APPENDIX I

The Tangle of Karma

OBVIOUSLY we must leave far behind us the current theory of Karma and its shallow attempt to justify the ways of the Cosmic Spirit by forcing on them a crude identity with the summary notions of law and justice, the crude and often savagely primitive methods of reward and punishment, lure and deterrent dear to the surface human mind. There is here a more authentic and spiritual truth at the base of Nature’s action and a far less mechanically calculable movement. Here is no rigid and narrow ethical law bound down to a petty human significance, no teaching of a child soul by a mixed system of blows and lollipops, no unprofitable wheel of a brutal cosmic justice automatically moved in the traces of man’s ignorant judgments and earthy desires and instincts. Life and rebirth do not follow these artificial constructions, but a movement spiritual and intimate to the deepest intention of Nature. A cosmic Will and Wisdom observant of the ascending march of the soul’s consciousness and experience as it emerges out of subconscient Matter and climbs to its own luminous divinity fixes the norm and constantly enlarges the lines of the law—or, let us say, since law is a too mechanical conception,—the truth of Karma.

For what we understand by law is a single immutably habitual movement or recurrence in Nature fruitful of a determined sequence of things and that sequence must be clear, precise, limited to its formula, invariable. If it is not that, if there is too much flexibility of movement, if there intervenes too embarrassing a variety or criss-cross of action and reaction, a too rich complex of forces, the narrow uncompromising incompetence of our logical intelligence finds there not law but an incertitude and a chaos. Our reason must be allowed to cut and hew and arbitrarily select its suitable circumstances, isolate its immutable
data, skeletonise or mechanise life; otherwise it stands open-mouthed at a loss unable to think with precision or act with effect in a field of subtle and indefinite measures. It must be allowed to deal with mighty Nature as it deals with human society, politics, ethics, conduct; for it can understand and do good work only where it is licensed to build and map out its own artificial laws, erect a clear, precise, rigid, infallible system and leave as little room as possible for the endless flexibility and variety and complexity that presses from the Infinite upon our mind and life. Moved by this need we endeavour to forge for our own souls and for the cosmic Spirit even such a single and inflexible law of Karma as we would ourselves have made, had the rule of the world been left to us. Not this mysterious universe would we have made, but the pattern of a rational cosmos fitted to our call for a simple definite guidance in action and for a well-marked thumb rule facile and clear to our limited intelligence. But this force we call Karma turns out to be no such precise and invariable mechanism as we hoped; it is rather a thing of many planes that changes its face and walk and very substance as it mounts from level to higher level, and on each plane even it is not one movement but an indefinite complex of many spiral movements hard enough for us to harmonise together or to find out whatever secret harmony unknown to us and incalculable these complexities are weaving out in this mighty field of the dealings of the soul with Nature.

Let us then call Karma no longer a Law, but rather the many-sided dynamic truth of all action and life, the organic movement here of the Infinite. That was what the ancient thinkers saw in it before it was cut and shredded by lesser minds and turned into an easy and misleading popular formula. Action of Karma follows and takes up many potential lines of the spirit into its multitudinous surge, many waves and streams of combining and disputing world-forces; it is the processus of the creative Infinite; it is the long and multiform way of the progression of the individual and the cosmic soul in Nature. Its complexities cannot be unravelled by our physical mind ever bound up in the superficial appearance, nor by our vital mind of desire stumbling
forward in the cloud of its own instincts and longings and rash determinations through the maze of these myriad favouring and opposing forces that surround and urge and drive and hamper us from the visible and invisible worlds. Nor can it be perfectly classified, accounted for, tied up in bundles by the precisions of our logical intelligence in its inveterate search for clear-cut dogmas. On that day only shall we perfectly decipher what is now to us Nature’s obscure hieroglyph of Karma when there rises in our enlarged consciousness the supramental way of knowledge. The supramental eye can see a hundred meeting and diverging motions in one glance and envelop in the largeness of its harmonising vision of Truth all that to our minds is clash and opposition and the collision and interlocked strife of numberless contending truths and powers. Truth to the supramental sight is at once single and infinite and the complexities of its play serve to bring out with an abundant ease the rich significance of the Eternal’s many-sided oneness.

The complexity of the lines of Karma is much greater than we have yet seen in the steps of thought that we have been obliged to cut in order to climb to the summits where they converge. For the convenience of the mind we have chosen to speak as if there were four quite separate planes each with its separate lines of Karma,—the physical with its fixed law and very easily perceptible return to our energies, the life plane, complex, full of doubtful rewards and dangerous rebounds, rich promise and dark menace, the mind plane with its high trenchant unattainable absolutes each in its separateness so difficult to embody and all so hard to reconcile and combine and the supramental where Nature’s absolutes are reached, her relativities ordered to their place and all these lower movements delivered and harmonised because they have found luminously their inner spiritual reason for existence. That division is not false in itself, but its truth is subject to two capital provisos which at once give them a complexity not apparent in the first formula. There are above and behind our human existence the four levels but there each plane contains in itself the others, although in each these others are subject to the dominant law
of the plane,—life for instance obeys on the mental level the law of mind and turns its movements into an instrumentation of the free intelligence. Again man exists here in the body and the physical world; he is open more or less to the vast movements of a life plane and the free movements of a mental world that are far vaster and freer in their potentialities than anything that we call here life and mind, but he does not live in that free mental light or in that vast vital force. His business is to bring down and embody here as much of that greater life and greater mind as can be precipitated into matter and equipped with a form and organised in the physical formula. In proportion as he ascends he does indeed rise above the physical and vital into the higher mental lines of Karma, but he cannot leave them entirely behind him. The saint, the intellectual man, scientist, thinker or creator, the seeker after beauty, the seeker after any mental absolute is not that alone; he is also, even if less exclusively than others, the vital and physical man; subject to the urgings of the life and the body, he participates in the vital and physical motives of Karma and receives the perplexed and intertwined return of these energies. It is not intended in his birth that he shall live entirely in mind, for he is here to deal with life and Matter as well and to bring as best he can a higher law into life and Matter. And since he is not a mental being in a mental world, it is not easy and in the end, we may suspect, not possible for him to impose entirely and perfectly the law of the mental absolutes, a mental good, beauty, love, truth and power on his lower parts. He has to take this other difficult truth into account that life and Matter have absolutes of their own armed with an equal right to formulation and persistence and he has to find some light, some truth, some spiritual and supramental power that can take up these imperatives also no less than the mind’s imperatives and harmonise all in a grand and integral transformation. But the difficulty is again that if he is not open to the world of free intelligence, he is still less open to the deeper and vaster spiritual and supramental levels. There can indeed be great descents of spiritual light, purity, power, love, delight into the earth consciousness in its human formula;
but man as he is now can hold only a little of these things and he can give them no adequate organisation and shape and body in his mental movements or his life-action or his physical and material consciousness and dynamis. The moment he tries to get at the absolute of the spirit, he feels himself obliged to reject body, to silence mind, and to draw back from life. It is that urgent necessity, that inability of mind and life and body to hold and answer to the spirit that is the secret of asceticism, the philosophical justification of the illusionist, the compulsion that moves the eremite and the recluse. If on the other hand he tries to spiritualise mind and life and the body he finds in the end that he has only brought down the spirit to a lower formulation that cannot give all its truth and purity and power. He has to some extent spiritualised mind, but much more has he mentalised the spiritual and to mentalise the spiritual is to falsify and obscure it or at the very least to dilute its truth, to imprison its force, to limit and alter its potentialities. He has perhaps to a much less extent spiritualised his life, but much more has he vitalised the spiritual and to vitalise the spiritual is to degrade it. He has never yet spiritualised the body, at most he has minimised the physical by a spiritual refusal and abstinence or brought down some mental and vital powers mistaken for spiritual into his physical force and physical frame. More has not been done in the human past so far as we can discover, or if anything greater was done it was a transitory gain from the superconscient and has returned again into our superconscience.

The secret reason of man’s failure to rise truly beyond himself is a fundamental incapacity in the mind, the life and the body to organise the highest integral truth and power of the spirit. And this incapacity exists because mind and life and matter are in their nature depressed and imperfect powers of the Infinite that need to be transformed into something greater than themselves before they can escape from their depression and imperfection; in their very nature they are a system of partial and separated values and cannot adequately express or embody the integral and the one, a movement of many divergent and mutually non-understanding or misunderstanding lines they cannot arrive
of themselves at any but a provisional, limited and imperfect harmony and order. There is no doubt a material Infinite, a vital Infinite, a mental Infinite in which we feel a perfection, a delight, an essential harmony, an inexpressible completeness which, when we experience it, makes us disregard the discords and imperfections and obscurities we see and even perceive them as elements of the infinite perfection. In other words the Spirit, the Infinite supports these depressed values and elicits from them a certain joy of his manifestation that is complete and illimitable enough in its own manner. But there is more behind and above, there are greater more unmistakably harmonious values, greater truly perfect powers of the Spirit than mind, life and matter and these wait for their expression and only when they are expressed can we escape from this system of harmony through discords and of a perfection on the whole that subsists by imperfection in the detail. And as we open to a greater knowledge, we find that even for such harmonies, stabilities, perfections as the energies of Mind, Life and Matter can realise, they depend really not on their own delegated and inferior power which is at best a more or less ignorant instrument but on a greater deeper organisating force and knowledge of which they are the inadequate derivations. That force and knowledge is the self-possessed supramental power and will and the perfect and untrammelled supramental gnosis of the Infinite. It is that which has fixed the precise measures of Matter, regulates the motive instincts and impulsions of Life, holds together the myriad seekings of Mind; but none of these things are that power and gnosis and nothing therefore mental, vital or physical is final or can even find its own integral truth and harmony nor all these together their reconciliation until they are taken up and transformed in a supramental manifestation. For this supermind or gnosis is the entire organisating will and knowledge of the spiritual, it is the Truth Consciousness, the Truth Force, the organic instrumentation of divine Law, the all-seeing eye of the divine Vision, the freely selecting and generating harmony of the eternal Ananda.