As mathematics in every part of the world does not differ, so the mystics do not differ. They are all similarly constituted and similarly situated. Their experience is the same; and this becomes law. . . .

‘Religion deals with the truths of the metaphysical world just as chemistry and the other natural sciences deal with the truths of the physical world. The book one must read to learn chemistry is the book of nature. The book from which to learn religion is your own mind and heart. The sage is often ignorant of physical science because he reads the wrong book—the book within; and the scientist is too often ignorant of religion, because he too reads the wrong book—the book without.’
(*ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 81, 6th edition)

The Indian thinkers discovered by their investigations that there are two fields in which man functions: one, the external field; the other, the internal. These are two different orders of phenomena. The

study of the one alone does not exhaust the whole range of experience. Also, the study of the one from the standpoint of the other will not lead to satisfactory results. But the study of the one in the light of the conclusions from the study of the other is helpful and relevant.

In a lecture on 'Cosmology', Swami Vivekananda said :

'There are two words, the microcosm and the macrocosm, the internal and the external. We get truth from both of these by means of experience. The truth gathered from internal experience is psychology, metaphysics, and religion ; from external experience, the physical sciences. Now a perfect truth should be in harmony with experiences in both these worlds. The microcosm must bear testimony to the macrocosm, and the macrocosm to the microcosm ; physical truth must have its counterpart in the internal world, and the internal world must have its verification outside.' (ibid., Vol. II, p. 432, 9th edition)

Thus the thinkers of ancient India said :

Here is the physical life of man, and here is the physical universe that environs him. Let us study both in a scientific spirit. But let us also study him in his depths, his nature as revealed by his consciousness, his awareness, his emotions, his ego, and his sense of selfhood. These latter also constitute a vast group of phenomena that need to be investigated. Every advance in this field is bound to advance also man's knowledge about the truth of the mystery of the external world. For to quote Eddington again: 'We have discovered that it is actually an aid in the search for knowledge to understand the nature of the knowledge which we seek.' (*Philosophy of Physical Science*, p. 5)

The method of investigation in the field of religion is largely the same as in the positive sciences: collection of facts, their classification, a dispassionate study of these so as to reveal the law or laws underlying them, such knowledge leading to the control over the phenomena concerned, and, finally, the application of such knowledge

for the alleviation of human suffering and the enhancement and enrichment of human life. This kind of study of religion, as a thorough scientific study of the facts of the inner life, was undertaken by the great thinkers of ancient India; the insights which they gained were re-tested and amplified by a galaxy of subsequent thinkers, leaving to posterity the invaluable legacy of a rich and dynamic scientific tradition in the field of religion. It is because of this adamant base that Indian spirituality has stood the test of time. That also explains its hospitality to modern science, and its pride in the remarkable achievements of this sister discipline developed by the modern West.

‘The true Vedāntic spirit’, says Romain Rolland, ‘does not start out with a system of preconceived ideas. It possesses absolute liberty and unrivalled courage among religions with regard to the facts to be observed and the diverse hypotheses it has laid down for their co-ordination. Never having been hampered by a priestly order, each man has been entirely free to

search wherever he pleased for the spiritual explanation of the spectacle of the universe.’
(*Life of Vivekananda*, p. 196)

After a thorough investigation into the real nature of man, the sages of the Upaniṣads made a fundamental discovery: Man, in his essential nature, is divine; behind the finite man is the Ātman, ever free, ever pure, and perfect. The body, the mind, and the ego are merely the externals of the real man who is immortal and divine. This discovery led to the further discovery that the same divinity is the ground of the world as well. This they termed Brahman, the totality of the Self and the not-Self, which they characterized as *satyam jñānam anantam*—‘Truth, Awareness, and Infinity’. In the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (I. i. 3), we find this question put by an earnest student to a great teacher:

Kasmin nu Bhagavo vijñāte sarvam idaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavati—

‘What is that reality, O Blessed One, by knowing which we can know all that there is in the universe?’

Is there such a unique reality by knowing which we can understand all the manifestations of nature, internal as well as external? Is there a unity behind this diversity, a one behind the many? To this question, the teacher gave a very significant reply :

*Dve vidye veditavye iti ha sma yad
Brahmavido vadanti parā caiva aparā ca—*

‘Two are the types of knowledge to be acquired by man; so say the knowers of Brahman. One is called *parā vidyā*, higher knowledge; the other is called *aparā vidyā*, lower knowledge.’ (ibid., I. i. 4)

Both these must be investigated. Of these, the lower or ordinary knowledge, says the Upaniṣad, consists of the sacred Vedas, phonetics, the code of rituals, grammar, etymology, prosody, and astronomy. In fact, it includes all the sacred books, literature, art, history, and science.

Here we have a scientific mind of the highest order—impersonal, objective, and detached. There is no desire to put forth a pet opinion; truth alone is the motive

power, even if that truth goes against one's pet attachments and aversions. The teacher says that even the Vedas, the sacred books of the people, belong to the category of lower knowledge. Who would dare to say that his own sacred books are ordinary, except he who is of a detached and scientific frame of mind, and is in search of truth and not dogma—he who has no truth to hide, no opinion to uphold, no prejudices to defend, who just wants to know the truth and is prepared to sacrifice everything else into the bargain? No religion except the Vedānta has practised this bold detachment. The follower of every other religion, if asked what is ordinary knowledge, would unhesitatingly reply: 'All the sacred books of all the religions except my own.' But this teacher of the Upaniṣads had the detachment and boldness, proceeding from love of truth, to say that even the Vedas, held in such veneration by himself and by his people, were secondary; all the sacred books and all positive sciences and arts are but lower knowledge—*aparā vidyā*.

What, then, is left to be included in the category of *parā vidyā*, higher knowledge? The teacher proceeds to indicate this elusive theme. There is a tremendous field of knowledge still left, he thinks; but it belongs to a different order. So he says (ibid., I. i. 5): *Atha parā yayā tad akṣaram adhigamyate*—‘That is *parā* by which the Imperishable is realized.’

Science and all the rest deal only with things that change, that are perishable. As Eddington puts it, science gives us ‘knowledge of structural form and not knowledge of content’. The sacred books give us, says Sri Ramakrishna, only *information* about God and not God Himself. And yet we feel that, in the words of Eddington, ‘all through the physical universe runs that unknown content’. What is that content? And how can we get at it? If the positive sciences cannot get at it, there must be another discipline, another line of inquiry, which must be able to give us this.

If the sacred books contain only *information* about God, there must be a discipline

which gives us God and not merely *information* about Him. It is this inquiry that pervades the Upaniṣads and that has made them immortal even as literature. And the nature and scope of that inquiry and the way it was conducted have something superb about them. There is no effort to uphold an opinion, however dear; no struggle to pronounce a dogma and cling to it, and thrust it upon others; no trace of tiredness or laziness of mind seeking a resting place on the way. Truth, and nothing but truth, is the watchword. Suffused with the spirit of truth, they declared (*ibid.*, III. i. 6):

Satyameva jayate nānṛtam

Satyena panthā vitato devayānah—

‘Truth alone triumphs, not untruth; the path to the highest excellence is spread out through truth only.’

And this path to the highest excellence is strewn with the debris of discarded opinions, pleasing dogmas, and broken hypotheses; thought was not allowed to rest on any of them for long; it forged

ahead on the two wings of critical discrimination and inner detachment, wafted by the current of a single-minded passion for truth. One thinker puts forth his conclusion ; another shows it as inadequate ; this leads to further inquiry, leading to a deeper pronouncement. There was this graceful conflict of thought between the most gifted minds, through which thought forged ahead. There was no national dogma or authoritarian church to suppress or arrest it. The whole process reached its consummation in the profound discovery of the imperishable Self of man, the Ātman, and its unity with the Self of the Universe, the Brahman. The entire process was a joyous voyage of discovery ; looking back, they saw that the steps left behind were also valid and that man travels not from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from truth that is lower to truth that is higher.

MODERN SCIENCE AND THE MYSTERY OF MAN

Pleading for the viewing of man in his

depths on the part of modern science, the eminent paleontologist, the late Père Teilhard de Chardin says :

‘When studied narrowly in himself by anthropologists or jurists, man is a tiny, even a shrinking, creature. His overpronounced individuality conceals from our eyes the whole to which he belongs ; as we look at him, our minds incline to break nature up into pieces and to forget both its deep interrelations and its measureless horizons : We incline to all that is bad in anthropocentrism. And it is this that leads scientists to refuse to consider man as an object of scientific scrutiny except through his body.

‘The time has come to realize that an interpretation of the universe—even a positivist one—remains unsatisfying unless it covers the interior as well as the exterior of things ; mind as well as matter. The true physics is that which will, one day, achieve the inclusion of man in his wholeness in a coherent picture of the world.’

(*The Phenomenon of Man*, London, Collins, 1959, pp. 35-36)

The Upaniṣads discovered the finite man as but the outer crust or layer of the infinite and immortal man within. In his finiteness, he enters and is entered into by the finite world around him. In this, he is a speck of dust in the vast immensity of space in which 'the universe engulfs me and reduces me to a pin-point', in the profound words of Pascal. But in his infinite dimension as the imperishable Self, he *understands the universe*. The inner aspect of man, and, through him, of the universe, is slowly dawning on modern scientific thought. Chardin asks: 'Up to now has science ever troubled to look at the world other than from without?' (*ibid.*, p. 52) And he proceeds to say:

'In the eyes of the physicist, nothing exists legitimately, at least up to now, except the *without* of things. The same intellectual attitude is still permissible in the bacteriologist, whose cultures (apart from substantial difficulties) are treated as laboratory reagents. But it is still more difficult in the realm of plants. It tends to become a gamble in the case of a biol-

ogist studying the behaviour of insects or coelenterates. It seems merely futile with regard to the vertebrates. Finally, it breaks down completely with man, in whom the existence of a *within* can no longer be evaded, because it is the object of a direct intuition and the substance of all knowledge.' (ibid., p. 55)

And Chardin concludes :

'It is impossible to deny that, deep within ourselves, an "interior" appears at the heart of beings, as it were seen through a rent. This is enough to ensure that, in one degree or another, this "interior" should obtrude itself as existing everywhere in nature from all time. Since the stuff of the universe has an inner aspect at one point of itself, there is necessarily a *double aspect to its structure*, that is to say, in every region of space and time—in the same way, for instance, as it is granular : *coextensive with their Without, there is a Within to things.*' (ibid., p. 56)

Says the great physiologist and neurologist, Sir Charles Sherrington :

'Today Nature looms larger than ever

and includes more fully than ever ourselves. It is, if you will, a machine, but it is a partly mentalized machine and in virtue of including ourselves it is a machine with human qualities of mind. It is a running stream of energy—mental and physical—and unlike man-made machines it is actuated by emotions, fears and hopes, dislikes and love.’ (*Man on His Nature*, p. 38, Pelican edition)

In a lecture on ‘The Evolutionary Vision’, delivered in 1959 at the closing session of the Chicago University symposium on ‘Evolution After Darwin’ held to commemorate the centenary of the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, Sir Julian Huxley, the noted biologist, gave a spiritual orientation to the evolutionary process :

‘Man’s evolution is not biological but psychosocial ; it operates by the mechanism of cultural tradition, which involves the cumulative self-reproduction and self-variation of mental activities and their products. Accordingly, major steps in the human phase of evolution are achieved by

breakthroughs to new dominant patterns of mental organization of knowledge, ideas, and beliefs—ideological instead of physiological or biological organization. . . .

‘All dominant thought organizations are concerned with the ultimate, as well as with the immediate, problems of existence or, I should rather say, with the most ultimate problems that the thought of the time is capable of formulating or even envisaging. They are all concerned with giving some interpretation of man, of the world which he is to live in, and of his place and role in that world—in other words, some comprehensive picture of human destiny and significance.’ (*Evolution After Darwin*, Vol. III, pp. 251-2)

Further, Huxley revealed the trend of evolution towards quality: ‘It (evolutionary vision) shows us mind enthroned above matter, quantity subordinate to quality,’ (ibid., Vol. III, pp. 261-2)

In his essay on ‘Emergence of Darwinism’, Huxley sums up the goal of the evolutionary process at the human level as ‘fulfilment’:

‘In the light of our present knowledge man’s most comprehensive aim is seen not as mere survival, not as numerical increase, not as increased complexity of organization or increased control over his environment, but as greater fulfilment—the fuller realization of more possibilities by the human species collectively and more of its component members individually.’ (ibid., Vol. I, p. 20)

And pleading for the development of a science of human possibilities, Huxley further says :

‘Once greater fulfilment is recognized as man’s ultimate or dominant aim, we shall need a science of human possibilities to help guide the long course of psychosocial evolution that lies ahead.’ (ibid., Vol. I, p. 21)

KINSHIP BETWEEN VEDĀNTA AND MODERN SCIENCE

Swami Vivekananda has shown that Vedānta and modern science are close to each other in spirit and temper and objectives. Both are spiritual disciplines. Even

in the cosmology of the physical universe, the two reveal many points of contact. The fundamental position in the cosmology of both is what Swami Vivekananda calls 'the postulate of a self-evolving cause'. Vedānta calls it Brahman which is a universal spiritual principle. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (III. 1) defines Brahman in a majestic utterance which will be welcomed by every scientific thinker :

Yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante, yena jātāni jīvanti ; yat prayantya bhisaṁviśanti ; Tad vijijñāsasva ; Tad Brahmeti—

'Wherefrom all these beings are born ; by which, being born, they abide ; into which, at the time of dissolution, they enter—seek to know That ; That is Brahman.'

To the modern scientist, it is a material reality, the background material or stuff, as astrophysicist Fred Hoyle terms it. And both uphold the theory of evolution, cosmic as well as organic.

Referring to this spiritual kinship between modern science and ancient Vedānta, Swami Vivekananda said in his speech at

the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893 :

‘Manifestation, and not creation, is the word of science today, and the Hindu is only glad that what he has been cherishing in his bosom for ages is going to be taught in more forcible language, and with further light, from the latest conclusions of science.’ (*The Complete Works*, Vol. I, p. 15, 11th edition)

Although modern scientific thought does not yet have a recognized place for any spiritual reality or principle, several scientists of the twentieth century, including biologists like Teilhard de Chardin and Sir Julian Huxley, have endeavoured to soften the materialism of physical science and to find a place for spiritual experience in the scientific world picture. Even in the last century, Thomas Huxley, collaborator of Darwin, had protested against the association of science with any fixed dogma such as materialism, and termed materialism an ‘intruder’. (*Methods and Results*, Vol. I, p. 161) In this century, this protest has come from great physicists them-

selves. Sir James Jeans found that the final picture of the universe emerging from twentieth century physical science was one in which matter was completely eliminated, 'mind reigning supreme and alone' (*The New Background of Science*, p. 307). Astrophysicist R. A. Millikan considered materialism 'a philosophy of unintelligence' (*An Autobiography*, last chapter). If twentieth century physics is thus turning its face away from thoroughgoing materialism, twentieth century biology is one step ahead of it in this orientation. The whole of modern scientific thought is in the throes of a silent spiritual revolution with the emergence, on the horizon of scientific thought, of mind and consciousness, and the consequent need to develop what Jeans calls 'a new background of science'. Julian Huxley and Chardin find the spiritual character of the world-stuff successively revealed in the course of organic evolution. Biology, in its theory of evolution, they hold, reveals what Chardin calls a *within* to nature, over and above and different from the *without* of nature revealed by

physics and astronomy. Vedānta terms the *within* as the *pratyak rūpa* and the *without* as the *parāk rūpa* of nature.

When the significance of this *within* of things is recognized in modern science, the scientific background material will undergo a spiritual orientation and thus come closer to the Brahman of the Vedānta. The synthesis of the knowledge of the *within* and the *without* is what India achieved in its Vedānta ages ago as *samyak jñāna*, comprehensive or perfect knowledge, or philosophy. Reality itself does not know any distinction between a *within* and a *without*. These distinctions are made only by the human mind for the convenience of study and research.

As the different branches of the positive sciences are but different approaches to the study of one and the same reality, and as all such branches of study, when pursued far enough, tend to mingle and merge into a grand science of the physical universe, into a unified science of the *without* of nature, so the science of the *within* and the science of the *without* mingle and

merge in a science of Brahman, the total Reality. This is how Vedānta viewed its *Brahmavidyā*, science of Brahman, the term Brahman standing for the totality of Reality, physical and non-physical; the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (I. i. 1) defined *Brahmavidyā* as *sarvavidyāpratiṣṭha*, the *pratiṣṭha* or basis of every *vidyā* or science. Says Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* (XIII. 2):

Kṣetrakṣetrajñayor jñānam yat tat jñānam matam mama—

‘The knowledge of *kṣetra*, the not-self (the without of things), and *kṣetrajña*, the Self, (the within of things), is true knowledge according to Me.’

Dealing with the all-inclusiveness of this Vedāntic thought as expounded by Swami Vivekananda, Romain Rolland says :

‘But it is a matter of indifference to the calm pride of him who deems himself the stronger whether Science accepts free Religion, in Vivekananda’s sense of the term, or not; for his Religion accepts Science. It is vast enough to find a place at its table for all loyal seekers after truth.’ (*Life of Vivekananda*, p. 289)

In his lecture on 'The Absolute and Manifestation' delivered in London in 1896, Swami Vivekananda said :

'Do you not see whither science is tending? The Hindu nation proceeded through the study of the mind, through metaphysics and logic. The European nations start from external nature, and now they, too, are coming to the same results. We find that searching through the mind we at last come to that Oneness, that universal One, the internal Soul of everything, the essence and reality of everything.... Through material science, we come to the same Oneness.' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. II, p 140, 9th edition)

The *Bhāgavata* (XI. vii. 19-21) refers to this complementary character of science and Vedānta in a profound utterance :

*Prāyeṇa manujā loke lokatattvavica-
kṣaṇāḥ ;*

*Samuddharanti hyātmānam ātmanai-
vāśubhāśayāt.*

*Ātmano gururātmaiva puruṣasya
viśeṣataḥ ;*

*Yat pratyakṣānumānābhyām śreyo'sau
anuvindate.*

*Puruṣatve ca mām dhīrāḥ sāṅkhyayoga-
viśāradāḥ ;*

*Āvistarām prapaśyanti sarvaśaktyupa-
br̥ṇhitam—*

'In the world, men who are efficient in the investigation of the truth of nature, generally uplift themselves by themselves from all sources of evil.

'For a human being particularly, his *guru* (teacher) is his own self; because he achieves his welfare through (inquiring into) direct sense experience and inference based on the same.

'In this very human personality also, wise men who have mastered the science and art of the spiritual life clearly realize Me (God, the universal Self of all) as fully manifest and endowed with all powers.'

THE VEDĀNTIC VIEW OF EVOLUTION

The Vedānta views the entire evolutionary process as progressive evolution of structure and form, and as greater and

greater manifestation of the infinite Self within. It is evolution of matter and manifestation of spirit. Twentieth century biology recognizes, in the first appearance of living organisms, the emergence, in rudimentary form, of the spiritual value of awareness.

This spiritual value of awareness grows, as it were, in richness and variety as we move up the evolutionary ladder. The evolution of the nervous system discloses progressive development of awareness in depth and range, and consequent increase in the grip of the organism on its environment.

This awareness achieves a new and significant dimension with the appearance of man on the evolutionary scene. The field of awareness of all other organisms is, largely, the external environment and also, to a small extent, the interior of their bodies—the *without* of nature. Man alone has awareness of the self, along with awareness of the not-self, of both the *within* and *without* of nature.

That is the uniqueness of man, accord-

ing to both twentieth century biology and ancient Vedānta. Self-awareness, which nature achieved through the evolution of the human organism, is a new dimension of awareness containing tremendous implications for man's destiny as much as for his philosophy of nature.

The Vedāntic view of evolution and of man's uniqueness finds a classic statement in the *Bhāgavata* (XI. ix. 28):

*Sṛṣṭvā purāṇi vividhānyajayātmaśaktyā
Vṛkṣān sarīsrpapaśūn khagadamśa-
matsyān ;*

*Taistaiḥ atuṣṭahrdayaḥ puruṣam vidhāya
Brahmāvalokadhīṣaṇam mudam apa-
devaḥ—*

'The divine One, having projected (evolved) with His own inherent power various forms such as trees, reptiles, cattle, birds, insects, and fish, was not satisfied at heart with forms such as these; He then projected the human form endowed with the capacity to realize Brahman (the universal divine Self of all), and became extremely pleased.'

INDIA'S URGE: REALIZATION AND NOT MERE SPECULATION

Evolution has revealed that the mystery of existence stirs in man as the mystery of the self. The mystery of the universe will ever remain a mystery until this mystery of the self is cleared. Till then all our conclusions about the truth of the universe proceeding from science or philosophy, theology or logic, will be speculative ventures yielding mere postulates and conjectures. The Indian mind was not content to remain at the stage of speculation or conjecture in so important a field as the knowledge of the ultimate truth. Her thinkers boldly penetrated into the world within, taking the facts of awareness and the ego as the clue, as *footprints*, in the words of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (I. iv. 7); and when they penetrated to the depth, they discovered the infinite and the eternal behind the finite and the time-bound. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III. iv. 1) registers this approach, and the object of its search, in another significant

passage :

*Yat sākṣāt aparokṣāt Brahma ya Ātmā
sarvāntaraḥ—*

‘The Brahman that is immediate and direct
—the Self that is within all.’

‘That thou art’ (*Tat tvam asi*), proclaims the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (VI. viii. 7). Again and again, the Upaniṣads reiterate this great Truth. If man as scientist has such a profound dimension that he can comprehend the vast universe in a formula given by his thought, what must be the dimension of man as the Ātman, the unchangeable, infinite Self? The mystery of the universe was finally resolved through the discovery of the solution to the mystery within man himself. The sages of the Upaniṣads discovered the centre of the universe in the heart of man. Through that discovery, man was revealed in his infinite dimension; and the universe was also revealed in all its spiritual glory. Realization of this truth is the only way to life-fulfilment, say the Upaniṣads. Says the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (II. 15) :

*Yadātmataṭṭvena tu Brahmataṭṭvam
Dīpopameneha yuktaḥ prapaśyet;
Ajam dhruvam sarvataṭṭvaiḥ viśuddham*

Jñātvā devam mucyate sarvapāpaiḥ—

‘When the self-controlled spiritual aspirant realizes in this very body the truth of Brahman (absolute Existence) through the truth of the Ātman (Self), self-luminous as light, then, knowing the Divinity which is unborn, eternal, and untouched by the modifications of nature, he is freed from all sins.’

This was a profound, joyous discovery, as can be seen even from the language in which it is couched in the Upaniṣads. In reaching the ultimate Truth of the Ātman, they had reached also the ultimate of knowledge and awareness, peace and joy. Hence they communicated their discovery as the discovery of the inexhaustible mine of *satyam* (truth), *jñānam* (awareness), and *anantam* (infinitude), or of *sat* (existence), *cit* (knowledge) and *ānanda* (bliss). In the struggle to realize this truth and the life-fulfilment it involves, they saw the true meaning of the entire course of cosmic

evolution, especially of human evolution.

The organism seeks fulfilment; that is the end and aim of all its activities and processes, says modern biology. In the Upaniṣads, we have the beautiful concepts of *mukti*, freedom, and *pūrṇatā*, fullness. We are bound now; we want to become integral, we must experience fullness. Jesus Christ calls it 'perfection': 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' (Matthew v. 48) To experience the delight of freedom, to enlarge the bounds of man's awareness, to get *bodhi*, complete enlightenment, as the Buddha expressed it, is the great aim of human evolution. Education, science, culture, socio-political processes, and religion are meant to increase and enlarge the bounds of this awareness and the range and depth of this fulfilment, by increasing man's knowledge of and control over not only the outside world but also the deep recesses within himself. Knowledge is power in the positive sciences; it is still more so in the science of religion, the science of the inner nature of man, where the power that is

gained is not only greater in terms of quantity but also higher in terms of quality.

While living as a prisoner in St. Helena, Napoleon made this significant confession :

‘There are in the world two powers—the sword and the spirit. The spirit has always vanquished the sword.

‘Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I founded great empires. But upon what did the creation of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded his empire upon love, and to this very day, millions would die for him.’

VIVEKANANDA AND A SCIENCE OF HUMAN POSSIBILITIES

India developed religion as a science, as what Julian Huxley calls ‘a science of human possibilities’. In this connexion, I can do no better than quote a significant passage from Swami Vivekananda ; though rather long, it is worth quoting in full in view of its relevance.

In his speech on ‘The Powers of the

Mind' delivered in Los Angeles, California, on January 8, 1900, Swami Vivekananda said :

'Now, I shall tell you a theory, which I will not argue now, but simply place before you the conclusion. Each man in his childhood runs through the stages through which his race has come up ; only the race took thousands of years to do it, while the child takes a few years. The child is first the old savage man, and he crushes a butterfly under his feet. The child is at first like the primitive ancestors of his race. As he grows, he passes through different stages until he reaches the development of his race. Only he does it swiftly and quickly. Now, take the whole of humanity as a race ; or take the whole of the animal creation, man and the lower animals, as one whole. There is an end towards which the whole is moving. Let us call it perfection.

'Some men and women are born who anticipate the whole progress of mankind. Instead of waiting and being reborn over and over again for ages until the whole

human race has attained to that perfection, they, as it were, rush through them in a few short years of their life. And we know that we can hasten these processes, if we be true to ourselves. If a number of men, without any culture, be left to live upon an island, and are given barely enough food, clothing, and shelter, they will gradually go on and on, evolving higher and higher stages of civilization. We know, also, that this growth can be hastened by additional means.

'We help the growth of trees, do we not? Left to nature they would have grown, only they would have taken a longer time; we help them to grow in a shorter time than they would otherwise have taken. We are doing all the time the same thing, hastening the growth of things by artificial means. Why cannot we hasten the growth of man? We can do that as a race. Why are teachers sent to other countries? Because, by these means, we can hasten the growth of races. Now, can we not hasten growth of individuals? We can. Can we put a limit to the hastening? We cannot

say how much a man can grow in one life. You have no reason to say that this much a man can do and no more. Circumstances can hasten him wonderfully. Can there be any limit then, till you come to perfection? So, what comes of it? That a perfect man, that is to say, the type that is to come of this race, perhaps millions of years hence, that man can come today. And this is what the *yogins* say, that all great incarnations and prophets are such men; that they reached perfection in this one life. We have had such men at all periods of the world's history and at all times. Quite recently, there was such a man (Sri Ramakrishna) who lived the life of the whole human race and reached the end even in this life.

'Even this hastening of the growth must be under laws. Suppose we can investigate these laws and understand their secrets and apply them to our own needs; it follows that we grow. We hasten our growth, we hasten our development, and we become perfect, even in this life. This is the higher part of our life, and the science of

the study of mind and its powers has this perfection as its real end. Helping others with money and other material things and teaching them how to go on smoothly in their daily life are mere details.

‘The utility of this science is to bring out the perfect man, and not let him wait and wait for ages, just a plaything in the hands of the physical world, like a log of drift-wood carried from wave to wave and tossing about in the ocean. This science wants you to be strong, to take the work in your own hand, instead of leaving it in the hands of nature, and get beyond this little life. That is the great idea.’ (*The Complete Works*, Vol. II, pp. 18-19, 9th edition)

THE VEDĀNTIC MESSAGE OF STRENGTH AND FEARLESSNESS

Spiritual knowledge confers on man infinite strength and fearlessness. That is the best proof of its truth and utility. Referring to this, Swami Vivekananda said in his lecture on ‘Vedānta and Its Application to Indian Life’ delivered in Madras in 1897 :

‘And in my mind rises from the past the vision of the great emperor of the West, Alexander the Great, and I see, as it were in a picture, the great monarch standing on the banks of the Indus, talking to one of our *sannyāsins* (monks) in the forest; the old man he was talking to, perhaps naked, stark naked, sitting upon a block of stone, and the Emperor, astonished at his wisdom, tempting him with gold and honour to come over to Greece. And this man smiles at his gold, and smiles at his temptations, and refuses; and then the Emperor standing on his authority as an Emperor, says, “I will kill you, if you do not come”, and the man bursts into a laugh and says, “You never told such a falsehood in your life as you tell just now. Who can kill me? *Me* you kill. Emperor of the material world! Never! For I am Spirit unborn and undecaying; never was I born and never do I die; I am the Infinite, the Omnipresent, the Omniscient; and you kill me, child that you are!” That is strength, that is strength.’ (ibid., Vol. III, pp. 237-8, 8th edition)

Swami Vivekananda also gives as illustration of spiritual strength the example of an Indian monk who was stabbed by a soldier during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. The other soldiers captured this soldier and brought him before the dying monk to be identified and, if identified, offered to kill him in revenge. But the monk, who had realized his Self and his oneness with all beings, seeing his assailant before him, broke his silence of fifteen years to say to his murderer with his dying breath and in a tone suffused with love: 'And Thou also art He.'

The strength and fearlessness of Socrates in the face of death, and his gentleness, had its source in his spiritual knowledge. When Crito asked him: 'In what way shall we bury you, Socrates?', Socrates answered: 'In any way you like, but first you must catch *me*, the real me. Be of good cheer, my dear Crito, and say that you are burying my body only, and do with *that* whatever is usual and what you think best.' (*Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. I, p. 474, Jowett's edition, 1953)

If man is to live a true life, if he is to achieve real life-fulfilment, he has to manifest the infinite Self within him by controlling and transcending his lower self, his finite sense-bound nature. There is a technique for achieving this, and the religions of the world tell us about it with varying degrees of clarity. *But in India alone did this subject receive a treatment at once scientific and thorough in its spirit and methods, and impersonal and universal in its results and applications.*

SCIENCE AND VEDĀNTA COMPLEMENTARY

Religion so expounded has a message for all humanity. Science through its technology may build for man a first class house, and equip it with radio, television, and other gadgets; the social security measures of a welfare state may provide him with everything necessary for a happy, fulfilled life in this world, and even, through the state church, in the world beyond; the man himself may give his house such arresting names as 'Śānti Kunj' (Peace Retreat), or

'Happy Villa'. Yet none of these can ensure that he will live in that house in peace or happiness. For that depends, to a large extent, on another source of strength and nourishment, another type of knowledge and discipline—the knowledge and discipline proceeding from religion. If man can have the help of the positive sciences to create a healthy external environment, and the help of the science of spirituality to create a healthy internal environment, he can hope to achieve total life-fulfilment; not otherwise. This is the view of the Upaniṣads.

But today this is not the picture that modern civilization presents. Man in this technological civilization is feeling inwardly impoverished and empty in an environment of wealth, power, and pleasure; he is full of tension and sorrow, doubt and uncertainty, all the time. Juvenile delinquency, drunkenness, suicide, and a variety of other maladies are ever on the increase. Why? Because man is not inwardly satisfied; he is smitten with ennui and boredom arising from the limitations of his sense-

bound *Weltanschauung*. Indian thinkers foresaw this predicament of modern man ages ago. Says the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (VI. 20):

*Yadā carmavad ākāśam veṣṭayiṣyanti
mānavāḥ ;*

*Tadā Devam avijñāya duḥkhasyānto
bhaviṣyati—*

‘Men may (through their technical skill) roll up the sky like a piece of leather ; still there will be no end of sorrow for them without realizing the luminous One within.’

Schopenhauer said a hundred years ago :

‘All men who are secure from want and care, now that at last they have thrown off all other burdens, become a burden to themselves.’ (*The World as Will and Idea*, Vol. I, p. 404)

Today, man is his own major burden and problem. He can tackle and solve this problem not by going in for more positivistic science, more technology, more life’s amenities, more socio-political manipulations of human conditions, but by the cultivation of the science of religion, by the understanding and practice of this science.

Says Swami Vivekananda: 'You must bear in mind that religion does not consist in talk, or doctrines, or books, but in realization; it is not learning but *being*.' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 35, 8th edition)

It is in this sense that India understood religion; and it is this idea of religion that Swami Vivekananda expounded in the West and the East through his powerful voice. The end and aim of religion, as our ancient teachers put it, is the experience, *anubhava*, of God, through the steady growth in man's spiritual awareness. *That is the touchstone of religion.* There is such a thing as the spiritual growth of the individual, step by step. We experience this growth, just as we see a building rising up step by step, brick by brick. When we live the life of religion, strength comes to us, consciousness becomes enlarged, sympathies grow and widen, and we feel that we are growing into better men. It is only the strength that proceeds from such inward growth and development that will enable man to digest and assimilate the energies

released by the progress of science. Such a one alone has the strength and wisdom to convert the chaos of life into a pattern of happiness and general welfare. If religion is taken away from society, what remains is simple barbarism. Ancient civilizations were destroyed by barbarians bred outside those civilizations. But modern civilization, if it is to go the same way, will be destroyed by barbarians bred within the civilization itself. What can save us from this predicament is a little 'Christian love' in our hearts for our neighbours, in the words of Bertrand Russell (*Impact of Science on Society*, p. 114), or a little more altruism, in the words of Pitirim A. Sorokin of Harvard University (*Reconstruction of Humanity*, especially part V). This love comes from the *practice* of religion, as defined by Swami Vivekananda and other great teachers of the world. Says Vivekananda: 'Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man.' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 358, 8th edition) Again: 'Him I call a *mahātman* (great soul) whose heart bleeds for the poor, otherwise

he is a *durātman* (wicked soul).’ (ibid., Vol. V, p. 58, 7th edition)

That is the function of religion; the finite man reaches out to the infinite man. No other discipline can give this education to man.

‘Now comes the question, can religion really accomplish anything?’, asked Swami Vivekananda, and proceeded to answer :

‘It can. It brings to man eternal life. It has made man what he is and will make of this human animal a god. That is what religion can do. Take religion from human society and what will remain? Nothing but a forest of brutes. Sense-happiness is not the goal of humanity. Wisdom (*jñāna*) is the goal of all life. We find that man enjoys his intellect more than an animal enjoys its senses; and we see that man enjoys his spiritual nature even more than his rational nature. So the highest wisdom must be this spiritual knowledge. With this knowledge will come bliss.’ (ibid., Vol. III, p. 4, 8th edition)

CONCLUSION

Understood in this light, there is no conflict between science and religion. Both have the identical aim of helping man to grow in spirituality, of ushering in a better social order which alone can provide him with the stimulus to total life-fulfilment. Each by itself is insufficient and helpless. They have been tried separately with unsatisfactory results. The old civilizations took guidance solely from religion ; their achievements were partial and limited. Modern civilization relies solely on science ; its achievements also have turned out to be partial and limited. The combination today of the spiritual energies of these two complementary disciplines in the life of man will produce fully integrated human beings and thus help to evolve a complete human civilization for which the world is ripe and waiting. This is the most outstanding contribution of Swami Vivekananda to human thought today. This synthetic vision of his finds lucid expression in a brief but comprehensive testament of

his Vedāntic faith :

‘Each soul is potentially divine.

‘The goal is to manifest this divine within by controlling nature, external and internal.

‘Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and *be free*.

‘This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.’ (ibid., Vol. I, p. 124, 11th edition)

The Vedānta expounded by Vivekananda as the synthesis of science and religion is also the synthesis of head and heart, of the classical and the romantic in the human heritage. The erstwhile tendency in modern education to treat the humanities and the sciences as mutually exclusive disciplines is giving place to the Vedāntic awareness that they are complementary to each other. Himself ‘the personification of the harmony of all human energy’, in the words of Romain Rolland which I have quoted at the beginning of this paper, Vivekananda has bequeathed to man, in a moving

passage, his vision of the unity and synthesis of all human energy and aspiration. Making a prophetic reference to the future religion of humanity in the course of his lecture on 'The Absolute and Manifestation' delivered in London in 1896, he said :

'In Buddha, we had the great universal heart, and infinite patience, making religion practical, and bringing it to everyone's door. In Śaṅkarācārya, we saw tremendous intellectual power, throwing the scorching light of reason upon everything. We want to-day that bright sun of intellectuality joined with the heart of Buddha, the wonderful, infinite heart of love and mercy. This union will give us the highest philosophy. Science and religion will meet and shake hands. Poetry and philosophy will become friends. This will be the religion of the future, and if we can work it out, we may be sure that it will be for all times and peoples.' (*The Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 140, 10th edition)

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