HERACLITUS

SRI AUROBINDO

HERACLITUS

HERACLITUS

SRI AUROBINDO

CALCUTTA
ARYA PUBLISHING HOUSE
COLLEGE STREET
1941

Publisher : R. K. NAG
ARYA PUBLISHING HOUSE
63, College Street, Calcutta

First published in the "Arya"
(December, 1916 to June, 1917)

FIRST EDITION
February, 1941

Printer : P. C. RAY
SRI GOURANGA PRESS
5, Chintamoni Das Lane
Calcutta

PRINTED IN INDIA

HERACLITUS

I

THE philosophy and thought of the Greeks is perhaps the most intellectually stimulating, the most fruitful of clarities the world has yet had. Indian philosophy was intuitive in its beginnings, stimulative rather to the deeper vision of things, —nothing more exalted and profound, more revelatory of the depths and the heights, more powerful to open unending vistas has ever been conceived than the divine and inspired Word, the *mantra* of Veda and Vedanta. When that philosophy became intellectual, precise, founded on the human reason, it became also rigidly logical, enamoured of fixity and system, desirous of a sort of geometry of thought. The ancient Greek mind had instead a kind of fluid precision, a flexibly inquiring logic; acuteness and the wide-open eye of the intellect were its leading characteristics and by this power in it it determined the whole character and field of subsequent European

thinking. Nor is any Greek thinker more directly stimulating than the aphoristic philosopher Heraclitus; and yet he keeps and adds to this more modern intellectual stimulativeness something of the antique psychic and intuitive vision and word of the older Mystics. The trend to rationalism is there, but not yet that fluid clarity of the reasoning mind which was the creation of the Sophists.

Professor R. D. Ranade has recently published a small treatise on the philosophy of Heraclitus. From the paging of the treatise it seems to be an excerpt, but from what there is nothing to tell. It is perhaps too much to hope that it is from a series of essays on philosophers or a history of philosophy by this perfect writer and scholar. At any rate such a work from such a hand would be a priceless gain. For Professor Ranade possesses in a superlative degree the rare gift of easy and yet adequate exposition; but he has more than this, for he can give a fascinating interest to subjects like philology and philosophy which to the ordinary reader seem harsh, dry, difficult and repellent. He joins to a luminous clarity, lucidity, and charm of expression an equal

luminousness and just clarity of presentation and that perfect manner in both native to the Greek and French language and mind, but rare in the English tongue. In these seventeen pages he has presented the thought of the old enigmatic Ephesian with a clearness and sufficiency which leaves us charmed, enlightened and satisfied.

On one or two difficult points I am inclined to differ with the conclusions he adopts. He rejects positively Pfleiderer's view of Heraclitus as a mystic, which is certainly exaggerated and, as stated, a misconception; but it seems to me that there is behind that misconception a certain truth. Heraclitus' abuse of the mysteries of his time is not very conclusive in this respect; for what he reviles is those aspects of obscure magic, physical ecstasy, sensual excitement which the Mysteries had put on in some at least of their final developments as the process of degeneration increased which made a century later even the Eleusinian a butt for the dangerous mockeries of Alcibiades and his companions. His complaint is that the secret rites which the populace held in ignorant and superstitious reverence "unholily mysticise what are held among men as mysteries." He

rebels against the darkness of the Dionysian ecstasy in the approach to the secrets of Nature; but there is a luminous Apollonian as well as an obscure and sometimes dangerous Dionysian mysticism, a Dakshina as well as a Vama Marga of the mystic Tantra. And though no partaker in or supporter of any kind of rites or mummery, Heraclitus still strikes one as at least an intellectual child of the Mystics and of mysticism, although perhaps a rebel son in the house of his mother. He has something of the mystic style, something of the intuitive Appollonian inlook into the secrets of existence.

Certainly, as Mr. Ranade says, mere aphorism is not mysticism; aphorism and epigram are often enough, perhaps usually a condensed or a pregnant effort of the intellect. But Heraclitus' style, as Mr. Ranade himself describes it, is not only aphoristic and epigrammatic but cryptic, and this cryptic character is not merely the self-willed obscurity of an intellectual thinker affecting an excessive condensation of his thought or a too closely-packed burden of suggestiveness. It is enigmatic in the style of the mystics, enigmatic in the manner of their thought which

sought to express the riddle of existence in the very language of the riddle. What for instance is the "ever-living Fire" in which he finds the primary and imperishable substance of the universe and identifies it in succession with Zeus and with eternity? or what should we understand by "the thunderbolt which steers all things." To interpret this fire as merely a material force of heat and flame or simply a metaphor for being which is eternal becoming is, it seems to me, to miss the character of Heraclitus' utterances. It includes both these ideas and everything that connects them. But then we get back at once to the Vedic language and turn of thought; we are reminded of the Vedic Fire which is hymned as the upbuilder of the worlds, the secret Immortal in men and things, the periphery of the gods, Agni who "becomes" all around the other immortals, himself becomes and contains all the gods; we are reminded of the Vedic thunderbolt, that electric Fire, of the Sun who is the true Light, the Eye, the wonderful weapon of the divine pathfinders Mitra and Varuna. It is the same cryptic form of language, the same brief and abundant method of thought even; though the

conceptions are not identical, there is a clear kinship.

The mystical language has always this disadvantage that it readily becomes obscure, meaningless or even misleading to those who have not the secret and to posterity a riddle. Mr. Ranade tells us that it is impossible to make out what Heraclitus meant when he said, "The gods are mortals, men immortals." But is it quite impossible if we do not cut off this thinker from the earlier thought of the mystics? The Vedic Rishi also invokes the Dawn, "O goddess and human"; the gods in the Veda are constantly addressed as "men", the same words are traditionally applied to indicate men and immortals. The immanence of the immortal principle in man, the descent of the gods into the workings of mortality was almost the fundamental idea of the mystics. Heraclitus, likewise, seems to recognise the inextricable unity of the eternal and the transitory, that which is for ever and yet seems to exist only in this strife and change which is a continual dying. The gods manifest themselves as things that continually change and perish; man is in principle an eternal being.

Heraclitus does not really deal in barren antitheses; his method is a statement of antinomies and an adumbrating of their reconciliation in the very terms of opposition. Thus when he says that the name of the bow (biôs) is life (bîos), but its work is death, obviously he intends no mere barren play upon words; he speaks of that principle of war, father of all and king of all, which makes cosmic existence an apparent process of life, but an actual process of death. The Upanishads seized hold of the same truth when they declared life to be the dominion of King Death, described it as the opposite of immortality and even related that all life and existence here were first created by Death for his food.

Unless we bear in mind this pregnant and symbolic character of Heraclitus' language we are likely to sterilise his thought by giving it a too literal sense. Heraclitus praises the "dry soul" as the wisest and best, but, he says, it is a pleasure and satisfaction to souls to become moist. This inclination of the soul to its natural delight in a sort of wine-drenched laxity must be discouraged; for Dionysus the wine-god and Hades, the Lord of Death, the Lord of the dark

underworld, are one and the same deity. Professor Ranade takes this eulogy of the dry soul as praise of the dry light of reason; he finds in it a proof that Heraclitus was a rationalist and not a mystic: yet strangely enough he takes the parallel and opposite expressions about the moist soul and Dionysus in a quite different and material sense, as an ethical disapprobation of wine-drinking. Surely, it cannot be so; Heraclitus cannot mean by the dry soul the reason of a sober man and by a moist soul the non-reason or bewildered reason of the drunkard; nor when he says that Hades and Dionysus are the same, is he simply discouraging the drinking of wine as fatal to the health! Evidently he employs here, as always, a figurative and symbolic language because he has to convey a deeper thought for which he finds ordinary language too poor and superficial.

Heraclitus is using the old language of the Mysteries, though in his own new way and for his own individual purpose, when he speaks of Hades and Dionysus and the ever-living Fire or of the Furies, the succourers of Justice who will find out the Sun if he oversteps his measure. We

miss his sense, if we see in these names of the gods only the poorer superficial meanings of the popular mythological religion. When Heraclitus speaks of the dry or the moist soul, it is of the soul and not the intellect that he is thinking, *psuchê* and not *nous*. *Psuchê* corresponds roughly to the *cetas* or *citta* of Indian psychology, *nous* to *buddhi;* the dry soul of the Greek thinker to the purified heart-consciousness, *śuddha citta,* of the Indian psychologists, which in their experience was the first basis for a purified intellect, *viśuddha buddhi.* The moist soul is that which allows itself to be perturbed by the impure wine of sense ecstasy, emotional excitement, an obscure impulse and inspiration whose source is from a dark underworld. Dionysus is the god of this wine-born ecstasy, the god of the Bacchic mysteries,—of the "walkers in the night, mages, bacchanals, mystics": therefore Heraclitus says that Dionysus and Hades are one. In an opposite sense the ecstatic devotee of the Bhakti path in India reproaches the exclusive seeker by the way of thought-discernment with his "dry-knowledge", using Heraclitus' epithet, but with a pejorative and not a laudatory significance.

To ignore the influence of the mystic thought and its methods of self-expression on the intellectual thinking of the Greeks from Pythagoras to Plato is to falsify the historical procession of the human mind. It was enveloped at first in the symbolic, intuitive, esoteric style and discipline of the Mystics,—Vedic and Vedantic seers, Orphic secret teachers, Egyptian priests. From that veil it emerged along the path of a metaphysical philosophy still related to the Mystics by the source of its fundamental ideas, its first aphoristic and cryptic style, its attempt to seize directly upon truth by intellectual vision rather than arrive at it by careful ratiocination, but nevertheless intellectual in its method and aim. This is the first period of the Darshanas in India, in Greece of the early intellectual thinkers. Afterwards came the full tide of philosophic rationalism, Buddha or the Buddhists and the logical philosophers in India, in Greece the sophists and Socrates with all their splendid progeny; with them the intellectual method did not indeed begin, but came to its own and grew to its fullness. Heraclitus belongs to the transition, not to the noontide of the

reason; he is even its most characteristic representative. Hence his cryptic style, hence his brief and burdened thought and the difficulty we feel when we try to clarify and entirely rationalise his significances. The ignoring of the Mystics, our pristine fathers, *pūrve pitaraḥ*, is the great defect of the modern account of our thought-evolution.

II

WHAT precisely is the key-note of Heraclitus' thinking, where has he found his starting-point, or what are the grand lines of his philosophy? For if his thought is not developed in the severe systematic method of later thinkers, if it does not come down to us in large streams of subtle reasoning and opulent imagery like Plato's but in detached aphoristic sentences aimed like arrows at truth, still they are not really scattered philosophical reflections. There is an inter-relation, an inter-dependence; they all start logically from his fundamental view of existence itself and go back to it for their constant justification.

As in Indian, so in Greek philosophy the first question for thought was the problem of the One and the Many. We see everywhere a multiplicity of things and beings; is it real or only phenomenal or practical, *māyā, vyavahāra*? Has individual man, for instance,—the question which concerns us most nearly,—an essential and immortal existence of his own or is he simply a phenomenal

and transient result in the evolution or play of some one original principle, Matter, Mind, Spirit, which is the only real reality of existence? Does unity exist at all and, if so, is it a unity of sum or of primordial principle, a result or an origin, a oneness of totality or a oneness of nature or a oneness of essence,—the various standpoints of Pluralism, of Sankhya, of Vedanta? Or if both the One and the Many are real, what are the relations between these two eternal principles of being, or are they reconciled in an Absolute beyond them? These are no barren questions of logic, no battle of cloudy metaphysical abstractions, as the practical and sensational man would have us contemptuously believe; for on our answer to them depends our conception of God, of existence, of the world and of human life and destiny.

Heraclitus, differing in this, as Mr. Ranade reminds us, from Anaximander who like our Mayavadins denied true reality to the Many and from Empedocles who thought the All to be alternately one and many, believed unity and multiplicity to be both of them real and co-existent. Existence is then eternally one and

eternally many,—even as Ramanuja and Madhwa have concluded, though in a very different spirit and from a quite different standpoint. Heraclitus' view arose from his strong concrete intuition of things, his acute sense of universal realities; for in our experience of the cosmos we do find always and inseparably this eternal coexistence and cannot really escape from it. Everywhere our gaze on the Many reveals to us an eternal oneness, no matter what we fix on as the principle of that oneness; yet is that unity inoperative except by the multiplicity of its powers and forms, nor do we anywhere see it void of or apart from its own multiplicity. One Matter, but many atoms, plasms, bodies; one Energy, but many forces; one Mind or at least Mind-stuff, but many mental beings; one Spirit, but many souls. Perhaps periodically this multiplicity goes back, is dissolved into, is swallowed up by the One from which it was originally evolved; but still the fact that it has evolved and got involved again, compels us to suppose a possibility and even a necessity of its renewed evolution: it is not then really destroyed. The Adwaitin by his Yoga goes back to the One, feels himself merged, believes

that he has got rid of the Many, proved perhaps their unreality; but it is the achievement of an individual, of one of the Many, and the Many go on existing in spite of it. The achievement proves only that there is a plane of consciousness on which the soul can realise and not merely perceive by the intellect the oneness of the Spirit, and it proves nothing else. Therefore, on this truth of eternal oneness and eternal multiplicity Heraclitus fixes and anchors himself; from his firm acceptance of it, not reasoning it away but accepting all its consequences, flows all the rest of his philosophy.

Still, one question remains to be resolved before we can move a step farther. Since there is an eternal One, what is that? Is it Force, Mind, Matter, Soul? or, since Matter has many principles, is it some one principle of Matter which has evolved all the rest or which by some power of its own activity has changed into all that we see? The old Greek thinkers conceived of cosmic Substance as possessed of four elements, omitting or not having arrived at the fifth, Ether, in which Indian analysis found the first and original principle. In seeking the nature of the

original substance they fixed then on one or other of these four as the primordial Nature, one finding it in Air, another in Water, while Heraclitus, as we have seen, describes or symbolises the source and reality of all things as an ever-living Fire. "No man or god", he says, "has created the universe, but ever there was and is and will be the ever-living Fire."

In the Veda, in the early language of the Mystics generally the names of the elements or primary principles of Substance were used with a clearly symbolic significance. The symbol of water is thus used constantly in the Rig Veda. It is said that in the beginning was the inconscient Ocean out of which the One was born by the vastness of His energy; but it is clear from the language of the hymn that no physical ocean is meant, but rather the unformed chaos of inconscient being in which the Divine, the Godhead lay concealed in a darkness enveloped by greater darkness. The seven active principles of existence are similarly spoken of as rivers or waters; we hear of the seven rivers, the great water, the four superior rivers, in a context which shows their symbolic significance. We see this

image fixed in the Puranic mythus of Vishnu sleeping on the serpent Infinite in the milky ocean. But even as early as the Rig Veda, ether is the highest symbol of the Infinite, the *apeiron* of the Greeks; water is that of the same Infinite in its aspect as the original substance; fire is the creative power, the active energy of the Infinite; air, the life-principle, is spoken of as that which brings down fire out of the ethereal heavens into the earth. Yet these were not merely symbols. The Vedic Mystics held, it is clear, a close connection and effective parallelism to exist between psychical and physical activities, between the action of Light, for instance, and the phenomena of mental illumination; fire was to them at once the luminous divine energy, the Seer-Will of the universal Godhead active and creative of all things, and the physical principle creative of the substantial forms of the universe, burning secretly in all life.

It is doubtful how far the earlier Greek philosophic thinkers preserved any of these complex conceptions in their generalisations about the original principle. But Heraclitus has clearly an idea of something more than a

physical substance or energy in his concept of the ever-living Fire. Fire is to him the physical aspect, as it were, of a great burning creative, formative and destructive force, the sum of all whose processes is a constant and unceasing change. The idea of the One which is eternally becoming Many and the Many which is eternally becoming One and of that One therefore not so much as stable substance or essence as active Force, a sort of substantial Will-to-become, is the foundation of Heraclitus' philosophy.

Nietzsche, whom Mr. Ranade rightly affiliates to Heraclitus, Nietzsche, the most vivid, concrete and suggestive of modern thinkers, as is Heraclitus among the early Greeks, founded his whole philosophical thought on this conception of existence as a vast Will-to-become and of the world as a play of Force; divine Power was to him the creative Word, the beginning of all things and that to which life aspires. But he affirms Becoming only and excludes Being from his view of things; hence his philosophy is in the end unsatisfactory, insufficient, lop-sided; it stimulates, but solves nothing. Heraclitus does not exclude Being from the data of the problem of existence,

although he will not make any opposition or gulf between that and Becoming. By his conception of existence as at once one and many, he is bound to accept these two aspects of his ever-living Fire as simultaneously true, true in each other; Being is an eternal becoming and yet the Becoming resolves itself into eternal being. All is in flux, for all is change of becoming; we cannot step into the same waters twice, for it is other and yet other waters that are flowing on. And yet, with his keen eye on the truth of things, preoccupied though he was with this aspect of existence, he could not help seeing another truth behind it. The waters into which we step, are and are not the same; our own existence is an eternity and an inconstant transience; we are and we are not. Heraclitus does not solve the contradiction; he states it and in his own way tries to give some account of its process.

That process he sees as a constant change and a changing back, an exchange and an interchange in a constant whole,—managed for the rest by a clash of forces, by a creative and determinative strife, "war which is the father and king of all things." Between Fire as the Being and Fire in

the Becoming existence describes a downward and upward movement—*pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*—which has been called the " back-returning road " upon which all travels. These are the master ideas of the thought of Heraclitus.

III

Two apopthegms of Heraclitus give us the starting-point of his whole thinking. They are his saying that it is wisdom to admit that all things are one and his other saying " One out of all and all out of One." How are we to understand these two pregnant utterances? Must we read them into each other and conclude that for Heraclitus the One only exists as resultant of the many even as the many only exist as a becoming of the One? Mr. Ranade seems to think so; he tells us that this philosophy denies Being and affirms only Becoming,—like Nietzsche, like the Buddhists. But surely this is to read a little too much into Heraclitus' theory of perpetual change, to take it too much by itself. If that was his whole belief, it is difficult to see why he should seek for an original and eternal principle, the ever-living Fire which creates all by its perpetual changing, governs all by its fiery force of the " thunderbolt ", resolves all back into itself by a cyclic conflagration, difficult to account for his theory of the upward

and downward way, difficult to concede what Mr. Ranade contends, that Heraclitus did hold the theory of a cosmic conflagration or to imagine what could be the result of such a cosmic catastrophe. To reduce all becoming into Nothing? Surely not; Heraclitus' thought is at the very antipodes from speculative Nihilism. Into another kind of becoming? Obviously not, since by an absolute conflagration existing things can only be reduced into their eternal principle of being, into Agni, back into the immortal Fire. Something that is eternal, that is itself eternity, something that is for ever one,—for the cosmos is eternally one and many and does not by becoming cease to be one,—something that is God (Zeus), something that can be imaged as Fire which, if an ever-active force, is yet a substance or at least a substantial force and not merely an abstract Will-to-become,—something out of which all cosmic becoming arises and into which it returns, what is this but eternal Being?

Heraclitus was greatly preoccupied with his idea of eternal becoming, for him the one right account of the cosmos, but his cosmos has still an eternal basis, a unique original principle. That

distinguishes his thought radically from Nietzsche's or the Buddhists'. The later Greeks derived from him the idea of the perpetual stream of things, "All things are in flux." The idea of the universe as constant motion and unceasing change was always before him, and yet behind and in it all he saw too a constant principle of determination and even a mysterious principle of identity. Every day, he says, it is a new sun that rises; yes, but if the sun is always new, exists only by change from moment to moment, like all things in Nature, still it is the same ever-living Fire that rises with each Dawn in the shape of the sun. We can never step again into the same stream, for ever other and other waters are flowing; and yet, says Heraclitus, "we do and we do not enter into the same waters, we are and we are not." The sense is clear; there is an identity in things, in all existences, *sarvabhūtāni,* as well as a constant changing; there is a Being as well as a Becoming and by that we have an eternal and real existence as well as a temporary and apparent, are not merely a constant mutation but a constant identical existence. Zeus exists, a sempiternal active Fire and eternal Word, a One by which all

things are unified, all laws and results perpetually determined, all measures unalterably maintained. Day and Night are one, Death and Life are one, Youth and Age are one, Good and Evil are one, because that is One and all these are only its various shapes and appearances.

Heraclitus would not have accepted a purely psychological principle of Self as the origin of things, but in essence he is not very far from the Vedantic position. The Buddhists of the Nihilistic school used in their own way the image of the stream and the image of the fire. They saw, as Heraclitus saw, that nothing in the world is for two moments the same even in the most insistent continuity of forms. The flame maintains itself unchanged in appearance, but every moment it is another and not the same fire; the stream is sustained in its flow by ever new waters. From this they drew the conclusion that there is no essence of things, nothing self-existent; the apparent becoming is all that we can call existence, behind it there is eternal Nothing, the absolute Void, or perhaps an original Non-Being. Heraclitus saw, on the contrary, that if the form of the flame only exists by a

constant change, a constant exchange rather of the substance of the wick into the substance of the fiery tongue, yet there must be a principle of their existence common to them which thus converts itself from one form into another;—even if the substance of the flame is always changing, the principle of Fire is always the same and produces always the same results of energy, maintains always the same measures.

The Upanishad too describes the cosmos as a universal motion and becoming; it is all this that is mobile in the mobility, *jagatyām jagat,*—the very word for universe, *jagat,* having the radical sense of motion, so that the whole universe, the macrocosm, is one vast principle of motion and therefore of change and instability, while each thing in the universe is in itself a microcosm of the same motion and instability. Existences are "all becomings"; the Self-existent Atman, Swayambhu, has become all becomings, *ātmā eva abhūt sarvāṇi bhūtāni.* The relation between God and World is summed up in the phrase, "It is He that has moved out everywhere, *sa paryagāt";* He is the Lord, the Seer and Thinker, who becoming everywhere—Heraclitus' Logos, his

Zeus, his One out of which come all things—" has fixed all things rightly according to their nature from years sempiternal ",—Heraclitus' " All things are fixed and determined." Substitute his Fire for the Vedantic Atman and there is nothing in the expressions of the Upanishad which the Greek thinker would not have accepted as another figure of his own thought. And do not the Upanishads use among other images this very symbol of the Fire? " As one Fire has entered into the world and taken shapes according to the various forms in the world," so the one Being has become all these names and forms and yet remains the One. Heraclitus tells us precisely the same thing; God is all contraries, " He takes various shapes just as fire, when it is mingled with spices, is named according to the savour of each." Each one names Him according to his pleasure, says the Greek seer, and He accepts all names and yet accepts none, not even the highest name of Zeus. " He consents and yet at the same time does not consent to be called by the name of Zeus." So too said Indian Dirghatamas of old in his long hymn of the divine Mysteries in the Rig Veda, " One existent the sages call by many names."

Though He assumes all these forms, says the Upanishad, He has no form that the vision can seize, He whose name is a mighty splendour. We see again how close are the thoughts of the Greek and very often even his expressions and images to the sense and style of the Vedic and Vedantic sages.

We must put each of Heraclitus' apopthegms into its right place if we would understand his thought. " It is wise to admit that all things are one,"—not merely, be it noted, that they came from oneness and will go back to oneness, but that they are one, now and always,—all is, was and ever will be the ever-living Fire. All seems to our experience to be many, an eternal becoming of manifold existences; where is there in it any principle of eternal identity? True, says Heraclitus, so it seems; but wisdom looks beyond and does see the identity of all things; Night and Day, Life and Death, the good and the evil, all are one, the eternal, the identical; those who see only a difference in objects, do not know the truth of the objects they observe. " Hesiod did not know day and night; for it is the One,"—*esti gar hen, asti hi ekam.* Now, an eternal and

identical which all things are, is precisely what we mean by Being; it is precisely what is denied by those who see only Becoming. The Nihilistic Buddhists[1] insisted that there were only so many ideas, *vijñānāni,* and impermanent forms which were but the combination of parts and elements: no oneness, no identity anywhere; get beyond ideas and forms, you get to self-extinction, to the Void, to Nothing. Yet one must posit a principle of unity somewhere, if not at the base or in the secret being of things, yet in their action. The Buddhists had to posit their universal principle of Karma which, when you think of it, comes after all to a universal energy as the cause of the world, a creator and preserver of unchanging measures. Nietzsche denied Being, but had to speak of a universal Will-to-be; which again, when you come to think of it, seems to be no more than a translation of the Upanishadic *tapo brahma,* "Will-Energy is Brahman." The later Sankhya denied the unity of conscious existences, but asserted the unity of Nature,

[1] Buddha himself remained silent on this question; his goal of Nirvana was a negation of phenomenal existence, but not necessarily a denial of any kind of existence.

Prakriti, which is again at once the original principle and substance of things and the creative energy, the *phusis* of the Greeks. It is indeed wise to agree that all things are one; for vision drives at that, the soul and the heart reach out to that, thought comes circling round to it in the very act of denial.

Heraclitus saw what all must see who look at the world with any attention, that there is something in all this motion and change and differentiation which insists on stability, which goes back to sameness, which assures unity, which triumphs into eternity. It has always the same measures; it is, was and ever will be. We are the same in spite of all our differences; we start from the same origin, proceed by the same universal laws, live, differ and strive in the bosom of an eternal oneness, are seeking always for that which binds all beings together and makes all things one. Each sees it in his own way, lays stress on this or that aspect of it, loses sight of or diminishes other aspects, gives it therefore a different name—even as Heraclitus, attracted by its aspect of creative and destructive Force, gave it the name of Fire. But when he generalises, he puts it widely

enough; it is the One that is All, it is the All that is One,—Zeus, eternity, the Fire. He could have said with the Upanishad, "All this is the Brahman", *sarvam khalu idam brahma,* though he could not have gone on and said, "This Self is the Brahman", but would have declared rather of Agni what a Vedantic formula says of Vayu, *tvam pratyakṣam brahmāsi,* Thou art manifest Brahman.

But we may admit the One in different ways. The Adwaitins affirmed the One, the Being, but put away "all things" as Maya, or they recognised the immanence of the Being in these becomings which are yet not-Self, not That. Vaishnava philosophy saw existence as eternally one in the Being, God, eternally many by His nature or conscious-energy in the souls who He becomes or who exist in her. In Greece also Anaximander denied the multiple reality of the Becoming. Empedocles affirmed that the All is eternally one and many; all is one which becomes many and then again goes back to oneness. But Heraclitus will not so cut the knot of the riddle. "No", he says in effect, "I hold to my idea of the eternal oneness of all things; never do they cease to be

one. It is all my ever-living Fire that takes various shapes and names, changes itself into all that is and yet remains itself, not at all by any illusion or mere appearance of becoming, but with a severe and positive reality." All things then are in their reality and substance and law and reason of their being the One; the One in its shapes, values, changings becomes really all things. It changes and is yet immutable: for it does not increase or diminish, nor does it lose for a moment its eternal nature and identity which is that of the ever-living Fire. Many values which reduce themselves to the same standard and judge of all values; many forces which go back to the same unalterable energy; many becomings which both represent and amount to one identical Being.

Here Heraclitus brings in his formula of "One out of all and all out of One", which is his account of the process of the cosmos just as his formula "All things are one" is his account of the eternal truth of the cosmos. One, he says, in the process of the cosmos is always becoming all things from moment to moment, hence the eternal flux of things; but all things also are eternally going back to their principle of oneness; hence the

unity of the cosmos, the sameness behind the flux of becoming, the stability of measures, the conservation of energy in all changes. This he explains farther by his theory of change as in its character a constant exchange. But is there then no end to this simultaneous upward and downward motion of things? As the downward has so far prevailed as to create the cosmos, will not the upward too prevail so as to dissolve it back into the ever-living Fire? Here we come to the question whether Heraclitus did or did not hold the theory of a periodic conflagration or *pralaya*. "Fire will come on all things and judge and convict them." If he held it, then we have again another striking coincidence of Heraclitus' thought with our familiar Indian notions, the periodic *pralaya*, the Puranic conflagration of the world by the appearance of the twelve suns, the Vedantic theory of the eternal cycles of manifestation and withdrawal from manifestation. In fact, both the lines of thought are essentially the same and had to arrive inevitably at the same conclusions.

IV

HERACLITUS' account of the cosmos is an evolution and involution out of his one eternal principle of Fire,—at once the one substance and the one force,—which he expresses in his figurative language as the upward and downward road. "The road up and down", he says, "is one and the same." Out of Fire, the radiant and energetic principle, air, water and earth proceed,—that is the procession of energy on its downward road; there is equally in the very tension of this process a force of potential return which would lead things backward to their source in the reverse order. In the balance of these two upward and downward forces resides the whole cosmic action; everything is a poise of contrary energies. The movement of life is like the back-returning of the bow, to which he compares it, an energy of traction and tension restraining an energy of release, every force of action compensated by a corresponding force of reaction. By the resistance of one to the other all the harmonies of existence are created.

We have the same idea of an evolution of successive conditions of energy out of a primal substance-force in the Indian theory of Sankhya. There indeed the system proposed is more complete and satisfying. It starts with the original or root energy, *mūla prakṛti,* which as the first substance, *pradhāna,* evolves by development and change into five successive principles. Ether, not fire, is the first principle, ignored by the Greeks, but rediscovered by modern Science[1]; there follow air, fire, the igneous, radiant and electric energy, water, earth, the fluid and solid. The Sankhya, like Anaximenes, puts Air first of the four principles admitted by the Greeks, though it does not like him make it the original substance, and it thus differs from the order of Heraclitus. But it gives to the principle of fire the function of creating all forms,—as Agni in the Veda is the great builder of the worlds,—and here at least it meets his thought; for it is as the energetic principle behind all formation and mutation that Heraclitus must have chosen Fire as his symbol and material representative of the One. We may

[1] Now again rejected, though that does not seem to be indubitable or final.

remember in this connection how far modern Science has gone to justify these old thinkers by the importance it gives to electricity and radio-active forces—Heraclitus' fire and thunderbolt, the Indian triple Agni—in the formation of atoms and in the transmutation of energy.

But the Greeks failed to go forward to that final discrimination which India attributed to Kapila, the supreme analytical thinker,—the discrimination between Prakriti and her cosmic principles, her twenty-four tattwas forming the subjective and objective aspects of Nature, and between Prakriti and Purusha, Conscious-Soul and Nature-Energy. Therefore while in the Sankhya ether, fire and the rest are only principles of the objective evolution of Prakriti, evolutionary aspects of the original *phusis,* the early Greeks could not get back beyond these aspects of Nature to the idea of a pure energy, nor could they at all account for her subjective side. The Fire of Heraclitus has to do duty at once for the original substance of all Matter and for God and Eternity. This preoccupation with Nature-Energy and the failure to fathom its relations with Soul has persisted in modern scientific thought, and we

find there too the same attempt to identify some primary principle of Nature, ether or electricity, with the original Force.

However that may be, the theory of the creation of the world by some kind of evolutionary change out of the original substance or energy, by *pariṇāma,* is common to the early Greek and the Indian systems, however they may differ about the nature of the original *phusis.* The distinction of Heraclitus among the early Greek sages is his conception of the upward and downward road, one and the same in the descent and the return. It corresponds to the Indian idea of *nivṛtti* and *pravṛtti,* the double movement of the Soul and Nature,—*pravṛtti,* the moving out and forward, *nivṛtti,* the moving back and in. The Indian thinkers were preoccupied with this double principle so far as it touches the action of the individual soul entering into the procession of Nature and drawing back from it; but still they saw a similar, a periodic movement forward and back of Nature itself which leads to an ever-repeated cycle of creation and dissolution; they held the idea of a periodic *pralaya.* Heraclitus' theory would seem to demand a similar conclusion.

Otherwise we must suppose that the downward tendency, once in action, has always the upper hand over the upward or that cosmos is eternally proceeding out of the original substance and eternally returning to it, but never actually returns. The Many are then eternal not only in power of manifestation, but in actual fact of manifestation.

It is possible that Heraclitus may so have thought, but it is not the logical conclusion of his theory; it contradicts the evident suggestion of his metaphor about the road which implies a starting-point and a point of return; and we have too the distinct statement of the Stoics that he believed in the theory of conflagration,—an assertion which they are hardly likely to have made if this were not generally accepted as his teaching. The modern arguments against enumerated by Mr. Ranade are founded upon misconceptions. Heraclitus' affirmation is not simply that the One is always Many, the Many always One, but in his own words, "out of all the One and out of One all." Plato's phrasing of the thought, "the reality is both many and one and in its division it is always being brought together," states the same idea in

different language. It means a constant current and back-current of change, the upward and downward road, and we may suppose that as the One by downward change becomes completely the All in the descending process, yet remains eternally the one ever-living Fire, so the All by upward change may resort completely to the One and yet essentially exist, since it can again return into various being by the repetition of the downward movement. All difficulty disappears if we remember that what is implied is a process of evolution and involution,—so too the Indian word for creation, *sṛṣṭi,* means a release or bringing forth of what is held in, latent,—and that the conflagration destroys existing forms, but not the principle of multiplicity. There will be then no inconsistency at all in Heraclitus' theory of a periodic conflagration; it is rather, that being the highest expression of change, the complete logic of his system.

V

If it is the law of Change that determines the evolution and involution of the one downward and upward road, the same law prevails all along the path, through all its steps and returns, in all the million transactions of the wayside. There is everywhere the law of exchange and interchange, *amoibê.* The unity and the multiplicity have at every moment this active relation to each other. The One is constantly exchanging itself for the many; that gold has been given, you have instead these commodities, but in fact they are only so much value of the gold. The many are constantly exchanging themselves for the One; these commodities are given, disappear, are destroyed, we say, but in their place there is the gold, the original substance-energy to the value of the commodities. You see the sun and you think it is the same sun always, but really it is a new sun that rises each day; for it is the Fire's constant giving of itself in exchange for the elemental commodities that compose the sun which preserves

its form, its energy, its movement, all its measures. Science shows us that this is true of all things, of the human body, for instance; it is always the same, but it preserves its apparent identity only by a constant change. There is a constant destruction, yet there is no destruction. Energy distributes itself, but never really dissipates itself; change and unalterable conservation of energy in the change are the law, not destruction. If this world of multiplicity is destroyed in the end by Fire, yet there is no end and it is not destroyed, but only exchanged for the Fire. Moreover, there is exchange between all these becomings which are only so many active values of the Being, commodities that are a fixed value and measure of the universal gold. Fire takes of its substance from one form and gives to another, changes one apparent value of its substance into another apparent value, but the substance-energy remains the same and the new value is the equivalent of the old,—as when it turns fuel into smoke and cinders and ashes. Modern Science with a more accurate knowledge of what actually happens in this change, yet confirms Heraclitus' conclusion. It is the law of the conservation of energy.

Practically, the active secret of life is there; all life physical or mental or merely dynamic maintains itself by constant change and interchange. Still, Heraclitus' account is so far not altogether satisfactory. The measure, the value of the energy exchanged remains unaltered even when the form is altered, but why should also the cosmic commodities we have for the universal gold be fixed and in a way unchanging? What is the explanation, how comes about this eternity of principles and elements and kinds of combination and this persistence and recurrence of the same forms which we observe in the cosmos? Why in this constant cosmic flux should everything after all remain the same? Why should the sun, though always new, be yet for all practical purposes the same sun? Why should the stream be, as Heraclitus himself admits, the same stream although it is ever other and other waters that are flowing? It was in this connection that Plato brought in his eternal, ideal plane of fixed ideas, by which he seems to have meant at once an originating real-idea and an original ideal schema for all things. An idealistic philosophy of the Indian type might say that this force, the Shakti

which you call Fire, is a consciousness which preserves by its energy its original scheme of ideas and corresponding forms of things. But Heraclitus gives us another account, not quite satisfactory, yet profound and full of suggestive truth; it is contained in his striking phrases about war and justice and tension and the Furies pursuing the transgressor of measures. He is the first thinker to see the world entirely in the terms of Power.

What is the nature of this exchange? It is strife, *eris*, it is war, *polemos*! What is the rule and result of the war? It is justice. How acts that justice? By a just tension and compensation of forces which produce the harmony of things and therefore, we presume, their stability. "War is the father of all and the king of all"; "All things becoming according to strife"; "To know that strife is justice"; these are his master apopthegms in this matter. At first we do not see why exchange should be strife; it would seem rather to be commerce. Strife there is, but why should there not also be peaceful and willing interchange? Heraclitus will have none of it; no peace! he would agree with the modern Teuton

that commerce itself is a department of War. It is true there is a commerce, gold for commodities, commodities for gold, but the commerce itself and all its circumstances are governed by a forceful, more, a violent compulsion of the universal Fire. That is what he means by the Furies pursuing the sun; "for fear of Him", says the Upanishad, "the wind blows . . . and death runs." And between all beings there is a constant trial of strength; by that warfare they come into being, by that their measures are maintained. We see that he is right; he has caught the initial aspect of cosmic Nature. Everything here is a clash of forces and by that clash and struggle and clinging and wrestling things not only come into being, but are maintained in being. Karma? Laws? But different laws meet and compete and by their tension the balance of the world is maintained. Karma? It is the forcible justice of an eternal compelling Power and it is the Furies pursuing us if we transgress our measures.

War, contends Heraclitus, is not mere injustice, chaotic violence; it is justice, although a violent justice, the only kind possible. Again, from that point of view, we see that he is right. By the

energy expended and its value shall the fruits be determined, and where two forces meet, expenditure of energy means a trial of strength. Shall not then the rewards be to the strong according to his strength and to the weak according to his weakness? So it is at least in the world, the primal law, although subject to the help of the weak by the strong which need not after all be an injustice or a violation of measures, in spite of Nietzsche and Heraclitus. And is there not after all sometimes a tremendous strength behind weakness, the very strength of the pressure on the oppressed which brings its terrible reaction, the back return of the bow, Zeus, the eternal Fire, observing his measures?

Not only between being and being, force and force is there war, but within each there is an eternal opposition, a tension of contraries, and it is this tension which creates the balance necessary to harmony. Harmony then there is, for cosmos itself is in its result a harmony; but it is so because in its process it is war, tension, opposition, a balance of eternal contraries. Real peace there cannot be, unless by peace you mean a stable tension, a balance of power between hostile forces,

a sort of mutual neutralisation of excesses. Peace cannot create, cannot maintain anything, and Homer's prayer that war might perish from among Gods and men is a monstrous absurdity, for that would mean the end of the world. A periodic end there may be, not by peace or reconciliation, but by conflagration, by an attack of Fire, *to pûr epelthon,* a fiery judgment and conviction. Force created the world, Force is the world, Force by its violence maintains the world, Force shall end the world,—and eternally re-create it.

VI

HERACLITUS is the first and the most consistent teacher of the law of relativity; it is the logical result of his primary philosophical concepts. Since all is one in its being and many in its becoming, it follows that everything must be one in its essence. Night and day, life and death, good and evil can only be different aspects of the same absolute reality. Life and death are in fact one, and we may say from different points of view that all death is only a process and change of life or that all life is only an activity of death. Really both are one energy whose activity presents to us a duality of aspects. From one point of view we are not, for our existence is only a constant mutation of energy; from another we are, because the being in us is always the same and sustains our secret identity. So too, we can only speak of a thing as good or evil, just or unjust, beautiful or ugly from a purely relative point of view, because we adopt a particular standpoint or have in view some

practical end or temporarily valid relation. He gives the example of "the sea, water purest and impurest", their fine element to the fish, abominable and undrinkable to man. And does not this apply to all things?—they are the same always in reality and assume their qualities and properties because of our standing-point in the universe of becoming, the nature of our seeing and the texture of our minds. All things circle back to the eternal unity and in their beginning and end are the same; it is only in the arc of becoming that they vary in themselves and from each other, and there they have no absoluteness to each other. Night and day are the same; it is only the nature of our vision and our standing-point on the earth and our relations of earth and sun that create the difference. What is day to us, is to others night.

Because of this insistence on the relativity of good and evil, Heraclitus is thought to have enunciated some kind of supermoralism; but it is well to see carefully to what this supermoralism of Heraclitus really amounts. Heraclitus does not deny the existence of an absolute; but for him the absolute is to be found in the One, in

the Divine,—not the gods, but the one supreme Divinity, the Fire. It has been objected that he attributes relativity to God, because he says that the first principle is willing and yet not willing to be called by the name of Zeus. But surely this is to misunderstand him altogether. The name Zeus expresses only the relative human idea of the Godhead; therefore while God accepts the name, He is not bound or limited by it. All our concepts of Him are partial and relative; "He is named according to the pleasure of each." This is nothing more nor less than the truth proclaimed by the Vedas, "One existent the sages call by many names." Brahman is willing to be called Vishnu, and yet he is not willing, because he is also Brahma and Maheshwara and all the gods and the world and all principles and all that is, and yet not any of these things, *neti neti*. As men approach him, so he accepts them. But the One to Heraclitus as to the Vedantin is absolute.

This is quite clear from all his sayings; day and night, good and evil are one, because they are the One in their essence and in the One the distinctions we make between them disappear.

There is a Word, a Reason in all things, a Logos, and that Reason is one; only men by the relativeness of their mentality turn it each into his personal thought and way of looking at things and live according to this variable relativity. It follows that there is an absolute, a divine way of looking at things. "To God all things are good and just, but men hold some things to be good, others unjust." There is then an absolute good, an absolute beauty, an absolute justice of which all things are the relative expression. There is a divine order in the world; each thing fulfils its nature according to its place in the order and in its place and symmetry in the one Reason of things is good, just and beautiful precisely because it fulfils that Reason according to the eternal measures. To take an example, the world war may be regarded as an evil by some, a sheer horror of carnage, to others because of the new possibilities it opens to mankind, it may seem a good. It is at once good and evil. But that is the relative view; in its entirety, in its fulfilment in each and all of its circumstances of a divine purpose, a divine justice, a divine force executing itself in the large reason of things, it is from the

absolute point of view good and just—to God, not to man.

Does it follow that the relative view-point has no validity at all? Not for a moment. On the contrary, it must be the expression, proper to each mentality according to the necessity of its nature and standpoint, of the divine Law. Heraclitus says that plainly; "Fed are all human laws by one, the divine." That sentence ought to be quite sufficient to protect Heraclitus against the charge of antinomianism. True, no human law is the absolute expression of the divine justice, but it draws its validity, its sanction from that and is valid for its purpose, in its place, in its proper time, has its relative necessity. Even though men's notions of good and justice vary in the mutations of the becoming, yet human good and justice persist in the stream of things, preserve a measure. Heraclitus admits relative standards, but as a thinker he is obliged to go beyond them. All is at once one and many, an absolute and a relative, and all the relations of the many are relativities, yet are fed by, go back to, persist by that in them which is absolute.

VII

THE ideas of Heraclitus on which I have so far laid stress, are general, philosophical, metaphysical; they glance at those first truths of existence, *devānām prathamā vratāni*,[1] for which philosophy first seeks because they are the key to all other truths. But what is their practical effect on human life and aspiration? For that is in the end the real value of philosophy for man, to give him light on the nature of his being, the principles of his psychology, his relations with the world and with God, the fixed lines or the great possibilities of his destiny. It is the weakness of most European philosophy—not the ancient—that it lives too much in the clouds and seeks after pure metaphysical truth too exclusively for its own sake; therefore it has been a little barren because much too indirect in its bearing on life. It is the great distinction of Nietzsche among later European thinkers to have brought back something of the old dynamism and practical

[1] The first laws of working of the Gods.

force into philosophy, although in the stress of this tendency he may have neglected unduly the dialectical and metaphysical side of philosophical thinking. No doubt, in seeking Truth we must seek it for its own sake first and not start with any preconceived practical aim and prepossession which would distort our disinterested view of things; but when Truth has been found, its bearing on life becomes of capital importance and is the solid justification of the labour spent in our research. Indian philosophy has always understood its double function; it has sought the Truth not only as an intellectual pleasure or the natural dharma of the reason, but in order to know how man may live by the Truth or strive after it; hence its intimate influence on the religion, the social ideas, the daily life of the people, its immense dynamic power on the mind and actions of Indian humanity. The Greek thinkers, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, the Stoics and Epicureans, had also this practical aim and dynamic force, but it acted only on the cultured few. That was because Greek philosophy, losing its ancient affiliation to the Mystics, separated itself from the popular religion; but as ordinarily

Philosophy alone can give light to religion and save it from crudeness, ignorance and superstition, so Religion alone can give, except for a few, spiritual passion and effective power to Philosophy and save it from becoming unsubstantial, abstract and sterile. It is a misfortune for both when the divine sisters part company.

But when we seek among Heraclitus' sayings for the human application of his great fundamental thoughts, we are disappointed. He gives us little direct guidance and on the whole leaves us to draw our own profit from the packed opulence of his first ideas. What may be called his aristocratic view of life, we might regard possibly as a moral result of his philosophical conception of Power as the nature of the original principle. He tells us that the many are bad, the few good and that one is to him equal to thousands, if he be the best. Power of knowledge, power of character,—character, he says, is man's divine force,—power and excellence generally are the things that prevail in human life and are supremely valuable, and these things in their high and pure degree are rare among men, they are the difficult attainment of the few. From

that, true enough so far as it goes, we might deduce a social and political philosophy. But the democrat might well answer that if there is an eminent and concentrated virtue, knowledge and force in the one or the few, so too there is a diffused virtue, knowledge and force in the many which acting collectively may outweigh and exceed isolated or rare excellences. If the king, the sage, the best are Vishnu himself, as old Indian thought also affirmed, to a degree to which the ordinary man, *prākṛto janāḥ,* cannot pretend, so also are " the five ", the group, the people. The Divine is *samaṣṭi* as well as *vyaṣṭi,* manifested in the collectivity as well as in the individual, and the justice on which Heraclitus insists demands that both should have their effect and their value; they depend indeed and draw on each other for the effectuation of their excellences.

Other sayings of Heraclitus are interesting enough, as when he affirms the divine element in human laws,—and that is also a profound and fruitful sentence. His views on the popular religion are interesting, but move on the surface and do not carry us very far even on the surface. He rejects with a violent contempt the current

degradation of the old mystic formulas and turns from them to the true mysteries, those of Nature and of our being, that Nature which, as he says, loves to be hidden, is full of mysteries, ever occult. It is a sign that the lore of the early Mystics had been lost, the spiritual sense had departed out of their symbols, even as in Vedic India; but there took place in Greece no new and powerful movement which could, as in India, replace them by new symbols, new and more philosophic restatements of their hidden truths, new disciplines, schools of Yoga. Attempts, such as that of Pythagoras, were made; but Greece at large followed the turn given by Heraclitus, developed the cult of the reason and left the remnants of the old occult religion to become a solemn superstition and a conventional pomp.

Doubly interesting is his condemnation of animal sacrifice; it is, he says, a vain attempt at purification by defilement of oneself with blood, as if we were to cleanse mud-stained feet with mud. Here we see the same trend of revolt against an ancient and universal religious practice as that which destroyed in India the sacrificial system of the Vedic religion,—although Buddha's

great impulse of compassion was absent from the mind of Heraclitus: pity could never have become a powerful motive among the old Mediterranean races. But the language of Heraclitus shows us that the ancient system of sacrifice in Greece and in India was not a mere barbaric propitiation of savage deities, as modern inquiry has falsely concluded; it had a psychological significance, purification of the soul as well as propitiation of higher and helpful powers, and was therefore in all probability mystic and symbolical; for purification was, as we know, one of the master ideas of the ancient Mysteries. In India of the Gita, in the development of Judaism by the prophets and by Jesus, while the old physical symbols were discouraged and especially the blood-rite, the psychological idea of sacrifice was saved, emphasised and equipped with subtler symbols, such as the Christian Eucharist and the offerings of the devout in the Shaiva or Vaishnava temples. But Greece with its rational bent and its insufficient religious sense was unable to save its religion; it tended towards that sharp division between philosophy and science on one side and religion on the other which has been so peculiar a characteristic of the

European mind. Here too Heraclitus was, as in so many other directions, a forerunner, an indicator of the natural bent of occidental thought.

Equally striking is his condemnation of idol-worship, one of the earliest in human history,—"he who prays to an image is chattering to a stone wall." The intolerant violence of this protestant rationalism and positivism makes Heraclitus again a precursor of a whole movement of the human mind. It is not indeed a religious protest such as that of Mahomed against the naturalistic, Pagan and idolatrous polytheism of the Arabs or of the Protestants against the aesthetic and emotional saint-worship of the Catholic Church, its Mariolatry and use of images and elaborate ritual; its motive is philosophic, rational, psychological. Heraclitus was not indeed a pure rationalist. He believes in the Gods, but as psychological presences, cosmic powers, and he is too impatient of the grossness of the physical image, its hold on the senses, its obscuration of the psychological significance of the godheads to see that it is not to the stone, but to the divine person figured in the stone that the prayer is offered. It is noticeable that in his conception of the gods he is kin to the

old Vedic seers, though not at all a religious mystic in his temperament. The Vedic religion seems to have excluded physical images and it was the protestant movements of Jainism and Buddhism which either introduced or at least popularised and made general the worship of images in India. Here too Heraclitus prepares the way for the destruction of the old religion, the reign of pure philosophy and reason and the void which was filled up by Christianity; for man cannot live by reason alone. When it was too late, some attempt was made to re-spiritualise the old religion, and there was the remarkable effort of Julian and Libanius to set up a regenerated Paganism against triumphant Christianity; but the attempt was too unsubstantial, too purely philosophic, empty of the dynamic power of the religious spirit. Europe had killed its old creeds beyond revival and had to turn for its religion to Asia.

Thus, for the general life of man Heraclitus has nothing to give us beyond his hint of an aristocratic principle in society and politics,—and we may note that this aristocratic bent was very strong in almost all the subsequent Greek philosophers. In religion his influence tended to

the destruction of the old creed without effectively putting anything more profound in its place; though not himself a pure rationalist, he prepared the way for philosophic rationalism. But even without religion philosophy by itself can give us at least some light on the spiritual destiny of man, some hope of the infinite, some ideal perfection after which we can strive. Plato who was influenced by Heraclitus, tried to do this for us; his thought sought after God, tried to seize the ideal, had its hope of a perfect human society. We know how the Neo-platonists developed his ideas under the influence of the East and how they affected Christianity. The Stoics, still more directly the intellectual descendants of Heraclitus, arrived at very remarkable and fruitful ideas of human possibility and a powerful psychological discipline,—as we should say in India, a Yoga,—by which they hoped to realise their ideal. But what has Heraclitus himself to give us? Nothing directly; we have to gather for ourselves whatever we can from his first principles and his cryptic sentences.

Heraclitus was regarded in ancient times as a pessimistic thinker and we have one or two sayings

of his from which we can, if we like, deduce the old vain gospel of the vanity of things. Time, he says, is playing draughts like a child, amusing itself with counters, building castles on the sea-shore only to throw them down again. If that is the last word, then all human effort and aspiration are vain. But on what primary philosophical conception does this discouraging sentence depend? Everything turns on that; for in itself this is no more than an assertion of a self-evident fact, the mutability of things and the recurrent transiency of forms. But if the principles which express themselves in forms are eternal or if there is a Spirit in things which finds its account in the mutations and evolutions of Time and if that Spirit dwells in the human being as the immortal and infinite power of his soul, then no conclusion of the vanity of the world or the vanity of human existence arises. If indeed the original and eternal principle of Fire is a purely physical substance or force, then, truly, since all the great play and effort of consciousness in us must sink and dissolve into that, there can be no permanent spiritual value in our being, much less in our works. But we have seen that

Heraclitus' Fire cannot be a purely physical or inconscient principle. Does he then mean that all our existence is merely a continual changeable Becoming, a play or Lila with no purpose in it except the playing and no end except the conviction of the vanity of all cosmic activity by its relapse into the indistinguishable unity of the original principle or substance? For even if that principle, the One to which the many return, be not merely physical or not really physical at all, but spiritual, we may still, like the Mayavadins, affirm the vanity of the world and of our human existence, precisely because the one is not eternal and the other has no eventual aim except its own self-abolition after the conviction of the vanity and unreality of all its temporal interests and purposes. Is the conviction of the world by the one absolute Fire such a conviction of the vanity of all the temporal and relative values of the Many?

That is one sense in which we can understand the thought of Heraclitus. His idea of all things as born of war and existing by strife might, if it stood by itself, lead us to adopt, even if he himself did not clearly arrive at that conclusion.

For if all is a continual struggle of forces, its best aspect only a violent justice and the highest harmony only a tension of opposites without any hope of a divine reconciliation, its end a conviction and destruction by eternal Fire, all our ideal hopes and aspirations are out of place; they have no foundation in the truth of things. But there is another side to the thought of Heraclitus. He says indeed that all things come into being "according to strife", by the clash of forces, are governed by the determining justice of war. He says farther that all is utterly determined, fated. But what then determines? The justice of a clash of forces is not fate; forces in conflict determine indeed, but from moment to moment, according to a constantly changing balance always modifiable by the arising of new forces. If there is pre-determination, an inevitable fate in things, then there must be some power behind the conflict which determines them, fixes their measures. What is that power? Heraclitus tells us; all indeed comes into being according to strife, but also all things come into being according to Reason, *kat erin* but also *kata ton logon*. What is this Logos? It is not an inconscient reason in

things, for his Fire is not merely an inconscient force, it is Zeus and eternity. Fire, Zeus is Force, but it is also an Intelligence; let us say then that it is an intelligent Force which is the origin and master of things. Nor can this Logos be identical in its nature with the human reason; for that is an individual and therefore relative and partial judgment and intelligence which can only seize on relative truth, not on the true truth of things, but the Logos is one and universal, an absolute reason therefore combining and managing all the relativities of the many. Was not then Philo justified in deducing from this idea of an intelligent Force originating and governing the world, Zeus and Fire, his interpretation of the Logos as "the divine dynamic, the energy and the self-revelation of God"? Heraclitus might not so have phrased it, might not have seen all that his thought contained, but it does contain this sense when his different sayings are fathomed and put together in their consequences.

We get very near the Indian conception of Brahman, the cause, origin and substance of all things, an absolute Existence whose nature is

consciousness (Chit) manifesting itself as Force (Tapas, Shakti) and moving in the world of his own being as the Seer and Thinker, *kavir manīṣī*, an immanent Knowledge-Will in all, *vijñānamaya puruṣa*, who is the Lord or Godhead, *īś*, *īśvara*, *deva*, and has ordained all things according to their nature from years sempiternal,—Heraclitus' "measures" which the Sun is forced to observe, his "things are utterly determined". This Knowledge-Will is the Logos. The Stoics spoke of it as a seed Logos, *spermatikos*, reproduced in conscious beings as a number of seed Logoi; and this at once reminds us of the Vedantic *prajñā puruṣa*, the supreme Intelligence who is the Lord and dwells in the sleep-state holding all things in a seed of dense consciousness which works out through the perceptions of the subtle Purusha, the mental Being. Vijnana is indeed a consciousness which sees things, not as the human reason sees them in parts and pieces, in separated and aggregated relations, but in the original reason of their existence and law of their existence, their primal and total truth; therefore it is the seed Logos, the originative and determinant conscious force working as supreme

Intelligence and Will. The Vedic seer called it the Truth-consciousness and believed that men also could become truth-conscious, enter into the divine Reason and Will and by the Truth become immortals, *anthrôpoi athanatoi*.

Does the thought of Heraclitus admit of any such hope as the Vedic seers held and hymned with so triumphant a confidence? or does it even give ground for any aspiration to some kind of a divine supermanhood such as his disciples the Stoics so sternly laboured for or as that of which Nietzsche, the modern Heraclitus, drew a too crude and violent figure? His saying that man is kindled and extinguished as light disappears into night, is commonplace and discouraging enough. But this may after all be only true of the apparent man. Is it possible for man in his becoming to raise his present fixed measures? to elevate his mental, relative, individual reason into direct communion with or direct participation in the divine and absolute reason? to inspire and raise the values of his human force to the higher values of the divine force? to become aware like the gods of an absolute good and an absolute beauty? to lift this mortal to the nature of

immortality? Against his melancholy image of human transiency we have that remarkable and cryptic sentence, " the gods are mortals, men immortals ", which, taken literally, might mean that the gods are powers that perish and replace each other and the soul of man alone is immortal, but must at least mean that there is in man behind his outward transiency an immortal spirit. We have too his saying, " thou canst not find the limits of the soul," and we have the profoundest of all Heraclitus' utterances, " the kingdom is of the child." If man is in his real being an infinite and immortal spirit, there is surely no reason why he should not awaken to his immortality, arise towards the consciousness of the universal, one and absolute, live in a higher self-realisation. " I have sought for myself " says Heraclitus; and what was it that he found?

But there is one great gap and defect whether in his knowledge of things or his knowledge of the self of man. We see in how many directions the deep divining eye of Heraclitus anticipated the largest and profoundest generalisations of Science and Philosophy and how even his more superficial thoughts indicate later powerful

tendencies of the occidental mind, how too some of his ideas influenced such profound and fruitful thinkers as Plato, the Stoics, the Neo-platonists. But in his defect also he is a forerunner; it illustrates the great deficiency of later European thought, such of it at least as has not been profoundly influenced by Asiatic religions or Asiatic mysticism. I have tried to show how often his thought touches and is almost identical with the Vedic and Vedantic. But his knowledge of the truth of things stopped with the vision of the universal reason and the universal force; he seems to have summed up the principle of things in these two first terms, the aspect of consciousness, the aspect of power, a supreme intelligence and a supreme energy. The eye of Indian thought saw a third aspect of the Self and of Brahman; besides the universal consciousness active in divine knowledge, besides the universal force active in divine will, it saw the universal delight active in divine love and joy. European thought, following the line of Heraclitus' thinking, has fixed itself on reason and on force and made them the principles towards whose perfection our being has to aspire. Force is the first aspect of the world,

war, the clash of energies; the second aspect, reason, emerges out of the appearance of force in which it is at first hidden and reveals itself as a certain justice, a certain harmony, a certain determining intelligence and reason in things; the third aspect is a deeper secret behind these two, universal delight, love, beauty which taking up the other two can establish something higher than justice, better than harmony, truer than reason,—unity and bliss, the ecstasy of our fulfilled existence. Of this last secret power Western thought has only seen two lower aspects, pleasure and aesthetic beauty; it has missed the spiritual beauty and the spiritual delight. For that reason Europe has never been able to develop a powerful religion of its own; it has been obliged to turn to Asia. Science takes possession of the measures and utilities of Force; rational philosophy pursues reason to its last subtleties; but inspired philosophy and religion can seize hold of the highest secret, *uttamam rahasyam*.

Heraclitus might have seen it if he had carried his vision a little farther. Force by itself can only produce a balance of forces, the strife that is justice; in that strife there takes place a constant

exchange and, once this need of exchange is seen, there arises the possibility of modifying and replacing war by reason as the determinant principle of the exchange. This is the second effort of man, of which Heraclitus did not clearly see the possibility. From exchange we can rise to the highest possible idea of interchange, a mutual dependency of self-giving as the hidden secret of life; from that can grow the power of Love replacing strife and exceeding the cold balance of reason. There is the gate of the divine ecstasy. Heraclitus could not see it, and yet his one saying about the kingdom of the child touches, almost reaches the heart of the secret. For this kingdom is evidently spiritual, it is the crown, the mastery to which the perfected man arrives; and the perfect man is a divine child! He is the soul which awakens to the divine play, accepts it without fear or reserve, gives itself up in a spiritual purity to the Divine, allows the careful and troubled force of man to be freed from care and grief and become the joyous play of the divine Will, his relative and stumbling reason to be replaced by that divine knowledge which to the Greek, the rational man, is foolishness, and

Heraclitus

Signature | Issue Date