Chapter XIII
Reason and Religion

IT WOULD seem then that reason is an insufficient, often an inefficient, even a stumbling and at its best a very partially enlightened guide for humanity in that great endeavour which is the real heart of human progress and the inner justification of our existence as souls, minds and bodies upon the earth. For that endeavour is not only the effort to survive and make a place for ourselves on the earth as the animals do, not only having made to keep it and develop its best vital and egoistic or communal use for the efficiency and enjoyment of the individual, the family or the collective ego, substantially as is done by the animal families and colonies, in bee-hive or ant-hill for example, though in the larger, many-sided way of reasoning animals; it is also, and much more characteristically of our human as distinguished from our animal element, the endeavour to arrive at a harmonised inner and outer perfection, and, as we find in the end, at its highest height, to culminate in the discovery of the divine Reality behind our existence and the complete and ideal Person within us and the shaping of human life in that image. But if that is the truth, then neither the Hellenic ideal of an all-round philosophic, aesthetic, moral and physical culture governed by the enlightened reason of man and led by the wisest minds of a free society, nor the modern ideal of an efficient culture and successful economic civilisation governed by the collective reason and organised knowledge of mankind can be either the highest or the widest goal of social development.

The Hellenic ideal was roughly expressed in the old Latin maxim, a sound mind in a sound body. And by a sound body the ancients meant a healthy and beautiful body well-fitted for the rational use and enjoyment of life. And by a sound mind they meant a clear and balanced reason and an enlightened and well-trained mentality, — trained in the sense of ancient, not of
modern education. It was not to be packed with all available information and ideas, cast in the mould of science and a rational utility and so prepared for the efficient performance of social and civic needs and duties, for a professional avocation or for an intellectual pursuit; rather it was to be cultured in all its human capacities intellectual, moral, aesthetic, trained to use them rightly and to range freely, intelligently and flexibly in all questions and in all practical matters of philosophy, science, art, politics and social living. The ancient Greek mind was philosophic, aesthetic and political; the modern mind has been scientific, economic and utilitarian. The ancient ideal laid stress on soundness and beauty and sought to build up a fine and rational human life; the modern lays very little or no stress on beauty, prefers rational and practical soundness, useful adaptation, just mechanism and seeks to build up a well-ordered, well-informed and efficient human life. Both take it that man is partly a mental, partly a physical being with the mentalised physical life for his field and reason for his highest attribute and his highest possibility. But if we follow to the end the new vistas opened by the most advanced tendencies of a subjective age, we shall be led back to a still more ancient truth and ideal that overtops both the Hellenic and the modern levels. For we shall then seize the truth that man is a developing spirit trying here to find and fulfil itself in the forms of mind, life and body; and we shall perceive luminously growing before us the greater ideal of a deeply conscious self-illumined, self-possessing, self-mastering soul in a pure and perfect mind and body. The wider field it seeks will be, not the mentalised physical life with which man has started, but a new spiritualised life inward and outward, by which the perfected internal figures itself in a perfected external living. Beyond man's long intelligent effort towards a perfected culture and a rational society there opens the old religious and spiritual ideal, the hope of the kingdom of heaven within us and the city of God upon earth.

But if the soul is the true sovereign and if its spiritual self-finding, its progressive largest widest integral fulfilment by the power of the spirit are to be accepted as the ultimate secret of our
evolution, then since certainly the instinctive being of man below reason is not the means of attaining that high end and since we find that reason also is an insufficient light and power, there must be a superior range of being with its own proper powers, — liberated soul-faculties, a spiritual will and knowledge higher than the reason and intelligent will, — by which alone an entire conscious self-fulfilment can become possible to the human being. We must remember that our aim of self-fulfilment is an integral unfolding of the Divine within us, a complete evolution of the hidden divinity in the individual soul and the collective life. Otherwise we may simply come back to an old idea of individual and social living which had its greatness, but did not provide all the conditions of our perfection. That was the idea of a spiritualised typal society. It proceeded upon the supposition that each man has his own peculiar nature which is born from and reflects one element of the divine nature. The character of each individual, his ethical type, his training, his social occupation, his spiritual possibility must be formed or developed within the conditions of that peculiar element; the perfection he seeks in this life must be according to its law. The theory of ancient Indian culture — its practice, as is the way of human practice, did not always correspond to the theory — worked upon this supposition. It divided man in society into the fourfold order — an at once spiritual, psychic, ethical and economic order — of the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, — practically, the spiritual and intellectual man, the dynamic man of will, the vital, hedonistic and economic man, the material man; the whole society organised in these four constituent classes represented the complete image of the creative and active Godhead.

A different division of the typal society is quite possible. But whatever the arrangement or division, the typal principle cannot be the foundation of an ideal human society. Even according to the Indian theory it does not belong either to the periods of man’s highest attainment or to the eras of his lowest possibility; it is neither the principle of his ideal age, his age of the perfected Truth, Satyayuga, Kritayuga, in which he lives according to some high and profound realisation of his divine possibility, nor of his
iron age, the Kaliyuga, in which he collapses towards the life of the instincts, impulses and desires with the reason degraded into a servant of this nether life of man. This too precise order is rather the appropriate principle of the intermediate ages of his cycle in which he attempts to maintain some imperfect form of his true law, his *dharma*, by will-power and force of character in the Treta, by law, arrangement and fixed convention in the Dwapara.¹ The type is not the integral man, it is the fixing and emphasising of the generally prominent part of his active nature. But each man contains in himself the whole divine potentiality and therefore the Shudra cannot be rigidly confined within his Shudrahood, nor the Brahmin in his Brahminhood, but each contains within himself the potentialities and the need of perfection of his other elements of a divine manhood. In the Kali age these potentialities may act in a state of crude disorder, the anarchy of our being which covers our confused attempt at a new order. In the intermediate ages the principle of order may take refuge in a limited perfection, suppressing some elements to perfect others. But the law of the Satya age is the large development of the whole truth of our being in the realisation of a spontaneous and self-supported spiritual harmony. That can only be realised by the evolution, in the measure of which our human capacity in its enlarging cycles becomes capable of it, of the spiritual ranges of our being and the unmasking of their inherent light and power, their knowledge and their divine capacities.

We shall better understand what may be this higher being and those higher faculties, if we look again at the dealings of the reason with the trend towards the absolute in our other faculties, in the divergent principles of our complex existence. Let us study especially its dealings with the suprarational in them and the infrarational, the two extremes between which our intelligence is some sort of mediator. The spiritual or suprarational is always turned at its heights towards the Absolute; in its extension, living

¹ Therefore it is said that Vishnu is the King in the Treta, but in the Dwapara the arranger and codifier of the knowledge and the law.
in the luminous infinite, its special power is to realise the infinite in the finite, the eternal unity in all divisions and differences. Our spiritual evolution ascends therefore through the relative to the absolute, through the finite to the infinite, through all divisions to oneness. Man in his spiritual realisation begins to find and seize hold on the satisfying intensities of the absolute in the relative, feels the large and serene presence of the infinite in the finite, discovers the reconciling law of a perfect unity in all divisions and differences. The spiritual will in his outer as in his inner life and formulation must be to effect a great reconciliation between the secret and eternal reality and the finite appearances of a world which seeks to express and in expressing seems to deny it. Our highest faculties then will be those which make this possible because they have in them the intimate light and power and joy by which these things can be grasped in direct knowledge and experience, realised and made normally and permanently effective in will, communicated to our whole nature. The infrarational, on the other hand, has its origin and basis in the obscure infinite of the Inconscient; it wells up in instincts and impulses, which are really the crude and more or less haphazard intuitions of a subconscient physical, vital, emotional and sensational mind and will in us. Its struggle is towards definition, towards self-creation, towards finding some finite order of its obscure knowledge and tendencies. But it has also the instinct and force of the infinite from which it proceeds; it contains obscure, limited and violent velleities that move it to grasp at the intensities of the absolute and pull them down or some touch of them into its finite action: but because it proceeds by ignorance and not by knowledge, it cannot truly succeed in this more vehement endeavour. The life of the reason and intelligent will stands between that upper and this nether power. On one side it takes up and enlightens the life of the instincts and impulses and helps it to find on a higher plane the finite order for which it gropes. On the other side it looks up towards the absolute, looks out towards the infinite, looks in towards the One, but without being able to grasp and hold their realities; for it is able only to consider them with a sort of derivative and
remote understanding, because it moves in the relative and, itself limited and definite, it can act only by definition, division and limitation. These three powers of being, the suprarational, rational and infrarational are present, but with an infinitely varying prominence in all our activities.

The limitations of the reason become very strikingly, very characteristically, very nakedly apparent when it is confronted with that great order of psychological truths and experiences which we have hitherto kept in the background — the religious being of man and his religious life. Here is a realm at which the intellectual reason gazes with the bewildered mind of a foreigner who hears a language of which the words and the spirit are unintelligible to him and sees everywhere forms of life and principles of thought and action which are absolutely strange to his experience. He may try to learn this speech and understand this strange and alien life; but it is with pain and difficulty, and he cannot succeed unless he has, so to speak, unlearned himself and become one in spirit and nature with the natives of this celestial empire. Till then his efforts to understand and interpret them in his own language and according to his own notions end at the worst in a gross misunderstanding and deformation. The attempts of the positive critical reason to dissect the phenomena of the religious life sound to men of spiritual experience like the prattle of a child who is trying to shape into the mould of his own habitual notions the life of adults or the blunders of an ignorant mind which thinks fit to criticise patronisingly or adversely the labours of a profound thinker or a great scientist. At the best even this futile labour can extract, can account for only the externals of the things it attempts to explain; the spirit is missed, the inner matter is left out, and as a result of that capital omission even the account of the externals is left without real truth and has only an apparent correctness.

The unaided intellectual reason faced with the phenomena of the religious life is naturally apt to adopt one of two attitudes, both of them shallow in the extreme, hastily presumptuous and erroneous. Either it views the whole thing as a mass of superstition, a mystical nonsense, a farrago of ignorant barbaric
survivals, — that was the extreme spirit of the rationalist now happily, though not dead, yet much weakened and almost moribund, — or it patronises religion, tries to explain its origins, to get rid of it by the process of explaining it away; or it labours gently or forcefully to reject or correct its superstitions, crudities, absurdities, to purify it into an abstract nothingness or persuade it to purify itself in the light of the reasoning intelligence; or it allows it a role, leaves it perhaps for the edification of the ignorant, admits its value as a moralising influence or its utility to the State for keeping the lower classes in order, even perhaps tries to invent that strange chimera, a rational religion.

The former attitude has on its positive side played a powerful part in the history of human thought, has even been of a considerable utility in its own way — we shall have to note briefly hereafter how and why — to human progress and in the end even to religion; but its intolerant negations are an arrogant falsity, as the human mind has now sufficiently begun to perceive. Its mistake is like that of a foreigner who thinks everything in an alien country absurd and inferior because these things are not his own ways of acting and thinking and cannot be cut out by his own measures or suited to his own standards. So the thoroughgoing rationalist asks the religious spirit, if it is to stand, to satisfy the material reason and even to give physical proof of its truths, while the very essence of religion is the discovery of the immaterial Spirit and the play of a supraphysical consciousness. So too he tries to judge religion by his idea of its externalities, just as an ignorant and obstreperous foreigner might try to judge a civilisation by the dress, outward colour of life and some of the most external peculiarities in the social manners of the inhabitants. That in this he errs in company with certain of the so-called religious themselves, may be his excuse, but cannot be the justification of his ignorance. The more moderate attitude of the rational mind has also played its part in the history of human thought. Its attempts to explain religion have resulted in the compilation of an immense mass of amazingly ingenious perversions, such as certain pseudo-scientific attempts to form a comparative Science of Religion. It has built up in the approved
modern style immense façades of theory with stray bricks of misunderstood facts for their material. Its mild condonations of religion have led to superficial phases of thought which have passed quickly away and left no trace behind them. Its efforts at the creation of a rational religion, perfectly well-intentioned, but helpless and unconvincing, have had no appreciable effect and have failed like a dispersing cloud, chinnābhram iva naśyati.

The deepest heart, the inmost essence of religion, apart from its outward machinery of creed, cult, ceremony and symbol, is the search for God and the finding of God. Its aspiration is to discover the Infinite, the Absolute, the One, the Divine, who is all these things and yet no abstraction but a Being. Its work is a sincere living out of the true and intimate relations between man and God, relations of unity, relations of difference, relations of an illuminated knowledge, an ecstatic love and delight, an absolute surrender and service, a casting of every part of our existence out of its normal status into an uprush of man towards the Divine and a descent of the Divine into man. All this has nothing to do with the realm of reason or its normal activities; its aim, its sphere, its process is suprarational. The knowledge of God is not to be gained by weighing the feeble arguments of reason for or against his existence: it is to be gained only by a self-transcending and absolute consecration, aspiration and experience. Nor does that experience proceed by anything like rational scientific experiment or rational philosophic thinking. Even in those parts of religious discipline which seem most to resemble scientific experiment, the method is a verification of things which exceed the reason and its timid scope. Even in those parts of religious knowledge which seem most to resemble intellectual operations, the illuminating faculties are not imagination, logic and rational judgment, but revelations, inspirations, intuitions, intuitive discernments that leap down to us from a plane of suprarational light. The love of God is an infinite and absolute feeling which does not admit of any rational limitation and does not use a language of rational worship and adoration; the delight in God is that peace and bliss which passes all understanding. The surrender to God is the surrender of the whole being to a
suprarational light, will, power and love and his service takes no account of the compromises with life which the practical reason of man uses as the best part of its method in the ordinary conduct of mundane existence. Wherever religion really finds itself, wherever it opens itself to its own spirit, — there is plenty of that sort of religious practice which is halting, imperfect, half-sincere, only half-sure of itself and in which reason can get in a word, — its way is absolute and its fruits are ineffable.

Reason has indeed a part to play in relation to this highest field of our religious being and experience, but that part is quite secondary and subordinate. It cannot lay down the law for the religious life, it cannot determine in its own right the system of divine knowledge; it cannot school and lesson the divine love and delight; it cannot set bounds to spiritual experience or lay its yoke upon the action of the spiritual man. Its sole legitimate sphere is to explain as best it can, in its own language and to the rational and intellectual parts of man, the truths, the experiences, the laws of our suprarational and spiritual existence. That has been the work of spiritual philosophy in the East and — much more crudely and imperfectly done — of theology in the West, a work of great importance at moments like the present when the intellect of mankind after a long wandering is again turning towards the search for the Divine. Here there must inevitably enter a part of those operations proper to the intellect, logical reasoning, inferences from the data given by rational experience, analogies drawn from our knowledge of the apparent facts of existence, appeals even to the physical truths of science, all the apparatus of the intelligent mind in its ordinary workings. But this is the weakest part of spiritual philosophy. It convinces the rational mind only where the intellect is already predisposed to belief, and even if it convinces, it cannot give the true knowledge. Reason is safest when it is content to take the profound truths and experiences of the spiritual being and the spiritual life, just as they are given to it, and throw them into such form, order and language as will make them the most intelligible or the least unintelligible to the reasoning mind. Even then it is not quite safe, for it is apt to harden the order into an intellectual system.
and to present the form as if it were the essence. And, at best, it has to use a language which is not the very tongue of the suprarational truth but its inadequate translation and, since it is not the ordinary tongue either of the rational intelligence, it is open to non-understanding or misunderstanding by the ordinary reason of mankind. It is well-known to the experience of the spiritual seeker that even the highest philosophising cannot give a true inner knowledge, is not the spiritual light, does not open the gates of experience. All it can do is to address the consciousness of man through his intellect and, when it has done, to say, “I have tried to give you the truth in a form and system which will make it intelligible and possible to you; if you are intellectually convinced or attracted, you can now seek the real knowledge, but you must seek it by other means which are beyond my province.”

But there is another level of the religious life in which reason might seem justified in interfering more independently and entitled to assume a superior role. For as there is the suprarational life in which religious aspiration finds entirely what it seeks, so too there is also the infrarational life of the instincts, impulses, sensations, crude emotions, vital activities from which all human aspiration takes its beginning. These too feel the touch of the religious sense in man, share its needs and experience, desire its satisfactions. Religion includes this satisfaction also in its scope, and in what is usually called religion it seems even to be the greater part, sometimes to an external view almost the whole; for the supreme purity of spiritual experience does not appear or is glimpsed only through this mixed and turbid current. Much impurity, ignorance, superstition, many doubtful elements must form as the result of this contact and union of our highest tendencies with our lower ignorant nature. Here it would seem that reason has its legitimate part; here surely it can intervene to enlighten, purify, rationalise the play of the instincts and impulses. It would seem that a religious reformation, a movement to substitute a “pure” and rational religion for one that is largely infrarational and impure, would be a distinct advance in the religious development of humanity. To
a certain extent this may be, but, owing to the peculiar nature
of the religious being, its entire urge towards the suprarational,
not without serious qualifications, nor can the rational mind do
anything here that is of a high positive value.

Religious forms and systems become effete and corrupt and
have to be destroyed, or they lose much of their inner sense and
become clouded in knowledge and injurious in practice, and
in destroying what is effete or in negating aberrations reason
has played an important part in religious history. But in its en-
deavour to get rid of the superstition and ignorance which have
attached themselves to religious forms and symbols, intellectual
reason unenlightened by spiritual knowledge tends to deny and,
so far as it can, to destroy the truth and the experience which
was contained in them. Reformations which give too much to
reason and are too negative and protestant, usually create reli-
gions which lack in wealth of spirituality and fullness of religious
emotion; they are not opulent in their contents; their form and
too often their spirit is impoverished, bare and cold. Nor are
they really rational; for they live not by their reasoning and
dogma, which to the rational mind is as irrational as that of
the creeds they replace, still less by their negations, but by their
positive quantum of faith and fervour which is suprarational
in its whole aim and has too its infrarational elements. If these
seem less gross to the ordinary mind than those of less self-
questioning creeds, it is often because they are more timid in
venturing into the realm of suprarational experience. The life
of the instincts and impulses on its religious side cannot be
satisfyingly purified by reason, but rather by being sublimated,
by being lifted up into the illuminations of the spirit. The natural
line of religious development proceeds always by illumination;
and religious reformation acts best when either it reilluminates
rather than destroys old forms or, where destruction is neces-
sary, replaces them by richer and not by poorer forms, and in
any case when it purifies by suprarational illumination, not by
rational enlightenment. A purely rational religion could only be
a cold and bare Deism, and such attempts have always failed
to achieve vitality and permanence; for they act contrary to
the dharma, the natural law and spirit of religion. If reason is to play any decisive part, it must be an intuitive rather than an intellectual reason, touched always by spiritual intensity and insight. For it must be remembered that the infraranational also has behind it a secret Truth which does not fall within the domain of the Reason and is not wholly amenable to its judgments. The heart has its knowledge, the life has its intuitive spirit within it, its intimations, divinations, outbreaks and upflamings of a Secret Energy, a divine or at least semi-divine aspiration and outreaching which the eye of intuition alone can fathom and only intuitive speech or symbol can shape or utter. To root out these things from religion or to purge religion of any elements necessary for its completeness because the forms are defective or obscure, without having the power to illuminate them from within or the patience to wait for their illumination from above or without replacing them by more luminous symbols, is not to purify but to pauperise.

But the relations of the spirit and the reason need not be, as they too often are in our practice, hostile or without any point of contact. Religion itself need not adopt for its principle the formula “I believe because it is impossible” or Pascal’s “I believe because it is absurd.” What is impossible or absurd to the unaided reason, becomes real and right to the reason lifted beyond itself by the power of the spirit and irradiated by its light. For then it is dominated by the intuitive mind which is our means of passage to a yet higher principle of knowledge. The widest spirituality does not exclude or discourage any essential human activity or faculty, but works rather to lift all of them up out of their imperfection and groping ignorance, transforms them by its touch and makes them the instruments of the light, power and joy of the divine being and the divine nature.