Chapter XVIII

The Evolutionary Process —
Ascent and Integration

As he mounts from peak to peak, . . . Indra makes him con-
scious of that goal of his movement.  
Rig Veda.1

A son of the two Mothers, he attains to kingship in his dis-
coveries of knowledge, he moves on the summit, he dwells in
his high foundation.  
Rig Veda.2

I have arisen from earth to the mid-world, I have arisen from
the mid-world to heaven, from the level of the firmament of
heaven I have gone to the Sun-world, the Light.3  
Yajur Veda.4

IT IS now possible and necessary, since we have formed a
sufficiently clear idea of the significance of the evolutionary
manifestation in earth-nature and the final turn it is taking
or destined to take, to direct a more understanding regard on
the principles of the process by which it has arrived at its present
level and by which, presumably, with whatever modifications,
its final development, its passage from our still dominant men-
tal ignorance to a supramental consciousness and an integral
knowledge, will be governed and made effective. For we find
that cosmic Nature is constant in its general law of action,
since that depends on a Truth of things which is invariable in
principle although in detail of application abundantly variable.
At the outset, we can easily see that, since this is an evolution

1 I. 10. 2. 2 III. 55. 7.
3 The four planes of Matter, Life, pure Mind and Supermind.
4 17. 67.
out of a material Inconscience into spiritual consciousness, an evolutionary self-building of Spirit on a base of Matter, there must be in the process a development of a triple character. An evolution of forms of Matter more and more subtly and intricately organised so as to admit the action of a growing, a more and more complex and subtle and capable organisation of consciousness is the indispensable physical foundation. An upward evolutionary progress of the consciousness itself from grade to higher grade, an ascent, is the evident spiral line or emerging curve that, on this foundation, the evolution must describe. A taking up of what has already been evolved into each higher grade as it is reached and a transformation more or less complete so as to admit of a total changed working of the whole being and nature, an integration, must be also part of the process, if the evolution is to be effective.

The end of this triple process must be a radical change of the action of the Ignorance into an action of Knowledge, of our basis of inconscience into a basis of complete consciousness, — a completeness which exists at present only in what is to us the superconscience. Each ascent will bring with it a partial change and modification of the old nature taken up and subjected to a new fundamental principle; the inconscience will be turned into a partial consciousness, an ignorance seeking for more and more knowledge and mastery: but at some point there must be an ascent which substitutes the principle of knowledge, of a fundamental true consciousness, the consciousness of the Spirit, for the inconscience and ignorance. An evolution in the Inconscience is the beginning, an evolution in the Ignorance is the middle, but the end is the liberation of the spirit into its true consciousness and an evolution in the Knowledge. This is actually what we find to be the law and method of the process which has hitherto been followed and by all signs is likely to be followed in her future working by evolutionary Nature. A first involutionary foundation in which originates all that has to evolve, an emergence and action of the involved powers in or upon that foundation in an ascending series, and a culminating emergence of the highest power of all as the agent of a
supreme manifestation are the necessary stages of the journey of
evolutionary Nature.

An evolutionary process must be by the very terms of the
problem to be solved a development, in some first established
basic principle of being or substance, of something that that
basic principle holds involved in itself or else admits from out-
side itself and modifies by the admission; for it must necessarily
modify by its own law of nature all that enters into it and is
not already part of its own nature. This must be so even if it
is a creative evolution in the sense of manifesting always new
powers of existence that are not native to the first foundation but
introduced into it, accepted into an original substance. If, on the
contrary, there is already there in involution,—present in the
first foundation, but not yet manifested or not yet organised,—
the new principle or power of existence that has to be evolved,
then, when it appears, it will still have to accept modification
by the nature and law of the basic substance: but also it will
modify that substance by its own power, its own law of nature.
If, further, it is aided by a descent of its own principle already
established in its own full force above the field of evolution and
pressing down into that field to possess it, then the new power
may even establish itself as a dominant element and considerably
or radically change the consciousness and action of the world
in which it emerges or into which it enters. But its force to
modify or change or to revolutionise the law and working of
the original substance chosen as the evolutionary matrix will
depend upon its own essential potency. It is not likely that it
will be able to bring about an entire transformation if it is not
itself the original Principle of Existence, if it is only derivative,
an instrumental power and not the first puissance.

Here the evolution takes place in a material universe; the
foundation, the original substance, the first established all-
conditioning status of things is Matter. Mind and Life are
evolved in Matter, but they are limited and modified in their
action by the obligation to use its substance for their instru-
mentation and by their subjection to the law of material Nature
even while they modify what they undergo and use. For they
do transform its substance, first into living substance and then into conscious substance; they succeed in changing its inertia, immobility and inconscience into a movement of consciousness, feeling and life. But they do not succeed in transforming it altogether; they cannot make it altogether alive or altogether conscious: life-nature evolving is bound to death; mind evolving is materialised as well as vitalised; it finds itself rooted in inconscience, limited by ignorance; it is moved by uncontrolled life-forces which drive and use it, it is mechanised by the physical forces on which it has to depend for its own self-expression. This is a sign that neither Mind nor Life is the original creative Power; they, like Matter, are intermediaries, successive and seried instruments of the evolutionary process. If a material energy is not that original Power, then we must seek for it in something above Mind or Life; there must be a deeper occult Reality which has yet to disclose itself in Nature.

An original creative or evolutionary Power there must be: but, although Matter is the first substance, the original and ultimate Power is not an inconscient material Energy; for then life and consciousness would be absent, since Inconscience cannot evolve consciousness nor an inanimate Force evolve life. There must be, therefore, since Mind and Life also are not that, a secret Consciousness greater than Life Consciousness or Mind Consciousness, an Energy more essential than the material Energy. Since it is greater than Mind, it must be a supramental Consciousness-Force; since it is a power of essential substance other than Matter, it must be the power of that which is the supreme essence and substance of all things, a power of the Spirit. There is a creative energy of Mind and a creative Life-Force, but they are instrumental and partial, not original and decisive: Mind and Life do indeed modify the material substance they inhabit and its energies and are not merely determined by them, but the extent and way of this mutual modification and determination are fixed by the inhabitant and all-containing Spirit through a secret indwelling light and force of supermind, an occult gnosis,—an invisible self-knowledge and all-knowledge. If there is to be an entire transformation, it can only be by the
full emergence of the law of the spirit; its power of supermind or gnosis must have entered into Matter and it must evolve in Matter. It must change the mental into the supramental being, make the inconscient in us conscious, spiritualise our material substance, erect its law of gnostic consciousness in our whole evolutionary being and nature. This must be the culminating emergence or, at least, that stage in the emergence which first decisively changes the nature of the evolution by transforming its action of Ignorance and its basis of Inconscience.

This movement of evolution, of a progressive self-manifestation of the Spirit in a material universe, has to make its account at every step with the fact of the involution of consciousness and force in the form and activity of material substance. For it proceeds by an awakening of the involved consciousness and force and its ascent from principle to principle, from grade to grade, from power to power of the secret Spirit, but this is not a free transference to a higher status. The law of action, the force of action of each grade or power in its emergence is determined, not by its own free, full and pure law of nature or vim of energy, but partly by the material organisation provided for it and partly by its own status, achieved degree, accomplished fact of consciousness which it has been able to impose upon Matter. Its effectivity is in some sort made up of a balance between the actual extent of this evolutionary emergence and the countervailing extent to which the emergent power is still enveloped, penetrated, diminished by the domination and continuing grip of the Inconscience. Mind as we see it is not mind pure and free, but mind clouded and diminished by an enveloping nescience, mind labouring and struggling to deliver knowledge out of that nescience. All depends upon the more or less involved or more or less evolved condition of consciousness, — quite involved in inconscient matter, hesitating on the verge between involution and conscious evolution in the first or non-animal forms of life in matter, consciously evolving but greatly limited and hampered in mind housed in a living body, destined to be fully evolved by the awakening of the supermind in the embodied mental being and nature.
To each grade in this series achieved by the evolving Consciousness belongs its appropriate class of existences,—one by one there appear material forms and forces, vegetable life, animals and half-animal man, developed human beings, imperfectly evolved or more evolved spiritual beings: but because of the continuity of the evolutionary process there is no rigid separation between them; each new advance or formation takes up what was before. The animal takes up into himself living and inanimate Matter; man takes up both along with the animal existence. There are furrows left by the transitional process or separating demarcations settled by the fixed habit of Nature; but these distinguish one series from another, serve perhaps to prevent a fall back of what has been evolved, they do not cancel or cut the continuity of the evolution. The evolving Consciousness passes from one grade to another or from one series of steps to another either by an imperceptible process or by some bound or crisis or, perhaps, by an intervention from above,—some descent or ensouling or influence from higher planes of Nature. But, by whatever means, the Consciousness secretly indwelling in matter, the occult Inhabitant, is able thus to make its way upward from the lower to the higher gradations, taking up what it was into what it is and preparing to take up both into what it will be. Thus, having first laid down a basis of material being, material forms, forces, existences in which it seems to be lying inconscient, though in reality, as we know now, always subconsciently at work, it is able to manifest life and living beings, to manifest mind and mental beings in a material world, and must therefore be able to manifest there supermind also and supramental beings. Thus has come about the present status of the evolution of which man is the now apparent culmination but not the real ultimate summit; for he is himself a transitional being and stands at the turning-point of the whole movement. Evolution, being thus continuous, must have at any given moment a past with its fundamental results still in evidence, a present in which the results it is labouring over are in process of becoming, a future in which still unevolved powers and forms of being must appear till there is the full and
perfect manifestation. The past has been the history of a slow and difficult subconscious working with effects on the surface, — it has been an unconscious evolution; the present is a middle stage, an uncertain spiral in which the human intelligence is used by the secret evolutionary Force of being and participates in its action without being fully taken into confidence, — it is an evolution slowly becoming conscious of itself; the future must be a more and more conscious evolution of the spiritual being until it is fully delivered into a self-aware action by the emergent gnostic principle.

The first foundation in this emergence, the creation of forms of Matter, first of inconscient and inanimate, then of living and thinking Matter, the appearance of more and more organised bodies adapted to express a greater power of consciousness, has been studied from the physical side, the side of form-building, by Science; but very little light has been shed on the inner side, the side of consciousness, and what little has been observed is rather of its physical basis and instrumentation than of the progressive operations of Consciousness in its own nature. In the evolution, as it has been observed so far, although a continuity is there, — for Life takes up Matter and Mind takes up submental Life, the Mind of intelligence takes up the mind of life and sensation, — the leap from one grade of consciousness in the series to another grade seems to our eyes immense, the crossing of the gulf whether by bridge or by leap impossible; we fail to discover any concrete and satisfactory evidence of its accomplishment in the past or of the manner in which it was accomplished. Even in the outward evolution, even in the development of physical forms where the data are clearly in evidence, there are missing links that remain always missing; but in the evolution of consciousness the passage is still more difficult to account for, for it seems more like a transformation than a passage. It may be, however, that, by our incapacity to penetrate the subconscious, to sound the submental or to understand sufficiently a lower mentality different from ours, we are unable to observe the minute gradations, not only in each degree of the series, but on the borders between grade and grade: the scientist who does observe minutely the physical
data, has been driven to believe in the continuity of evolution in spite of the gaps and missing links; if we could observe similarly the inner evolution, we could, no doubt, discover the possibility and the mode of these formidable transitions. But still there is a real, a radical difference between grade and grade, so much so that the passage from one to another seems a new creation, a miracle of metamorphosis rather than a natural predictable development or quiet passing from one state of being to another with its well-marked steps arranged in an easy sequence.

These gulfs appear deeper, but less wide, as we rise higher in the scale of Nature. If there are rudiments of life-reaction in the metal, as has been recently contended, it may be identical with life-reaction in the plant in its essence, but what might be called the vital-physical difference is so considerable that one seems to us inanimate, the other, though not apparently conscious, might be called a living creature. Between the highest plant life and lowest animal the gulf is visibly deeper, for it is the difference between mind and the entire absence of any apparent or even rudimentary movement of mind: in the one the stuff of mental consciousness is unawakened though there is a life of vital reactions, a suppressed or subconscious or perhaps only submental sense vibration which seems to be intensely active; in the other, though the life is at first less automatic and secure in the subconscious way of living and in its own new way of overt consciousness imperfectly determined, still mind is awakened, — there is a conscious life, a profound transition has been made. But the community of the phenomenon of life between plant and animal, however different their organisation, narrows the gulf, even though it does not fill in its profundity. Between the highest animal and the lowest man there is a still deeper though narrower gulf to be crossed, the gulf between sense-mind and the intellect: for however we may insist on the primitive nature of the savage, we cannot alter the fact that the most primitive human being has above and beyond the sense-mind, emotional vitality and primary practical intelligence which we share with the animals, a human intellect and is capable — in whatever limits — of reflection, ideas, conscious invention, religious and ethical
thought and feeling, everything fundamental of which man as a race is capable; he has the same kind of intelligence, it differs only in its past instruction and formative training and the degree of its developed capacity, intensity and activity. Still, in spite of these dividing furrows, we can no longer suppose that God or some Demiurge has manufactured each genus and species ready-made in body and in consciousness and left the matter there, having looked upon his work and seen that it was good. It has become evident that a secretly conscious or an inconscient Energy of creation has effected the transition by swift or slow degrees, by whatever means, devices, biological, physical or psychological machinery,—perhaps, having made it, did not care to preserve as distinct forms what were only stepping-stones and had no longer any function nor served any purpose in evolutionary Nature. But this explanation of the gaps is little more than a hypothesis which as yet we cannot sufficiently substantiate. It is probable at any rate that the reason for these radical differences is to be found in the working of the inner Force and not in the outer process of the evolutionary transition; if we look at it more deeply from that inner side, the difficulty of understanding ceases and these transitions become intelligible and indeed inevitable by the very nature of the evolutionary process and its principle.

For if we look, not at the scientific or physical aspects, but at the psychological side of the question and inquire in what precisely the difference lies, we shall see that it consists in the rise of consciousness to another principle of being. The metal is fixed in the inconscient and inanimate principle of matter; even if we can suppose that it has some reactions suggestive of life in it or at least of rudimentary vibrations that in the plant developed into life, still it is not at all characteristically a form of life; it is characteristically a form of matter. The plant is fixed in a subconscient action of the principle of life,—not that it is not subject to matter or devoid of reactions that find their full meaning only in mind, for it seems to have submental reactions that in us are the foundation of pleasure and pain or of attraction and repulsion; but still it is a form of life, not of mere matter, nor is it, so far as we know, at all a mind-conscious
being. Man and the animal are both mentally conscious beings: but the animal is fixed in vital mind and mind-sense and cannot exceed its limitations, while man has received into his sense-mind the light of another principle, the intellect, which is really at once a reflection and a degradation of the supermind, a ray of gnosis seized by the sense-mentality and transformed by it into something other than its source: for it is agnostic like the sense-mind in which and for which it works, not gnostic; it seeks to lay hold on knowledge, because it does not possess it, it does not like supermind hold knowledge in itself as its natural prerogative. In other words, in each of these forms of existence the universal being has fixed its action of consciousness in a different principle or, as between man and animal, in the modification of a lower by a higher though still not a highest-grade principle. It is this stride from one principle of being to another quite different principle of being that creates the transitions, the furrows, the sharp lines of distance, and makes, not all the difference, but still a radical characteristic difference between being and being in their nature.

But it must be observed that this ascent, this successive fixing in higher and higher principles, does not carry with it the abandonment of the lower grades, any more than a status of existence in the lower grades means the entire absence of the higher principles. This heals the objection against the evolutionary theory created by these sharp lines of difference; for if the rudiments of the higher are present in the lower creation and the lower characters are taken up into the higher evolved being, that of itself constitutes an indubitable evolutionary process. What is necessary is a working that brings the lower gradation of being to a point at which the higher can manifest in it; at that point a pressure from some superior plane where the new power is dominant may assist towards a more or less rapid and decisive transition by a bound or a series of bounds, — a slow, creeping, imperceptible or even occult action is followed by a run and an evolutionary saltus across the border. It is in some such way that the transition from the lower to higher grades of consciousness seems to have been made in Nature.

In fact, life, mind, supermind are present in the atom, are
at work there, but invisible, occult, latent in a subconscious or apparently unconscious action of the Energy; there is an informing Spirit, but the outer force and figure of being, what we might call the formal or form existence as distinguished from the immanent or secretly governing consciousness, is lost in the physical action, is so absorbed into it as to be fixed in a stereotypic self-oblivion unaware of what it is and what it is doing. 

The electron and atom are in this view eternal somnambulists; each material object contains an outer or form consciousness involved, absorbed in the form, asleep, seeming to be an unconsciousness driven by an unknown and unfelt inner Existence,—he who is awake in the sleeper, the universal Inhabitant of the Upanishads,—an outer absorbed form-consciousness which, unlike that of the human somnambulist, has never been awake and is not always or ever on the point of waking. In the plant this outer form-consciousness is still in the state of sleep, but a sleep full of nervous dreams, always on the point of waking, but never waking. Life has appeared; in other words, force of concealed conscious being has been so much intensified, has raised itself to such a height of power as to develop or become capable of a new principle of action, that which we see as vitality, life-force. It has become vitally responsive to existence, though not mentally aware, and has put forth a new grade of activities of a higher and subtler value than any purely physical action. At the same time, it is capable of receiving and turning into these new life-values, into motions and phenomena of a vibration of vitality, life-contacts and physical contacts from other forms than its own and from universal Nature. This is a thing which forms of mere matter cannot do; they cannot turn contacts into life-values or any kind of value, partly because their power of reception, — although it exists, if occult evidence is to be trusted,—is not sufficiently awake to do anything but dumbly receive and imperceptibly react, partly because the energies transmitted by the contacts are too subtle to be utilised by the crude inorganic density of formed Matter. Life in the tree is determined by its physical body, but it takes up the physical existence and gives it a new value or system of values,—the life-value.
The transition to the mind and sense that appear in the animal being, that which we call conscious life, is operated in the same manner. The force of being is so much intensified, rises to such a height as to admit or develop a new principle of existence, — apparently new at least in the world of Matter, — mentality. Animal being is mentally aware of existence, its own and others, puts forth a higher and subtler grade of activities, receives a wider range of contacts, mental, vital, physical, from forms other than its own, takes up the physical and vital existence and turns all it can get from them into sense values and vital-mind values. It senses body, it senses life, but it senses also mind; for it has not only blind nervous reactions, but conscious sensations, memories, impulses, volitions, emotions, mental associations, the stuff of feeling and thought and will. It has even a practical intelligence, founded on memory, association, stimulating need, observation, a power of device; it is capable of cunning, strategy, planning; it can invent, adapt to some extent its inventions, meet in this or that detail the demand of new circumstance. All is not in it a half-conscious instinct; the animal prepares human intelligence.

But when we come to man, we see the whole thing becoming conscious; the world, which he epitomises, begins in him to reveal to itself its own nature. The higher animal is not the somnambulist, — as the very lowest animal forms still mainly or almost are, — but it has only a limited waking mind, capable of just what is necessary for its vital existence: in man the conscious mentality enlarges its wakefulness and, though not at first fully self-conscious, though still conscious only on the surface, can open more and more to his inner and integral being. As in the two lower ascents, there is a heightening of the force of conscious existence to a new power and a new range of subtle activities; there is a transition from vital mind to reflecting and thinking mind, there is developed a higher power of observation and invention, taking up and connecting data, conscious of process and result, a force of imagination and aesthetic creation, a higher more plastic sensibility, the co-ordinating and interpreting reason, the values no longer of a reflex or reactive but of a
mastering, understanding, self-detaching intelligence. As in the lower ascents, so here there is also a widening of the range of consciousness; man is able to take in more of the world and of himself as well as to give to this knowledge higher and completer figures of conscious experience. So, too, there is here also the third constant element of the ascension; mind takes up the lower grades and gives to their action and reaction intelligent values. Man has not only like the animal the sense of his body and life, but an intelligent sense and idea of life and a conscious and observant perception of body. He takes up too the mental life of the animal, as well as the material and bodily; although he loses something in the process, he gives to what he retains a higher value; he has the intelligent sense and the idea of his sensations, emotions, volitions, impulses, mental associations; what was crude stuff of thought and feeling and will, capable only of gross determinations, he turns into the finished work and artistry of these things. For the animal too thinks, but in an automatic way based mainly on a mechanical series of memories and mental associations, accepting quickly or slowly the suggestions of Nature and only awakened to a more conscious personal action when there is need of close observation and device; it has some first crude stuff of practical reason, but not the formed ideative and reflective faculty. The awaking consciousness in the animal is the unskilled primitive artisan of mind, in man it is the skilled craftsman and can become,—but this he does not attempt sufficiently,—not only the artist, but master and adept.

But here we have to observe two particularities of this human and at present highest development, which bring us to the heart of the matter. First, this taking up of the lower parts of life reveals itself as a turning downward of the master eye of the secret evolving spirit or of the universal Being in the individual from the height to which he has reached on all that now lies below him, a gazing down with the double or twin power of the being’s consciousness-force,—the power of will, the power of knowledge,—so as to understand from this new, different and wider range of consciousness and perception and nature the lower life and its possibilities and to raise it up, it also, to a
higher level, to give it higher values, to bring out of it higher potentialities. And this he does because evidently he does not intend to kill or destroy it, but, delight of existence being his eternal business and a harmony of various strains, not a sweet but monotonous melody the method of his music, he wishes to include the lower notes also and, by surcharging them with a deeper and finer significance, get more delight out of them than was possible in the cruder formulation. Still in the end he lays on them as a condition for his continued acceptance their consent to admit the higher values and, until they do consent, he can deal harshly enough with them even to trampling them under foot when he is bent on perfection and they are rebellious. And that indeed is the true inmost aim and meaning of ethics, discipline and askesis, to lesson and tame, purify and prepare to be fit instruments the vital and physical and lower mental life so that they may be transformed into notes of the higher mental and eventually the supramental harmony, but not to mutilate and destroy them. Ascent is the first necessity, but an integration is an accompanying intention of the spirit in Nature.

This downward eye of knowledge and will with a view to an all-round heightening, deepening and subtler, finer and richer intensification is the secret Spirit’s way from the beginning. The plant soul takes, as we may say, a nervous-material view of its whole physical existence so as to get out of it all the vital-physical intensity possible; for it seems to have some intense excitations of a mute life-vibration in it, — perhaps, though that is difficult for us to imagine, more intense relatively to its lower rudimentary scale than the animal mind and body in its higher and more powerful scale could tolerate. The animal being takes a mentalised sense-view of its vital and physical existence so as to get out of it all the sense value possible, much acuter in many respects than man’s as mere sensation or sense-emotion or satisfaction of vital desire and pleasure. Man, looking downward from the plane of will and intelligence, abandons these lower intensities, but in order to get out of mind and life and sense a higher intensity in other values, intellectual, aesthetic, moral, spiritual, mentally dynamic or practical — as he terms it; by these higher elements
he enlarges, subtilises and elevates his use of life-values. He does not abandon the animal reactions and enjoyments, but more lucidly, finely and sensitively mentalises them. This he does even on his normal and his lower levels, but, as he develops, he puts his lower being to a severer test, begins to demand from it on pain of rejection something like a transformation: that is the mind’s way of preparing for a spiritual life still beyond it.

But man not only turns his gaze downward and around him, when he has reached his higher level, but upward towards what is above him and inward towards what is occult within him. In him not only the downward gaze of the universal Being in the evolution has become conscious, but its conscious upward and inward gaze also develops. The animal lives as if satisfied with what Nature has done for it; if there is any upward gaze of the secret spirit within its animal being, it has nothing consciously to do with it, that is still Nature’s business: it is man who first makes this upward gaze consciously his own business. For already by his possession of intelligent will, deformed ray of the gnosia though it be, he begins to put on the double nature of Sachchidananda; he is no longer, like the animal, an undeveloped conscious being entirely driven by Prakriti, a slave of the executive Force, played with by the mechanical energies of Nature, but has begun to be a developing conscious soul or Purusha interfering with what was her sole affair, wishing to have a say in it and eventually to be the master. He cannot do it yet, he is too much in her meshes, too much involved in her established mechanism: but he feels,—though as yet too vaguely and uncertainly,—that the spirit within him wishes to rise to yet higher heights, to widen its bounds; something within, something occult, knows that it is not the intention of the deeper conscious Soul-Nature, the Purusha-Prakriti, to be satisfied with his present lowness and limitations. To climb to higher altitudes, to get a greater scope, to transform his lower nature, this is always a natural impulse of man as soon as he has made his place for himself in the physical and vital world of earth and has a little leisure to consider his farther possibilities. It must be so not because of any false and pitiful imaginative illusion in him, but,
first, because he is the imperfect, still developing mental being and must strive for more development, for perfection, and still more because he is capable, unlike other terrestrial creatures, of becoming aware of what is deeper than mind, of the soul within him, and of what is above the mind, of supermind, of spirit, capable of opening to it, admitting it, rising towards it, taking hold of it. It is in his human nature, in all human nature, to exceed itself by conscious evolution, to climb beyond what he is. Not individuals only, but in time the race also, in a general rule of being and living if not in all its members, can have the hope, if it develops a sufficient will, to rise beyond the imperfections of our present very undivine nature and to ascend at least to a superior humanity, to rise nearer, even if it cannot absolutely reach, to a divine manhood or supermanhood. At any rate, it is the compulsion of evolutionary Nature in him to strive to develop upward, to erect the ideal, to make the endeavour.

But where is the limit of effectuation in the evolutionary being's self-becoming by self-exceeding? In mind itself there are grades of the series and each grade again is a series in itself; there are successive elevations which we may conveniently call planes and sub-planes of the mental consciousness and the mental being. The development of our mental self is largely an ascent of this stair; we can take our stand on any one of them, while yet maintaining a dependence on the lower stages and a power of occasional ascension to higher levels or of a response to influences from our being's superior strata. At present we still normally take our first secure stand on the lowest sub-plane of the intelligence, which we may call the physical-mental, because it depends for its evidence of fact and sense of reality on the physical brain, the physical sense-mind, the physical sense-organs; there we are the physical man who attaches most importance to objective things and to his outer life, has little intensity of the subjective or inner existence and subordinates whatever he has of it to the greater claims of exterior reality. The physical man has a vital part, but it is mainly made up of the smaller instinctive and impulsive formations of life-consciousness emerging from the subconscious, along with a customary crowd or round of sensations, desires,
hopes, feelings, satisfactions which are dependent on external things and external contacts and concerned with the practical, the immediately realisable and possible, the habitual, the common and average. He has a mental part, but this too is customary, traditional, practical, objective, and respects what belongs to the domain of mind mostly for its utility for the support, comfort, use, satisfaction and entertainment of his physical and sensa-tional existence. For the physical mind takes its stand on matter and the material world, on the body and the bodily life, on sense-experience and on a normal practical mentality and its experience. All that is not of this order, the physical mind builds up as a restricted superstructure dependent upon the external sense-mentality. Even so, it regards these higher contents of life as either helpful adjuncts or a superfluous but pleasant luxury of imaginations, feelings and thought-abstractions, not as inner realities; or, even if it receives them as realities, it does not feel them concretely and substantially in their own proper substance, subtler than the physical substance and its grosser concreteness, — it treats them as a subjective, less substantial extension from physical realities. It is inevitable that the human being should thus take his first stand on Matter and give the external fact and external existence its due importance; for this is Nature’s first provision for our existence, on which she insists greatly: the physical man is emphasised in us and is multiplied abundantly in the world by her as her force for conservation of the secure, if somewhat inert, material basis on which she can maintain herself while she attempts her higher human developments; but in this mental formation there is no power for progress or only for a material progress. It is our first mental status, but the mental being cannot remain always at this lowest rung of the human evolutionary ladder.

Above physical mind and deeper within than physical sensa-tion, there is what we may call an intelligence of the life-mind, dynamic, vital, nervous, more open, though still obscurely, to the psychic, capable of a first soul-formation, though only of an obscurer life-soul, — not the psychic being, but a frontal formation of the vital Purusha. This life-soul concretely senses
and contacts the things of the life-world, and tries to realise them here; it attaches immense importance to the satisfaction and fulfilment of the life-being, the life-force, the vital nature: it looks on physical existence as a field for the life-impulses’ self-fulfilment, for the play of ambition, power, strong character, love, passion, adventure, for the individual, the collective, the general human seeking and hazard and venture, for all kinds of life-experiment and new life-experience, and but for this saving element, this greater power, interest, significance, the physical existence would have for it no value. This life mentality is supported by our secret subliminal vital being and is in veiled contact with a life-world to which it can easily open and so feel the unseen dynamic forces and realities behind the material universe. There is an inner life-mind which does not need for its perceptions the evidence of the physical senses, is not limited by them; for on this level our inner life and the inner life of the world become real to us independent of the body and of the symbols of the physical world which alone we call natural phenomena, as if Nature had no greater phenomena and no greater realities than those of gross Matter. The vital man, moulded consciously or unconsciously by these influences, is the man of desire and sensation, the man of force and action, the man of passion and emotion, the kinetic individual: he may and does lay great stress on the material existence, but he gives it, even when most pre-occupied with its present actualities, a push for life-experience, for force of realisation, for life-extension, for life-power, for life-affirmation and life-expansion which is Nature’s first impetus towards enlargement of the being; at a highest intensity of this life impetus, he becomes the breaker of bonds, the seeker of new horizons, the disturber of the past and present in the interest of the future. He has a mental life which is often enslaved to the vital force and its desires and passions, and it is these he seeks to satisfy through the mind: but when he interests himself strongly in mental things, he can become the mental adventurer, the opener of the way to new mind-formations or the fighter for an idea, the sensitive type of artist, the dynamic poet of life or the prophet or champion of a cause. The vital mind is kinetic and
therefore a great force in the working of evolutionary Nature.

Above this level of vital mentality and yet more inly extended, is a mind-plane of pure thought and intelligence to which the things of the mental world are the most important realities; those who are under its influence, the philosopher, thinker, scientist, intellectual creator, the man of the idea, the man of the written or spoken word, the idealist and dreamer are the present mental being at his highest attained summit. This mental man has his life-part, his life of passions and desires and ambitions and life-hopes of all kinds and his lower sensational and physical existence, and this lower part can often equibalance or weigh down his nobler mental element so that, although it is the highest portion of him, it does not become dominant and formative in his whole nature: but this is not typical of him in his greatest development, for there the vital and physical are controlled and subjected by the thinking will and intelligence. The mental man cannot transform his nature, but he can control and harmonise it and lay on it the law of a mental ideal, impose a balance or a sublimating and refining influence, and give a high consistency to the multipersonal confusion and conflict or the summary patch-work of our divided and half-constructed being. He can be the observer and governor of his own mind and life, can consciously develop them and become to that extent a self-creator.

This mind of pure intelligence has behind it our inner or subliminal mind which senses directly all the things of the mind-plane, is open to the action of a world of mental forces, and can feel the ideative and other imponderable influences which act upon the material world and the life-plane but which at present we can only infer and cannot directly experience: these intangibles and imponderables are to the mental man real and patent and he regards them as truths demanding to be realised in our or the earth’s nature. On the inner plane mind and mind-soul independent of the body can become to us an entire reality, and we can consciously live in them as much as in the body. Thus to live in mind and the things of the mind, to be an intelligence rather than a life and a body, is our highest position, short of spirituality, in the degrees of Nature. The mental man, the man
of a self-dominating and self-formative mind and will conscious
of an ideal and turned towards its realisation, the high intellect,
the thinker, the sage, less kinetic and immediately effective than
the vital man, who is the man of action and outer swift life-
fulfilment, but as powerful and eventually even more powerful
to open new vistas to the race, is the normal summit of Nature's
evolutionary formation on the human plane. These three degrees
of mentality, clear in themselves, but most often mixed in our
composition, are to our ordinary intelligence only psychological
types that happen to have developed, and we do not discover
any other significance in them; but in fact they are full of sig-
nificance, for they are the steps of Nature's evolution of mental
being towards its self-exceeding, and, as thinking mind is the
highest step she can now attain, the perfected mental man is the
rarest and highest of her normal human creatures. To go farther
she has to bring into the mind and make active in mind, life and
body the spiritual principle.

For these are her evolutionary figures built out of the surface
mentality; to do more she has to use more amply the unseen
material hidden below our surface, to dive inwards and bring
out the secret soul, the psyche, or to ascend above our nor-
mal mental level into planes of intuitive consciousness dense
with light derived from the spiritual gnosis, ascending planes
of pure spiritual mind in which we are in direct contact with
the infinite, in touch with the self and highest reality of things,
Sachchidananda. In ourselves, behind our surface natural being,
there is a soul, an inner mind, an inner life-part which can open
to these heights as well as to the occult spirit within us, and
this double opening is the secret of a new evolution; by that
breaking of lids and walls and boundaries the consciousness
rises to a greater ascent and a larger integration which, as the
evolution of mind has mentalised, so will by this new evolution
spiritualise all the powers of our nature. For the mental man
has not been Nature's last effort or highest reach,—though he
has been, in general, more fully evolved in his own nature than
those who have achieved themselves below or aspired above
him; she has pointed man to a yet higher and more difficult
level, inspired him with the ideal of a spiritual living, begun
the evolution in him of a spiritual being. The spiritual man is
her supreme supernormal effort of human creation; for, having
evolved the mental creator, thinker, sage, prophet of an ideal,
the self-controlled, self-disciplined, harmonised mental being,
she has tried to go higher and deeper within and call out into
the front the soul and inner mind and heart, call down from
above the forces of the spiritual mind and higher mind and
overmind and create under their light and by their influence
the spiritual sage, seer, prophet, God-lover, Yogin, gnostic, Sufi,
mystic.

This is man’s only way of true self-exceeding: for so long
as we live in the surface being or found ourselves wholly on
Matter, it is impossible to go higher and vain to expect that
there can be any new transition of a radical character in our
evolutionary being. The vital man, the mental man have had an
immense effect upon the earth-life, they have carried humanity
forward from the mere human animal to what it is now. But it is
only within the bounds of the already established evolutionary
formula of the human being that they can act; they can enlarge
the human circle but not change or transform the principle of
consciousness or its characteristic operation. Any attempt to
heighten inordinately the mental or exaggerate inordinately the
vital man, — a Nietzschean supermanhood, for example, — can
only colossalise the human creature, it cannot transform or div-
inise him. A different possibility opens if we can live within in
the inner being and make it the direct ruler of life or station
ourselves on the spiritual and intuitive planes of being and from
there and by their power transmute our nature.

The spiritual man is the sign of this new evolution, this
new and higher endeavour of Nature. But this evolution differs
from the past process of the evolutionary Energy in two re-
spects: it is conducted by a conscious effort of the human mind,
and it is not confined to a conscious progression of the surface
nature, but is accompanied by an attempt to break the walls
of the Ignorance and extend ourselves inward into the secret
principle of our present being and outward into cosmic being
as well as upward towards a higher principle. Up till now what Nature had achieved was an enlarging of the bounds of our surface Knowledge-Ignorance; what is attempted in the spiritual endeavour is to abolish the Ignorance, to go inwards and discover the soul and to become united in consciousness with God and with all existence. This is the final aim of the mental stage of evolutionary Nature in man; it is the initial step towards a radical transmutation of the Ignorance into the Knowledge. The spiritual change begins by an influence of the inner being and the higher spiritual mind, an action felt and accepted on the surface; but this by itself can lead only to an illumined mental idealism or to the growth of a religious mind, a religious temperament and some devotion in the heart and piety in the conduct; it is a first approach of mind to spirit, but it cannot make a radical change: more has to be done, we have to live deeper within, we have to exceed our present consciousness and surpass our present status of Nature.

It is evident that if we can live thus deeper within and put out steadily the inner forces into the outer instrumentation or raise ourselves to dwell on higher and wider levels and bring their powers to bear on physical existence, not merely receive influences descending from them, which is all we can now do, there could begin a heightening of our force of conscious being so as to create a new principle of consciousness, a new range of activities, new values for all things, a widening of our consciousness and life, a taking up and transformation of the lower grades of our existence,—in brief, the whole evolutionary process by which the Spirit in Nature creates a higher type of being. Each step could mean a pace, however distant from the goal, or a close approach leading to a larger and more divine being, a larger and more divine force and consciousness, knowledge and will, sense of existence and delight in existence; there could be an initial unfolding towards the divine life. All religion, all occult knowledge, all supernormal (as opposed to abnormal) psychological experience, all Yoga, all psychic experience and discipline are sign-posts and directions pointing us upon that road of progress of the occult self-unfolding spirit.
But the human race is still weighted by a certain gravitation towards the physical, it obeys still the pull of our yet unconquered earth-matter; it is dominated by the brain-mind, the physical intelligence: thus held back by many ties, it hesitates before the indication or falls back before the too tense demand of the spiritual effort. It has, too, still a great capacity for sceptical folly, an immense indolence, an enormous intellectual and spiritual timidity and conservatism when called out of the grooves of habit: even the constant evidence of life itself that where it chooses to conquer it can conquer, — witness the miracles of that quite inferior power, physical Science, — does not prevent it from doubting; it repels the new call and leaves the response to a few individuals. But that is not enough if the step forward is to be for humanity; for it is only if the race advances that, for it, the victories of the Spirit can be secure. For then, even if there is a lapse of Nature, a fall in her effort, the Spirit within, employing a secret memory, — sometimes represented on the lower side, that of downward gravitation, as an atavistic force in the race, but really the force of a persistent memory in Nature which can pull us either upward or downward, — will call it upward again and the next ascent will be both easier and more lasting, because of the past endeavour; for that endeavour and its impulse and its result cannot but remain stored in the subconscious mind of humanity. Who can say what victories of the kind may have been achieved in our past cycles and how near may be the next ascension? It is not indeed necessary or possible that the whole race should transform itself from mental into spiritual beings, but a general admission of the ideal, a widespread endeavour, a conscious concentration are needed to carry the stream of tendency to its definitive achievement. Otherwise what will be ultimately accomplished is an achievement by the few initiating a new order of beings, while humanity will have passed sentence of unfitness on itself and may fall back into an evolutionary decline or a stationary immobility; for it is the constant upward effort that has kept humanity alive and maintained for it its place in the front of creation.
The Evolutionary Process — Ascent and Integration

The principle of the process of evolution is a foundation, from that foundation an ascent, in that ascent a reversal of consciousness and, from the greater height and wideness gained, an action of change and new integration of the whole nature. The first foundation is Matter; the ascent is that of Nature; the integration is an at first unconscious or half-conscious automatic change of Nature by Nature. But as soon as a more completely conscious participation of the being has begun in these workings of Nature, a change in the functioning of the process is inevitable. The physical foundation of Matter remains, but Matter can no longer be the foundation of the consciousness; consciousness itself will be no longer in its origin a welling up from the Inconscient or a concealed flow from an occult inner subliminal force under the pressure of contacts from the universe. The foundation of the developing existence will be the new spiritual status above or the unveiled soul status within us; it is a flow of light and knowledge and will from above and a reception from within that will determine the reactions of the being to cosmic experience. The whole concentration of the being will be shifted from below upwards and from without inwards; our higher and inner being now unknown to us will become ourselves, and the outer or surface being which we now take for ourselves will be only an open front or an annexe through which the true being meets the universe. The outer world itself will become inward to the spiritual awareness, a part of itself, intimately embraced in a knowledge and feeling of unity and identity, penetrated by an intuitive regard of the mind, responded to by the direct contact of consciousness with consciousness, taken into an achieved integrality. The old inconscient foundation itself will be made conscious in us by the inflow of light and awareness from above and its depths annexed to the heights of the spirit. An integral consciousness will become the basis of an entire harmonisation of life through the total transformation, unification, integration of the being and the nature.