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## *The Future Poetry*

### I

#### The Mantra

It is not often that we see published in India literary criticism which is of the first order, at once discerning and suggestive, criticism which forces us both to see and think. A book which recently I have read and more than once re-perused with a yet unexhausted pleasure and fruitfulness, Mr. James Cousins' *New Ways in English Literature*, is eminently of this kind. It raises thought which goes beyond the strict limits of the author's subject and suggests the whole question of the future of poetry in the age which is coming upon us, the higher functions open to it—as yet very imperfectly fulfilled,—and the part which English literature on the one side and the Indian mind and temperament on the other are likely to take in determining the new trend. The author is himself a poet, a writer of considerable force in the Irish movement which has given contemporary English literature its two greatest poets, and the book on every page attracts and satisfies by its living force of style, its almost perfect measure, its delicacy of touch, its fineness and depth of observation and insight, its just sympathy and appreciation.

For the purpose for which these essays have been, not indeed written, but put together, the criticism, fine and helpful as it is, suffers from one great fault,—there is too little of it. Mr. Cousins is satisfied with giving us the essential, just what is necessary for a trained mind to seize intimately the spirit and manner and poetic quality of the writers whose work he brings before us. This is done sometimes in such a masterly manner that even one touch more might well have been a touch in excess. The essay on Emerson is a masterpiece in this kind; it gives perfectly in a few pages all that should be said about Emerson's poetry and nothing that need not be said. But some of the essays, admirable in themselves, are too slight for our need. The book is not indeed intended to be exhaustive in its range. Mr. Cousins wisely takes for the most part,—there is one notable exception,—writers with whom he is in close poetical sympathy or for whom he has a strong appreciation; certain names which have come over to our ears with some flourish of the trumpets of renown, Thompson, Masfield, Hardy, do not occur at all or only in a passing allusion.

But still the book deals among contemporary poets with Tagore, A. E. and Yeats, among recent poets with Stephen Phillips, Meredith, Carpenter, great names all of them, not to speak of lesser writers. This little book with its 135 short pages is almost too small a pedestal for the figures it has to support, not, be it understood, for the purposes of the English reader interested in poetry, but for ours in India who have on this subject a great ignorance and, most of us, a very poorly trained critical intelligence. We need something a little more ample to enchain our attention and fix in us a permanent interest; a finger-post by the way is not enough for the Indian reader, you will have to carry him some miles on the road if you would have him follow it.

But Mr. Cousins has done a great service to the Indian mind by giving it at all a chance to follow this direction with such a guide to point out the way. The English language and literature is practically the only window the Indian mind, with the narrow and meagre and yet burdensome education given to it, possesses into the world of European thought and culture; but at least as possessed at present, it is a painfully small and insufficient opening. English poetry for all but a few of us stops short with Tennyson and Browning, when it does not stop with Byron and Shelley. A few have heard of some of the recent, fewer of some of the contemporary poets; their readers are hardly enough to make a number. In this matter of culture this huge peninsula, once one of the greatest centres of civilisation, has been for long the most provincial of provinces; it has been a patch of tilled fields round a lawyer's office and a Government cutcherry, a cross between a little district town and the most rural of villages, at its largest a dried-up bank far away from the great stream of the world's living thought and action, visited with no great force by occasional and belated waves, but for the rest a bare field for sluggish activities, the falsest possible education, a knowledge always twenty-five or fifty years behind the time. The awakening brought by the opening years of the twentieth century has chiefly taken the form of a revival of cultural patriotism, highly necessary for a nation which has a distinctive contribution to make to the human spirit in its future development, some new and great thing which it must evolve out of a magnificent past for the opening splendours of the future; but in order that this may evolve rapidly and surely, it needs a wide and sound information, a richer stuff to work upon, a more vital touch with the life and master tendencies of the world around it. Such books as this will be of invaluable help in creating what is now deficient.

The helpfulness of this suggestive work comes more home to me personally because I have shared to the full the state of mere blank which is the ordinary condition of the Indian mind with regard to its subject. Such touch as in the intellectual remoteness of India I have been able to keep up with the times, had been with contemporary continental rather than contemporary

English literature. With the latter all vital connection came to a dead stop with my departure from England a quarter of a century ago; it had for its last events the discovery of Meredith as a poet, in his *Modern Love*, and the perusal of *Christ in Hades*,—some years before its publication,—the latter an unforgettable date. I had long heard, standing aloof in giant ignorance, the great name of Yeats, but with no more than a fragmentary and mostly indirect acquaintance with some of his work; A. E. only lives for me in Mr. Cousins' pages; other poets of the day are still represented in my mind by scattered citations. In the things of culture such a state of ignorance is certainly an unholy state of sin; but in this immoral and imperfect world even sin has sometimes its rewards, and I get that now in the joy and light of a new world opening to me all in one view while I stand, Cortez-like, on the peak of the large impression created for me by Mr. Cousins' book. For the light we get from a vital and illuminative criticism from within by another mind can sometimes almost take the place of a direct knowledge.

There disengages itself from these essays not so much a special point of view as a distinctive critical and literary temperament, which may be perhaps not so much the whole mind of the critic as the response to his subject in a mind naturally in sympathy with it. Mr. Cousins is a little nervous about this in his preface; he is apprehensive of being labelled as an idealist. The cut and dried distinction between idealism and realism in literature has always seemed to me to be a little arbitrary and unreal, and whatever its value in drama and fiction, it has no legitimate place in poetry. What we find here is a self-identification with what is best and most characteristic of a new spirit in the age, a new developing aesthetic temper and outlook,—or should we rather say, inlook? Its mark is a greater (not exclusive) tendency to the spiritual rather than the merely earthly, to the inward and subjective than the outward and objective, to the life within and behind than to the life in front, and in its purest, which seems to be its Irish form, a preference of the lyrical to the dramatic and of the inwardly suggestive to the concrete method of poetical presentation. Every distinctive temperament has naturally the defect of an insufficient sympathy, often a pronounced and intolerant antipathy towards all that departs from its own motives. Moreover contemporary criticism is beset with many dangers; there is the charm of new thought and feeling and expression of tendency which blinds us to the defects and misplaces or misproportions to our view the real merits of the expression itself; there are powerful cross-currents of immediate attraction and repulsion which carry us from the true track; especially, there is the inevitable want of perspective which prevents us from getting a right vision of things too near us in time. And if in addition one is oneself part of a creative movement with powerful tendencies and a pronounced ideal, it becomes difficult to get away from the

standpoint it creates to a larger critical outlook. From these reefs and shallows Mr. Cousins' sense of measure and justice of appreciation largely, generally indeed, preserve him, though not, I think, quite invariably. But still it is not a passionless, quite disinterested criticism which we get or want from this book, but a much more helpful thing, an interpretation of work which embodies the creative tendencies of the time by one who has himself lived in them and helped both to direct and to form.

Mr. Cousins' positive criticism is almost always fine, just and inspired by a warm glow of sympathy and understanding tempered by discernment, restraint and measure; whatever the future critic, using his scales and balance, may have to take away from it, will be, one would imagine, only by way of a slight alteration of stress here and there. His depreciations, though generally sound enough, are not, I think, invariably as just as his appreciations. Thus his essay on the work of J. M. Synge, "The Realist on the Stage", is, in sharp distinction from the rest of the book, an almost entirely negative and destructive criticism, strong and interesting, but written from the point of view of the ideals and aims of the Irish literary movement against a principle of work which seemed entirely to depart from them; yet we are allowed to get some glimpse of a positive side of dramatic power which the critic does not show us, but leaves us rather to guess at. Mr. Cousins seems to me to take the dramatist's theory of his own art more seriously than it should be taken; for the creator can seldom be accepted—there may of course be exceptions, rare instances of clairvoyant self-sight—as a sound exponent of his own creative impulse. He is in his central inspiration the instrument of a light and power not his own, and his account of it is usually vitiated, out of focus, an attempt to explain the workings of this impersonal power by motives which were the contribution of his own personal effort, but which are often quite subordinate or even accidental side-lights of the lower brain-mind, not the central moving force.

Mr. Cousins' has pointed out clearly enough that art can never be a copy of life. But it is also true, I think, that that is not the secret object of most realism, whatever it may say about itself; realism is in fact a sort of nether idealism, or, perhaps more correctly, sometimes an inverse, sometimes a perverse romanticism which tries to get a revelation of creative truth by an effective force of presentation, by an intensity, often an exaggeration at the opposite side of the complex phenomenon of life. All art starts from the sensuous and sensible, or takes it as a continual point of reference or, at the lowest, uses it as a symbol and a fount of images; even when it soars into invisible worlds, it is from the earth that it soars; but equally all art worth the name must go beyond the visible, must reveal, must show us something that is hidden, and in its total effect not reproduce but create. We may say that the artist creates

an ideal world of his own, not necessarily in the sense of ideal perfection, but a world that exists in the idea, the imagination and vision of the creator. More truly, he throws into significant form a truth he has seen, which may be truth of hell or truth of heaven or an immediate truth behind things terrestrial or any other, but is never merely the external truth of earth. By that ideative truth and the power, the perfection and the beauty of his presentation and utterance of it his work must be judged.

Some occasional utterances in this book seem to spring from very pronounced idiosyncrasies of its distinctive literary temperament or standpoint and cannot always be accepted without reservation. I do not myself share its rather disparaging attitude towards the dramatic form and motive or its comparative coldness towards the architectural faculty and impulse in poetry. When Mr. Cousins tells us that "its poetry and not its drama, will prove to be the thing of life" in Shakespeare's work, I feel that the distinction is not sound all through, that there is a truth behind it, but it is overstated. Or when still more vivaciously he dismisses Shakespeare the dramatist to "a dusty and reverent immortality in the libraries" or speaks of the "monstrous net of his life's work" which but for certain buoys of line and speech "might sink in the ocean of forgetfulness," I cannot help feeling that this can only be at most the mood of the hour born of the effort to get rid of the burden of its past and move more freely towards its future, and not the definitive verdict of the poetic and aesthetic mind on what has been so long the object of its sincere admiration and a powerful presence and influence. Perhaps I am wrong, I may be too much influenced by my own settled idiosyncrasies of an aesthetic temperament and being impregnated with an early cult for the work of the great builders in Sanskrit and Greek, Italian and English poetry. At any rate, this is true that whatever relation we may keep with the great masters of the past, our present business is to go beyond and not to repeat them, and it must always be the lyrical motive and spirit which find a new secret and begin a new creation; for the lyrical is the primary poetical motive and spirit and the dramatic and epic must wait for it to open for them their new heaven and new earth.

I have referred to these points which are only side issues or occasional touches in Mr. Cousins' book, because they are germane to the question which it most strongly raises, the future of English poetry and of the world's poetry. It is still uncertain how that future will deal with the old quarrel between idealism and realism, for the two tendencies these names roughly represent are still present in the tendencies of recent work. More generally, poetry always sways between two opposite trends, towards predominance of subjective vision and towards an emphasis on objective presentation, and it can rise too beyond these to a spiritual plane where the distinction is exceeded, the divergence reconciled. Again, it is not likely that the poetic imagination will

ever give up the narrative and dramatic form of its creative impulse; a new spirit in poetry, even though primarily lyrical, is moved always to seize upon and do what it can with them,—as we see in the impulsion which has driven Maeterlinck, Yeats, Rabindranath to take hold of the dramatic form for self-expression as well as the lyrical in spite of their dominant subjectivity. We may perhaps think that this was not the proper form for their spirit, that they cannot get there a full or a flawless success; but who shall lay down rules for creative genius or say what it shall or shall not attempt? It follows its own course and makes its own shaping experiments. And it is interesting to speculate whether the new spirit in poetry will take and use with modifications the old dramatic and narrative forms, as did Rabindranath in his earlier dramatic attempts, or quite transform them to its own ends, as he has attempted in his later work. But after all these are subordinate issues.

It will be more fruitful to take the main substance of the matter for which the body of Mr. Cousins' criticism gives a good material. Taking the impression it creates for a starting-point and the trend of English poetry for our main text, but casting our view farther back into the past, we may try to sound what the future has to give us through the medium of the poetic mind and its power for creation and interpretation. The issues of recent activity are still doubtful and it would be rash to make any confident prediction; but there is one possibility which this book strongly suggests and which it is at least interesting and may be fruitful to search and consider. That possibility is the discovery of a closer approximation to what we might call the *mantra* in poetry, that rhythmic speech which, as the Veda puts it, rises at once from the heart of the seer and from the distant home of the Truth,—the discovery of the word, the divine movement, the form of thought proper to the reality which, as Mr. Cousins excellently says, "lies in the apprehension of a something stable behind the instability of word and deed, something that is a reflection of the fundamental passion of humanity for something beyond itself, something that is a dim shadowing of the divine urge which is prompting all creation to unfold itself and to rise out of its limitations towards its Godlike possibilities." Poetry in the past has done that in moments of supreme elevation; in the future there seems to be some chance of its making it a more conscious aim and steadfast endeavour.

## II

### The Essence of Poetry

What then is the nature of poetry, its essential law? what is the highest power we can demand from it, what the supreme music that the human mind,

reaching up and in and out to its own widest breadths, deepest depths and topmost summits, can extract from this self-expressive instrument? and how out of that does there arise the possibility of its use as the *mantra* of the Real? Not that we need spend any energy in a vain effort to define anything so profound, elusive and indefinable as the breath of poetic creation; to take the myriad-stringed harp of Saraswati to pieces for the purpose of scientific analysis is a narrow and barren amusement. But we stand in need of some guiding intuitions, some helpful descriptions which will serve to enlighten our search; to fix in that way, not by definition, but by description, the essential things in poetry is neither an impossible, nor an unprofitable endeavour.

We meet here two common enough errors, to one of which the ordinary uninstructed mind is most liable, to the other the too instructed critic or the too intellectually conscientious artist or craftsman. To the ordinary mind, judging poetry without really entering into it, it looks as if it were nothing more than an aesthetic pleasure of the imagination, the intellect and the ear, a sort of elevated pastime. If that were all, we need not have wasted time in seeking for its spirit, its inner aim, its deeper law. Anything pretty, pleasant and melodious with a beautiful idea in it would serve our turn; a song of Anacreon or a plaint of Mimnermus would be as satisfying to the poetic sense as the Oedipus, Agamemnon or Odyssey, for from this point of view they might well strike us as equally and even, one might contend, more perfect in their light but exquisite unity and brevity. Pleasure, certainly, we expect from poetry as from all art; but the external sensible and even the inner imaginative pleasure are only first elements. For these must not only be refined in order to meet the highest requirements of the intelligence, the imagination and the ear; but afterwards they have to be still farther heightened and in their nature raised beyond even their own noblest levels, so that they may become the support for something greater beyond them; otherwise they cannot lead to the height on which lives the Mantra.

For neither the intelligence, the imagination nor the ear are the true or at least the deepest or highest recipients of the poetic delight, even as they are not its true or highest creators; they are only its channels and instruments: the true creator, the true hearer is the soul. The more rapidly and transparently the rest do their work of transmission, the less they make of their separate claim to satisfaction, the more directly the word reaches and sinks deep into the soul, the greater the poetry. Therefore poetry has not really done its work, at least its highest work, until it has raised the pleasure of the instrument and transmuted it into the deeper delight of the soul. A divine *Ānanda*,<sup>1</sup> a delight

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1. *Ānanda*, in the language of Indian spiritual experience, is the essential delight which the Infinite feels in itself and in its creation. By the infinite Self's *Ānanda* all exists, for the Self's *Ānanda* all was made.

interpretative, creative, revealing, formative,—one might almost say, an inverse reflection of the joy which the universal Soul felt in its great release of energy when it rang out into the rhythmic forms of the universe the spiritual truth, the large interpretative idea, the life, the power, the emotion of things packed into an original creative vision,—such spiritual joy is that which the soul of the poet feels and which, when he can conquer the human difficulties of his task, he succeeds in pouring also into all those who are prepared to receive it. This delight is not merely a godlike pastime; it is a great formative and illuminative power.

The critic—of a certain type—or the intellectually conscientious artist will, on the other hand, often talk as if poetry were mainly a matter of a faultlessly correct or at most an exquisite technique. Certainly, in all art good technique is the first step towards perfection; but there are so many other steps, there is a whole world beyond before you can get near to what you seek; so much so that even a deficient correctness of execution will not prevent an intense and gifted soul from creating great poetry which keeps its hold on the centuries. Moreover, technique, however indispensable, occupies a smaller field perhaps in poetry than in any other art,—first, because its instrument, the rhythmic word, is fuller of subtle and immaterial elements; then because, the most complex, flexible, variously suggestive of all the instruments of the artistic creator, it has more—almost infinite—possibilities in many directions than any other. The rhythmic word has a subtly sensible element, its sound value, a quite immaterial element, its significance or thought value, and both of these again, its sound and its sense, have separately and together a soul value, a direct spiritual power, which is infinitely the most important thing about them. And though this comes to birth with a small element subject to the laws of technique, yet almost immediately, almost at the beginning of its flight, its power soars up beyond the province of any laws of mechanical construction: and this form of speech carries in it on its summits an element which draws close to the empire of the ineffable.

Poetry rather determines its own form; the form is not imposed on it by any law mechanical or external to it. The poet least of all artists needs to create with his eye fixed anxiously on the technique of his art. He has to possess it, no doubt; but in the heat of creation the intellectual sense of it becomes a subordinate action or even a mere undertone in his mind, and in his best moments he is permitted, in a way, to forget it altogether. For then the perfection of his sound-movement and style come entirely as the spontaneous form of his soul: that utters itself in an inspired rhythm and an innate, a revealed word, even as the universal Soul created the harmonies of the universe out of the power of the word secret and eternal within him, leaving the mechanical work to be done in a surge of hidden spiritual excitement by the subconscious



part of his Nature. It is this highest speech which is the supreme poetic utterance, the immortal element in his poetry, and a little of it is enough to save the rest of his work from oblivion. *Svalpam apyasya dharmasya!*

This power makes the rhythmic word of the poet the highest form of speech available to man for the expression whether of his self-vision or of his world-vision. It is noticeable that even the deepest experience, the pure spiritual which enters into things that can never be wholly expressed, still, when it does try to express them and not merely to explain them intellectually, tends instinctively to use, often the rhythmic forms, almost always the manner of speech characteristic of poetry. But poetry attempts to extend this manner of vision and utterance to all experience, even the most objective, and therefore it has a natural urge towards the expression of something in the object beyond its mere appearances, even when these seem outwardly to be all that it is enjoying.

We may usefully cast a glance, not at the last inexpressible secret, but at the first elements of this heightening and intensity peculiar to poetic utterance. Ordinary speech uses language mostly for a limited practical utility of communication; it uses it for life and for the expression of ideas and feelings necessary or useful to life. In doing so, we treat words as conventional signs for ideas with nothing but a perfunctory attention to their natural force, much as we use any kind of common machine or simple implement; we treat them as if, though useful for life, they were themselves without life. When we wish to put a more vital power into them, we have to lend it to them out of ourselves, by marked intonations of the voice, by the emotional force or vital energy we throw into the sound so as to infuse into the conventional word-sign something which is not inherent in itself. But if we go back earlier in the history of language and still more if we look into its origins, we shall, I think, find that it was not always so with human speech. Words had not only a real and vivid life of their own, but the speaker was more conscious of it than we can possibly be with our mechanised and sophisticated intellects. This arose from the primitive nature of language which, probably, in its first movement was not intended,—or shall we say, did not intend,—so much to stand for distinct ideas of the intelligence as for feelings, sensations, broad indefinite mental impressions with minute shades of quality in them which we do not now care to pursue. The intellectual sense in its precision must have been a secondary element which grew more dominant as language evolved along with the evolving intelligence.

For the reason why sound came to express fixed ideas, lies not in any natural and inherent equivalence between the sound and its intellectual sense, for there is none,—intellectually any sound might express any sense, if men were agreed on a conventional equivalence between them; it started from an

indefinable quality or property in the sound to raise certain vibrations in the life-soul of the human creature, in his sensational, his emotional, his crude mental being. An example may indicate more clearly what I mean. The word wolf, the origin of which is no longer present to our minds, denotes to our intelligence a certain living object and that is all, the rest we have to do for ourselves: the Sanskrit word *vṛka*, "tearer", came in the end to do the same thing, but originally it expressed the sensational relation between the wolf and man which most affected the man's life, and it did so by a certain quality in the sound which readily associated it with the sensation of tearing. This must have given early language a powerful life, a concrete vigour, in one direction a natural poetic force which it has lost, however greatly it has gained in precision, clarity, utility.

Now, poetry goes back in a way and recovers, though in another fashion, as much as it can of this original element. It does this partly by a stress on the image replacing the old sensational concreteness, partly by a greater attention to the suggestive force of the sound, its life, its power, the mental impression it carries. It associates this with the definitive thought value contributed by the intelligence and increases both by each other. In that way it succeeds at the same time in carrying up the power of speech to the direct expression of a higher reach of experience than the intellectual or vital. For it brings out not only the definitive intellectual value of the word, not only its power of emotion and sensation, its vital suggestion, but through and beyond these aids its soul-suggestion, its spirit. So poetry arrives at the indication of infinite meanings beyond the finite intellectual meaning the word carries. It expresses not only the life-soul of man as did the primitive word, not only the ideas of his intelligence for which speech now usually serves, but the experience, the vision, the ideas, as we may say, of the higher and wider soul in him. Making them real to our life-soul as well as present to our intellect, it opens to us by the word the doors of the Spirit.

Prose style carries speech to a much higher power than its ordinary use, but it differs from poetry in not making this yet greater attempt. For it takes its stand firmly on the intellectual value of the word. It uses rhythms which ordinary speech neglects, and aims at a general fluid harmony of movement. It seeks to associate words agreeably and luminously so as at once to please and to clarify the intelligence. It strives after a more accurate, subtle, flexible and satisfying expression than the rough methods of ordinary speech care to compass. A higher adequacy of speech is its first object. Beyond this adequacy it may aim at a greater forcefulness and effectiveness by various devices of speech, by many rhetorical means for heightening the stress of its intellectual appeal. Passing beyond this first limit, this just or strong, but always restrained measure, it may admit a more emphatic rhythm, more directly and powerfully

stimulate the emotion, appeal to a more vivid aesthetic sense. It may even make such a free or rich use of images as to suggest an outward approximation to the manner of poetry; but it employs them decoratively, as ornaments, *alamkāra*, or for their effective value in giving a stronger intellectual vision of the thing or the thought it describes or defines; it does not use the image for that profounder and more living vision for which the poet is always seeking. And always it has its eye on its chief hearer and judge, the intelligence, and calls in other powers only as important aids to capture his suffrage. Reason and taste, two powers of the intelligence, are rightly the supreme gods of the prose stylist, while to the poet they are only minor deities.

If it goes beyond these limits, approaches in its measures a more striking rhythmic balance, uses images for sheer vision, opens itself to a mightier breath of speech, prose style passes beyond its normal province and approaches or even enters the confines of poetry. It becomes poetical prose or even poetry itself using the apparent forms of prose as a disguise or a loose apparel. A high or a fine adequacy, effectivity, intellectual illuminativeness and a carefully tempered aesthetic satisfaction are the natural and proper powers of its speech. But the privilege of the poet is to go beyond and discover that more intense illumination of speech, that inspired word and supreme inevitable utterance, in which there meets the unity of a divine rhythmic movement with a depth of sense and a power of infinite suggestion welling up directly from the fountain-heads of the spirit within us. He may not always or often find it, but to seek for it is the law or at least the highest trend of his utterance, and when he can not only find it, but cast into it some deeply revealed truth of the spirit itself, he utters the *mantra*.

But always, whether in the search or the finding, the whole style and rhythm of poetry are the expression and movement which come from us out of a certain spiritual excitement caused by a vision in the soul of which it is eager to deliver itself. The vision may be of anything in Nature or God or man or the life of creatures or the life of things; it may be a vision of force and action, or of sensible beauty, or of truth of thought, or of emotion and pleasure and pain, of this life or the life beyond. It is sufficient that it is the soul which sees and the eye, sense, heart and thought-mind become the passive instruments of the soul. Then we get the real, the high poetry. But if what acts is too much an excitement of the intellect, the imagination, the emotions, the vital activities seeking rhythmical and forceful expression, without that greater spiritual excitement embracing them, or if all these are not sufficiently sunk into the soul, steeped in it, fused in it, and the expression does not come out purified and uplifted by a sort of spiritual transmutation, then we fall to lower levels of poetry and get work of a much more doubtful immortality. And when the appeal is altogether to the lower things in us, to the mere mind, we

arrive outside the true domain of poetry; we approach the confines of prose or get prose itself masking in the apparent forms of poetry, and the work is distinguished from prose style only or mainly by its mechanical elements, a good verse form and perhaps a more compact, catching or energetic expression than the prose writer will ordinarily permit to the easier and looser balance of his speech. It will not have at all or not sufficiently the true essence of poetry.

For in all things that speech can express there are two elements, the outward or instrumental and the real or spiritual. In thought, for instance, there is the intellectual idea, that which the intelligence makes precise and definite to us, and the soul-idea, that which exceeds the intellectual and brings us into nearness or identity with the whole reality of the thing expressed. Equally in emotion, it is not the mere emotion itself the poet seeks, but the soul of emotion, that in it for the delight of which the soul in us and the world desires or accepts emotional experience. So too with the poetical sense of objects, the poet's attempt to embody in his speech truth of life or truth of Nature. It is this greater truth and its delight and beauty for which he is seeking, beauty which is truth and truth beauty and therefore a joy for ever, because it brings us the delight of the soul in the discovery of its own deeper realities. This greater element the more timid and temperate speech of prose can sometimes shadow out to us, but the heightened and fearless style of poetry makes it close and living and the higher cadences of poetry carry in on their wings what the style by itself could not bring. This is the source of that intensity which is the stamp of poetical speech and of the poetical movement. It comes from the stress of the soul-vision behind the word; it is the spiritual excitement of a rhythmic voyage of self-discovery among the magic islands of form and name in these inner and outer worlds.

### III

#### Rhythm and Movement

The Mantra, poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality, is only possible when three highest intensities of poetic speech meet and become indissolubly one, a highest intensity of rhythmic movement, a highest intensity of interwoven verbal form and thought-substance, of style, and a highest intensity of the soul's vision of truth. All great poetry comes about by a unison of these three elements; it is the insufficiency of one or another which makes the inequalities in the work of even the greatest poets, and it is the failure of some one element which is the cause of their lapses, of the scoriae in their work, the spots in the sun. But it is only at a certain highest level of the fused intensities that the Mantra becomes possible.

It is from a certain point of view the rhythm, the poetic movement that is of primary importance; for that is the first fundamental and indispensable element without which all the rest, whatever its other value, remains unacceptable to the Muse of poetry. A perfect rhythm will often even give immortality to work which is slight in vision and very far from the higher intensities of style. But it is not merely metrical rhythm, even in a perfect technical excellence, which we mean when we speak of poetic movement; that perfection is only a first step, a physical basis. There must be a deeper and more subtle music, a rhythmical soul-movement entering into the metrical form and often overflowing it before the real poetic achievement begins. A mere metrical excellence, however subtle, rich or varied, however perfectly it satisfies the outer ear, does not meet the deeper aims of the creative spirit; for there is an inner hearing which makes its greater claim, and to reach and satisfy it is the true aim of the creator of melody and harmony.

Nevertheless metre, by which we mean a fixed and balanced system of the measures of sound, *mātrā*, is not only the traditional, but also surely the right physical basis for the poetic movement. A recent modern tendency—that which has given us the poetry of Whitman and Carpenter and the experimentalists in *vers libre* in France and Italy,—denies this tradition and sets aside metre as a limiting bondage, perhaps even a frivolous artificiality or a falsification of true, free and natural poetic rhythm. That is, it seems to me, a point of view which cannot eventually prevail, because it does not deserve to prevail. It certainly cannot triumph, unless it justifies itself by supreme rhythmical achievements beside which the highest work of the great masters of poetic harmony in the past shall sink into a clear inferiority. That has not yet been done. On the contrary, *vers libre* has done its best when it has either limited its aim in rhythm to a kind of chanting poetical prose or else based itself on a sort of irregular and complex metrical movement which in its inner law, though not in its form, recalls the idea of Greek choric poetry.

Milton disparaging rhyme, which he had himself used with so much skill in his earlier, less sublime, but more beautiful poetry, forgot or ignored the spiritual value of rhyme, its power to enforce and clinch the appeal of melodic or harmonic recurrence which is a principal element in the measured movement of poetry, its habit of opening sealed doors to the inspiration, its capacity to suggest and reveal beauty to that supra-intellectual something in us which music is missioned to awake. The Whitmanic technique falls into a similar, but wider error. When mankind found out the power of thought and feeling thrown into fixed and recurring measures of sound to move and take possession of the mind and soul, they were not discovering a mere artistic device, but a subtle truth of psychology, of which the conscious theory is preserved in the Vedic tradition. And when the ancient Indians chose more often than

not to throw whatever they wished to endure, even philosophy, science and law, into metrical form, it was not merely to aid the memory,—they were able to memorise huge prose Brahmanas quite as accurately as the Vedic hymnal or the metrical Upaniṣads,—but because they perceived that metrical speech has in itself not only an easier durability, but a greater natural power than unmetrical, not only an intenser value of sound, but a force to compel language and sense to heighten themselves in order to fall fitly into this stricter mould. There is perhaps a truth in the Vedic idea that the Spirit of creation framed all the movements of the world by *Chandas*, in certain fixed rhythms of the formative Word, and it is because they are faithful to the cosmic metres that the basic world-movements unchangingly endure. A balanced harmony maintained by a system of subtle recurrences is the foundation of immortality in created things, and metrical movement is nothing else than creative sound grown conscious of this secret of its own powers.

Still there are all sorts of heights and gradations in the use of this power. General consent seems indeed to have sanctioned the name of poetry for any kind of effective language set in a vigorous or catching metrical form, and although the wideness of this definition is such that it has enabled even the Macaulays and Kiplings to mount their queer poetic thrones, I will not object: catholicity is always a virtue. Nevertheless, mere force of language tacked on to the trick of the metrical beat does not answer the higher description of poetry; it may have the form or its shadow, it has not the essence. There is a whole mass of poetry,—the French metrical romances and most of the mediæval ballad poetry may be taken as examples,—which relies simply on the metrical beat for its rhythm and on an even level of just tolerable expression for its style; there is hardly a line whose rhythm floats home or where the expression strikes deep. Even in later European poetry, though the art of verse and language has been better learned, essentially the same method persists, and poets who use it have earned not only the popular suffrage, but the praise of the critical mind. Still the definitive verdict on their verse is that it is nothing more than an effective jog-trot of Pegasus, a pleasing canter or a showy gallop. It has great staying-power,—indeed there seems no reason why, once begun, it should not go on for ever,—it carries the poet easily over his ground, but it does nothing more. Certainly, no real soul-movement can get easily into this mould. It has its merits and its powers; it is good for metrical romances of a sort, for war poetry and popular patriotic poetry, or perhaps any poetry which wants to be an “echo of life”; it may stir, not the soul, but the vital being in us like a trumpet or excite it like a drum. But after all the drum and the trumpet do not carry us far in the way of music.

But even high above this level we still do not get at once the greater sound-movement of which we are speaking. Poets of considerable power, sometimes

even the greatest in their less exalted moments, are satisfied ordinarily with a set harmony or a set melody, which is very satisfying to the outward ear and carries the aesthetic sense along with it in a sort of even, indistinctive pleasure, and into this mould of easy melody or harmony they throw their teeming or flowing imaginations without difficulty or check, without any need of an intenser heightening, a deeper appeal. It is beautiful poetry; it satisfies the aesthetic sense, the imagination and the ear; but there the charm ends. Once we have heard its rhythm, we have nothing new to expect, no surprise for the inner ear, no danger of the soul being suddenly seized and carried away into unknown depths. It is sure of being floated along evenly as if upon a flowing stream. Or sometimes it is not so much a flowing stream as a steady march or other even movement: this comes oftenest in poets who appeal more to the thought than to the ear; they are concerned chiefly with the thing they have to say and satisfied to have found an adequate rhythmic mould into which they can throw it without any farther preoccupation.

But even a great attention and skill in the use of metrical possibilities, in the invention of rhythmical turns, devices, modulations, variations, strong to satisfy the intelligence, to seize the ear, to maintain its vigilant interest, will not bring us yet to the higher point we have in view. There are periods of literature in which this kind of skill is carried very far. The rhythms of Victorian poetry seem to me to be of this kind; they show sometimes the skill of the artist, sometimes of the classical or romantic technician, of the prestigious melodist or harmonist, sometimes the power of the vigorous craftsman or even the performer of robust metrical feats. All kinds of instrumental faculties have been active; but the one thing that is lacking, except in moments or brief periods of inspiration, is the soul behind creating and listening to its own greater movements.

Poetic rhythm begins to reach its highest levels, the greater poetic movements become possible when, using any of these powers but rising beyond them, the soul begins to make its direct demand and yearn for a profounder satisfaction: they awake when the inner ear begins to listen. Technically, we may say that this comes in when the poet becomes, in Keats' phrase, a miser of sound and syllable, economical of his means, not in the sense of a niggardly sparing, but of making the most of all its possibilities of sound. It is then that poetry gets farthest away from the method of prose-rhythm. Prose-rhythm aims characteristically at a general harmony in which the parts are subdued to get the tone of a total effect; even the sounds which give the support or the relief, yet to a great extent seem to be trying to efface themselves in order not to disturb by a too striking particular effect the general harmony which is the whole aim. Poetry on the contrary makes much of its beats and measures; it seeks for a very definite and insistent rhythm. But still, where

the greater rhythmical intensities are not pursued, it is only some total effect that predominates and the rest is subdued to it. But in these highest, intensest rhythms every sound is made the most of, whether in its suppression or in its swelling expansion, its narrowness or its open wideness, in order to get in the combined effect something which the ordinary harmonic flow of poetry cannot give us.

But this is only the technical side, the physical means by which the effect is produced. It is not the artistic intelligence or the listening physical ear that is most at work, but something within that is trying to bring out the echo of a hidden harmony, to discover a secret of rhythmic infinities within us. It is not a labour of the devising intellect or the aesthetic sense which the poet has achieved, but a labour of the spirit within itself to cast something out of the surge of the eternal depths. The other faculties are there in their place, but the conductor of the orchestral movement is the soul suddenly and potently coming forward to get its own work done by its own higher and unanalysable methods. The result is something as near to wordless music as word-music can get, and with the same power of soul-life, of soul-emotion, of profound supra-intellectual significance. In these higher harmonies and melodies the metrical rhythm is taken up by the spiritual; it is filled with or sometimes it seems rolled away and lost in a music that has really another unseizable and spiritual secret of movement.

This is the intensity of poetic movement out of which the greatest possibility of poetic expression arises. It is where the metrical movement remains as a base, but either enshrines and contains or is itself contained and floats in an element of greater music which exceeds it and yet brings out all its possibilities, that the music fit for the Mantra makes itself audible. It is the triumph of the embodied spirit over the difficulties and limitations of the physical instrument. And the listener seems to be that other vaster and yet identical eternal spirit whom the Upanishad speaks of as the ear of the ear, he who listens to all hearings; "behind the instabilities of word and speech" it is the profound inevitable harmonies of his own thought and vision for which he is listening.

## IV

### Style and Substance

Rhythm is the premier necessity of poetical expression because it is the sound-movement which carries on its wave the thought-movement in the word; and it is the musical sound-image which most helps to fill in, to extend, subtilise and deepen the thought impression or the emotional or vital impression and to carry the sense beyond itself into an expression of the intellectually



inexpressible,—always the peculiar power of music. This truth was better understood on the whole or at least more consistently felt by the ancients than by the modern mind and ear, perhaps because they were more in the habit of singing, chanting or intoning their poetry while we are content to read ours, a habit which brings out the intellectual and emotional element, but unduly depresses the rhythmic value. On the other hand modern poetry has achieved a far greater subtlety, minute fineness and curious depth of suggestion in style and thought than was possible to the ancients,—at the price perhaps of some loss in power, height and simple largeness. The ancients would not so easily as the moderns have admitted into the rank of great poets writers of poor rhythmic faculty or condoned, ignored or praised in really great poets rhythmic lapses, roughnesses and crudities for the sake of their power of style and substance.

In regard to poetic style we have to make, for the purpose of the idea we have in view, the starting-point of the Mantra, precisely the same distinctions as in regard to poetic rhythm,—since here too we find actually everything admitted as poetry which has some power of style and is cast into some kind of rhythmical form. But the question is, what kind of power and in that kind what intensity of achievement? There is plenty of poetry signed by poets of present reputation or lasting fame which one is obliged to consign to a border region of half-poetry, because its principle of expression has not got far enough away from the principle of prose expression. It seems to forget that while the first aim of prose style is to define and fix an object, fact, feeling, thought before the appreciating intelligence with whatever clearness, power, richness or other beauty of presentation may be added to that essential aim, the first aim of poetic style is to make the thing presented living to the imaginative vision, the responsive inner emotion, the spiritual sense, the soul-feeling and soul-sight. Where the failure is to express at all with any sufficient power, to get home in any way, the distinction becomes palpable enough, and we readily say of such writings that this is verse but not poetry. But where there is some thought-power or other worth of substance attended with some power of expression, false values more easily become current and even a whole literary age may dwell on this borderland or be misled into an undue exaltation and cult for this half-poetry.

Poetry, like the kindred arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, appeals to the spirit of man through significant images, and it makes no essential difference that in this case the image is mental and verbal and not material. The essential power of the poetic word is to make us see, not to make us think or feel; thought and feeling<sup>2</sup> must arise out of the sight or be included in it, but

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2. I speak here of the outer emotional or sensational feeling, not of the spiritual sense and soul-stir which is the invariable concomitant of the soul's sight.

sight is the primary consequence and power of poetic speech. For the poet has to make us live in the soul and in the inner mind and heart what is ordinarily lived in the outer mind and the senses, and for that he must first make us see by the soul, in its light and with its deeper vision, what we ordinarily see in a more limited and halting fashion by the senses and the intelligence. He is, as the ancients knew, a seer and not merely a maker of rhymes, not merely a jongleur, rhapsodist or troubadour, and not merely a thinker in lines and stanzas. He sees beyond the sight of the surface mind and finds the revealing word, not merely the adequate and effective, but the illumined and illuminating, the inspired and inevitable word, which compels us to see also. To arrive at that word is the whole endeavour of poetic style.

The modern distinction is that the poet appeals to the imagination and not to the intellect. But there are many kinds of imagination; the objective imagination which visualises strongly the outward aspects of life and things; the subjective imagination which visualises strongly the mental and emotional impressions they have the power to start in the mind; the imagination which deals in the play of mental fictions and to which we give the name of poetic fancy; the aesthetic imagination which delights in the beauty of words and images for their own sake and sees no farther. All these have their place in poetry, but they only give the poet his materials, they are only the first instruments in the creation of poetic style. The essential poetic imagination does not stop short with even the most subtle reproductions of things external or internal, with the richest or delicatest play of fancy or with the most beautiful colouring of word or image. It is creative, not of either the actual or the fictitious, but of the more and the most real; it sees the spiritual truth of things,—of this truth too there are many gradations,—which may take either the actual or the ideal for its starting-point. The aim of poetry, as of all true art, is neither a photographic or otherwise realistic imitation of Nature, nor a romantic furbishing and painting or idealistic improvement of her image, but an interpretation by the images she herself affords us, not on one but on many planes of her creation, of that which she conceals from us, but is ready, when rightly approached, to reveal.

This is the true, because highest and essential aim of poetry; but the human mind arrives at it only by a succession of steps, the first of which seems far enough from its object. It begins by stringing its most obvious and external ideas, feelings and sensations of things on a thread of verse in a sufficient language of no very high quality. But even when it gets to a greater adequacy and effectiveness, it is often no more than a vital, an emotional or an intellectual adequacy and effectiveness. There is a strong vital poetry which powerfully appeals to our sensations and our sense of life, like much of Byron or the less inspired mass of the Elizabethan drama; a strong emotional poetry which stirs

our feelings and gives us the sense and active image of the passions; a strong intellectual poetry which satisfies our curiosity about life and its mechanism, or deals with its psychological and other “problems”, or shapes for us our thoughts in an effective, striking and often quite resistlessly quotable fashion. All this has its pleasures for the mind and the surface soul in us, and it is certainly quite legitimate to enjoy them and to enjoy them strongly and vividly on our way upward; but if we rest content with these only, we shall never get very high up the hill of the Muses.

The style of such poetry corresponds usually to its substance; for between the word and the vision there tends to be, though there is not by any means perfectly or invariably, a certain equation. There is a force of vital style, a force of emotional style, a force of intellectual style which we meet constantly in poetry and which it is essential to distinguish from the language of the higher spiritual imagination. The forceful expression of thought and sentiment is not enough for this higher language. To take some examples, it is not enough for it to express its sense of world-sorrow in a line of cheap sentimental force like Byron’s

There’s not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,

or to voice an opposite truth in the sprightly-forcible manner of Browning’s

God’s in his heaven,  
All’s right with the world,

or to strike the balance in a sense of equality with the pointed and ever quotable intellectuality of Pope’s

God sees with equal eyes as lord of all  
A hero perish or a sparrow fall.

This may be the poetical or half-poetical language of thought and sentiment; it is not the language of real poetic vision. Note that all three brush the skirts of ideas whose deeper expression from the vision of a great poet might touch the very heights of poetic revelation. Byron’s line is the starting-point in the emotional sensations for that high world-pessimism and its spiritual release which finds expression in the *Gītā*’s

*Anityam asukham lokam imam prāpya bhajasva mām;*<sup>3</sup>

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3. “Thou who hast come to this transient and unhappy world, love and turn to Me.”

and one has only to compare the manner of the two in style and rhythm, even leaving the substance aside, to see the difference between the lesser and the greater poetry. Browning's language rises from a robust cheerfulness of temperament, it does not touch the deeper fountain-heads of truth in us; an opposite temperament may well smile at it as vigorous optimistic fustian. Pope's actually falsifies by its poetical inadequacy that great truth of the Gītā's teaching, the truth of the divine equality, because he has not seen and therefore cannot make us see; his significant images of the truth are, like his perception of it, intellectual and rhetorical, not poetic figures.

There is a higher style of poetry than this which yet falls below the level to which we have to climb. It is no longer poetical language of a merely intellectual, vital or emotional force, but instead or in addition a genuinely imaginative style, with a certain, often a great beauty of vision in it, whether objective or subjective, or with a certain, often a great but indefinite soul-power bearing up its movement of word and rhythm. It varies in intensity: for the lower intensity we can get plenty of examples from Chaucer, when he is indulging his imagination rather than his observation, and at a higher pitch from Spenser; for the loftier intensity we can cite at will for one kind from Milton's early poetry, for another from poets who have a real spiritual vision like Keats and Shelley. English poetry runs, indeed, ordinarily in this mould. But this too is not that highest intensity of the revelatory poetic word from which the Mantra starts. It has a certain power of revelation in it, but the deeper vision is still coated up in something more external; sometimes the poetic intention of decorative beauty, sometimes some other deliberate intention of the poetic mind overlays with the more outward beauty, beauty of image, beauty of thought, beauty of emotion, the deeper intention of the spirit within, so that we have still to look for that beyond the image rather than are seized by it through the image. A high pleasure is there, not unspiritual in its nature, but still it is not that point where pleasure passes into or is rather drowned in the pure spiritual *Ānanda*, the ecstasy of the creative, poetic revelation.

That intensity comes where everything else may be present, but all is powerfully carried on the surge of a spiritual vision which has found its inspired and inevitable speech. All or any of the other elements may be there, but they are at once subordinated and transfigured to their highest capacity for poetic light and rapture. This intensity belongs to no particular style, depends on no conceivable formula of diction. It may be the height of the decorative imaged style as often we find it in Kalidasa or Shakespeare; it may be that height of bare and direct expression where language seems to be used as a scarcely felt vaulting-board for a leap into the infinite; it may be the packed intensity of language which uses either the bare or the imaged form at will, but fills every word with its utmost possible rhythmic and thought suggestion. But in itself

it depends on none of these things; it is not a style, but poetic style itself, the Word; it creates and carries with it its elements rather than is created by them. Whatever its outward forms, it is always the one fit style for the Mantra.

## V

### Poetic Vision and the Mantra

This highest intensity of style and movement which is the crest of the poetical impulse in its self-expression, the point at which the aesthetic, the vital, the intellectual elements of poetic speech pass into the spiritual, justifies itself perfectly when it is the body of a deep, high or wide spiritual vision into which the life-sense, the thought, the emotion, the appeal of beauty in the thing discovered and in its expression—for all great poetic utterance is discovery,—rise on the wave of the culminating poetic inspiration and pass into an ecstasy of sight. In the lesser poets these moments are rare and come like brilliant accidents, angels' visits; in the greater they are more frequent outbursts; but in the greatest they abound because they arise from a constant faculty of poetic vision and poetic speech which has its lesser and its greater moments, but never entirely fails these supreme masters of the expressive word.

Vision is the characteristic power of the poet, as is discriminative thought the essential gift of the philosopher and analytic observation the natural genius of the scientist. The Kavi<sup>4</sup> was in the idea of the ancients the seer and revealer of truth, and though we have wandered far enough from that ideal to demand from him only the pleasure of the ear and the amusement of the aesthetic faculty, still all great poetry instinctively preserves something of that higher turn of its own aim and significance. Poetry, in fact, being Art, must attempt to make us see, and since it is to the inner senses that it has to address itself,—for the ear is its only physical gate of entry and even there its real appeal is to an inner hearing,—and since its object is to make us live within ourselves what the poet has embodied in his verse, it is an inner sight which he opens in us, and this inner sight must have been intense in him before he can awaken it in us.

Therefore the greatest poets have been always those who have had a large and powerful interpretative and intuitive vision of Nature and life and man and whose poetry has arisen out of that in a supreme revelatory utterance of it. Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Vālmiki, Kālidāsa, however much they may

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4. The Sanskrit word for poet. In classical Sanskrit it is applied to any maker of verse or even of prose, but in the Vedic it meant the poet-seer who saw the Truth and found in a subtle truth-hearing the inspired word of his vision.

differ in everything else, are at one in having this as the fundamental character of their greatness. Their supremacy does not lie essentially in a greater thought-power or a more lavish imagery or a more penetrating force of passion and emotion; these things they may have had, one being more gifted in one direction, another in others, but these other powers were aids to their poetic expression rather than its essence or its source. There is often more thought in a short essay of Bacon's than in a whole play of Shakespeare's, but not even a hundred cryptograms can make him the author of the dramas; for, as he showed when he tried to write poetry, the very nature of his thought-power and the characteristic way of expression of the born philosophic thinker hampered him in poetic expression. It was the constant outstreaming of form and thought and image from an abundant inner vision of life which made Shakespeare, whatever his other deficiencies, the sovereign dramatic poet. Sight is the essential poetic gift. The archetypal poet in a world of original ideas is, we may say, a Soul that sees in itself intimately this world and all the others and God and Nature and the life of beings and sets flowing from its centre a surge of creative rhythm and word-images which become the expressive body of the vision. The great poets are those who repeat in some measure this ideal creation, *kavayahsatyaśrutah*, seers of the poetic truth and hearers of its word.

The tendency of the modern mind at the present day seems to be towards laying a predominant value on the thought in poetry. We live still in an age which is in a great intellectual trouble and ferment about life and the world and is developing enormously the human intelligence,—often at the expense of other powers which are no less necessary to self-knowledge,—in order to grapple with life and master it. We are seeking always and in many directions to decipher the enigma of things, the cryptogram of the worlds which we are set to read, and to decipher it by the aid of the intellect; and for the most part we are much too busy living and thinking to have leisure to be silent and see. We expect the poet to use his great mastery of language to help us in this endeavour; we ask of him not so much perfect beauty of song or largeness of creative vision as a message to our perplexed and seeking intellects. Therefore we hear constantly today of the “philosophy” of a poet, even the most inveterate beautifier of commonplaces being forcibly gifted by his admirers with a philosophy, or of his message,—the message of Tagore, the message of Whitman. We are asking then of the poet to be, not a supreme singer or an inspired seer of the worlds, but a philosopher, a prophet, a teacher, even something perhaps of a religious or ethical preacher. It is necessary therefore to say that when I claim for the poet the role of a seer of Truth and find the source of great poetry in a great and revealing vision of life or God or the gods or man or Nature, I do not mean that it is necessary for him to have an intellectual philosophy of life or a message for humanity, which he chooses to express

in verse because he has the metrical gift and the gift of imagery, or that he must give us a solution of the problems of the age, or come with a mission to improve mankind, or, as it is said, "to leave the world better than he found it." As a man, he may have these things, but the less he allows them to get the better of his poetic gift, the happier it will be for his poetry. Material for his poetry they may give, an influence in it they may be, provided they are transmuted into vision and life by the poetic spirit, but they can be neither its soul nor its aim, nor give the law to its creative activity and its expression.

The poet-seer sees differently, thinks in another way, voices himself in quite another manner than the philosopher or the prophet. The prophet announces the Truth as the Word, the Law or the command of the Eternal, he is the giver of the message; the poet shows us Truth in its power of beauty, in its symbol or image, or reveals it to us in the workings of Nature or in the workings of life, and when he has done that, his whole work is done; he need not be its explicit spokesman or its official messenger. The philosopher's business is to discriminate Truth and put its parts and aspects into intellectual relation with each other; the poet's is to seize and embody aspects of Truth in their living relations, or rather—for that is too philosophical a language—to see her features and, excited by the vision, create in the beauty of her image.

No doubt, the prophet may have in him a poet who breaks out often into speech and surrounds with the vivid atmosphere of life the directness of his message; he may follow up his injunction "Take no thought for the morrow," by a revealing image of the beauty of the truth he enounces, in the life of Nature, in the figure of the lily, or link it to human life by apologue and parable. The philosopher may bring in the aid of colour and image to give some relief and hue to his dry light of reason and water his arid path of abstractions with some healing dew of poetry. But these are ornaments and not the substance of his work; and if the philosopher makes his thought substance of poetry, he ceases to be a philosophic thinker and becomes a poet-seer of Truth. Thus the more rigid metaphysicians are perhaps right in denying to Nietzsche the name of philosopher; for Nietzsche does not think, but always sees, turbidly or clearly, rightly or distortedly, but with the eye of the seer rather than with the brain of the thinker. On the other hand we may get great poetry which is full of a prophetic enthusiasm of utterance or is largely or even wholly philosophic in its matter; but this prophetic poetry gives us no direct message, only a mass of sublime inspirations of thought and image, and this philosophic poetry is poetry and lives as poetry only in so far as it departs from the method, the expression, the way of seeing proper to the philosophic mind. It must be vision pouring itself into thought-images and not thought trying to observe truth and distinguish its province and bounds and fences.

In earlier days this distinction was not at all clearly understood and therefore we find even poets of great power attempting to set philosophic systems to music or even much more prosaic matter than a philosophic system, Hesiod and Virgil setting about even a manual of agriculture in verse! In Rome, always a little blunt of perception in the aesthetic mind, her two greatest poets fell a victim to this unhappy conception, with results which are a lesson and a warning to all posterity. Lucretius' work lives only, in spite of the majestic energy behind it, by its splendid digressions into pure poetry, Virgil's *Georgics* by fine passages and pictures of Nature and beauties of word and image; but in both the general substance is lifeless matter which has floated to us on the stream of Time, saved only by the beauty of its setting. India, and perhaps India alone, managed once or twice to turn this kind of philosophic attempt into a poetic success, in the *Gītā*, in the Upaniṣads and some minor works modelled upon them. But the difference is great. The *Gītā* owes its poetical success to its starting from a great and critical situation in life, its constant keeping of that in view and always returning upon it, and to its method which is to seize on a spiritual experience or moment or stage of the inner life and throw it into the form of thought; and this, though a delicate operation, can well abide within the limits of the poetic manner of speech. Only where it overburdens itself with metaphysical matter and deviates into sheer philosophic definition and discrimination, which happens especially in two or three of its closing chapters, does the poetic voice sink under the weight, even occasionally into flattest versified prose. The Upaniṣads too, and much more, are not at all philosophic thinking, but spiritual seeing; these ancient stanzas are a rush of spiritual intuitions, flames of a burning fire of mystic experience, waves of an inner sea of light and life, and they throw themselves into the language and cadence of poetry because that is their natural speech and a more intellectual utterance would have falsified their vision.

Nowadays we have clarified our aesthetic perceptions sufficiently to avoid the mistake of the Roman poets; but in a subtler form the intellectual tendency still shows a dangerous spirit of encroachment. For the impulse to teach is upon us, the inclination to be an observer and critic of life,—there could be no more perilous definition than Arnold's poetic "criticism of life", in spite of the saving epithet,—to clothe, merely, in the forms of poetry a critical or philosophic idea of life to the detriment of our vision. Allegory with its intellectual ingenuities, its facile wedding of the abstract idea and the concrete image, shows a tendency to invade again the domain of poetry. And there are other signs of the intellectual malady of which we are almost all of us the victims. Therefore it is well to insist that the native power of poetry is



in its sight, not in its intellectual thought-matter, and its safety is in adhering to this native principle of vision; its conception, its thought, its emotion, its presentation, its structure must rise out of that or else rise into it before it takes its finished form. The poetic vision of things is not a criticism of life, not an intellectual or philosophic view of it, but a soul-view, a seizing by the inner sense. The Mantra too is not in its substance or its form a poetic enunciation of philosophic verities, but a rhythmic revelation or intuition arising out of the soul's sight of God and Nature and itself and of the world and of the inner truth—occult to the outward eye—of all that peoples it, the secrets of their life and being.

In the attempt to fix the view of life which Art must take, distinctions are constantly laid down, such as the necessity of a subjective or an objective treatment or of a realistic or an idealistic view, which mislead more than they enlighten. Certainly, one poet may seem to excel in the concrete presentation of things and falter or be less sure in his grasp of the purely subjective, while another may move freely in the more subjective worlds and be less at home in the concrete; and both may be poets of a high order. But when we look closer, we see that just as a certain objectivity is necessary to make poetry live and the thing seen stand out before our eyes, so on the other hand even the most objective presentation starts from an inner view and subjective process of creation or at least a personal interpretation and transmutation of the thing seen. The poet really creates out of himself and not out of what he sees outwardly: that outward seeing only serves to excite the inner vision to its work. Otherwise his work would be a mechanical construction and putting together, not a living creation.

Sheer objectivity brings us down from art to photography; and the attempt to diminish the subjective view to the vanishing-point so as to get an accurate presentation is proper to science, not to poetry. We are not thereby likely to get a greater truth or reality, but very much the reverse; for the scientific presentation of things, however valid in its own domain, that of the senses and the observing reason, is not true to the soul. It is not the integral truth or the whole vision of things, for it gives only their process and machinery and mechanic law, but not their inner life and spirit. That is the error in realism,—in its theory, at least, for its practice is something other than what it intends or pretends to be. Realistic art does not and cannot give us a scientifically accurate presentation of life, because Art is not and cannot be Science. What it does do, is to make an arbitrary selection of motives, forms and hues, here of dull blues and greys and browns and dingy whites and sordid yellows, there of violent blacks and reds, and the result is sometimes a thing of power and sometimes a nightmare. Idealistic art makes a different

selection and produces either a work of nobly-coloured power or soft-hued beauty or else a high-pitched and false travesty or a specious day-dream. In these distinctions there is no safety; nor can any rule be laid down for the poet, since he must necessarily go by what he is and what he sees, except that he should work from the living poetic centre within him and not exile himself into artificial standpoints.

From our present point of view we may say that the poet may do as he pleases in all that is not the essential matter. Thought-matter may be prominent in his work or life-substance predominate. He may proceed by sheer force of presentation or by direct power of interpretation. He may make this world his text, or wander into regions beyond, or soar straight into the pure empyrean of the infinite. To arrive at the Mantra he may start from the colour of a rose, or the power or beauty of a character, or the splendour of an action, or go away from all these into his own secret soul and its most hidden movements. The one thing needful is that he should be able to go beyond the word or image he uses or the form of the thing he sees, not be limited by them, but get into the light of that which they have the power to reveal and flood them with it until they overflow with its suggestions or seem even to lose themselves and disappear into the revelation and the apocalypse. At the highest he himself disappears into sight; the personality of the seer is lost in the eternity of the vision, and the Spirit of all seems alone to be there speaking out sovereignly its own secrets.

But the poetic vision, like everything else, follows necessarily the evolution of the human mind and according to the age and environment, it has its ascents and descents, its high levels and its low returns. Ordinarily, it follows the sequence of an abrupt ascent pushing to a rapid decline. The eye of early man is turned upon the physical world about him, the interest of the story of life and its primary ideas and emotions; he sees man and his world only, or he sees the other worlds and their gods and beings, but it is still his own physical world in a magnified and heightened image. He asks little of poetry except a more forceful vision of familiar things, things real and things commonly imagined, which will help him to see them more largely and feel them more strongly and give him a certain inspiration to live them more powerfully. Next,—but this transition is sometimes brief or even quite overleaped,—there comes a period in which he feels the joy and curiosity and rich adventure of the expanding life-force within him, the passion and romance of existence and it is this in all its vivid colour that he expects art and poetry to express and satisfy him through the imagination and the emotions with its charm and power. Afterwards he begins to intellectualise, but still on the same subject-matter; he asks now from the poet a view of things enlightened by the inspired reason and beautifully shaped by the first strong

and clear joy of his developed aesthetic sense. A vital poetry appealing to the imagination through the sense-mind and the emotions and a poetry interpretative of life to the intelligence are the fruit of these ages. A later poetry tends always to return on these forms with a more subtilised intellect and a richer life-experience. But, having got so far, it can go no farther and there is the beginning of a decadence.

Great things may be done by poetry within these limits and the limited lifetime it gives to a literature; but it is evident that the poet will have a certain difficulty in getting to a deeper vision, because he has to lean entirely on the external thought and form; he must be subservient to them because they are the only safe support he knows, and he gets at what truth he can that may be beyond them with their veil still thickly interposing between him and a greater light. A higher level can come, bringing with it the possibility of a renewed and prolonged course for the poetic impulse, if the mind of man begins to see more intimately the forces behind life, the powers concealed by our subjective existence. The poet can attempt to reveal these unsuspected ranges and motives and use the outward physical and vital and thought symbol only as a suggestion of greater things. Yet a higher level can be attained, deeper depths, larger horizons when the soul in things comes nearer to man or when other worlds than the physical open themselves to him. And the entire liberation of the poetic vision to see most profoundly and the poetic power to do its highest work will arrive when the spiritual itself is the possession of the greatest minds and the age stands on the verge of its revelation.

Therefore it is not sufficient for poetry to attain high intensities of word and rhythm; it must have, to fill them, an answering intensity of vision and always new and more and more uplifted or inward ranges of experience. And this does not depend only on the individual power of vision of the poet, but on the mind of his age and country, its level of thought and experience, the adequacy of its symbols, the depth of its spiritual attainment. A lesser poet in a greater age may give us occasionally things which exceed in this kind the work of less favoured immortals. The religious poetry of the later Indian tongues has for us fervours of poetic revelation which in the great classics are absent, even though no mediaeval poet can rank in power with *Vālmīki* and *Kālidāsa*. The modern literatures of Europe commonly fall short of the Greek perfection of harmony and form, but they give us what the greatest Greek poets had not and could not have. And in our own days a poet of secondary power in his moments of inspiration can get to a vision far more satisfying to the deepest soul within us than Shakespeare's or Dante's. Greatest of all is the promise of the age that is coming, if the race fulfils its highest and largest opening possibilities and does not founder in a vitalistic bog or remain tied

in the materialistic paddock; for it will be an age in which all the worlds are beginning to withdraw their screens from man's gaze and invite his experience, and he will be near to the revelation of the Spirit of which they are, as we choose, the obscuring veils, the significant forms and symbols or else the transparent raiment. It is as yet uncertain to which of these consummations destiny is leading us.