Chapter XXV

The Knot of Matter

I cannot travel to the Truth of the luminous Lord by force or by the duality. . . . Who are they that protect the foundation of the falsehood? Who are the guardians of the unreal word?

Then existence was not nor non-existence, the mid-world was not nor the Ether nor what is beyond. What covered all? where was it? in whose refuge? what was that ocean dense and deep? Death was not nor immortality nor the knowledge of day and night. That One lived without breath by his self-law, there was nothing else nor aught beyond it. In the beginning Darkness was hidden by darkness, all this was an ocean of inconscience. When universal being was concealed by fragmentation, then by the greatness of its energy That One was born. That moved at first as desire within, which was the primal seed of mind. The seers of Truth discovered the building of being in non-being by will in the heart and by the thought; their ray was extended horizontally; but what was there below, what was there above? There were Casters of the seed, there were Greatnesses; there was self-law below, there was Will above.

Rig Veda.¹

If then the conclusion at which we have arrived is correct, — and there is no other possible on the data upon which we are working, — the sharp division which practical experience and long habit of mind have created between Spirit and Matter has no longer any fundamental reality. The world is a differentiated unity, a manifold oneness, not a constant attempt at compromise between eternal dissonances, not an everlasting

¹ V. 12. 2, 4; X. 129. 1-5.
struggle between irreconcilable opposites. An inalienable one-
ness generating infinite variety is its foundation and beginning;
a constant reconciliation behind apparent division and struggle
combining all possible disparates for vast ends in a secret Con-
sciousness and Will which is ever one and master of all its own
complex action, appears to be its real character in the middle;
we must assume therefore that a fulfilment of the emerging Will
and Consciousness and a triumphant harmony must be its con-
clusion. Substance is the form of itself on which it works, and of
that substance if Matter is one end, Spirit is the other. The two
are one: Spirit is the soul and reality of that which we sense as
Matter; Matter is a form and body of that which we realise as
Spirit.

Certainly, there is a vast practical difference and on that
difference the whole indivisible series and ever-ascending degrees
of the world-existence are founded. Substance, we have said, is
conscious existence presenting itself to the sense as object so that,
on the basis of whatever sense-relation is established, the work
of world-formation and cosmic progression may proceed. But
there need not be only one basis, only one fundamental principle
of relation immutably created between sense and substance; on
the contrary, there is an ascending and developing series. We
are aware of another substance in which pure mind works as
its natural medium and which is far subtler, more flexible, more
plastic than anything that our physical sense can conceive of as
Matter. We can speak of a substance of mind because we become
aware of a subtler medium in which forms arise and action takes
place; we can speak also of a substance of pure dynamic life-
ergy other than the subtlest forms of material substance and its
physically sensible force-currents. Spirit itself is pure substance
of being presenting itself as an object no longer to physical, vital
or mental sense, but to a light of a pure spiritual perceptive
knowledge in which the subject becomes its own object, that is
to say, in which the Timeless and Spaceless is aware of itself in
a pure spiritually self-conceptive self-extension as the basis and
primal material of all existence. Beyond this foundation is the
disappearance of all conscious differentiation between subject
The Life Divine

and object in an absolute identity, and there we can no longer speak of Substance.

Therefore it is a purely conceptive — a spiritually, not a mentally conceptive difference ending in a practical distinction, which creates the series descending from Spirit through Mind to Matter and ascending again from Matter through Mind to Spirit. But the real oneness is never abrogated, and, when we get back to the original and integral view of things, we see that it is never even truly diminished or impaired, not even in the grossest densities of Matter. Brahman is not only the cause and supporting power and indwelling principle of the universe, he is also its material and its sole material. Matter also is Brahman and it is nothing other than or different from Brahman. If indeed Matter were cut off from Spirit, this would not be so; but it is, as we have seen, only a final form and objective aspect of the divine Existence with all of God ever present in it and behind it. As this apparently brute and inert Matter is everywhere and always instinct with a mighty dynamic force of Life, as this dynamic but apparently unconscious Life secretes within it an ever-working unapparent Mind of whose secret dealings it is the overt energy, as this ignorant, unillumined and groping Mind in the living body is supported and sovereignly guided by its own real self, the Supermind, which is there equally in unmentalised Matter, so all Matter as well as all Life, Mind and Supermind are only modes of the Brahman, the Eternal, the Spirit, Sachchidananda, who not only dwells in them all, but is all these things though no one of them is His absolute being.

But still there is this conceptive difference and practical distinction, and in that, even if Matter is not really cut off from Spirit, yet it seems with such a practical definiteness to be so cut off, it is so different, even so contrary in its law, the material life seems so much to be the negation of all spiritual existence that its rejection might well appear to be the one short cut out of the difficulty, — as undoubtedly it is; but a short cut or any cut is no solution. Still, there, in Matter undoubtedly lies the crux; that raises the obstacle: for because of Matter Life is gross and limited and stricken with death and pain, because of
Matter Mind is more than half blind, its wings clipped, its feet tied to a narrow perch and held back from the vastness and freedom above of which it is conscious. Therefore the exclusive spiritual seeker is justified from his view-point if, disgusted with the mud of Matter, revolted by the animal grossness of Life or impatient of the self-imprisoned narrowness and downward vision of Mind, he determines to break from it all and return by inaction and silence to the Spirit’s immobile liberty. But that is not the sole view-point, nor, because it has been sublimely held or glorified by shining and golden examples, need we consider it the integral and ultimate wisdom. Rather, liberating ourselves from all passion and revolt, let us see what this divine order of the universe means, and, as for this great knot and tangle of Matter denying the Spirit, let us seek to find out and separate its strands so as to loosen it by a solution and not cut through it by a violence. We must state the difficulty, the opposition first, entirely, trenchantly, with exaggeration, if need be, rather than with diminution, and then look for the issue.

First, then, the fundamental opposition Matter presents to Spirit is this that it is the culmination of the principle of Ignorance. Here Consciousness has lost and forgotten itself in a form of its works, as a man might forget in extreme absorption not only who he is but that he is at all and become momentarily only the work that is being done and the force that is doing it. The Spirit self-luminous, infinitely aware of itself behind all workings of force and their master, seems here to have disappeared and not to be at all; somewhere He is perhaps, but here He seems to have left only a brute and inconscient material Force which creates and destroys eternally without knowing itself or what it creates or why it creates at all or why it destroys what once it has created: it does not know, for it has no mind; it does not care, for it has no heart. And if that is not the real truth even of the material universe, if behind all this false phenomenon there is a Mind, a Will and something greater than Mind or mental Will, yet it is this dark semblance that the material universe itself presents as a truth to the consciousness which emerges in it out of its night; and if it be no truth but a lie, yet is it a most effective
lie, for it determines the conditions of our phenomenal existence and besieges all our aspiration and effort.

For this is the monstrous thing, the terrible and pitiless miracle of the material universe that out of this no-Mind a mind or, at least, minds emerge and find themselves struggling feebly for light, helpless individually, only less helpless when in self-defence they associate their individual feeblenesses in the midst of the giant Ignorance which is the law of the universe. Out of this heartless Inconscience and within its rigorous jurisdiction hearts have been born and aspire and are tortured and bleed under the weight of the blind and insentient cruelty of this iron existence, a cruelty which lays its law upon them and becomes sentient in their sentience, brutal, ferocious, horrible. But what after all, behind appearances, is this seeming mystery? We can see that it is the Consciousness which had lost itself returning again to itself, emerging out of its giant self-forgetfulness, slowly, painfully, as a Life that is would-be sentient, half-sentient, dimly sentient, wholly sentient and finally struggles to be more than sentient, to be again divinely self-conscious, free, infinite, immortal. But it works towards this under a law that is the opposite of all these things, under the conditions of Matter, that is to say, against the grasp of the Ignorance. The movements it has to follow, the instruments it has to use are set and made for it by this brute and divided Matter and impose on it at every step ignorance and limitation.

For the second fundamental opposition that Matter offers to Spirit, is this that it is the culmination of bondage to mechanic Law and opposes to all that seeks to liberate itself a colossal Inertia. Not that Matter itself is inert; it is rather an infinite motion, an inconceivable force, a limitless action, whose grandiose movements are a subject for our constant admiration. But while Spirit is free, master of itself and its works, not bound by them, creator of law and not its subject, this giant Matter is rigidly chained by a fixed and mechanical Law which is imposed on it, which it does not understand nor has ever conceived but works out inconsciently as a machine works and knows not who created it, by what process or to what end. And when Life
awakes and seeks to impose itself on physical form and material force and to use all things at its own will and for its own need, when Mind awakes and seeks to know the who, the why, the how of itself and all things and above all to use its knowledge for the imposition of its own freer law and self-guiding action upon things, material Nature seems to yield, even to approve and aid, though after a struggle, reluctantly and only up to a certain point. But beyond that point it presents an obstinate inertia, obstruction, negation and even persuades Life and Mind that they cannot go farther, cannot pursue to the end their partial victory. Life strives to enlarge and prolong itself and succeeds; but when it seeks utter wideness and immortality, it meets the iron obstruction of Matter and finds itself bound to narrowness and death. Mind seeks to aid life and to fulfil its own impulse to embrace all knowledge, to become all light, to possess truth and be truth, to enforce love and joy and be love and joy; but always there is the deviation and error and grossness of the material life-instincts and the denial and obstruction of the material sense and the physical instruments. Error ever pursues its knowledge, darkness is inseparably the companion and background of its light; truth is successfully sought and yet, when grasped, it ceases to be truth and the quest has to continue; love is there but it cannot satisfy itself, joy is there but it cannot justify itself, and each of them drags as if its chain or casts as if its shadow its own opposites, anger and hatred and indifference, satiety and grief and pain. The inertia with which Matter responds to the demands of the Mind and Life, prevents the conquest of the Ignorance and of the brute Force that is the power of the Ignorance.

And when we seek to know why this is so, we see that the success of this inertia and obstruction is due to a third power of Matter; for the third fundamental opposition which Matter offers to Spirit is this that it is the culmination of the principle of division and struggle. Indivisible indeed in reality, divisibility is its whole basis of action from which it seems forbidden ever to depart; for its only two methods of union are either the aggregation of units or an assimilation which involves the
destruction of one unit by another; and both of these methods of union are a confession of eternal division, since even the first associates rather than unifies and by its very principle admits the constant possibility and therefore the ultimate necessity of dissociation, of dissolution. Both methods repose on death, one as a means, the other as a condition of life. And both presuppose as the condition of world-existence a constant struggle of the divided units with each other, each striving to maintain itself, to maintain its associations, to compel or destroy what resists it, to gather in and devour others as its food, but itself moved to revolt against and flee from compulsion, destruction and assimilation by devouring. When the vital principle manifests its activities in Matter, it finds there this basis only for all its activities and is compelled to bow itself to the yoke; it has to accept the law of death, desire and limitation and that constant struggle to devour, possess, dominate which we have seen to be the first aspect of Life. And when the mental principle manifests in Matter, it has to accept from the mould and material in which it works the same principle of limitation, of seeking without secure finding, the same constant association and dissociation of its gains and of the constituents of its works, so that the knowledge gained by man, the mental being, seems never to be final or free from doubt and denial and all his labour seems condemned to move in a rhythm of action and reaction and of making and unmaking, in cycles of creation and brief preservation and long destruction with no certain and assured progress.

Especially and most fatally, the ignorance, inertia and division of Matter impose on the vital and mental existence emerging in it the law of pain and suffering and the unrest of dissatisfaction with its status of division, inertia and ignorance. Ignorance would indeed bring no pain of dissatisfaction if the mental consciousness were entirely ignorant, if it could halt satisfied in some shell of custom, unaware of its own ignorance or of the infinite ocean of consciousness and knowledge by which it lives surrounded; but precisely it is to this that the emerging consciousness in Matter awakes, first, to its ignorance of the world in which it lives and which it has to know and master
in order to be happy, secondly, to the ultimate barrenness and limitation of this knowledge, to the meagerness and insecurity of the power and happiness it brings and to the awareness of an infinite consciousness, knowledge, true being in which alone is to be found a victorious and infinite happiness. Nor would the obstruction of inertia bring with it unrest and dissatisfaction if the vital sentience emerging in Matter were entirely inert, if it were kept satisfied with its own half-conscient limited existence, unaware of the infinite power and immortal existence in which it lives as part of and yet separated from it, or if it had nothing within driving it towards the effort really to participate in that infinity and immortality. But this is precisely what all life is driven to feel and seek from the first, its insecurity and the need and struggle for persistence, for self-preservation; it awakes in the end to the limitation of its existence and begins to feel the impulsion towards largeness and persistence, towards the infinite and the eternal.

And when in man life becomes wholly self-conscious, this unavoidable struggle and effort and aspiration reach their acme and the pain and discord of the world become finally too keenly sensible to be borne with contentment. Man may for a long time quiet himself by seeking to be satisfied with his limitations or by confining his struggle to such mastery as he can gain over this material world he inhabits, some mental and physical triumph of his progressive knowledge over its inconscient fixities, of his small, concentrated conscious will and power over its inertly-driven monstrous forces. But here, too, he finds the limitation, the poor inconclusiveness of the greatest results he can achieve and is obliged to look beyond. The finite cannot remain permanently satisfied so long as it is conscious either of a finite greater than itself or of an infinite beyond itself to which it can yet aspire. And if the finite could be so satisfied, yet the apparently finite being who feels himself to be really an infinite or feels merely the presence or the impulse and stirring of an infinite within, can never be satisfied till these two are reconciled, till That is possessed by him and he is possessed by it in whatever degree or manner. Man is such a finite-seeming infinity and cannot fail
to arrive at a seeking after the Infinite. He is the first son of earth who becomes vaguely aware of God within him, of his immortality or of his need of immortality, and the knowledge is a whip that drives and a cross of crucifixion until he is able to turn it into a source of infinite light and joy and power.

This progressive development, this growing manifestation of the divine Consciousness and Force, Knowledge and Will that had lost itself in the ignorance and inertia of Matter, might well be a happy efflorescence proceeding from joy to greater and at last to infinite joy if it were not for the principle of rigid division from which Matter has started. The shutting up of the individual in his own personal consciousness of separate and limited mind, life and body prevents what would otherwise be the natural law of our development. It brings into the body the law of attraction and repulsion, of defence and attack, of discord and pain. For each body being a limited conscious-force feels itself exposed to the attack, impact, forceful contact of other such limited conscious-forces or of universal forces and, where it feels itself broken in upon or unable to harmonise the contacting and the recipient consciousness, it suffers discomfort and pain, is attracted or repelled, has to defend itself or to assail; it is constantly called upon to undergo what it is unwilling or unable to suffer. Into the emotional and the sense-mind the law of division brings the same reactions with the higher values of grief and joy, love and hatred, oppression and depression, all cast into terms of desire, and by desire into straining and effort, and by the straining into excess and defect of force, incapacity, the rhythm of attainment and disappointment, possession and recoil, a constant strife and trouble and unease. Into the mind as a whole, instead of a divine law of narrower truth flowing into greater truth, lesser light taken up into wider light, lower will surrendered to higher transforming will, pettier satisfaction progressing towards nobler and more complete satisfaction, it brings similar dualities of truth pursued by error, light by darkness, power by incapacity, pleasure of pursuit and attainment by pain of repulse and of dissatisfaction with what is attained; mind takes up its own affliction along with the affliction of life and
body and becomes aware of the triple defect and insufficiency of our natural being. All this means the denial of Ananda, the negation of the trinity of Sachchidananda and therefore, if the negation be insuperable, the futility of existence; for existence in throwing itself out in the play of consciousness and force must seek that movement not merely for itself, but for satisfaction in the play, and if in the play no real satisfaction can be found, it must obviously be abandoned in the end as a vain attempt, a colossal mistake, a delirium of the self-embodying spirit.

This is the whole basis of the pessimist theory of the world,—optimist, it may be, as to worlds and states beyond, but pessimist as to the earthly life and the destiny of the mental being in his dealings with the material universe. For it affirms that since the very nature of material existence is division and the very seed of embodied mind is self-limitation, ignorance and egoism, to seek satisfaction of the spirit upon earth or to seek an issue and divine purpose and culmination for the world-play is a vanity and delusion; only in a heaven of the Spirit and not in the world, or only in the Spirit's true quietude and not in its phenomenal activities can we reunite existence and consciousness with the divine self-delight. The Infinite can only recover itself by rejecting as an error and a false step its attempt to find itself in the finite. Nor can the emergence of mental consciousness in the material universe bring with it any promise of a divine fulfilment. For the principle of division is not proper to Matter, but to Mind; Matter is only an illusion of Mind into which Mind brings its own rule of division and ignorance. Therefore within this illusion Mind can only find itself; it can only travel between the three terms of the divided existence it has created: it cannot find there the unity of the Spirit or the truth of the spiritual existence.

Now it is true that the principle of division in Matter can be only a creation of the divided Mind which has precipitated itself into material existence; for that material existence has no self-being, is not the original phenomenon but only a form created by an all-dividing Life-force which works out the conceptions of an all-dividing Mind. By working out being into these appearances of the ignorance, inertia and division of Matter the dividing
Mind has lost and imprisoned itself in a dungeon of its own building, is bound with chains which it has itself forged. And if it be true that the dividing Mind is the first principle of creation, then it must be also the ultimate attainment possible in the creation, and the mental being struggling vainly with Life and Matter, overpowering them only to be overpowered by them, repeating eternally a fruitless cycle must be the last and highest word of cosmic existence. But no such consequence ensues if, on the contrary, it is the immortal and infinite Spirit that has veiled itself in the dense robe of material substance and works there by the supreme creative power of Supermind, permitting the divisions of Mind and the reign of the lowest or material principle only as initial conditions for a certain evolutionary play of the One in the Many. If, in other words, it is not merely a mental being who is hidden in the forms of the universe, but the infinite Being, Knowledge, Will which emerges out of Matter first as Life, then as Mind, with the rest of it still unrevealed, then the emergence of consciousness out of the apparently Inconscient must have another and completer term; the appearance of a supramental spiritual being who shall impose on his mental, vital, bodily workings a higher law than that of the dividing Mind is no longer impossible. On the contrary, it is the natural and inevitable conclusion of the nature of cosmic existence.

Such a supramental being would, as we have seen, liberate the mind from the knot of its divided existence and use the individualisation of mind as merely a useful subordinate action of the all-embracing Supermind; and he would liberate the life also from the knot of its divided existence and use the individualisation of life as merely a useful subordinate action of the one Conscious-Force fulfilling its being and joy in a diversified unity. Is there any reason why he should not also liberate the bodily existence from the present law of death, division and mutual devouring and use individualisation of body as merely a useful subordinate term of the one divine Conscious-Existence made serviceable for the joy of the Infinite in the finite? or why this spirit should not be free in a sovereign occupation of form, consciously immortal even in the changing of his robe of Matter,
possessed of his self-delight in a world subjected to the law of unity and love and beauty? And if man be the inhabitant of terrestrial existence through whom that transformation of the mental into the supramental can at last be operated, is it not possible that he may develop, as well as a divine mind and a divine life, also a divine body? or, if the phrase seem to be too startling to our present limited conceptions of human potentiality, may he not in his development of his true being and its light and joy and power arrive at a divine use of mind and life and body by which the descent of Spirit into form shall be at once humanly and divinely justified?

The one thing that can stand in the way of that ultimate terrestrial possibility is if our present view of Matter and its laws represent the only possible relation between sense and substance, between the Divine as knower and the Divine as object, or if, other relations being possible, they are yet not in any way possible here, but must be sought on higher planes of existence. In that case, it is in heavens beyond that we must seek our entire divine fulfilment, as the religions assert, and their other assertion of the kingdom of God or the kingdom of the perfect upon earth must be put aside as a delusion. Here we can only pursue or attain an internal preparation or victory and, having liberated the mind and life and soul within, must turn from the unconquered and unconquerable material principle, from an unregenerated and intractable earth to find elsewhere our divine substance. There is, however, no reason why we should accept this limiting conclusion. There are, quite certainly, other states even of Matter itself; there is undoubtedly an ascending series of the divine gradations of substance; there is the possibility of the material being transfiguring itself through the acceptance of a higher law than its own which is yet its own because it is always there latent and potential in its own secrecy.