What is Truth? said Pilate confronted with a mighty messenger of the truth, not jesting surely, not in a spirit of shallow lightness, but turning away from the Christ with the impatience of the disillusioned soul for those who still use high words that have lost their meaning and believe in great ideals which the test of the event has proved to be fallacious. What is truth, — this phantom so long pursued, so impossible to grasp firmly, — that a man young, beautiful, gifted, eloquent and admired should consent to be crucified for its sake? Have not circumstance and event justified the half-pitying, half-sorrowful question of the Roman governor? The Messenger suffered on the cross, and what happened to the truth that was his message? As Christ himself foresaw, it has never been understood even by its professors. For five hundred years it was a glorious mirage for which thousands of men and women willingly underwent imprisonment, torture and death in order that Christ’s kingdom might come on earth & felicity possess the nations. But the kingdom that came was not Christ’s; it was Constantine’s, it was Hildebrand’s, it was Alexander Borgia’s. For another thirteen centuries the message was — what? Has it not been the chief support of fanaticism, falsehood, cruelty and hypocrisy, the purveyor of selfish power, the keystone of a society that was everything Christ had denounced? Jesus died on the cross, for the benefit, it would seem, of those who united to slay him, the Sadducee, atheist & high priest, the Pharisee, zealot, hypocrite & persecutor and the brutal, self-seeking, callous military Roman. Now in its last state, after such a lamentable career, Christ’s truth stands finally rejected by the world’s recent enlightenment as a hallucination or a superstition which sometimes helpfully, sometimes harmfully amused the infancy of the human intellect. This history is written in too pronounced characters to be the exact type of all messages
that the world has received, but is it not in some sort a type of the fate of all truth? What idea has stood successfully the test of a prolonged & pitiless inquiry? what ideal has stood successfully the test of time? Has not mankind been busy for the last fifty years and more denying almost all that it had formerly affirmed? And now that under the name of rationalism or materialism the denial has shaped itself into some form of workably practical affirmation, mankind is again at its work of denying its denial and rearranging — but this time doubtingly — its old affirmations. The scepticism of Pilate would therefore seem to have some excuse in a recurrent human experience. Is there, indeed, such a thing as truth, — beyond of course that practical truth of persistent material appearances by which we govern our lives, the truth of death, birth, hunger, sexuality, pain, pleasure, commerce, money making, ease, discomfort, ambition, failure and success? Has not indeed the loftiest of our philosophical systems declared all things here to be Maya? And if Maya is illusion, a deceit of the thinking consciousness, then indeed there can be no truth anywhere in the world except that indefinable Existence which we cannot comprehend and which, after all, Buddhism, not without logic and plausibility, setting it down as another & more generalised sanskara, a false sensation of consciousness in the eternal Void, denies. And yet man is so constituted that he must follow after truth whether it is attained or not; something in him secret, masterful, essential to his existence, forbids him to be satisfied with a falsehood; the moment it is perceived or even believed to be a falsehood, he rejects it and the thing begins to crumble. If he persists in his rejection, it cannot last. Yesterday it was, today we see it tottering, tomorrow we shall look for it and find that it is no longer. It has passed back into Prakriti; it has dissolved into that of which it was made. For sraddha is the condition of all existence in consciousness and that to which sraddha is denied, ceases to have existence whether here or elsewhere, na caivamutra no iha. It is not, neither in this world nor in another. We may not unreasonably infer from this importance and this imperative necessity that Truth does really exist and everything is not illusion. If then Truth is always
escaping our hold and leaving us to disillusionment and derision, it may be because we have neither formed any clear conception of what Truth itself is nor taken hold of the right means by which it can be grasped. Let us leave aside, for a while, Buddha’s world of sanskaras; let us put aside, packed away in an accessible corner of the brain, Shankara’s gospel of Maya, and start instead from the old Vedantic beginnings OM Tat Sat, That (Brahman) is the thing that Is, and Sarvam khalvidam Brahma, Verily, all this, everything of which we are aware, is Brahman. It is at least possible that we may return from this inquiry with a deeper idea both of sanskaras and of Maya and may find that we have answered Pilate’s question by discovering the nature and conditions of Truth.

I am speaking of the fundamental truth, the truth of things and not merely the fact about particulars or of particulars only as their knowledge forms a basis or a help to the discovery of fundamental truth. The fact that a particular sort of contact makes me uncomfortable is nothing in itself except in so far as it throws light upon the general causes of pain; the nature, origin and purpose of pain is the fundamental truth that I seek about the sensational reaction to contact. This law of pain, moreover, is not so fundamental as the truth about the nature, origin and purpose of sensation and contact themselves, of which pain is a particularity, an example or a modification. This more fundamental truth becomes again itself particular when compared with the truth about the nature, origin and purpose of existence of which sensation and contact are only particular circumstances. In this we arrive at the one fundamental truth of all, and a little consideration will show that if we really & rightly know that, the rest ought and probably will reveal themselves at once and fall into their places. Tasmin vijnate sarvam vijnatam, That being known, all is known. Our ancestors perceived this truth of the fundamental unity of knowledge and sought to know Sat first, confident that Sat being known, the different tattwas, laws, details & particulars of Sat would more readily yield up their secret. The moderns follow another thought, which, also, has a truth of its own. They think
that since being is one the knowledge of the particulars must lead to the knowledge of the fundamental unity and they begin therefore at the bottom and climb upwards—a slow but, one might imagine, a safe method of procession. “Little flower in the crannies” cries Tennyson addressing a pretty blossom in the wall in lines which make good thought, but execrable poetry, “if I could but know what you are, I should know what God and man is.” Undoubtedly; the question is whether, without knowing God, we can really know the flower,—know it, and not merely its name and form or all the details of its name and form. Rupa we can know & analyse by the aid of science, nama by the aid of philosophy; but swarupa? It would seem that some third instrument is needed for that consummation of knowledge. The senses & reason, even though aided by microscope and telescope, cannot show it to us. Na sandrishe tisthati rupam asya. The form of That stands not in the ken of sight. Mind and speech are not permitted to lead us to it, na vag gacchati na mano. Even the metaphysical logic of a Shankara stops short of that final victory. Naisha tarkena matir apaneya. This realisation in thought is not to be obtained by logic. All these various disabilities are due to one compelling cause; they are, because Sat, the truth of existence, Brahman, the reality of things which fills & supports their idea and form, is beyond the recognisable & analysable elements of idea and form. Anor aniyan atarkyam anupramanat. It is subtler even than elemental subtlety and therefore not to be deduced, induced, inferred or discovered by a reasoning which proceeds from a consideration of the elements of name and form and makes that its standard. This is a truth which even the greatest philosophers, Vedantic or unVedantic, are apt to forget; but the Sruti insists on it always.

Nevertheless mankind has for some thousands of years been attempting obstinately & with passion to discover that Truth by the very means which the Sruti has forbidden. Such error is natural and inevitable to the human consciousness. For the Angel in man is one who has descended out of light & bliss into the darkness, twilight and half light here, the darkness
of matter, the twilight of vital consciousness, the broken half lights of the mind, and the master impulse of his nature is to yearn passionately towards the light from which [he] has fallen. Unable to find it at once, too little *dhira* (calm & discerning) to perfect himself patiently, it is natural that he in his eagerness should grasp at other instruments meant for a limited utility and straining them beyond their capacity compel them to serve this his supreme object — which is always to recover the perfect light and by that recovery to recover also what dwells only in the perfect light, — the perfect & unfailing bliss. From this abuse of his parts of knowledge have resulted three illegitimate human activities, of which Philosophy, Religion & Science have severally made themselves guilty, the disputatious metaphysical philosophy of the schools, the theology of the Churches and the scientific philosophy of the laboratories. Philosophy, Religion & Science have each their appointed field and dominion; each can help man in his great preoccupation, the attempt to know all that he can about Sat, about Brahman. The business of Philosophy is to arrange logically the general modes of Sat, the business of Religion is to arrange practically & vitally the personal relations of Sat, the business of Science is to arrange observantly & analytically the particular forms & movements of Sat. They are really necessary to and ought to lean on each other; and, if all recognised proper limitations and boundary marks, could by their joint activity help man to his present attainable fullness; but by a sort of intellectual land hunger they are perpetual invaders of each other’s dominion, deny each other’s positions and therefore remain unprofitably at war through the human ages. Finally, all three after illegitimately occupying each other’s fields insist on snatching at a knowledge of which they are all equally incapable — the essential nature of the world, the secret reality of Sat, the uttamam rahasyam of the Brahman. This error, this confusion, this sankara or illegitimate mixing of different nature and function is the curse of the Kali and from it arises much, if not most, of the difficulty we experience as a race in escaping from this misery & darkness into bliss and light. It is part and a great part of Kali Kalila, the chaos of the Kali.
India has always attempted, though not, since the confusion of Buddhism, with any success, if not to keep the three to their proper division of labour — which, with the general growth of ignorance became impossible — at least, always to maintain or reestablish, if disturbed, some harmony between them. Of this attempt the Gita is the standing monument and the most perfect example. To see the confusion working in its untrammelled force, — and it is only so, by isolating the disease from the modification of curative forces, that we can observe, diagnose and afterwards find its remedy — we must go to the intellectual history of the European continent. There have been, properly speaking, two critical periods in this history, the Graeco-Roman era of philosophic illumination previous to Christianity and the era of modern scientific illumination which is still unexhausted. In the first we see the revolt of Philosophy (with Science concealed in her protective embrace) against the usurpation of religion. We find it, after achieving liberation, in its turn denying religion and usurping her sacred prerogative. In the modern era we see Science this time emerged and adult, keeping Philosophy behind her, in revolt against religion, first liberate herself, then deny religion & usurp her prerogatives, then, or as part of this final process of conquest, turn, deny & strike down her lofty ally and usurp also her ancient territory. For if Science has scorned & denied religion, she has equally scorned & denied Metaphysics. If she has declared God to be a barbarous myth, a fiction of dreams and terrors and longings and denied us the right of communion with the infinite, equally has she declared metaphysics to be an aberration of the ideative faculty, a false extension of logic and denied our right to recognise any metaphysical existence or anything at all which cannot be judged by or inferred from the results of the test tube, the scalpel, the microscope & the telescope. Neither, however, has she herself hesitated to dogmatise about the essential nature of existence and the mutual relations of its general modes, matter, life, mind and spirit. But for our immediate purpose it is only necessary to note the result in either of these eras of these tremendous usurpations. The result of the usurpations of philosophy was
that mankind flung itself with an infinite sincerity, with a passionate sense of relief into the religion of an obscure Jewish sect and consented for a length of time which amazes us to every theological absurdity, even the most monstrous, so that it might once more be permitted to believe in something greater than earth & to have relations with God. The old philosophical spirit was torn to pieces with Hypatia in the bloodstained streets of Alexandria. Theology usurped her place and discoursed blindly & foolishly on transubstantiation and consubstantiality and one knows not what other barren mysteries. So far as philosophy was allowed an independent existence, she was compelled to do not her own work but the work of science; so we find the schoolmen elaborately determining by logic and a priori word fencing questions which could only be properly determined by observation and analysis. For Theology, for Mediaeval Religion herself did not care for this field of knowledge; she had no need for scientific truths just as the Jacobin Republic had “no need of chemists”; in fact she guillotined Science wherever its presence attracted her attention. But all injustice — and that means at bottom all denial of truth, of the satyam and ritam — brings about its own punishment or, as Religion would put it, God’s visitation & vengeance. Science liberated, given in her strenuous emergence the strength of the Titans, avenges herself today on her old oppressors, on Religion, on Philosophy, breaks their temples, scorns their gods & prophets & seeks to deprive them even of the right to existence. That was the result of the Graeco-Roman illumination. And what will be the result of the scientific illumination, the modern enlightenment, the fiery triumph and ardent intellectual bigotry of the materialist? It is too early to foresee the final denouement, but unformed lines of it show themselves, obscure masses arise. Mysticism is growing obscurely in strength, as Science grew obscurely in strength in the Middle Ages. We see Titanic & mystic figures striding out of the East, building themselves fortresses & points of departure, spreading among the half-intellectual, capturing even the intellectual — vague figures of Theosophy, Spiritualism, Mental Science, Psychical Research, Neo-Hinduism, Neo-Buddhism,
Neo-Mahomedanism, Neo-Christianity. The priests of Isis, the adepts & illuminati of Gnosticism, denied their triumph by the intervention of St Paul & the Pope, reborn into this latter age, claim now their satisfaction. Already some outworks of materialism are giving way, the attack grows more insistent, the defence more uncertain, less proudly self-confident, though not less angry, contemptuous, bitter & intolerant; the invaders increase their adherents, extend the number of their strongholds. If no wider & higher truth intervenes, it would almost seem as if the old confusion in a new form might replace the new. Perhaps an Esoteric Society or a Spiritualist Circle of High Mediums will in a few centuries be laying down for us what we shall think about this world & the next, what particular relations with Gods will be permitted us, what Influences or Initiates we shall worship. Who knows? The fires of Smithfield may yet rebaze to save heretics from the perdition which an illustrious voice has declared to us to be the destined doom of all who do not acknowledge Maurya & Kutthumi.

These are not mere fantastic speculations. The history of humanity & the peculiar capacities of that apparently incalculable & erratic thing, human nature, ought to warn us of their possibility — or at least that they are not entirely impossible, in spite of the printing press, in spite of the clarities of Science. No doubt the old philosophers [thought] that with so many Stoas & Academies, such spread of education, never again would enlightenment be dimmed and the worship of gods & ghosts would in the end amuse none but the vulgar. We must accept these things as possible & examine why they are possible. This reaction is inevitable because Philosophy, though exceedingly high & luminous, tends to be exclusive & narrow and Science, though exceedingly patient, accurate & minute, tends to be limited, dry & purblind. They are both apt to be as dogmatic & intolerant in their own high way or in their own clear, dry way as Religion in her way which is not high, but intense, not clear but enthusiastic; and they live on a plane of mentality on which humanity at large does not yet find itself at perfect ease, cannot live without a struggle and a difficulty in breathing. They
both demand from man that he shall sacrifice his heart & his imagination to his intellect, shall deny his full human nature and live coldly & dryly. You might just as well ask him to live without free breathing. The mental world in which we are asked to live, resembles what the life of humanity would be if the warmth of the sun had diminished, the earth were growing chill and its atmosphere were already too rarefied for our comfort. It is no use saying that he ought to live in such an atmosphere, that it will improve his mental health & vigour. Perhaps he ought, though I do not think so, but he cannot. Or rather the individual may, — everything is possible to individual man, — but the race cannot. The demand can never be allowed; for it is a denial of Nature, a violation of the great Mother, a displacement of her eternal facts by the aridities of logic; it is a refusal of the Truth of things, of the Satyam, Ritam, and if it is persisted in, it will bring its own revenges. Philosophy & Science, if they are to help mankind without hurting it and themselves, must recognise that mankind is a complex being and his nature demands that every part of that complexity shall have its field of activity & every essential aspiration in him must be satisfied. It is his nature & his destiny to be aptakama, satisfied in his desires, in the individual & in the race — though always in accordance with the satyam, the ritam, which is also the sukham & sundaram, not lawlessly & according to aberrations & caprices. It was the great virtue of the ancient Hinduism, before Buddhism upset its balance & other aberrations followed, that it recognised in principle at least this fundamental verity, did not deny what God insists upon but strove, it does not matter whether perfectly or imperfectly, to put everything in its place & create a natural harmony.