Involution and Evolution

THE WESTERN idea of evolution is the statement of a process of formation, not an explanation of our being. Limited to the physical and biological data of Nature, it does not attempt except in a summary or a superficial fashion to discover its own meaning, but is content to announce itself as the general law of a quite mysterious and inexplicable energy. Evolution becomes a problem in motion which is satisfied to work up with an automatic regularity its own puzzle, but not to work it out, because, since it is only a process, it has no understanding of itself, and, since it is a blind perpetual automatism of mechanical energy, it has neither an origin nor an issue. It began perhaps or is always beginning; it will stop perhaps in time or is always somewhere stopping and going back to its beginnings, but there is no why, only a great turmoil and fuss of a how to its beginning and its cessation; for there is in its acts no fountain of spiritual intention, but only the force of an unresting material necessity. The ancient idea of evolution was the fruit of a philosophical intuition, the modern is an effort of scientific observation. Each as enounced misses something, but the ancient got at the spirit of the movement where the modern is content with a form and the most external machinery. The Sankhya thinker gave us the psychological elements of the total evolutionary process, analysed mind and sense and the subtle basis of matter and divined some of the secrets of the executive energy, but had no eye for the detail of the physical labour of Nature. He saw in it too not only the covering active evident Force, but the concealed sustaining spiritual entity, though by an excess of the analytic intellect, obsessed with its love of trenchant scissions and symmetrical oppositions, he set between meeting Soul and Force an original and eternal gulf or line of separation. The modern scientist strives to make a complete scheme and
institution of the physical method which he has detected in its minute workings, but is blind to the miracle each step involves or content to lose the sense of it in the satisfied observation of a vast ordered phenomenon. But always the marvel of the thing remains, one with the inexplicable wonder of all existence,—even as it is said in the ancient Scripture,

āścaryavat paśyati kaścid enam,
āścaryavad vadati tathaiva caṇyaḥ;
āścaryavac cainam anyaḥ śrṇoti,
śrutvāpyenaṁ veda na caiva kaścit.

“One looks on it and sees a miracle, another speaks of it as a miracle, as a miracle another hears of it, but what it is, for all the hearing, none knoweth.” We know that an evolution there is, but not what evolution is; that remains still one of the initial mysteries of Nature.

For evolution, as is the habit with the human reason’s accounts and solutions of the deep and unfathomable way of the spirit in things, raises more questions than it solves; it does not do away with the problem of creation, for all its appearance of solid orderly fact, any more than the religious affirmation of an external omnipotent Creator could do it or the illusionist’s mystic Maya, aghanā-ghanā-patīyasi, very skilful in bringing about the impossible, some strange existent non-existent Power with an idea in That which is beyond and without ideas, self-empowered to create an existent non-existent world, existent because it very evidently is, non-existent because it is a patched up consistency of dreamful unreal transiences. The problem is only prolonged, put farther back, given a subtle and orderly, but all the more challengingly complex appearance. But, even when our questioning is confined to the one issue of evolution alone, the difficulty still arises of the essential significance of the bare outward facts observed, what is meant by evolution, what is it that evolves, from what and by what force of necessity? The scientist is content to affirm an original matter or substance, atomic, electric, etheric or whatever it may finally turn out to be, which by the very nature of its own inherent energy or of an
energy acting in it and on it,—the two things are not the same, and the distinction, though it may seem immaterial in the beginning of the process, is of a considerable ultimate consequence,—produces owing to some unexplained law, constant system of results or other unalterable principle a number of different basic forms and powers of matter or different sensible and effective movements of energy: these come into being, it seems, when the minute original particles of matter meet together in variously disposed quantities, measures and combinations, and all the rest is a varying, developing, mounting movement of organised energy and its evolutionary consequences, pariṇāma, which depends on this crude constituting basis. All that is or may be a correct statement of phenomenal fact,—but we must not forget that the fundamental theory of science has been going of late through a considerable commotion of an upsetting and a rapid rearrangement,—but it carries us no step farther towards the principal, the all-important thing that we want to know. The way in which man sees and experiences the universe, imposes on his reason the necessity of a one original eternal substance of which all things are the forms and a one eternal original energy of which all movement of action and consequence is the variation. But the whole question is what is the reality of this substance and what is the essential nature of this energy?

Then, even if we suppose the least explicable part of the action to be an evolutionary development of the immaterial from Matter, still is that development a creation or a liberation, a birth of what did not exist before or a slow bringing out of what already existed in suppressed fact or in eternal potentiality? And the interest of the question becomes acute, its importance incalculable when we come to the still unexplained phenomenon of life and mind. Is life a creation out of inanimate substance or the appearance of a new, a suddenly or slowly resultant power out of the brute material energy, and is conscious mind a creation out of inconscient or subconscient life, or do these powers and godheads appear because they were always there though in a shrouded and by us unrecognizable condition of their hidden or suppressed idea and activity, Nomen and Numen? And what
of the soul and of man? Is soul a new result or creation of our mentalised life, — even so many regard it, because it clearly appears as a self-conscious, bright, distinguishable power only when thinking life has reached some high pitch of its intensity, — or is it not a permanent entity, the original mystery that now unveils its hidden form, the eternal companion of the energy we call Nature, her secret inhabitant or her very spirit and reality? And is man a biological creation of a brute energy which has somehow unexpectedly and quite inexplicably managed to begin to feel and think, or is he in his real self that inner Being and Power which is the whole sense of the evolution and the master of Nature? Is Nature only the force of self-expression, self-formation, self-creation of a secret spirit, and man however hedged in his present capacity, the first being in Nature in whom that power begins to be consciently self-creative in the front of the action, in this outer chamber of physical being, there set to work and bring out by an increasingly self-conscious evolution what he can of all its human significance or its divine possibility? That is the clear conclusion we must arrive at in the end, if we once admit as the key of the whole movement, the reality of this whole mounting creation a spiritual evolution.

The word evolution carries with it in its intrinsic sense, in the idea at its root the necessity of a previous involution. We must, if a hidden spiritual being is the secret of all the action of Nature, give its full power to that latent value of the idea. We are bound then to suppose that all that evolves already existed involved, passive or otherwise active, but in either case concealed from us in the shell of material Nature. The Spirit which manifests itself here in a body, must be involved from the beginning in the whole of matter and in every knot, formation and particle of matter; life, mind and whatever is above mind must be latent inactive or concealed active powers in all the operations of material energy. The only alternative would be to drive in between the two sides of our being the acute Sankhya scission; but that divides too much spirit and nature. Nature would be an inert and mechanical thing, but she would set to her work activised by some pressure on her of the Spirit. Spirit would be Being conscious
and free in its own essence from the natural activity, but would phenomenally modify or appear to modify its consciousness in response to some reaction of Nature. One would reflect the movements of the active Power, the other would enlighten her activities with the consciousness of the self-aware immortal being. In that case the scientific evolutionary view of Nature as a vast mechanical energy, life, mind and natural soul action its scale of developing operations would have a justification. Our consciousness would only be a luminous translation of the self-driven unceasing mechanical activity into responsive notes of experience of the consenting spiritual witness. But the disabling difficulty in this notion is the quite opposite character of our own highest seeing; for in the end and as the energy of the universal force mounts up the gradients of its own possibilities, Nature becomes always more evidently a power of the spirit and all her mechanism only figures of its devising mastery. The power of the Flame cannot be divided from the Flame; where the Flame is, there is the power, and where the power is there is the fiery Principle. We have to come back to the idea of a spirit present in the universe and, if the process of its works of power and its appearance is in the steps of an evolution, there imposes itself the necessity of a previous involution.

This spirit in things is not apparent from the beginning, but self-betrayed in an increasing light of manifestation. We see the compressed powers of Nature start released from their original involution, disclose in a passion of work the secrets of their infinite capacity, press upon themselves and on the supporting inferior principle to subject its lower movement on which they are forced to depend into a higher working proper to their own type and feel their proper greatness in the greatness of their self-revealing effectuations. Life takes hold of matter and breathes into it the numberless figures of its abundant creative force, its subtle and variable patterns, its enthusiasm of birth and death and growth and act and response, its will of more and more complex organisation of experience, its quivering search and feeling out after a self-consciousness of its own pleasure and pain and understanding gust of action; mind seizes on life to make
it an instrument for the wonders of will and intelligence; soul possesses and lifts mind through the attraction of beauty and good and wisdom and greatness towards the joy of some half-seen ideal highest existence; and in all this miraculous movement and these climbing greatnesses each step sets its foot on a higher rung and opens to a clearer, larger and fuller scope and view of the always secret and always self-manifesting spirit in things. The eye fixed on the physical evolution has only the sight of a mechanical grandeur and subtlety of creation; the evolution of life opening to mind, the evolution of mind opening to the soul of its own light and action, the evolution of soul out of the limited powers of mind to a resplendent blaze of the infinities of spiritual being are the more significant things, give us greater and subtler reaches of the self-disclosing Secrecy. The physical evolution is only an outward sign, the more and more complex and subtle development of a supporting structure, the growing exterior metre mould of form which is devised to sustain in matter the rising intonations of the spiritual harmony. The spiritual significance finds us as the notes rise; but not till we get to the summit of the scale can we command the integral meaning of that for which all these first formal measures were made the outward lines, the sketch or the crude notation. Life itself is only a coloured vehicle, physical birth a convenience for the greater and greater births of the Spirit.

The spiritual process of evolution is then in some sense a creation, but a self-creation, not a making of what never was, but a bringing out of what was implicit in the Being. The Sanskrit word for creation signifies a loosing forth, a letting out into the workings of Nature. The Upanishad in a telling figure applies the image of the spider which brings its web out of itself and creates the structure in which it takes its station. That is applied in the ancient Scripture not to the evolution of things out of Matter, but to an original bringing of temporal becoming out of the eternal infinity; Matter itself and this material universe are only such a web or indeed no more than a part of it brought out from the spiritual being of the Infinite. But the same truth, the same law holds good of all that we see of the emergence of things from
involution in the material energy. We might almost speak here of a double evolution. A Force inherent in the Infinite brings out of it eternally the structure of its action in a universe of which the last descending scale is based upon an involution of all the powers of the spirit into an inconscient absorption in her self-oblivious passion of form and structural working. Thence comes an ascent and progressive liberation of power after power till the spirit self-disclosed and set free by knowledge and mastery of its works repossesses the eternal fullness of its being which envelops then and carries in its grasp the manifold and unified splendours of its nature. At any rate the spiritual process of which our human birth is a step and our life is a portion, appears as the bringing out of a greatness, asya mahimānam, which is secret, inherent and self-imprisoned, absorbed in the form and working of things. Our world-action figures an evolution, an outrolling of a manifold Power gathered and coiled up in the crude intricacy of Matter. The upward progress of the successive births of things is a rise into waking and larger and larger light of a consciousness shut into the first hermetic cell of sleep of the eternal Energy.

There is a parallel in the Yogic experience of the Kundalini, eternal Force coiled up in the body in the bottom root vessel or chamber, mūlādharā, pedestal, earth-centre of the physical nervous system. There she slumbers coiled up like a Python and filled full of all that she holds gathered in her being, but when she is struck by the freely coursing breath, by the current of Life which enters in to search for her, she awakes and rises flaming up the ladder of the spinal chord and forces open centre after centre of the involved dynamic secrets of consciousness till at the summit she finds, joins and becomes one with the spirit. Thus she passes from an involution in inconscience through a series of opening glories of her powers into the greatest eternal superconscience of the spirit. This mysterious evolving Nature in the world around us follows even such a course. Inconscient being is not so much a matrix as a chamber of materialised energy in which are gathered up all the powers of the spirit; they are there, but work in the conditions of the material energy, involved, we say, and therefore not apparent as themselves because they have
passed into a form of working subnormal to their own right scale where the characteristics by which we recognise and think we know them are suppressed into a minor and an undetected force of working. As Nature rises in the scale, she liberates them into their recognisable scales of energy, discloses the operations by which they can feel themselves and their greatness. At the highest summit she rises into the self-knowledge of the spirit which informed her action, but because of its involution or concealment in the forms of its workings could not be known in the greatness of its reality. Spirit and Nature discovering the secret of her energies become one at the top of the spiritual evolution by a soul in Nature which awakens to the significance of its own being in the liberation of the highest truth: it comes to know that its births were the births, the assumptions of form of an eternal Spirit, to know itself as that and not a creature of Nature and rises to the possession of the revealed, full and highest power of its own real and spiritual nature. That liberation, because liberation is self-possession, comes to us as the crown of a spiritual evolution.

We must consider all the packed significance of this involution. The spirit involved in material energy is there with all its powers; life, mind and a greater supramental power are involved in Matter. But what do we mean when we say that they are involved, and do we mean that all these things are quite different energies cut off from each other by an essential separateness, but rolled up together in an interaction, or do we mean that there is only one Being with its one energy, varying shades of the light of its power differentiated in the spectrum of Nature? When we say that Life is involved in Matter or in material Force, for of that Force Matter seems after all to be only a various self-spun formation, do we not mean that all this universal working, even in what seems to us its inconscient inanimate action, is a life-power of the spirit busy with formation, and we do not recognise it because it is there in a lower scale in which the characteristics by which we recognise life are not evident or are only slightly evolved in the dullness of the material covering? Material energy would be then Life packed into the density of
Matter and feeling out in it for its own intenser recognisable power which it finds within itself in the material concealment and liberates into action. Life itself would be an energy of a secret mind, a mind imprisoned in its own forms and quivering out in the nervous seekings of life for its intenser recognisable power of consciousness which it discovers within the vital and material suppression and liberates into sensibility. No doubt, practically, these powers work upon each other as different energies, but in essence they would be one energy and their interaction the power of the spirit working by its higher on its lower forces, depending on them at first, but yet turning in the scale of its ascent to overtop and master them. Mind too might only be an inferior scale and formulation derived from a much greater and supramental consciousness, and that consciousness too with its greater light and will a characteristic originating power of spiritual being, the power which secret in all things, in mind, in life, in matter, in the plant and the metal and the atom assures constantly by its inevitable action the idea and harmony of the universe. And what is the spirit itself but infinite existence, eternal, immortal being, but always a conscious self-aware being, — and that is the difference between the materialist’s mechanical monism and the spiritual theory of the universe, — which here expresses itself in a world finite to our conceptions whose every movement yet bears witness to the Infinite? And this world is because the spirit has the delight of its own infinite existence and the delight of its own infinite self-variation; birth is because all consciousness carries with it power of its own being and all power of being is self-creative and must have the joy of its self-creation. For creation means nothing else than a self-expression; and the birth of the soul in the body is nothing but a mode of its own self-expression. Therefore all things here are expression, form, energy, action of the Spirit; matter itself is but form of spirit, life but power of being of the spirit, mind but working of consciousness of the spirit. All Nature is a display and a play of God, power and action and self-creation of the one spiritual Being. Nature presents to spirit at once the force, the instrument, the medium, the obstacle, the result of his powers, and all these
things, obstacle as well as instrument, are the necessary elements for a gradual and developing creation.

But if the Spirit has involved its eternal greatness in the material universe and is there evolving its powers by the virtue of a secret self-knowledge, is disclosing them in a grandiose succession under the self-imposed difficulties of a material form of being, is disengaging them from a first veiling absorbed in-consciousness of Nature, there is no difficulty in thinking or seeing that this soul shaped into humanity is a being of that Being, that this also has risen out of material involution by increasing self-expression in a series of births of which each grade is a new ridge of the ascent opening to higher powers of the spirit and that it is still arising and will not be for ever limited by the present walls of its birth but may, if we will, be born into a divine humanity. Our humanity is the conscious meeting place of the finite and the infinite and to grow more and more towards that Infinite even in this physical birth is our privilege. This Infinite, this Spirit who is housed within us but not bound or shut in by mind or body, is our own self and to find and be our self was, as the ancient sages knew, always the object of our human striving, for it is the object of the whole immense working of Nature. But it is by degrees of the self-finding that Nature enlarges to her spiritual reality. Man himself is a doubly involved being; most of himself in mind and below is involved in a subliminal conscience or a subconscience; most of himself above mind is involved in a spiritual superconscience. When he becomes conscient in the superconscience, the heights and the depths of his being will be illumined by another light of knowledge than the flickering lamp of the reason can now cast into a few corners; for then the master of the field will enlighten this whole wonderful field of his being, as the sun illumines the whole system it has created out of its own glories. Then only he can know the reality even of his own mind and life and body. Mind will be changed into a greater consciousness, his life will be a direct power and action of the Divinity, his very body no longer this first gross lump of breathing clay, but a very image and body of spiritual being. That transfiguration on the summit
of the mountain, divine birth, *divya janma*, is that to which all these births are a long series of laborious steps. An involution of spirit in matter is the beginning, but a spiritual assumption of divine birth is the fullness of the evolution.

East and West have two ways of looking at life which are opposite sides of one reality. Between the pragmatic truth on which the vital thought of modern Europe enamoured of the vigour of life, all the dance of God in Nature, puts so vehement and exclusive a stress and the eternal immutable Truth to which the Indian mind enamoured of calm and poise loves to turn with an equal passion for an exclusive finding, there is no such divorce and quarrel as is now declared by the partisan mind, the separating reason, the absorbing passion of an exclusive will of realisation. The one eternal immutable Truth is the Spirit and without the spirit the pragmatic truth of a self-creating universe would have no origin or foundation; it would be barren of significance, empty of inner guidance, lost in its end, a firework display shooting up into the void only to fall away and perish in mid-air. But neither is the pragmatic truth a dream of the non-existent, an illusion or a long lapse into some futile delirium of creative imagination; that would be to make the eternal Spirit a drunkard or a dreamer, the fool of his own gigantic self-hallucinations. The truths of universal existence are of two kinds, truths of the spirit which are themselves eternal and immutable, and these are the great things that cast themselves out into becoming and there constantly realise their powers and significances, and the play of the consciousness with them, the discords, the musical variations, soundings of possibility, progressive notations, reversions, perversions, mounting conversions into a greater figure of harmony; and of all these things the spirit has made, makes always his universe. But it is himself that he makes in it, himself that is the creator and the energy of creation and the cause and the method and the result of the working, the mechanist and the machine, the music and the musician, the poet and the poem, supermind, mind and life and matter, the soul and Nature.

An original error pursues us in our solutions of our problem. We are perplexed by the appearance of an antinomy; we set soul
against Nature, the spirit against his creative energy. But Soul and Nature, Purusha and Prakriti, are two eternal lovers who possess their perpetual unity and enjoy their constant difference, and in the unity abound in the passion of the multitudinous play of their difference, and in every step of the difference abound in the secret sense or the overt consciousness of unity. Nature takes the Soul into herself so that he falls asleep in a trance of union with her absorbed passion of creation and she too seems then to be asleep in the whirl of her own creative energy; and that is the involution in Matter. Above, it may be, the Soul takes Nature into himself so that she falls asleep in a trance of oneness with the absorbed self-possession of the spirit and he too seems to be asleep in the deep of his own self-locked immobile being. But still above and below and around and within all this beat and rhythm is the eternity of the spirit who has thus figured himself in soul and nature and enjoys with a perfect awareness all that he creates in himself by this involution and evolution. The soul fulfills itself in Nature when it possesses in her the consciousness of that eternity and its power and joy and transfigures the natural becoming with the fullness of the spiritual being. The constant self-creation which we call birth finds there the perfect evolution of all that it held in its own nature and reveals its own utmost significance. The complete soul possesses all its self and all Nature.

Therefore all this evolution is a growing of the Self in material nature to the conscious possession of its own spiritual being. It begins with form — apparently a form of Force — in which a spirit is housed and hidden; it ends in a spirit which consciously directs its own force and creates or assumes its own forms for the free joy of its being in Nature. Nature holding her own self and spirit involved and suppressed within herself, an imprisoned master of existence subjected to her ways of birth and action, — yet are these ways his and this spirit the condition of her being and the law of her workings, — commences the evolution: the spirit holding Nature conscious in himself, complete by his completeness, liberated by his liberation, perfected in his perfection, crowns the evolution. All our births are the
births of this spirit and self which has become or put forth a soul in Nature. To be is the object of our existence,—there is no other end or object, for the consciousness and bliss of being is the whole beginning and middle and end, as it is that which is without beginning or end. But this means in the steps of the evolution to grow more and more until we grow into our own fullness of self; all birth is a progressive self-finding, a means of self-realisation. To grow in knowledge, in power, in delight, love and oneness, towards the infinite light, capacity and bliss of spiritual existence, to universalise ourselves till we are one with all being, and to exceed constantly our present limited self till it opens fully to the transcendence in which the universal lives and to base upon it all our becoming, that is the full evolution of what now lies darkly wrapped or works half evolved in Nature.