

# THE WAY AND THE MOUNTAIN



MARCO PALLIS

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PEAKS AND LAMAS"

Marco Pallis is well-known for his earlier book, *Peaks and Lamas*, which went into a number of editions and was translated into several languages. In that book, starting out from a story of travel and mountaineering, the author described his gradual discovery of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. After the war Marco Pallis returned to the East for three years, during which time he was allowed to enter Tibet to continue his studies under Lama teachers. *The Way and the Mountain* has taken shape in the light of these experiences; in this sense it can be regarded as a continuation of the preceding work, although the viewpoint is different. Of the various aspects of spiritual life with which it deals, some are presented in a specifically Tibetan framework, while others draw on a wider field for their illustration. None of the material derives from purely scholarly research, which is not the author's primary interest, but every chapter touches on a question that has affected, directly or indirectly, either the author himself or his acquaintances. The whole work has a practical bearing on spiritual problems of the present time in intention and fact.

The chapter on the Dalai Lama and his function is the first of its kind to appear in a European language, and is especially interesting in view of the recent events in Tibet. It is based on traditional data, and is designed to meet the need for exact information as well as to dispel some curious misapprehensions prevailing in the West.

**Fully illustrated including a full colour**

THE WAY AND  
THE MOUNTAIN

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*To Father Thomas Merton  
with greetings  
from the author*

*London, June 24<sup>th</sup> 1963*

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BY MARCO PALLIS

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PETER OWEN LIMITED  
LONDON

281  
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P6  
1960  
PETER OWEN LIMITED

50 Old Brompton Road

London S.W.7

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1485

P34

Made and Printed in Great Britain by  
Five Oaks Press, Jersey, Channel Islands.

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MCMLX

61-1444

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its nature indirect and relative, capable, that is to say, of finding out something about things, and of relating them to other things, but never of knowing things as they are in themselves. Ordinary human speech, being itself a rational construction, is ill-fitted to handle knowledge which, by reason of its universal character, precludes analysis and escapes relativity; such a purpose requires the use of other means, calculated to evoke an idea immediately as in a single flash unblurred by more or less clumsy attempts to discuss or explain.

Nevertheless, whatever is expected to serve this purpose must, in the first place, be taken from that world in which the human being is actually abiding (which in this case happens to be the world of physical appearances), since no one is able to set out on a journey, to start "wayfaring", except from the point where he is actually situated at the time—this may sound like a truism, but it is a truth of which the wider implications are only too often missed. Applying the general principle to the case in point, it therefore follows that the means to be used in suggesting the idea not only may, but must, be derived from the world to which the being concerned belongs. In other words, something to be found in a lower (i.e., limited and relative) order of reality—such as, for instance, the world of physical existence we have just mentioned—is presented in a manner calculated to make it the vehicle of an idea of a superior order; this being possible in virtue of the connection between all the various orders in a universe wherein no absolute state of separation is admissible. Thus whatever is contingent, superficial and confined corresponds, in some degree, to that which is free, profound and universal and which indeed is its ultimate source of reality, being reflected in it as far as its own possibilities will allow; and moreover it is this correspondence which allows the former to be used as a "support" for the conceiving of the latter, that is to say, used "symbolically". It seems hardly necessary to point out that everything enjoying any kind of existence whatsoever must therefore have its symbolical aspect, which actually constitutes its most profound reality; those who see in symbolism nothing better than an invention of the poets miss the point, unless indeed they are prepared to take

the word "invention" in its primitive sense of "a finding" of something that is already and always there to be found—one might also say a "discovery" or even a "revelation". Moreover they would also have to restore to the words "poet" and "poetry" that fuller meaning which they bore for the ancients but which now survives in their etymology alone—for, in Greek, "poiesis" is actually derived from "poiein"="to do" or "make", and poetry is fundamentally nothing other than "doing" or "making", or what we should nowadays call "an act of creation". In that sense, it is the supreme Poet who, by symbols, constructs the worlds: and in so far as he conforms to that eternal model every true artist may justly call himself a poet.

Furthermore, even an elementary acquaintance with traditional art all over the world—ranging from the antique relics of Ur of the Chaldees and Tutankammen, through the sublime creations of Gothic architecture or Chinese painting, down to quite simple domestic objects still in use among African and Polynesian tribes—will reveal the fact not only that every object, whatever its nature, is regarded from a twofold point of view, physical and metaphysical, as an object of contingent utility and ultimate significance, but also that every feature entering into its construction, as well as the whole craft of making it, is itself symbolical, being intimately related to the underlying symbolism of the object as well as to its practical uses regarded as a whole; most of the features that we call "decorative" are so in a secondary sense only, their primary appeal being not aesthetic but intellectual. The divorce between utilitarian and significant—otherwise the decay of the sense of symbolism—is the invariable mark of cultures in process of decay—sometimes even described as "progressive"—whereas for normal mankind, for the man around whom the fairy-tales are being enacted daily, such a splitting up into compartments is unthinkable, and every function of his life is but the acting of yet another part in the symbolical play that is existence.

Symbolism, within its human confines and apart from its most universal sense, is best described as a traditional Algebra serving for the expression of ideas of the universal order. Additional investigation reveals the fact that there are a variety of different ways of

symbolising the same idea. It is also a matter of historical observation that men usually have preferred to take, as symbols of the highest to which they could aspire, those things which were most directly and intimately bound up with their daily life, because it was those things which appeared most real to them in their earthly existence, consequently providing the most appropriate symbolical links with that transcendent and unconditional reality of which their own relative reality was a translation in conditioned mode.

Thus for hunting peoples, such as the Red Indians, the pursuit of truth quite naturally appears as the Grand Chase. In order that they may keep themselves perpetually reminded of this theme, it is in its turn allowed to overflow into the practice of the daily hunting which serves as its "support" so that the hunting itself is treated as a ritual—a "mystery play" in which the hunter and his quarry both correctly play their allotted parts. Similarly all weapons or other implements used in this service are themselves fashioned so as to be symbolically suggestive of their double purpose. So also for the warrior peoples, their natural symbolical dialect is drawn from the practice of war; in this connection one might mention the Japanese Samurai, the Bedouins and the Knightly Orders of Mediaeval Europe. For them the typical representation of the process of self-perfection is the "holy war" or "crusade", in which the external enemy corresponds, at one level of reality, with the internal enemies at another, those far more formidable foemen who carry on civil war within the soul, all of whom must in turn be overcome and slain. Similar examples can be multiplied almost indefinitely, as one passes from one form of civilization to another. Therefore it should surprise nobody that there is a metaphysical doctrine of wayfaring and also one of climbing, each carrying with it its appropriate symbolism.

In this chapter it is proposed to examine some aspects of a particular symbol of world-wide significance, the one that the title of "the Wayfarers" unwittingly enshrines; that symbol is the Way, and this is moreover often considered in correlation with another symbol of like importance, the Mountain. Firstly, let us enumerate a few examples chosen out of the long catalogue of traditional allusions to the Way as symbolising the destiny of Man and its fulfilment.

Starting with the Far East we find that the Way, *Tao*, has actually given its name to a whole body of tradition, commonly known as Taoism; though it would be more accurate to say that this is the name for one side of the Chinese tradition, of which the other side is represented by Confucianism, the latter being concerned with the social applications of the traditional teaching, while the former is of a purely intellectual character and deals with principles.

The *Tao-Te-King*, the fundamental scripture of this tradition, has sometimes been translated as "the Book of the Way and of Virtue", but this should be regarded rather as a derivative meaning, for the underlying idea is the "*Book of the Principle and Its Activity*". But it is no accident that a word symbolising the ultimate and utterly indefinable Principle is also, in human parlance, called the Way; since if the passage of the wayfarer along his appointed way is an imitation on the earthly plane of the Activity of Heaven (to use a Chinese term) upon the cosmic plane, the Way itself is indefinable apart from the wayfarer. Without a way there can be no wayfaring but it is the wayfarer's presence in it which in effect makes it possible to speak of a way at all. The "realizing" of the Way is therefore, for the wayfarer, nothing other than the "pilgrimage of his own Self" (as an Indian sage once described it) and it is the unseen Way which itself makes its own various stages and incidents real according to their kind and degree.

In China the symbolism of the Way is far from being confined to one tradition; for we find it again figuring prominently in the Buddhist doctrine. Buddhism, though Indian in origin, is now but slightly represented in its parent country; it has made its principal home in the Far East and adjoining regions like Burma, Siam and Tibet. In this tradition the idea of the Way is put into close correlation with another symbol, that of the Goal; the latter represents the attainment of the state of a Buddha, meaning one who is "awake", having been roused from the drowsy state of ignorance and illusion in which beings spend their lives, in order to become aware of the one and only reality. In Buddhist writings much attention is devoted to the consideration of various stages which have to be traversed by the wayfarer seeking the Goal; the present writer formerly possessed

a Tibetan scroll-painting actually entitled "Stages in the Way" and there is also a well-known Tibetan book of the same name, as well as another bearing the title "A Lamp for the Way"; both of these works occupy an important place in the education of a lama. Moreover the Buddhist tradition, in the form that it assumes in China, Japan and Tibet is generally known as the Mahâyâna or Great Way, along which all beings without exception are led towards Enlightenment. The Tibetans also make an important distinction between the indirect route followed by the ordinary run of men, stage by stage, and the "direct path" or "short cut" which is the way of the saints whose concentration on the Goal is such that no obstacle is able to delay their arrival.

This idea of the "short cut" may be compared with a very similar one to be found, this time, in Christianity, namely the symbol of the "narrow way" leading into the Kingdom of Heaven. There is besides a more general allusion contained in the words of Christ Himself when He said "I am the Way"; it would be impossible to find a more telling example than this.

To the doctrine of the Way must also be referred the many descriptions of symbolic journeys which play so prominent a part in the traditional lore of almost every people. To mention only a few; we have the Homecoming of Odysseus and the story of the Argonauts sailing in search of the Golden Fleece (which is evidently equivalent to the Goal), only here the Way is represented as leading not overland but across the seas, as is only natural in the tradition of a pre-eminently seafaring people like the ancient Hellenes whose minds such a symbolism would impress with peculiar vividness. The various dangers and monsters encountered in the course of the voyage are relatable to the stages of Self-Knowledge.

In both the above-mentioned legends an important episode occurs in the form of a passage through a narrow strait (and again one should remember the "narrow way" and the "strait gate" of the Gospel), a passage which entails the avoidance of two extremes. In the case of Jason, we have the *Symplegades* or Clapping Rocks (geographically identified with the entrance to the Black Sea) that kept alternately opening and closing to the great danger of any ship ad-

venturing between them. In the Odyssey, on the other hand, the sides of the straits (here represented by those of Messina) are guarded respectively by the monsters Scylla and Charybdis, ever ready to prey upon the crews of ships sailing too close inshore on the one or the other side. Symbols conceived after this pattern commonly refer to the oppositions arising out of any dualism that fails to be resolved by reference to the unity of a superior principle, the most typical example being that of "me" and "other", containing as it does the ultimate root of all conflicts. Since the journey invariably is a quest for Unity, the escape from dangers lurking on either side of the strait represents the avoidance of both the poles which together constitute the opposition; in this connection one might recall the words of the Buddha when He said: "I teach you a Middle Way", that is to say one which, to use our nautical symbolism once again, "steers clear" of both Scylla and Charybdis.

The foregoing examples should be sufficient to give an inkling of what is implied by the symbolism of Wayfaring. We must now pass on to the consideration of a complementary symbolism, that of the Mountain. Here we have an almost bewildering wealth of examples to draw upon. Sacred mountains, symbolising the exaltation of Divinity, are to be found in every corner of the globe. The Grecian Olympus will be the first to spring to mind, only here it is important to expose the common error of thinking that the ancients believed their gods to be physically resident on the actual Mount Olympus, that glorious peak which some of us who were out in the Balkans during the 1914-18 war remember having seen reflecting the sunset beyond the Gulf of Salonika. Such a supposition really reverses the symbolical relationship: the true Olympus is only discernible by those "who have eyes to see", and it can only be scaled by a true wayfarer, while the earthly mountains that have been given that name (for there are several of them) are themselves so called in order to turn them into reminders, or symbols, of the heavenly Olympus. The taking of such a symbolism too literally by the ignorant, among whom many professional scholars must be included, is but an example of how a doctrine can degenerate in times of decay

into a "superstition", by the literal survival of its symbols after their deeper meaning has been lost sight of.

The way to the Mountain is nowhere and everywhere; it therefore cannot be specified in rational language, but it becomes immediately apparent to those who have earned that knowledge by paying the required price. That price is the renunciation or denial of self in its separative individual sense, in order to realise true Selfhood in the universal sense. Middle English possessed a most concise and expressive term for this sacrificial abandonment: it called it "self-noughting" (which is the same as Self-knowing), and this it is which furnishes the principal theme for many a Gospel and for all the fairy-tales. Whatever other elements may be found therein are accessory to this one and only end, and therefore come under the heading of means.

The idea of an inherent invisibility of the Way such as only will yield to true insight is brought out with particular emphasis in another tradition centred round a mountain, that of the Holy Grail; the legend, rendered familiar to us by Richard Wagner's setting of it, is Celtic in origin but passed over later into Christianity. In this story the mountain is significantly named Monsalvat or Mount of Salvation on which is situated the castle of the Grail guarded by its dedicated knights. Behind the mountain lies the factitious paradise of the magician Klingsor, himself a renegade knight, thus illustrating the fact that every lie or error arises through the perversion of some aspect of the truth. Moreover, the word "error" itself contains an implicit tribute to the Way, since its original meaning in Latin is "wandering", as judged by reference to the standard of wayfaring when unswervingly conducted.

It is noteworthy that Parsifal's attainment of the Grail (which was identified with the chalice in which angels received the Precious Blood of the Crucified Christ) involved three distinct phases: firstly, as a simple-minded youth, taken for a fool by the world, he roamed about in apparently aimless fashion and came upon Monsalvat as if by accident. This symbolism is intended to convey the truth that every being, whether aware of it or not, is born a potential wayfarer, and that his true destiny is to realise all that is implied in such a

tains of Garhwal, with their indescribably glorious scenery, is well calculated to awaken, in the mind of one coming from the plains, an aspiration to enter that supreme and inward Way which is thus outwardly prefigured.

On arrival at the foot of the Kailas, after crossing the last and highest of the passes, the pilgrim makes a solemn circuit round the mountain in a clockwise direction, fixing his attention meanwhile upon the Divine Name to which the mountain is dedicated; his success in making of this earthly counterpart a means for the realizing of the unearthly journey of which it is the image will depend upon his own intellectual capacity and on his skill in concentration. This circumambulation or "girdle-traverse" occupies several days and also involves the crossing of a number of subsidiary passes. Similarly, Buddhist pilgrims from all over Tibet visit the Kailas; among the Tibetans it goes by the name of the Mountain of Precious Snow. In passing, it might also be mentioned that if members of Everest expeditions have sometimes claimed particular holiness for their chosen peak, this can only be said to hold good in quite a general sense, in so far as all perpetual snow is looked upon as holy in Tibet, so that the chief snow-mountain of any and every district serves the same purpose locally that the Kailas serves in a larger way for the entire region.

It will have been noticed, in the examples just given, that in the one case, that of Mount Fuji, the pilgrimage involves an actual ascent, whereas, in the others, the mountain is simply treated as a whole. The former case, however, might well be regarded as the one in which the rite of mountain pilgrimage is carried nearest to its logical conclusion, since it is the focal point towards which all the ridges and slopes of the mountain converge and in which their diverse tendencies are finally unified, namely the summit, which most perfectly typifies the Goal, in which all separate and individual ways go to lose themselves in the end, this being an indispensable condition for finding themselves, as the Christian Gospel has declared; and this brings us to the consideration of the most profound and fundamental of all the ideas connected with mountain symbolism, that of the Universal Axis.

from that line is dictated by the presence of some obstacle and by the climber's own inability to surmount it.

The doctrine of the Axial Peak, with all that this implies, can be taken for granted in every case where there is question of a sacred mountain, whatever particular form the idea may assume in this or that place or tradition. The Chinese, in particular, have made a free use of this symbolism, and the Mountain of the Axis, rising boldly out of the middle of the swirling Sea of Possibilities, invariably forms the central feature of the border of the ritual robes worn by the Emperor in his capacity as mediator before Heaven on behalf of his people: what its Axis is for the World, the ruler should be for his own subjects. Part of such a robe has been reproduced to illustrate the present chapter.

There are, of course, many obvious reasons why mountain-climbing should lend itself to a symbolism of the Way and the Goal; for one thing, going uphill involves, on the physical plane, more persistent effort than most other forms of activity and effort is inseparable from wayfaring on every plane. But there are also a number of less self-evident points that deserve attention: in order to consider them in logical sequence the best thing is to take the phases of our climb, now assimilated to the Way, in their natural succession, while carrying on a running commentary intended to bring out their symbolical implications.

First of all, we come to the cairn that indicates the starting-point at the foot of the climb. Cairns marking various spots of particular significance are among the most ancient and widely distributed monuments of human art; and the derivation of the word itself will suggest a reason. The primitive sense of the Celtic *carn* is "horn" (actually the same root) and the word is secondarily applied to any horn-like eminence, especially to mountain tops—one has only to think of Carnedd, Carn Dearg, Y Garn and many others. The miniature cairn built of a pile of stones was used by the Celts and other peoples in order to mark sites of burial; the profound reasons for this practice are clear, since the cairn is itself an emblem of the Mountain of the Axis and fashioned on its model; it stands there to serve as a perpetual reminder to the quick and the dead alike that the true

setting aside the exceptional case of those whose path is the "direct" one, the route involves a number of movements to the right or left, the most extreme example of which is offered by the traverse; every path but one involves an oblique movement of some kind, or, if a ridge be in question, the passage over a number of minor obstacles in the form of rocky "gendarmes" or even subsidiary summits. Where such a summit is important enough to require a prolonged effort it is then not entirely illegitimate to regard it as a provisional goal and to refer to it as such—always provided one does not forget that it is *a* goal and not *the* Goal. In so far as it assumes the form of a peak, it too, like its predecessor the cairn, can be regarded as an adequate symbol of the true summit; in so far as it marks a definite point on the climb, it is one of the "stages" in the Way. But woe to him who, after having reached the top of one of these secondary eminences, lingers there through letting himself imagine that he has accomplished something final; for then it immediately turns from an aid into a hindrance, from a stage into a barrier, from an open into a closed door, from a symbol into an "idol". This indeed is the essence of that "idolatry" against which all the traditions are continually inveighing; nothing can be called an idol in itself, but anything, even down to "good works" and "service", can become one if it is for a moment allowed to assert its own independence of the Principle and thus enter into rivalry with it.

There are many subsidiary aspects of mountain symbolism which, though meriting discussion, cannot find a place in the present chapter. One exception may however be made in favour of the first really important stage on the Way, the one that bounds the wayfarer's horizon immediately after he has set out, and which, on the Mountain, may well be likened to a prominent though lesser peak on the main ridge, which must be climbed before the true summit actually springs into unobstructed view; for up till that moment the latter remains half-veiled by the mists of ignorance and its presence has been sensed by inference from the trend of the slopes rather than by any direct observation.

The first clear view-point, therefore, corresponds to the stage we are now about to consider, which has variously been called the "pri-

mordial" or "adamic" state, or the state of "true man". All the traditions are agreed in teaching that, for the wayfarer, though the starting-point on his journey must necessarily be found somewhere in his present stage of individual human existence, yet in a larger sense, his human status is something to be won back, having been impaired as the result of a fall sustained at a time when he was actually residing at the height of that first peak which he now has to re-climb so laboriously. In other words, that peak corresponds to the realizing of the full possibilities of human individuality, short of which the description of the wayfarer as "human" is something in the nature of a courtesy title bereft of its deeper reality.

For a detailed description of this first important stage of wayfaring one cannot do better than turn to the Italian poet Dante, whose *Divine Comedy* is largely developed around this theme. In the second part of his journey through "the three worlds" the poet describes the ascent of the Hill of Purgatory, on the top of which he situates the "terrestrial paradise", which is precisely the condition of "true man" (as the Chinese call it) or Adam before the Fall, following the Biblical symbolism. From that point the traveller is able to step forth into the Celestial regions, representing states of the being higher than the human, and which do not for the moment concern us.

It will be remembered that the "terrestrial paradise" or Garden of Eden was described in Genesis as disposed around a central tree, known as the Tree of Life. Now this tree is simply an alternative symbol of the Axis; among similar examples one might mention the Sacred Oak of the Druids, the World Ash-tree of the Scandinavians and the Lime-tree of the ancient Germans. Adam and Eve, or in other words humanity in its truly normal state, dwell in the garden near the Tree, that is to say they lead a life in which the Contemplative Intelligence is always directed towards the one essential Truth, excluding all competition, while the various faculties of indirect knowledge and action are grouped around it in their proper order, each occupying the place that belongs to it in virtue both of its possibilities and its limitations. Such a condition of inward harmony is automatically reflected in the outward peace symbolised by the garden in which all kinds of creatures, including Man himself, dwell together

in friendship. The Fall, when it occurs, is ascribed to the tasting of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of knowledge of Good and Evil; that is to say, the formerly single eye begins to see double, and unity gives place to dualism, or polarisation into contraries. From that moment harmony is destroyed and now Man, at war with himself, finds himself likewise vowed to conflict with everything else around him, while peace lingers on only as a more or less blurred memory in the back of his consciousness, causing him to feel perpetually discontented with his present state and thus inspiring him to seek the path of return to the lost paradise, or, following our mountain symbolism, to climb up the Hill of Purgatory. As for the main summit of the Mountain, its recollection has by then grown so dim that its existence has largely to be taken on trust, as a matter of "faith".

It is to this symbolism of the "primordial state" that should logically be attached all those movements that take the form of a cultivation of the simple life or of a flight from the artificiality and distraction of the city, and which might well include, among accessory aids to realization, both wayfaring and mountaineering as we know them. Many forms of art have quite consciously drawn their inspiration from this source. Chinese landscape painting provides a notable example. Moreover it is the same doctrine that is able to offer a consistent basis for all kindred movements such as those having for their aim the protection of animals and plants and the preservation of natural beauties, as against their abuse and profanation by the sophisticated and commercial-minded. In the love and championship of wild Nature and of solitude one must recognise a distant echo of the original harmony in which Man, instead of acting like a tyrant and exploiter, was on the contrary the acknowledged protector and ruler of his fellow-creatures and their spokesman with the celestial Powers; in fact, like the Chinese Emperor mentioned before, he himself played the part of the axis for them, and this in virtue of his own firm adherence to the axial position which kept his wayfaring ever on the line of the "direct route".

"Fallen" man, on the other hand, lacks this sureness of judgment, for he regards all things in a disconnected way and this often leads

tampering" is a spiritual maxim the Taoist sages made into the keynote of their teaching; the world's busybodies have gone on neglecting it to their own and our great peril. Under the continual measuring and delving and lumping together which now has reached its climax, the face of the Great Mother is becoming so disfigured that soon it may be unrecognisable, with all its eminences "conquered", its furrowing dales "brought under discipline of a map" (as another blasphemy hath it), its underwater—sky even—contaminated, the whole so blotched and flayed and carved up and reshuffled that only the all-seeing Intellectual Eye will still be able, across the wreckage of a dishallowed world, to perceive the Motherly Presence there where she subsists, unenhanced as undiminished by the variegated issue of her womb, in the eternal actuality of Divine Intellect Itself.

If the accumulated pressure of historical fatality (which some call "progress") now seems to be closing in upon this matricidal, suicidal modern world of ours, let this not be the cause of overmuch concern (advice easily given, but how hard to follow!), for this process men undergo with such mixed feelings dates back to the beginning, to that first slide from Eden. Rather should it be borne in mind that every way, to be such, must run in both directions, every slope will have its up and its down. If one end be called Heaven and the other Hell, then to walk the Way is itself a hill of purgatory and when the pilgrim-climber feels it growing steep and narrow, and not broad and easy, he may take comfort—he knows he is not straying off his route.

\* \* \*

All that remains now is to speak of the summit of the Mountain; other intermediate stages can be taken for granted, since once the primordial state has been regained, once the hill of Purgatory has been climbed, the path to the Goal henceforth lies clear before the wayfarer; the summit once plainly seen, its attraction is irresistible.

Mention of the word "attraction" in this context moves us to draw particular attention to a question which is really of the first importance, but which might otherwise escape notice. Until now the stand-

point which we have all along taken up has been that of "free-will", that is to say we have treated the wayfarer as if he were the active agent throughout, the Goal being simply regarded as the term of his aspiration and effort; this, however, gives but one half of the picture and not the most important half, so that it is now necessary to consider the other and complementary point of view, that of "grace". Once we have spoken of the attraction exerted upon the wayfarer by the summit, their respective parts are reversed and now it is the latter which reveals itself as the essentially active power, while in the case of the former, his initiative, from being seemingly absolute, now is seen to be relative, since it is both evoked and sustained by the idea of the summit, failing which it could not even come into existence. Indeed, not a step would be taken but for this incentive, which conditions both the form of the climb and its direction; apart from the "actionless activity" of the summit the whole route would be devoid of meaning.

After this last digression, only the final step need concern us, but here Man must frankly confess his impotence, for nothing that he can say will fit the occasion; only he who has attained the summit and made himself one with it knows the solution of the mystery, for as between any stage or step, even the most exalted, and the supreme realization there is an absolute discontinuity which it would be idle to try and bridge by word or thought. So long as there yet exists a step to be taken there are alternatives and hence there are possibilities of comparison, but at the summit all alternative routes become one; every distinction between them, and therefore every opposition, is spontaneously reconciled. The summit itself not only occupies no space, although the whole mountain is virtually contained in it, but it is also outside time and all succession, and only the "eternal present" reigns there. It is utterly inexpressible in its uniqueness; silent is the Knower of the Summit and the whole Universe strains its ears to catch the accents of his speechless eloquence.

\* \* \*

Those who have had the patience to follow this argument along its

winding course may perhaps by now have formed the opinion that, besides other things, it may also contain, by implication, an answer to the question, so frequently, and fruitlessly, debated—"Why do we climb?" If the explanations offered by moralists and advocates of "pure sport" alike have proved on the whole unsatisfying, this has largely been because the question itself was badly put in the first instance. Let us think back for a moment to the legend of Parsifal previously mentioned; it will be remembered that he received the right answer only because he knew how to frame the question itself aright. Concerning the Grail, Parsifal did not inquire "Why?" but "What is the Grail?" "Why?" by its very form, requires a rational solution and Reason, by definition, is concerned with the relation of things to one another, as the Latin word *ratio*, from which it is derived, plainly testifies, a meaning which has been preserved in mathematics; things in their essence Reason is impotent to touch. The Grail, which is the same as the Goal and the Summit of the Mountain, transcends all relativities and therefore escapes all rationalising. It must be known immediately or not at all; ultimately all roundabout approaches must rejoin the direct route, of which they are but translations in discursive mode, or they will not arrive.

In the controversies alluded to above, it is somewhat paradoxical that those who apparently take up the more earnest standpoint are usually the ones who have gone widest of the mark, while their light-hearted opponents, those who are out to repudiate any serious purpose in mountaineering, have come closer to the true answer, though both parties alike have fallen victims to the unsuitable form of the question put. The former are right in their contention that unless climbing can, somehow or other, be integrated in the Way, in way-faring, it must come under the heading of waywardness, of error. But in seeking their justification in some moral purpose, one related to the social order, they neither find it possible to make their case fit the facts nor have they avoided giving their argument an almost priggish sound which was hardly their intention.

Their opponents on the other hand, those who put the case in favour of pure sport exclusively of all other motives, have failed in that they have been inclined to abstract their conception from the

whole, thus establishing an irreducible opposition between responsible work and duty as they saw them, and certain other things, apparently lightly undertaken, which they called sport. The fact is that they too, in spite of their protestations, have tended to confine their point of view to the social or moral order, in which they do not differ from their adversaries, and as they were not able to fit climbing into it—for after all climbing is not a social occupation, springing as it does rather from a wish to react against social pressures—they simply were content to call it “a sport” leaving the question at issue to answer itself. The course of the controversy indeed has been in many ways typical of all oppositions; it was a factor derived from an underlying community of outlook that really was answerable for the apparent divergence—it is like pole that repels like, and the fiercest conflicts are always those that occur between persons whose points of view are similar, leading them to pursue similar ends and thus engaging them in competition. It is rather in the recognition and fostering of formal differences that lies the way towards peace.

The solution to any opposition, whatever its nature, should always be sought in the knowledge of some unifying principle to which both its terms alike can be referred because it lies beyond their distinction. This is true even on the relative plane, just as all the ridges and faces of the Mountain are resolved in the unity of the summit, on the universal plane. The Hindus, who have had the happiest knack of suggesting ideas while avoiding the danger of attempting over-exact verbal definitions, here also can help us to get clear of the horns of our dilemma. Their wise men have always steadfastly refused to entertain such a question as “Why was the world created?” for the same reasons as were given above. All that they have been content to say on the subject is that Creation is the “Divine Sport”.

The essence of a sport, as opposed to the idea of work, is the element of freedom, or in other words, the absence of coactive necessity. The moment we admit a specifiable reason impelling us to do something we tacitly recognize the existence of some law that thus imposes the need for the action. But Divinity admits of no law whatsoever, for who says law says limitation by some extraneous

power, which in the case of Divinity would land one in an absurd contradiction. Therefore in describing Creation symbolically as "God's Sport", we are, as far as language allows, affirming the divine freedom from all limitation. That is why a sport, taken in the traditional sense, after excluding all such motives as personal or national competition and other similar irrelevancies that might vitiate its purity, can be regarded as a mirror of the godlike liberty and, for us, a possible means towards its eventual knowledge. On the other hand the true workman, artist or poet, that is to say he who does anything whatsoever that needs to be done, is himself an imitator of the creative art, so that in his work the free element is present as well as the element of necessity, wherefore he too can justly claim for his own work, if correctly done, that "this service is perfect freedom". Thus at the summit, the spot where all oppositions are finally laid to rest, sport and work likewise find themselves reconciled.

In conclusion, we must return once again to our original symbolism of the Way and the Mountain. It will be remembered that at the outset we had pictured the Way as a road with stages, therefore as following the valleys. Later, we reconsidered it as an ascent of the mountain, its stages becoming levels superimposed on one another, while the original direction of the valley is now represented by the traverse round the mountain at a particular level, for example the human individual level. It will perhaps be noticed that these two conceptions, that of the mountain axis and that of the valley or traverse, together go to form a Cross. The axis itself, passing as it does through each level at its central point, may truly be said to be productive of it, since the level or stage in question is nothing but an indefinite development of possibilities entirely contained within that point: thus in the fullest sense, the realization of the Axis, the direct route, is the realization of the mountain in its totality and beyond. "*Once upon a time*" as the fairy-tale would say, "*there was a wayfarer called Polestar. He reached the Summit and in him the Way and the Mountain were made one so that he sang with Isaiah 'every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low'. He was a Knower of the Cross and his was the peace thereof.*"

*The Active Life**What it is and what it is not*

The title and subject-matter of the present essay has been chosen, not because Action is to be regarded as the most important element in the life of beings or as coincident with the full extent of their possibilities, but simply because it is, for many of us, the chief vehicle of realization at the present moment. We are largely engaged in leading the Active Life, at least in intention, and it is therefore of immediate and practical consequence for us to discover something of its nature and to be made aware of the conditions governing it, and perhaps most important of all, to recognize what are its limitations, so that while profiting by the Life of Action in the greatest possible degree we may at the same time be saved from a common delusion which takes the form of expecting from it certain benefits that lie outside its resources. But even if we do come to recognize the existence of those limits and succeed in catching a glimpse of the realms beyond them, we shall still be compelled, if we intend to penetrate to those regions, to take our present situation in the world of Action as a starting-point, since it is evident—or perhaps not always quite so evident—that a person can only set out on a journey from the place where he actually is situated and not from elsewhere.

When this essay was originally composed, it was designed to be read to a small group of people who used to meet regularly once a week for the common study of questions having a bearing, direct or indirect, on certain personal issues raised for them by the war; it formed the last item of a special programme of talks given in the autumn of 1943 and the author was at some pains to make it link on to the subjects of previous talks. For example, the first evening of the series was taken up with the need for a doctrine; it is the traditional doctrine of the Active Life that is now about to be presented to the reader. Another of the talks took for its title "Man,

God and the land"; man's proper use of the land plainly enters into the Active Life, while all that concerns man's knowledge of God is on the contrary the subject of what has usually been known as the Contemplative Life. The reason for this is obvious, since man is not capable of *doing* anything to God, who is beyond his reach as far as Action and its effects are concerned. It is only through Knowledge, through a direct and indissoluble identification, that he can fully respond to the Divine Grace, the Activity of Heaven as the Chinese call it, and it is this supreme Knowledge together with the methods dispositive to its acquisition, methods which differ from those of the Active Life, which go to make up the Contemplative Life. The aim of these methods is to train the being to keep its gaze constantly fixed on its Transcendent Cause, without so much as a flicker of distraction, so that the springing up of Knowledge may take place without the slightest interference from outside; such a centring of the attention upon a single point might be compared to the action of the fine tip of a silversmith's punch focusing the whole power of his hammer-blow upon one chosen spot. This state of "one-pointedness", as it has been called, constitutes an essential condition for perfect contemplation; outwardly the being is quiet, with mind withdrawn from all the separate objects of sense around it; its gaze is "turned inward"—to use a common Tibetan expression—and wholly absorbed in the vision; but that apparent stillness, which the ignorant mistake for inactivity, actually represents the most real and intense state of activity conceivable, for it is indistinguishable from the Activity of Heaven itself. Compared with it, the efforts of the Active Life in the more restricted sense of the word, activities outwardly turned and directed towards the environment of the being and which are visible by reason of their very dispersion, are of quite a subordinate character. If we use the same word "activity" in both cases, this is only in virtue of the interconnection of all the constituent elements of existence, whereby the lower, relatively bound and limited orders reflect in varying degrees the reality of the one unfettered and universal order, on which all lesser realities depend. Indeed did they not do so they would be bereft of any reality

to be contemplated—and refers to those preliminary and then gradually sharpening views of the yet distant goal vouchsafed to the pilgrim, without which he would have no incentive either to set out or to continue on his journey. By theory the gate is opened that gives access to the Way, and theory is likewise the name given to the vista of successive visions, merging imperceptibly into one another, which draw the traveller on step by step from comparative ignorance through many intermediate stages of partial knowledge, towards the end of all journeyings.

The most important point to grasp about the traditional conception of a complete doctrine is that it is always to be regarded as potentially “effective”, in the fullest possible sense, and its theoretical exposition must be accompanied by the appropriate methods for realizing it; which is neatly expressed by a favourite saying of the Tibetan lamas that Wisdom (pertaining to theory) and Method (pertaining to realization) are eternal partners and can never be divorced. It is on the strength of this association that the various traditions, especially the Eastern ones, have been at such pains to stress the essential part to be played by the *guru* or Spiritual Master, a personal guide who, in virtue of his own place in a regular line of succession going back to a more-than-human origin, is qualified to “initiate” others into the method he himself has followed, adapting it, as occasion may require, to each disciple’s individual character and powers. The relationship so established between them is of the most intimate kind, often described as a “spiritual paternity” on the one hand and a “spiritual filiation” on the other, expressions which again translate the idea of the transmission of something that transcends the individual order. The influence of the master, whose function makes of him an embodiment of tradition as well as a mouthpiece of the theory, will embrace all that might in any way affect the pupil’s proficiency, action being no exception, since one of the commonest obstacles in the way of spiritual development is the existence, in greater or lesser measure, of a contradiction between the outward and inward life of the being. The former must be brought to order in such a way that no sense of strain persists between the two; or rather the outward activities, in so far as these

are necessary, which to some extent applies to most beings if not to all, should be so ordered and directed as to form part of the method itself, furnishing it with many of its natural appliances. That is why this conception of the teacher and his function has by no means been confined to the transmittal of obviously contemplative disciplines, but has also embraced all the active arts, from government downwards.

Given that the indissoluble wedlock of the pair Wisdom-Method has been fully recognized, the entire conception of what really constitutes Knowledge will be seen to be founded upon the idea of effective realization. It is this possibility of an immediate verification which clearly distinguishes true Knowledge from the various special sciences dealing, by methods necessarily roundabout, with the unnumbered separate "facts" apparent to the senses—their authority can at best only be a derived one, in so far as they are able to be effectively linked to the transcendent Knowledge as auxiliary means. It is only through an abuse of language, corresponding to an advanced state of scientific decadence, that the bare word "knowledge" has come to be loosely applied to the heterogeneous and disconnected results of such studies, for which the word "information" would be a more accurate term.

Information about things, when pursued with reasonable aims and not, as so often happens, as part of an idle and pretentious academic hobby, comes within the province of the Life of Action, in conformity with the "practical" character of the objects kept in view by the sciences in question. The same applies to "scholarship", "research", "philosophy" and indeed to whatever can be codified in a system and expounded in class-rooms, no less than to more outdoor or obviously manual activities; the fact that certain professions are comparatively sedentary in no wise authorises us to regard them as a halfway house to contemplation, though many people seem to suffer from such a delusion. It must be repeated—Knowledge, in the full and unrestricted sense given to it by the sacred doctrines of both East and West, excluding as it does all methods of indirect investigation, is not *about* things but *of* That on which our very being depends. Ultimately the only way to know is to be—on the highest

planes of reference any distinction between the two disappears, as has been recognised by all the traditional teachers; and it was the same doctrine that found an echo in Aristotle when he declared that "the soul is all that it knows". Once this idea has been properly grasped, it will be found to carry the most far-reaching implications, which will have their repercussions in every sphere of existence.

One additional remark is still needed and it is this: one must remember that in every idea, whether it be profound or comparatively superficial, the idea itself greatly surpasses in scope all possible forms of its expression. Even the most faultless exposition is bound, by definition, to leave out far more than it includes; moreover what it omits is really the kernel of the kernel, the very essence of the idea, which is incommunicable by its nature and can only be seized by those "who have ears to hear", that is by means of a direct intellectual assimilation, accomplished in loneliness. Therefore even if someone should succeed in presenting the doctrine without distortion—and that would be no small feat and one truly deserving of the epithet "original"—even then, the listener or reader must make every allowance for the inexpressible, which is the one all-important factor.

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Enough has now been said for the reader to have gained a certain insight into the relation of Action to Knowledge, even though the foregoing remarks have in great part been concerned with the latter, while the theme that gives its title to this chapter has remained rather in the background. This postponement need not occasion any surprise, however, since it is reasons arising out of the inherent instability of Action in comparison with Knowledge which thus impose the need for "situating" the former in regard to the latter, whereas the converse does not hold good. Whatever is contingent, transitory and limited in its scope can only be "valued" in terms of something that escapes those limitations; failure to put things into their proper perspective through attempting to consider the life of Action independently would, almost literally, have been to build

upon the sand, and this is perhaps the most profound of the lessons contained in the Gospel story of the two men who set out to build their houses, the one upon sand and the other upon rock. Those who allow their horizon to be bounded by Action and put their entire trust in it for the accomplishing even of quite worldly, let alone other-worldly, ends might well take warning from this aspect of the parable, so persistently overlooked. If both the world and the way of living which they are so laboriously engaged in organizing seem to disintegrate as fast as they are put together, the results are only what are to be expected from any attempt to use one of the chief weapons borrowed from the armoury of Method—for that is all that Action amounts to—independently of Wisdom.

The ultimate identification of "knowing" with "being" carries with it the corollary that the fruits of Knowledge are one and the same thing as the Knowledge itself and thus constitute a permanent acquisition for the knower; wherein they differ from the fruits of Action which cannot but be ulterior to the act that produced them, whether that act was undertaken with some specific purpose in view or in response to an outside stimulus, as a reaction; but in either case the result of the action will involve someone or something besides the agent himself, though that other might of course form part of his own person. It follows from this that the things that have been obtained through one action are equally liable to be lost as a result of a different action, since, in themselves, they remain separate and therefore separable. The Hindus put it concisely when they say that "Action is always separated from its fruits"; whereas Knowledge, once realized, is there for ever.

All this contributes to showing that there is a fundamental irreiprocity of relation between Action and Knowledge in favour of the latter, which is enshrined in the formal statement that "Knowledge is superior to Action"; from which it also follows that if two constituents of any order of existence are respectively attached to Knowledge and Action, the two must stand towards one another in a similar relationship. It seems hardly necessary to point out that this principle will apply to the Contemplative and Active Lives as a whole. Other and more particular applications of it can also be made to the

various faculties constituent of a single being, according to whether it is Knowledge or Action that uses this or that faculty for its vehicle—it is therefore unquestionably the faculty of inward understanding, the “single eye” of Contemplation or the transcendent Intellect (to give that word the meaning it bore in Christian usage and which later misuse has perverted) that must be the guide and ruler, with the rational mind and the senses and bodily limbs carrying out their indirectly active tasks in the light it transmits to them. Otherwise one really has no right to speak of a normal human life at all; and, in passing, it might be mentioned that all the traditions are agreed that the Active Life is pre-eminently an instrument adapted for the restoration of the being to this condition of normality, usually known as the “primordial state” or state of Adam before his fall; after that point has been reached the importance of externally active disciplines is much diminished. Again, turning to the social order, it is a similar principle that governs the much misunderstood institution of the Hindu “castes” and the analogous institutions to be found in other civilizations, the hierarchy of different social functions being determined according to the degree in which they involve participation in the two chief factors now under discussion. Although in any traditional way of life the pre-eminent position of Contemplation remains beyond dispute, individuals and even whole races will be found to differ considerably in their capacity for it—apart from more or less exceptional cases—some kinds of temperament being inclined more in the direction of Action and others contrariwise. Stability and harmony consist in giving the fullest effect to these differences; it is only after the individual point of view itself has been superseded in favour of an attitude in which knowledge of the Universal is the sole concern that these distinctions lose their force and meaning, with a consequent shedding of duties, rights and other social ties. Lastly, it is again the same principle that underlies the complementary conceptions of the Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power, as acknowledged in Christendom, and that has likewise decided which of them shall always have the final say.

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We have now reached the point where we can usefully begin to be more explicit about what is meant by the "Active Life" itself—for though it is too early to attempt any very complete definition, it is at least possible to arrive at some working approximation, which will gradually take clearer shape as we advance deeper into our subject. Moreover we shall attain to a truer understanding if we rely more upon the suggestive power of symbols than upon any formula of a systematic and therefore exclusive character; such attempts at an exact verbal definition are usually unsatisfactory and are best avoided. There are many aspects of the subject to which no one could hope to do justice in the course of a short survey; at times we shall have to content ourselves with a bare outline, leaving details to be filled in on some subsequent occasion, while at other times we shall go no further than just pushing a door ajar simply in order to give some slight inkling of possibilities that lie beyond it, but without trying to explore them for fear of too many complicated digressions. A subject like this is positively inexhaustible and the present essay cannot hope to provide much more than a rather sketchy introduction to it.

Traditionally, the Active Life is distinguished from, and therefore delimited by, two other Lives existing respectively above and below it, namely the Contemplative Life (which we have mentioned already) and the Life of Pleasure. In modern times the sharp distinction between these three attitudes in the face of Existence has been blurred through the name "Active Life" being often applied loosely so as to include both the second and third-named in one and the same category; to which one might add that the transcendent character of the Contemplative Life first came to be doubted, and then denied, with the result that its influence has almost vanished as a positive factor in human affairs, at least in the West. The reason for both the above-mentioned changes of valuation resides in the fact that modern thought has tended to restrict its conception of reality to the realm of relativity, or in other words to the natural world, wherein movement and change appear to reign supreme. Thus, wherever movement was apparent, as occurs in both the Active Life and the Life of Pleasure alike (though, as we shall see later on, the

nature of their activities differs in certain important respects), it was supposed that activity without any further qualification was to be found, whereas where outward movement was not observable people were led to impute inactivity in a purely negative sense. The difference between the two attitudes of mind which we have just been comparing, and which might conveniently be labelled the traditional and anti-traditional outlooks, lies in the fact that the first-named derives the lesser reality of the changing and moving world from a principle or "sufficient cause" residing in the universal realm, which is by its nature the seat of the changeless and the uncompounded, while the second of the two mentalities attempts to place all reality in the realm of change. The difference of these two ways of looking at things is of fundamental importance, as affecting not only general ideas but even the minutest details of daily life; for whereas the traditional outlook fosters a habit of always looking to the cause rather than to the effect in all orders, and not least in the order of the changing world itself, the anti-traditional attitude encourages precisely the contrary tendency, namely the paying of more attention to applications than to principles, to effects than to causes, to symptoms rather than to the disease—and still less to health—to the absence of open warfare rather than to the things that make for peace. This mental habit, which is all the more dangerous in that it is largely unconscious, lies at the root of most of our troubles, and so long as it is prevalent among us we shall be condemned to remain the dreamers that we are, instead of the men of awareness that we might be.

The first requisite, therefore, is for one's ideas to be clarified—hence the need for a doctrine; continual worrying about acts before one's general outlook has been reduced to some degree of order is an unpractical policy, since it is one's ideas, or the lack of them—one's knowledge or ignorance, what one is or is not—that will condition one's acts; though these acts will in their turn serve to reinforce this or that tendency, ploughing certain furrows deeper and filling up others, thus providing a firmer "support" to knowledge or, alternatively, interposing a more insurmountable obstacle in its path.

It is above all this state of dependence upon a corresponding know-

ledge that gives to an act such importance as it possesses, and the effectiveness of all symbolism rests upon this correspondence between different orders of reality. An act, when viewed by itself, is just an isolated occurrence devoid of significance and the whole multitude of such acts when regarded separatively, that is to say apart from their causes, amounts to little more than an unresolvable chaos; but these same acts, taken as "symbols" or "signs" able to reveal something more fundamental and real than their mere appearance, then become an effective means of understanding. In this way whatever is situated in a lower or more limited order of existence can always be utilised as a means of approach to that higher order which its relative reality mirrors. Through the effect we are put in mind of the cause, through the act the idea is suggested, through the exercise of the Active Life in its entirety we are disposed towards the Contemplative Life. Meister Eckhardt, one of the brightest stars of Christian knowledge, expressed this truth by saying that "any flea as it is in God is higher than the highest of the angels as he is in himself"—that is to say, anything that forms part of the manifested world, whether being or occurrence, exalted or lowly, if regarded in isolation is worthless, but if referred to its principle, that is to say to its "sufficient cause", is of supreme moment. Thus, almost inadvertently, we have stumbled into awareness of one of the most important characteristics of the Active Life—perhaps the most important—namely that it provides a means of reference to the life of Knowledge, the Contemplative Life: and what is true of the whole also holds good of the parts—every act or fact or distinct being, all human conduct or the entire Universe itself, are but signs, that can only be rightly interpreted and made use of by being referred back to their principle. There is no question of denying the reality of their appearance, as an appearance; but an appearance must be the appearance of something and the essential question to ask is "what is that reality of which these things are appearances?" In the answer to that question will be found the key to Knowledge.

The function of the Active Life which we are at present considering is illustrated, to take one example among others to be found in the Gospels, by the words of Christ when He spoke of "giving a

cup of water in my Name"—for the act to be effective it must be performed not for its own sake, but in the name of the All-giver and in imitation, on the relative plane, of the archetype of All-giving on the universal plane. No less important, the act of taking must be ordered according to the model set by the gesture of the All-taker, a truth which is remembered in those places where Tradition still holds sway, though ignored by the fashionable school of altruists, whose name betrays their obsession with the notion of "other" and, therefore, inevitably, with the correlative notion of "I" and "mine". Once the idea has been firmly grasped that the entire Life of Action, for all its wide and varied range of possibilities, is yet essentially dependent and therefore limited, the temptation to single out certain particular spheres of activity, as if they were privileged to stand alone, will with all the more reason lose its power over us. The mind will, for instance, no longer be so inclined to over-stress questions affecting social relationships nor yet to toy with such catchwords as "virtue is its own reward" or "art for art's sake", so dear to our pseudo-intellectuals, who allow themselves to be taken in by the specious disinterestedness expressed by these high-sounding phrases. A statement of this kind could only be valid if the activity referred to were absolutely independent and real in its own right, carrying within itself its own principle or "sufficient cause", and for this to be true it would have to be all-embracing, unlimited in every respect, which would amount to making it identical with the Infinite Itself. It is not possible to admit a plurality of self-sufficing but limited entities, for they will inevitably limit one another and this precludes their self-sufficiency. Such a suggestion lands one in an absurdity, which is however disguised by the rhetorical appeal of the phrase, a purely sentimental deception. Action on the relative plane has no other justification than its dependence on a superior principle, which it helps the being to realize, thus earning its only possible reward. Therefore Christ's words "in My Name" include both the cause and the aim of giving the cup of water; the phrase must however not merely be taken in the momentary and literal sense of a formal citing of the Holy Name when about to perform the act, though this ritual form might sometimes usefully be employed to

inaugurate the operation. Nor is the forging of a purely mental and rational link sufficient. There is much more to it than that, for the reference to the Divine Name must involve a real integration of the act in the idea, an ordering which must moreover continue to be operative throughout the action, otherwise that action will become defective to the extent that this is omitted. At the same time it must not be thought that an ascription to the principle need necessarily be conscious in the ordinary sense of the word; when it has become second nature to such an extent that it embraces every kind of action without the agent requiring to set in motion any conscious effort of will, the mastery of this pre-eminent art will be complete. To sum up—regarded separately, Action and its fruits only serve as a net that entangles attention, diverting it from the quest of the one and only source of truth; but viewed in the light of their principle, as effects depending on a cause, that selfsame Action and its fruits lose their power to restrict and instead become a powerful means promoting realization. This doctrine, together with the appropriate methods for applying it, is known in India as *Karma-Marga*, the “Way of Works”, and it forms the subject of what is perhaps the most extraordinary of the doctrinal books composed in Sanskrit, the *Bhagavad Gita* or Song of the Lord.

There is still another way of expressing this aspect of the doctrine, which consists in saying that in the Active Life when fully integrated, all acts without exception are ritual in character. The object of any rite is to establish communication with a higher reality, and, as we have seen, every act, whatever its nature, is capable of such ritualization, not least those daily acts which we are inclined to regard as insignificant just because they are so familiar but which are really most intimately bound up with the existence of the being, acts such as eating, washing or sexual intercourse, as well as those arts of making things which minister to men’s material needs or the husbandry on which they depend for their livelihood. It will be found that in a fully traditional society these are just the acts that tend to be ritualised in the highest degree and it is interesting to note that the Indian word for action, *karma*, is also used, in a more technical sense, to denote ritual action as such, the difference in the use of an

identical word depending only on the angle from which the act is viewed. From the general point of view of the Active Life every act must be a rite, that is, it must be performed "in My Name", while from the general point of view of rites they must be made to embrace every kind of action. Thus it will be seen that we are dealing with two aspects of one and the same thing and that the distinction between acts and rites, though a convenience for purposes of discussion, disappears in the final analysis. In such a conception of the Active Life those more specialised acts, designed for what we now call "a religious purpose", have their place, but they by no means monopolise the ritual field and in the highest state of understanding cannot be isolated even logically. Under such circumstances life attains its maximum coherence and it is impossible to recognize distinctions, and still less oppositions, between spiritual and physical or sacred and secular.

As against the view of life that we have just outlined, wherever a civilization has to a greater or less extent accepted a division of interest as if between two independent worlds, which might respectively be called "sacred" and "profane,"—a state of affairs which, though now widely prevalent, is abnormal in the extreme if judged from the standpoint of humanity viewed as a whole both in space and time—one may be sure that in an intellectual sense a serious degeneration has taken place. At an advanced stage of this process—which shows, incidentally, the utter fallacy inherent in any hypothesis of "progress" as commonly entertained—the ritual element, if it survives at all, becomes restricted to a few specific and isolated practices and occasions, while the rest of life, including most of the vital functions, is "profaned", that is to say *abandoned to itself*. When this happens it is certain that the day of dissolution is not far off and the words of Christ concerning "the abomination of desolation standing in the holy places" apply with full force; for the "holy places" are all the possible functions of existence, and Jerusalem and Bethlehem are here with us in this room at this moment and always.

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It is worth recapitulating some of the important general conclusions about the Active Life at which we have arrived so far:—

- (1) It is not self-sufficing, but it is a means.
- (2) It can only be effective in proportion as it remains undetached from its principle; or, if the same idea be considered from the complementary point of view, every action must be "ritualised", that is to say referred to its principle throughout its performance, otherwise that action will constitute not an aid but an obstacle.
- (3) The principle on which the Active Life is dependent resides in the Contemplative Life; its goal is likewise to be found there, the two being identical.

It will now be convenient to retrace one or two steps in order to state our thesis in a slightly different way with the object of throwing certain aspects of it into still sharper relief. Contemplation and Action can be described as the twofold activity, inward and outward, of any being: or again, the first may be said to pertain to universal principles, while the second has to be exercised in the relative world of becoming or Nature, and is concerned with the interaction of the being and the rest of the universe around it. The first-named, therefore, is largely taken up with the life of the being regarded in the first person and with the answer that must be given to the question "who or what am I?"; while the second, the Active Life, is made up of the relationship between that same being which we have just called "I" and all that falls under the general heading of "others".

In the Christian Gospel these two terms will be found to be respectively connected with the two fundamental propositions of the Christian Life, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy strength"—this is Contemplation—and "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"—taking the word "neighbour" in its widest sense as including all the other beings that form the remainder of the Universe after abstracting from it one particular being. The classical symbol of these two lives is to be found in the story of Mary and Martha, and for anyone whose mind still harbours a lingering

The life of Pleasure consists of nothing else but a residue left over from an emptying of the Active Life through the abstraction of its superior principle which normally should order it from within; an impoverishment which, wherever it has occurred, arose in the first place from an overvaluing of the Active Life itself, in comparison with the Contemplative Life that provides it with its sanction; for there is no surer way of corrupting a thing than by inviting it to occupy a higher place in the hierarchy of values than naturally belongs to it in virtue of its possibilities. Pushed by human adulation on to an impossible pedestal, it tries in vain to stretch its own limitations and disintegrates in the process.

Once the principal focus of attention has been allowed to shift away from Contemplation to the side of Action, it is only natural that the tendency to seek in the latter a remedy for every kind of ill should be progressively re-enforced; and with such a tendency the development of the means of action is also bound to keep pace, for the human mind is exuberantly ingenious, so that whatever engages its interest is almost certain to prosper, at least after a fashion, while other things from which it has been withdrawn will as certainly perish from want of care. Furthermore one of the manifold effects issuing out of the incessant multiplication of practical appliances of every kind is a restricting, even to the point of their virtual suppression, of such conditions as solitude, silence and the like, conditions commonly associated with the survival of Nature in an untamed state, but which also, though in a more relative way, enter into the question of the tempo of social existence itself. In either case, however, the more unfamiliar such conditions become, the greater the probability that they will, whenever they are experienced, be productive of a sense of disquiet and even fear, leading to a deliberate attempt to abolish them; and since these are among the conditions that are known to favour the growth of a habit of meditation and inward recollection, their extinction, apart from all other possible disadvantages, amounts to depriving mankind of some of its most effective aids in cultivating the contemplative art, with the further result that it is delivered more irremediably than ever into the power of Action and of its uncontrollable boon-companion, Reaction. If

draught of the Life of Pleasure, with its persistently bitter aftertaste of unslaked desire, well calculated to drive the being from action to action in an endless round of attempted acquisition and divestment.

Just as the contemplative influence over men's activities leaves an unmistakable stamp of its presence on everything they do or make, so, conversely, are the signs of its absence equally recognizable. The instruments designed to minister to the Life of Pleasure, whether as forms of activity or as objects invented for that purpose, are in their own way just as characteristic as their traditional counterparts. To a dispassionate eye, the shadow cast by a thing is almost as revealing as the sight of the thing itself, and no less indicative of the existence of the light. A fact that must be faced, even though it is apt to prove an extremely uncomfortable one, is that whatever admits, whether explicitly or merely by tacit implication, that the Life of Pleasure is an adequate human life, whatever stops short at providing for the needs of Man as if he were a being whom the Life of Pleasure is or might be sufficient to satisfy, is itself ascribable to that same Life of Pleasure. This is true not only of those luxuries which men usually call "enjoyments" and which furnish the professional moral censor with his favourite targets, but also, and not less so, of many activities which are commonly supposed to serve "humanitarian" purposes, including much that passes under the name of "public service" and even a good deal of activity actually labelled as "religious". Similar considerations apply to social institutions of every kind, to the conception both of "education" and "standards of living", to the products of human manufacture, to arts and sciences and indeed to anything, whether private or public, that can conceivably be described as human activity. All turns on the fundamental conception of the being and its constitution, from which its various needs are necessarily derived; a man's own picture of himself contains the touchstone by which he may distinguish one kind of activity from another outwardly similar, leading to their respective inclusion in the Active Life or in the Life of Pleasure. No judgment of Action is possible except by reference to the Contemplative principle; even if the latter be not formally denied, to leave it out of account amounts to a virtual disavowal.

satisfactions for which they are always craving. Moreover, the need to remove as much as possible out of the range of the moral point of view becomes all the more imperative from the fact that sentimental morality, whether professing to be religious or merely abstract, tends to place an almost pathetic reliance on violence as the only really effective means of attaining its objectives; violence, at least in the usual sense of the word, being nothing else but an intensified form of Action, released and driven by ungovernable sentiment. But for his department of neutrality, the sentimentalist, through his indulgence in what may well be termed "moral gluttony", would be vowed to ceaseless warfare, and indeed he comes very close to that state as it is. It is not the rationally-minded person, still less the man with a contemplative bent, who flies readily to the use of violence; for moderation is the usual companion of impartial criticism, while in the second case there is in addition the fact that the main centre of attraction lies elsewhere than on the moving surface of events; so that, as between him and his more passionate colleague, the differences in their respective points of view, if translated into action, are likely to be productive of policies no less markedly contrasted.

Together with its equally colourless inhabitant, the so-called "common man", this realm of supposedly neutral activities represents one of the subtlest, as well as one of the most frequent disguises assumed by the Life of Pleasure, one of those in which the spirit of passivity and negation is carried to its maximum. But, even while stripping off that disguise in order to expose the real nature of any given action, it must still clearly be borne in mind that Action itself is devoid of any absolute character by definition, since it can only be exercised within the confines of the relative world; so that in speaking of the perfection or imperfection of an act one can mean it in a relative sense only. This, once again, invalidates all attempts to bestow an absolute authority upon a moral code, for that also plainly comes within the province of the Active Life and cannot avoid sharing in its relativity. Ethics, like any other constituent of that life, do provide a salutary, and indeed at most stages an indispensable, instrument for restoring and maintaining order in the little kingdom of human individuality. If they are given exaggerated

and independent value by the mind however, ethics, no less than other things, will point the way into a blind alley: for neither deeds, however meritorious, nor facts, however interesting or useful, nor indeed any of the dual fruits of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, are to be reckoned as "food for the soul" in Plato's sense, the kind of nourishment on which, as he said, "the soul can grow wings" for its final flight. What is demanded is something more; to be perfect "even as your Father in heaven is perfect". Even stopping short of this idea of transcendent perfection, which is the proper object of the Contemplative Life, the adjective "perfect" may however, without undue impropriety, be applied in a relative way to an act simply in order to show that it conforms, to the limits of its inherent possibilities, to the conditions appropriate to such an act. Nevertheless, if those conditions were to be regarded as limiting it in an absolute sense—which is impossible, since to say "absolute limit" is to utter a contradiction in terms—the act would be devoid of any reality whatsoever and could never exist at all.

Consequently that which within the limits of Action is an act is also more than an act in virtue of its dependence on a principle which transcends those limits. Thus the act, in its function of a "support" for the realization of something residing outside its relative limitations, that is to say the act in its symbolical capacity, is able to serve a purpose far exceeding the possibilities of the same act considered in itself. No component of the Universe, whether a being or a happening, forms a completely watertight compartment, and it is this possibility of communication which alone enables beings to aspire to the Knowledge which otherwise would be forever closed to them. It is this same possibility of communication which constitutes Tradition in its essence.

Below the level of the perfect act, as we have defined it, all remaining acts suffer from a greater or lesser degree of defectiveness, which can easily be proved by recalling a few of the conditions that a competently conceived and executed act must fulfil. It must be necessary, that is, performed in view of a genuinely necessary end—it goes without saying that an arbitrary or luxurious attribution of necessity in no wise fulfils the condition in question—and it must be skilfully

ordered for its purpose. It must exclude all irrelevancy, and lastly it must throughout the whole cycle of its manifestation be referred to its principle, through a full use of its symbolical or ritual possibilities. The doctrine of Islam contains a particularly apt formula to describe such an act: "It must be all that it should be and nothing else besides". Comment would seem superfluous, and this formula may well be left to each person as a suitable theme for meditation in order that he may extract for himself the secret of its manifold applications. Whoever tries to apply it as an invariable test to the various actions of his day-to-day life will soon discover in it potentialities of self-discipline that are as numberless as they are severe. That single sentence contains the most complete and concise theory of Action conceivable, and he who succeeds in applying it consistently and intelligently can be sure of realizing the highest possibilities of the Active Life. He will do more than that, since one who sails forth on this course may well awake one day to the discovery that the wind that "bloweth where it listeth" has carried him whither he did not even dream at the outset; for at the end of it all must come release, according to the universal law that only he "who shall lose his life shall find it", the Active Life being no exception to the rule. In the last extremity, after it has yielded all those things of which it is capable, it too must be denied, suffering death in the sacrificial fire of pure Contemplation which is both its principle and its end, *alpha* and *omega*. This death to Action is the ultimate fulfilment of the Active Life: outside this purpose the pursuit of any activity is but agitation, an aimless strewing by the wayside.

#### *Additional note on Ritual Action*

Someone to whom the foregoing chapter was shown has raised a question of considerable practical importance at the present time, one which, however, because of its contingent character failed to find a natural place in the main text where it would have created too much of a digression. Did not the virtual equating of rites and acts when correctly accomplished, he asked, entail the danger of causing

people to neglect or despise ritual activities in their more specific sense, as enjoined by the various religions upon their adherents? Certainly the last thing one would wish to do is to depreciate the value of ritual action against the background of an otherwise profane-minded society, for without it even the most elementary spirituality would find it hard to survive, so that the mere fact that such a danger has troubled the thoughts of one qualified person is sufficient reason for trying to counter it to the best of one's ability.

Therefore one would answer his objection as follows:— the assimilating, under normal conditions of traditional life, of acts to rites, as being re-enactments here below of divinely executed prototypes, in no wise authorises one to exchange the emphasis, as between the two, by saying that rites, as such, amount to mere acts and no more, for it is the ritual principle, as it were, which will justify the act, and not vice versa: any inference to the contrary could only be drawn by one already imbued with a profane outlook, such as could hardly exist in the midst of a world still fully traditional; and were it ever to arise there sporadically, it would certainly receive no kind of recognition or indulgence.

However, seeing that we are now living in a world where on the one hand the value of ritual action has been largely called in question and where, on the other, the distinction of rites and acts is felt in an extreme degree, it is quite proper and in accordance with prudence for one to take up the standpoint of that distinction; in which case rites will appear, among all other forms of activity, as the highest possible, one might say as human action *par excellence*, this being moreover transcendent in relation to other forms of action in proportion to their degree of dissociation from the operative spiritual principle, or, put the other way, in proportion to the degree of ignorance affecting both the intention behind them and the manner of their execution. In such a context, assuredly, the principal indistinction of rites and acts disappears in favour of their distinction carried in fact to the highest power—for such is the penalty of admitting the profane point of view at all.

Under the conditions prevailing today, especially in the West, ritual action in the above sense, and more particularly rites having

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a sacrificial character, such as the Christian Eucharist for instance, are of extreme importance if only because the action in question alone continues to fulfil the normal conditions of the Active Life, those to which all actions whatsoever should by rights conform; indeed it is no paradox to say that in this sphere as in others it is the normal that has become rare, while abnormality abounds, the criteria of what is or is not normal being in no wise quantitative ones. For the many people compelled by circumstances to give their time to profane activities, despite any wish of their own, the sacramental rites in which they participate constitute for them almost the only firm support of the sacred influence of their tradition, and it is only when taking part in these rites that their acts are able to be disengaged altogether from profane influences such as, in everything else, have come to attach themselves to the activities of men. That is why, in judging a Christian's mode of living, for instance, it is not quite far-fetched to count it more in his favour that he "goes to church" than that he "does good". Whoever wishes to recapture the true spirit of the Active Life under present circumstances has no other choice but to set out from the accomplishment of those few ritual acts that still, in essence as in their finality and form, possess the character of normal acts.

anxiously seeking spiritual advice with a view to giving effect, in the face of the modern world and under its pressure, to that which, thanks to their own reading of Guénon or other works imbued with the traditional spirit, had become for them a matter of pressing necessity.

These inquiries, however, though animated by a common motive, have in fact taken on many different and sometimes most unexpected forms, calling for answers no less variable: it is nevertheless possible, looking back, to recognise some features of common occurrence that may allow of a few profitable generalisations touching the way in which a man should prepare himself to meet an opportunity of this kind. It must however be clearly understood that any suggestions offered here, even if they commend themselves, are intended to be carried out, whenever the occasion presents itself, in a resourceful spirit and with the greatest flexibility, lest by faulty handling on one's own part the person most concerned be driven back prematurely on his defences, as can so easily happen with temperaments either passionately or else timidly inclined. Ability or willingness to discuss a vital matter in a spirit of detachment, as experience has shown again and again, can but rarely be taken for granted in anyone; a certain failure in this respect at the outset must not cause the other person to be written off as "uninteresting", as a result of a summary estimate of his character and motives; in handling such matters a remembrance of one's own limitations can be of great service as a corrective to impatience or complacency.

At the same time, neither is it necessary to wrap up every statement or avoid every straight issue for fear of causing pain, and if some question productive of an answer from oneself couched in rigorous terms happens to awaken an unexpectedly strong sentimental reaction in one's interlocutor this too must be accepted patiently and without surprise; the cause of such hitches may well lie in the fact that anyone with a mind seriously divided about spiritual questions will necessarily be living under some degree of strain and this state of acute doubt may well give rise in season to symptoms of irritability. On the other hand it also sometimes happens that an inquirer, professedly asking for counsel, has already made up his mind,

if unconsciously, and all he is really seeking is a peg on which to hang a decision prejudged on the strength of secret desires; in such a case a straight answer, that brings matters sharply to a head, may be the only way left open to one. Nevertheless, these cases are comparatively rare, and the greater number of consultations of the kind here referred to are more likely to follow a line of gradual and also of fluctuating approach.

For the sake of those who, either from natural diffidence or for any other reason, might feel dismayed at the possibility of having some day to impart spiritual counsel to another, and possibly even to one who, at the mental level, is more highly equipped than themselves, it should be repeated that the function here under discussion, that of *upaguru*, is not one that depends on the possession of any kind of transcendent qualification, though within the very wide limits defining the field of its possible exercise all manner of degrees are to be found. If it be argued, rightly as it happens, that the function of instructor, even in its most relative sense, will always carry with it some implication of superiority over the person instructed, the answer in this case will be that the mere fact that the latter has come to one seeking spiritual advice itself constitutes recognition of a certain superiority, however temporary and however limited in scope. To accept this fact in no wise runs counter to true humility; for in fact no human instrument as such is ever adequate to a divinely imparted vocation at any degree, therefore also his own unworthiness can never rule a man out altogether. One can take comfort in the fact that the very disproportion of the two terms involved serves to illustrate the transcendence of the one and the dependence of the other: paradoxically, it is the "good man's" personal lustre which might, in the eyes of the world, seem to mask the seemingly distant source of its own illumination, but this can hardly be said of the sinner's!

Incidentally this same principle contains an answer to the classical attack of the man of "protestant" turn of mind on various sacred offices because of the occasional, or even frequent, moral deficiencies of those traditionally entrusted with their exercise. The function itself remains objectively what it was at the origins; neither can the saintliness of one holder validate it further, nor the corruption of

indispensable for the purpose of rendering a spiritual problem more "concrete". Once again, it is well to remind oneself that for someone to be seeking advice of this nature does in itself argue a degree, and often an acute degree, of "spiritual distress" that deserves all one's sympathy. It should be added that in trying to probe the nature of another's spiritual need, small, apparently irrelevant signs will often tell one more than any rationalised explanations, since the latter, even when honestly advanced, are almost bound to take on an apologetic and forensic character, affecting their usefulness as evidence to a greater or lesser extent.

*B. Concerning the need for a traditional framework:—*

In the case of one who is already attached to an authentic traditional form, the positive possibilities of that form must first be taken into account, if only for the reason that the individual concerned will already have been moulded psychically according to that form, at least in part, and will understand its language without special effort.

As for one who is "unattached" traditionally, the primary necessity of a traditional basis for a spiritual life must, as Guénon has done repeatedly, be stressed in unequivocal terms; an esoterism *in vacuo* is not to be thought of, if only from the fact that man is not pure Intellect, but is also both mind and body the several faculties of which, because they are relatively external themselves, require correspondingly external means for their ordering. This insistence on the "discipline of form" is a great stumbling-block to the modernist mentality, and not least so when that mentality is imbued with pseudo-esoteric pretensions. Therefore it provides, over and above its own correctness, one of the earliest means for testing the true character of a man's aspiration, even to the point of bringing about an immediate "discrimination of spirits": only here again one must beware of making a system of this test, since it has become such a commonplace, on the part of modern writers on spiritual subjects, to decry the value of forms that a person not already forearmed can be pardoned, at least in some cases, for having developed a similar distaste in the sincere belief that he is merely escaping

from the servitude of the letter in the direction of "pure spirit"; whereas all he is doing is to substitute mental abstractions for concrete symbols, and human opinions for the traditional wisdom and the laws that express it outwardly. Nevertheless, in the long run, a persistent unwillingness to accept any traditional formation for oneself, on the common plea that there is no form but has exhibited imperfections in greater or lesser degree in the course of its history, must be reckoned as evidence of spiritual disqualification. Form necessarily implies limitation and this in its turn implies the possibility of corruption; it would be futile to wish things otherwise. This fact however does not invalidate the efficacy of a formal disposition for those elements in the individuality that belong themselves to the formal order, of which thought is one. For this reason one must not allow oneself to weaken in regard to the principle of traditional conformity, which does not mean, however, that one should try to ignore incontestable facts concerning various manifestations of human corruptibility that have occurred in the traditional civilizations, especially in more recent times, from some of which, moreover, the modern profanity itself can be traced in lineal descent.

C. *What attachment to a traditional form implies:—*

Attachment to a revealed form which, to meet its corresponding necessity, must be an effective and not merely "ideal" attachment, will imply, as an indispensable condition: (a) The taking up of an *active* attitude towards the world, in opposition to the attitude of passive acceptance that has become so general in these latter days, and it also implies a symbolical but still relatively passive participation in the mysteries, firstly through faith and secondly through general conformity to the traditional institutions. This relatively (though not wholly) passive participation is in fact the distinguishing "note" of an attitude properly qualifiable as "exoteric", in contrast to an "esoteric" attitude (b) which, for its part, implies, over and above, an active, truly "intellectual" participation in the mysteries with a view to their effective realization, sooner or later, in the heart of the devotee. In the latter case the more external side of

the tradition, with all its component elements, instead of appearing to fill the entire spiritual horizon, will rather be thought of as offering two advantages, namely (i) as imposing the indispensable discipline of form upon the psycho-physical faculties of the being, the rational faculty included, so that they may all serve, and never obstruct, the activity of the central organ or Spiritual Heart and (ii), as providing teacher (when found) and disciple alike with appropriate "supports", symbolic or other, wherewith the more inward activities can be steadied in the course of development, and more particularly in the earlier stages.

These supports if they are to be utilisable in an effective sense, as instruments of a spiritual method, must be formally consistent (hence the objection, voiced by Guénon, against any arbitrary "mingling of forms"); otherwise all kinds of psychological dissonances are likely to arise. The modern mind, with its habit of conceiving progress in terms of an indefinite amassing of things regarded as beyond question beneficial and not so merely under a given set of conditions, finds it especially hard to admit that two elements, each advantageous in its own place, can nevertheless be mutually exclusive and capable, when brought into association, of producing far more harm than good. Behind this reluctance there lies in fact a serious metaphysical fallacy, due to a radical inability to grasp the true nature of forms which, to be such, must each display aspects of inclusion and exclusion, both.

D. *Concerning the nature of tradition:—*

For any human being, his "traditional attachment" can be regarded as a minimum condition defining him as human, at least in intention, and this, regardless of the greater or lesser extent of that being's spiritual horizon: in this sense, tradition will appear as the chief compensating factor for Man's fall from Grace, and as a means for regaining a lost state of equilibrium. In a sense, it is untrue to speak of a man's attachment to tradition; it would be more accurate to say that by tradition man is connected with the source of Knowledge and Grace, as by an Ariadne's clue, one that gives him his

direction as well as the hope and promise of safety, if he will but use the opportunity it offers him. For every man, his tradition will be evocative of certain spiritual "values", besides providing the ritual and formal supports (as explained before) which are the carriers and catalysts of celestial influences, at all degrees of receptiveness and participation. The tradition will dedicate that man or woman in principle to the Way and it will unlock the door to all the possibilities of realization. Likewise it will serve to "regulate" all the more external aspects of human activity and it will, under normal conditions, suffuse its characteristic "colour" or "flavour" over all the elements of daily life.

For an esoterist the same holds good, with the difference that the whole conception of the Way will be raised, as it were, to a higher power, its finality being transposed beyond individual and indeed beyond all formal limits.

#### *E. Digression on Orthodoxy.*

Faith has been defined as confident acceptance of a revealed truth, orthodoxy marking a parallel conformity of thought and expression to this same revealed truth. It is not our purpose here to attempt a detailed study of this important aspect of traditional participation, the one that imparts to spiritual life its formal consistency. There is however one aspect of the subject which must find a place here because in practice it often plays its part in the difficulties surrounding the early stages of spiritual quest: it is the distinction, not always apparent to everybody, between an expression of traditional orthodoxy in the strict sense and a private opinion which happens to coincide with the orthodox teaching. From the point of view of its objective content, such an opinion can be accepted at its face value since, as St. Ambrose pointed out, truth by whomsoever expressed is always "of the Holy Ghost". Subjectively judged, however, the correctness of an opinion so held, though creditable to its author and in any case welcome, still remains "accidental" and therefore precarious; the traditional guarantees are not in themselves replaceable thanks to any purely human initiative, carried out, that is to

welfare, represents an undeniable fact, and all other forms of activity, private or public, are valued in proportion as they contribute more or less directly to the promotion of spiritual interests. What, for the Tibetan mind, is an unthinkable proposition is the possibility that any kind of human existence can remain really healthy while in a state of insubordination, overt or concealed, to the Spiritual Order; to speak of "raising the standard of living" or "establishing permanent peace" under such circumstances would sound like a cruel joke, and so would the phrase "the Welfare State". The secularist conception of man and his interests, according to which contemplative activity, even when tolerated, ceases to be a necessity and becomes reduced to the level of a private hobby, coupled with the conviction that to live "by bread alone" is, for man, actually feasible—this is something so alien to normal Tibetan thinking that it would be almost hopeless to try to put over such a point of view even to many of those who profess an interest in the ways and beliefs of the outside world—I have more than once made the attempt and my Tibetan friends, who are extremely polite, have listened patiently, but it was easy to gauge from the look on their faces how little they had taken in of my laborious explanations.

An attitude of such indifference towards things of a spiritual Order would appear to these people, and indeed to all who still live and think in a traditional manner, to be not so much impious as suicidal. For are not the sages and saints, so they will say, the only efficient protectors of mankind, failing whose presence and applied skill, itself based on awareness and prompted by compassion, everything else would infallibly go to pieces for lack of principle? Furthermore they will go on to point out that the saints in question owe their beneficent power precisely to their own detachment from the world and from all social exigencies, whether these take the form of duties or of rights: having won through to the point where it is possible to contemplate the naked Vision, they have become like a mirror in which those whose eyes are as yet too feeble to bear its radiance otherwise than as viewed "in a glass darkly" may nevertheless discern something of its reflected glory, in a form tempered to their own lack of strength. Truth revealed and veiled, the immediate

vision and the vision by reflection, knowledge and faith, realization direct and intuitive or, failing that, a participating at one or more removes, herein is to be found the essential structure of a traditional civilization like that of Tibet, all the values of which are assessable in terms of one or other of these two main categories.

Passing to the human microcosm, the same quality of transcendence, as pertaining to the contemplative function, is recognisable: here the central or "axial" position is occupied by the organ of contemplation, the Intellect or, as some traditions have it, the "Eye of the Heart". The human norm is itself describable by reference to its supreme possibility which is to be an Awakened One, a Buddha, one, that is to say, who has become aware of what he is not and of what things are not (note the negative form which is characteristic) and consequently of what he is and of what things are; as one of the Zen Masters has put it, at first the disciple, his mind still entangled in the cosmic mirage, beholds around him objects such as mountains and trees and houses; then, with the gaining of partial knowledge, mountains and trees and houses fade from sight; but lastly having arrived at complete understanding, the man, no longer a disciple, again beholds mountains and trees and houses, but this time without the superimpositions of illusion.

It is characteristic of the Buddhist tradition, its Tibetan branch included, that it prefers to express truth in terms of an "apophatic theology" (to use a Christian expression), one that lays itself out to unmask and destroy the various limiting concepts that veil the face of the Sun of Knowledge, which, for its part, once the fog of attribution has been cleared away, can be trusted to shine forth by its own light. Roughly speaking, the whole Buddhist technique derives from this conscious avoidance of conceptual affirmations and that is why, in the case of the Buddhist, his immediate attention will be directed, not upon a principle to be realized, upon God, but rather upon the obstacles to be dispelled, the limits to be transcended, upon the Round of Existence, the World.

Such an attitude is already to be found implied in the first of the "Four Truths", starting point of the Buddhist Way as revealed by the Founder, whereby existence is equated with "Suffering", a word

to the sentimentalist and do not enter into the point of view of spirituality which is always, in intention at least, impartial and resigned.

A genuinely carefree attitude, a serene outlook, these are not to be won by refusing to face facts, and it is rather those who, despite all warnings, insist on laying up their treasure where moth and rust will corrupt it who, as the inescapable hour of disappointment draws near, will yield to despair. Clutching hard at things which in the very course of nature are bound to disappear, they try to put off the hour of awareness, using every possible narcotic device that human ingenuity can invent, the true "opium of the people"; but despite their efforts they are overtaken by fate and certainly their end will be a lamentable one. In many the desire to be deceived is carried so far that even in the hour of death itself people conspire to trick the dying into unconsciousness, an impious proceeding which those who are still traditionally minded, like the Tibetans, will hardly credit. Is it then really surprising that persons brought up in such an atmosphere of escapism—here this much abused word applies with full force—should develop every kind of morbid symptom such as all the palliatives offered by physician and psychologist alike are impotent to remove? In contrast to this mentality, the Buddhist peoples generally and especially the Tibetans are characterised by a conspicuous cheerfulness, one as uncontaminated by optimism as it is free from its more obviously depressing partner, and this buoyant outlook goes hand in hand with an ability to contemplate the mortality of things.

The doctrine of Death and Impermanence, to give it its full name, together with its uttermost prolongation into the doctrine of the emptiness, or lack of self-nature or, in other words, of the negative character attaching to every form of existence whatsoever, remains, throughout his course, the staff on which the Buddhist pilgrim leans, and all possible means are called into play with a view to keeping an aspirant perpetually reminded of it. To mention one example, when the disciple in meditation finds himself thronged by distracting thoughts, often very trivial ones—many of us must have had this experience—a recognised remedy is to go back to the very begin-

ning, letting the mind dwell once again upon the universally shared certainty of Impermanence and Suffering (which is always the first theme proposed at the start of the meditative process) and, as an eminent *Geshe* (Doctor) told me, if this is done persistently the distractions will be stayed. It should perhaps also be explained that in case of the contrary happening, by the disciple's mind sinking into torpor, it is likewise a contrary remedy that may be applied by dwelling on the positive aspect of the world and on the opportunity provided by a human birth, with a view to rousing the drooping spirits.

But to return to the subject of Impermanence; continued meditation upon this theme will, almost inevitably, bring another kind of awareness, pertaining to the fact that there is a shared fatality enveloping all existences regardless of their nature, from long-lived inhabitants of the god and titan worlds, through mankind down to the lowliest animal, plant and mineral forms and again below these to the tormented existences that constitute the hells. In proportion as this welter of common suffering makes itself evident to one's consciousness so will one be moved thereby to Compassion which will go on growing until, having been possessed by it entirely, one will no longer be able to hold back from the next step, which is to become a fully dedicated being by taking the "Bodhisattva's vow", as it is called, in an unshakeable resolve to win Enlightenment, not merely for one's own sake, but for the emancipation of every suffering creature; from that moment onward whatever meritorious deeds one is able to accomplish, instead of being accumulated on one's own account, will be freely shared with all the beings in the universe, regardless of everything but their compelling need.

The traditional form of the Bodhisattva's vow will be of interest; it runs with some omissions as follows:— "I, so and so, in the presence of my Master so and so, in the presence of the Buddhas, do call forth the idea of Enlightenment . . . I adopt all creatures as mother, father, brothers, sons, sisters and relatives. Henceforth . . . for the benefit of creatures I shall practise charity, discipline, patience, energy, meditation, wisdom and the means of application . . . let my Master accept me as a future Buddha." Furthermore, these words are uttered as it were in anticipation of a similar vow ascribed

to the Bodhisattva himself, the fully enlightened being, already entitled to Buddhahood in twofold virtue of Knowledge of the Voidness of Existence and of Universal Compassion, a vow which is symbolically conveyed—for clearly one has gone beyond the ordinary resources of language—under the paradoxical form of a “refusal to enter Nirvana so long as one single blade of grass remains unenlightened”.

Bodhisattvahood, this is the heart of the matter, as far as Tibetan spirituality is concerned. In a subsequent chapter this theme will be treated in greater detail; but for the time being it is enough to have allowed the reader to gain an inkling of that which, more than anything else, has given the Tibetan world and tradition their characteristic quality; and it is this same flavour, perfume of the Bodhisattva's presence, which is immediately sensed, by anyone who has even a partially awakened perception of such things, on crossing the barrier of the Great Himalaya and setting foot upon the Tibetan plateau proper.

Tibet, largely because of its closed character, has gained the reputation of being a land of mysterious happenings, a “lost horizon”, and many things true or fantastic have been published on the subject; but in one respect at least it is possible to substantiate such a description out of one's own experience, for during one's stay there one did become very frequently conscious as of a mysterious presence, using that epithet, however, without any sensational connotation, but rather according to its primitive meaning of something not to be uttered, something that can only remain an object of the unbroken silence of the soul.

All one can do is to repeat that one became conscious more than once of a peculiar quality of transparency affecting the whole atmosphere of the place; it was as if the obstacles to the passage of certain influences had here been thinned down to something quite light and tenuous, obstacles which in the outer world remained dense and opaque. The Himalayan ranges through which one approaches, mounting through their deep-cut gorges, tend to awaken in the mind an ever changing series of vividly separate sense-impressions which in their way are deeply stirring; it would be an insensitive person

indeed who did not yield to the magical beauty of slopes all covered with small metallic purple, dark crimson, or white rhododendron from the midst of which blue or yellow *Meconopsis* poppies raise aloft their crown of flowers; while in damper spots the associated loveliness of dark blue iris and yellow primula seems to offer a foretaste of the delights of *Sukhâvati*, the Western Paradise of Amitabha, the Buddha of Light. But once out on the plateau all this is quickly forgotten, for there one finds oneself in a landscape of such ineffable contemplative serenity that all separate impressions coalesce into a single feeling of—how can one best describe it?—yes, of impartiality. It is this quality of the Tibetan landscape which made one call it “transparent”, for before all else it preaches the essential emptiness of things and the compassion which is born of an awareness of their vacuity. ✓

If some readers are inclined to dismiss this impression of Tibet as rather fanciful and in any case explainable as an effect, upon an imaginative nature, of a high mountain climate—the valleys are all over 12,000 feet and the air is indescribably exhilarating to both body and mind—this writer can only make answer that though much can reasonably be attributed to such a cause, this is nevertheless insufficient to account in full for the conviction, formed at the time and remaining undimmed after twelve years of absence, that Tibet is a focus of spiritual influence in a particular and objective sense and apart from any power of one's own to respond or otherwise, as the case may be. Essentially, this is a question that pertains to what may properly be called the Science of Sacred Geography, and Tibet is by no means the only example of the kind, though it is one of the most remarkable and extensive. 1

Were a Tibetan to be asked to account for this special character attaching to his homeland he would doubtless evince no surprise, since for him the explanation would be as plain as the fact itself, and expressible in the following terms:—Tibet is in a very special sense the seat, or if one so prefers, the focus of manifestation of that Divine Function or Aspect known as Chenrezig, the All-Compassionate Lord and Good Shepherd, of whom it is said “that he will not enter the sheepfold before all the sheep, down to the last,



“When thou meditatest upon sentient beings as having engendered thee in previous lives, again and again give them grateful thanks.”

*Mila Repa*



as "meaningless", for to those critics they truly are so, but not to everyone. This point needs to be mentioned because people nowadays are apt to regard the spiritually endowed man as being typically a thinker, whereas it is the opposite that is the truth. Thinking has its uses, admittedly, and also—let this not be forgotten—its dangers. Actually, there is no more reason for a spiritual person to be a thinker than a cricketer; occasionally the two things, spirituality and an unusually acute brain, may be found together, of course, as with, say, Saint Thomas Aquinas, but equally often it is the other way: which does not mean, however, that spirituality can ever go hand in hand with shallowness or obtuseness of outlook (as can easily happen in the case of a purely mental agility), if only because spirituality, to be such, implies a power of intuitive vision in greater or lesser degree, and he who is able to embrace a truth as in a single glance has no need to analyse or rationalise an experience which is, for him, beyond all relativity as well as beyond all doubt.

Invocation with a *mantra* can be carried out in several ways:—most commonly the words are repeated on a rosary, or else they can be rhythmically assisted by the turning of a *mani* wheel as already mentioned, in which case the wheel itself will contain the same formula, inscribed many times over on the paper cylinder which forms its core. The Tibetan word for "invocation" is taken from the purring of a cat, which well describes the murmured repetition; but in cases where the invoking person has attained a higher degree of aptitude, the *mantra* will be repeated silently and without the aid of rosary or other similar instrument. But before going further there is a story to be told.

Some years ago a friend belonging to the Swiss foreign service was visited by a Catholic missionary who had been stationed in the South-West of China, in a district which by race and language is entirely Tibetan. My friend, wishing to obtain an unbiased account of conditions out there, inquired whether the stories he had heard about the Tibetans and their great piety were true or exaggerated, to which the missionary answered without hesitation: "Oh! not in the least exaggerated, the Tibetans are without the slightest doubt the most pious people on the face of the earth." "How do you make that

one is trying to make. The introductory verse runs as follows:—

“Thou who art entirely unstained by sin  
Born from the head of the supreme Buddha  
By Compassion look upon beings:  
To Chenrezig let obeisance be made.”

In this context “the supreme Buddha” refers to Amitabha, Limitless Light, who is the heavenly begetter, as also the *Guru* of the Bodhisattva Chenrezig. In traditional symbolism, the world over, Light represents Knowledge, born of which is Compassion, Chenrezig’s self. And now for the concluding verse:

“By the merit of this (invocation) soon may I  
Have realized the power of Chenrezig,  
Thereby may beings without a single exception  
Attain to the land of the Norm.”

Phrases like “the land of the Norm” or “the Pure Land” are commonly used periphrases for the supreme realization, Enlightenment. It is easy to see from the wording that this verse amounts to no less than an anticipation of the Bodhisattva’s vow. Thus every initiate into the *Mani*, even if he be but a novice, is by that very fact already looking forward consciously or unconsciously to a time when that vow can be taken with a more clear and deliberate mind; as for the adept, the *Mani* itself constitutes his call to Bodhisattvahood, while the whole process provides the occasion to obey the call effectively. It is not without reason that the *Mani Mantra* has been described as “the concentrated quintessence of all the thoughts of all the Buddhas”.

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One day in the Spring of 1951, as the author was about to leave Kalimpong for England, a man brought along a prayer-wheel (by which is meant a *Mani*-wheel) which he wished to dispose of: it was made of silver, most beautifully chased by some artist of the province of Kham far to eastward on the Sino-Tibetan border, for the Khamba smiths excel at every form of metalwork. The man opened the silver container in order to show the roll of writing in-

Standing on any lofty spot and letting one's eye roam over the tangle of ridges and deep-cut valleys which together make up Western Sikkim, one notices that every second spur, of which Sinen is one, is crowned with its temple or small *gonpa*, each a sentinel of the Doctrine looking out across this once blessed region, and it is impossible not to feel a certain contemplative urge oneself at the mere scene displayed before one's gaze, the serenity of which is such as to make one imagine every forest recess or mountain cave as still harbouring its hermit Lama, as must have been the case down to quite recent times. Today, however, most of these likely-looking places are deserted and it can be said that, in the higher sense, the Contemplative Life has largely ceased to be followed in these parts, and it is only the more outward things of the tradition which now serve to canalize the spiritual influence, more indirectly therefore and in a less active or conscious way. This is really a cardinal fact concerning Buddhism in Sikkim, one which any honest survey must first of all take into account; for the contemplative or intellectual element (which must not be confused with what is merely mental or rational, due to a loose, modern misuse of the word "intellect"), being the central element in any true tradition, is the one essential factor in the absence of which all the others, necessary as they are in their own relative order, rituals, arts, moral legislation and the Active Life in general, are bound eventually to fall apart through lack of a principle to unify them. Knowledge constitutes the one and only stable guarantee of a normal existence in the Buddhist sense, and by knowledge is meant, not the variegated fruits of individual mental activity, but *That* which comes only by way of direct Intellection, without intermediary, *That* which being ever present shines by its own light so that it is perceptible from the moment that the mentally and physically created obstacles have, through applying the appropriate Method, been rendered fully transparent. It is this end that all spiritual disciplines have in view, and it is for this purpose that one resorts to a Spiritual Master, but it is Contemplation itself which makes of a man a Master, so that here again one is back where one started—Contemplation it is which constitutes the heart of a tradition and if that heart is allowed to grow weak, how then

related to the general pattern of Tibetan art, possesses a number of features of its own, one of which is the wealth of bold and original woodwork in the interiors; especially remarkable are the great supporting piers with the spreading, bracketed capitals most splendidly carved and very aptly left uncoloured; the great temple at Tashiding provides another magnificent example.

And what manner of men, it may be asked, were the creators of these wonders? The answer is that they were quite simple, normal people not very obviously distinguishable from other descendants of the peasant stock to which they belonged; indeed the only secret of what, to us, appears like "genius" lay in their normality itself, that typically Buddhist virtue (in the sense of conformity to "the Norm", to *dharma*), and doubtless these same men would have felt hard put to it if asked to explain how they went about their creative achievement, and probably their only answer would have been that they had been so taught by their predecessors in the craft, who had shown them how, when one wishes to put up a temple or fashion a pillar, such a way is the "correct" one, as traditionally revealed in the ancient days, and any other way is not. The traditional mind, when artistically engaged or otherwise, is a unanimous mind, and it is its very unanimity and the reduction in the sense of individual selfhood that goes with it which, by thus restricting the agent of restriction, causes that spontaneous and at the same time ordered originality to be released. That is the lesson of all traditional art, and besides its accomplishment how small do the supposed triumphs of artistic individualism seem, when once one has learned to see through the various tricks whereby it is wont to assert itself.

The interior walls of Sinen are covered with ancient paintings, now somewhat faded, but still clear at such times of day as the light is shining in at the right angle. They fall nothing short of the other features already described, and the same applies to the images: certainly, were these things to be found in Europe, Sinen would be a famous place and every precaution would be taken to preserve its treasures by guarding them jealously against the dangers of well-meaning but uninstructed restoration, as well as by an occasional repair rendered necessary as a result of weathering: of the two dangers

times marred by superstitious misinterpretation of elements occurring in the rites themselves, is not altogether lacking in realism; for the chief purpose of rites, all the world over, is to keep open channels of communication with something which, if it were once shut off (as happens when the profane point of view has come to prevail, with consequent cessation of ritual activity), would inevitably leave the beings concerned exposed, helplessly, to all kinds of obscure influences of a subtle order, emanating from a level far below the human, and these influences, finding the field clear, would tend to extend themselves further and further over the world of men. This is perhaps the greatest danger resulting from materialism, which may be compared to a general encrusting over the human scene whereby the free circulation of the spiritual influence, of which tradition is the vehicle, is hindered more and more, until that crust, which in man is so aptly described as a "hardening of the heart", begins to crack by its own rigidity, whereupon the obscure forces of dissolution already mentioned begin to pour in, reducing everything to a state of disintegration. This, broadly speaking, is the story of the modern world, and the loss of interest in the ritual function (itself part of the process of scepticism in regard to spiritual things, coupled with credulity in regard to a quasi-absolute validity of "facts" and their applications) is not the smallest of the causes bringing about this result.

I have enlarged somewhat on this aspect of the question, not only because it is daily becoming more and more forced on one's attention, but also because, in relation to our immediate purpose, namely an assessing of the chief factors affecting the Buddhist situation in Sikkim, it would be easy to underestimate the value of what exists there because of its being predominantly ritual in form; very many travellers have written down Sikkim Buddhism as being a mere residue, a tissue of superstitions, in which very little of real Buddhism inheres. With this view I disagree because, though doctrinal instruction is admittedly and often dangerously lacking among people of every walk of life (and it is often among the well-to-do that the danger is most apparent, because they are being subjected to much greater pressure from the side of modern profanity than are the

and self-sufficing, but partial and dependent on something that will quicken its latent possibilities. For theory, doctrine expressed, is after all but a preparation for Knowledge unqualified and the latter is only to be realized intuitively through the Intellect, the true Intelligence, which, for its part is not to be regarded as an intermediary, like another Mind, but as a prolongation of the Knowledge itself, a ray which, though it is not the sun, is not other than the sun.

The highest order of Knowledge—this is the one omission in our balance-sheet which no merely human artifice can rectify; other things can be improvised, more or less, yet without its vivifying presence in the persons of one or two at least who have realized it, the rest of the traditional edifice will remain shaky for lack of intellectual foundation. One must face the truth: today the Great Lights have been dimmed, the twilight has descended. Sikkim has its long tale of saints and teachers second to none; even a few years ago one still heard echoes of great names like Bermiak Rinpoche and others of like eminence, and the Great Hermit of Lachhen was still there, he could be visited, round him were disciples, but now who is going to fill the vacant places?

Is there then reason for despair? That can never be said, for the Compassion of the Bodhisattva is inexhaustible and so long as one blade of grass remains undelivered he will not quit the Round of Existence nor abandon creatures in their need, only those who want his help must prove that they are in earnest. Therefore, even while not deluding oneself with the idea that the essential Knowledge can either be dispensed with or else replaced by some other thing, one should preserve an attitude of hopeful vigilance and meantime one should continue to work at the preparation of the ground, the field of oneself and others, so that all may be in readiness if and when the Lama reappears. Besides, there is another possibility to be considered in the same connection; if perchance it is known that somewhere in the Buddhist world a Lama is to be found, preferably one of the spiritual family of the *Nyingmapa* or of one allied to it, who might, in response to pressing entreaty and from compassion, consent to make his home in Sikkim for the purpose of fanning back into flame the still smouldering embers of its ancient spirituality,

by way of doing or undoing. In the present chapter appeal will be made, all along, to the parallel authority of the Hindu and Islamic traditions, as being the ones that between them share the Indian scene; such reference being primarily intended as a guarantee of traditional authenticity, as against a merely human, personal and private expression of opinion on the part of the writer.

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Fundamentally, the question of what kind of clothes a person may or may not wear (like any other similar question) is a matter of *svadharma*, an application of that law or norm of behaviour which is intrinsic to every being in virtue of its own particular mode of existence (*svabhava*). By conforming to his norm a man *becomes what he is*, thus realizing the full extent of his possibilities; in so far as he fails, he accepts a measure of self-contradiction and disintegrates proportionally.

The late Sir John Woodroffe, in "*Bharata Shakti*" (Ganesh, 1921)—a work that ought to be in the hands of every Indian and more especially the young—quotes George Tyrrell as having once written: "I begin to think that the only real sin is suicide or *not being one-self*." That author was probably thinking in individual terms only; nevertheless, his statement contains echoes of a doctrine of universal scope—from which all its relative validity at the individual level is derived—namely, that the ultimate and only sin is *not to be One Self*, ignorance (*avidya*) of *What one is*, belief that one is *other* than the Self—indeed, on that reckoning we, one and all, are engaged in committing self-murder daily and hourly and we shall continue to do so, paying the penalty meanwhile, until such time as we can finally *recollect ourselves*, thus "becoming what we are".\*

It has been said that there are three degrees of conformity (*islam*)

\*Following Tyrrell, we have used the word "suicide" here in its more usual and unfavourable sense, as denoting an extremity of self-abuse; it can however, be taken in a different sense, when it is far from constituting a term of reproach: we are referring to the voluntary self-immolation implied in a phrase like that of Meister Eckhart when he says that "the soul must put itself to death" or in the Buddhist "*atta-m-jaho*" (= "self-noughting" in Mediaeval

to the truth; firstly, everyone is *muslim* from the very fact of being at all, since, do as he will, he cannot conceivably move one hairsbreadth out of the orbit of the Divine Will that laid down for him the pattern of his existence; secondly, he is *muslim* in so far as he recognizes his state of dependence and behaves accordingly—this level is represented by his conscious attachment to a tradition, whereby he is able to be informed of what he is and of the means to realize it; and thirdly, he is *muslim* through having achieved perfect conformity, so that henceforth he is identical with his true Self, beyond all fear of parting. In Hindu parlance this same doctrine might be expressed as follows: every being is *yogi* in that any kind of existence apart from the Self is a sheer impossibility, even in the sense of an illusion; that being is a *yogi*—called thus by courtesy, as it were—in so far as he, she or it strives, by the use of suitable disciplines (*sadhana*), to realize Self-union; the selfsame being is *the Yogi* in virtue of having made that union effective. No element in life can therefore be said to lie outside the scope of *yoga*.

What individual man is, he owes, positively, to his inherent possibilities and, negatively, to his limitations; the two together, by their mutual interplay, constitute his *svabhava* and are the factors which make him uniquely qualified (*adhikari*) for the filling of a certain part in the Cosmic "Play" (*lila*), for which part he has been "cast" by the Divine Producer. Neither possibilities nor limiting condi-

English) which coincides, on the other hand with *bhavit' atto* (=Self-made-become). This whole doctrine, and ultimately our basic thesis in this essay, rests on the principle that "as there are two in him who is both Love and Death, so there are, as all tradition affirms unanimously, two in us; although not two of him or two of us, nor even one of him and one of us, but only one of both. As we stand now, in between the first beginning and the last end, we are divided against ourselves, essence from nature, and therefore see him likewise divided against himself and from us." This quotation is taken from A.K.C.'s two-pronged essay *Hinduism and Buddhism* (New York, 1943); the section dealing with Theology and Autology is strongly recommended to all who wish to understand the meaning of the universal axiom "*duo sunt in homine*." We say "Be yourself" to someone who is misbehaving: it is in fact, only the carnal self (*nafs*) or soul that *can* misbehave, the Self is infallible. Hence for the former an ultimate suicide is essential. As between the outer and inner man, only the latter is the Man (the image of God), the outer man being the "shadow" or "vehicle" or "house" or "garment" of the inner, just as the world is the Lord's "garment" (Cp. *Isha Upanishad I*, and Philo, Moses II, 135).

tions are of his own choice—not his either to accept, select or evade. The relative freedom of will which he enjoys within the limits assigned to him is but a translation, into the individual mode, of that limitless and unconditional freedom which the Principle enjoys universally.

Individual responsibility, therefore, applies solely to the manner of playing the allotted part; this, however, presupposes some opportunity of comparing the individual performance throughout with its pattern as subsisting in the intellect of the dramatist; but for some means of access to this standard of comparison, all judgment must be exercised at random. The authentic source of such information can only be the dramatist himself, so that its communication implies the receiving of a favour or “grace” at his hands, by a handing-over of the required knowledge, either directly or through some indirect channel—in other words, an act of “revelation” is implied. As for the carrying out of the task in practice, by faithful imitation of the pattern as traditionally revealed, that is a question of using the tools one has been given, never of forging new ones. Furthermore, in so far as one has been led, from any reasons of contingent utility, to extend the range of one’s natural tools by artificial adjuncts, these too must, in some sort, be treated as supplementary attributes (*upadhi*) of the individuality: whatever equipment or “ornament” (the primary meaning of both these words is the same) may be required, it must be of such a character and quality as to harmonize with the general purpose in view, which is the realization, first at an individual and then at every possible level, of what one is.

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Of the many things a man puts to use in the pursuit of his earthly vocation there are none, perhaps, which are so intimately bound up with his whole personality as the clothes he wears. The more obviously utilitarian considerations influencing the forms of dress, such as climate, sex, occupation and social status can be taken for granted; here we are especially concerned with the complementary aspect of any utility, that of its significance, whence is derived its power to

become an integrating or else a disintegrating factor in men's lives. As for the actual elements which go to define a particular form of apparel, the principal ones are shape or "cut", material, colour and ornamental features, if any, including fastenings and also trimmings of every sort.

The first point to be noted is that any kind of clothing greatly modifies the appearance of a person, the apparent change extending even to his facial expression; this can easily be proved by observing the same individual wearing two quite distinct styles of dress. Though one knows that the man underneath is the same, the impression he makes on the bystanders is markedly different. It is evident, therefore, that we have here the reproduction of a cosmic process, by the clothing of a self-same entity in a variety of appearances; on that showing, the term "dress" can fittingly be attached to any and every appearance superimposed upon the stark nakedness of the Real, extending to all the various orders of manifestation which, separately or collectively, are included in the "seventy thousand veils obscuring the Face of *Allah*". In view of this far-reaching analogy, it is hardly surprising if, at the individual level also, dress is endowed with such a power to veil (or reveal) as it has.\*

For the human being, his choice of dress, within the limits of whatever resources are actually available to him, is especially indicative of three things: firstly, it shows what that man regards as compatible with a normal human state, with human dignity; secondly, it indicates how he likes to picture himself and what kind of attributes he would prefer to manifest; thirdly, his choice will be affected by the opinion he would wish his neighbours to have of him, this social consideration and the previous factor of self-respect being so closely bound up together as to interact continually.

According to his idea of the part he is called upon to play in the world, so does a man clothe himself; a correct or erroneous conception of the nature of his part is therefore fundamental to the whole

\*The concepts of change of clothes and becoming (*bhava*) are inseparable: Being (*bhuti*) only can be naked, in that, as constituting the principle of manifestation, it remains itself in the Unmanifest. Ultimately, the whole task of "shaking off one's bodies" (or garments) is involved—these including all that contributes to the texture of the outer self "that is not my Self."

question—the common phrase “to dress the part” is admirably expressive. No better illustration can be given of the way dress can work on the mind than one taken from that little world of make-believe called the theatre: it is a commonplace of theatrical production that from the moment an actor has “put on his motley” and applied the appropriate “make-up”, he tends to feel like another person, so that his voice and movements almost spontaneously begin to exhale the flavour (*rasa*) of the new character he represents. The same individual, wearing the kingly robes and crown, paces majestically across the stage; exchanging them for a beggar’s rags, he whines and cringes; a hoary wig is sufficient to impart to his voice a soft and quavering sound; he buckles on a sword and the same voice starts issuing peremptory commands. Indeed, if the “impersonation” be at all complete, the actor almost becomes that *other* man whose clothes he has borrowed, thus “forgetting who he is”; it is only afterwards, when he is restored “to his right mind” that he discovers the truth of the saying that, after all, “clothes do not make the man”.

Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa has paid a tribute to this power of dress to mould a personality in the following rather humorous saying: “The nature of man changes with each *upadhi*. When a man wears black-bordered muslin, the love-songs of Nidhu Babu come naturally to his lips and he begins to play cards and flourishes a stick as he goes out for a walk. Even though a man be thin, if he wears English boots he immediately begins to whistle: and if he has to mount a flight of stairs, he leaps up from one step to another like a *sahib*.”

This testimony of the Sage can be matched by evidence drawn from a very different quarter. When one studies the history of various political tyrannies which, during recent centuries, have deliberately set out to undermine the traditional order with a view to its replacement by the “humanism” of the modern West, one is struck by a truly remarkable unanimity among them in respect of the policy both of discouraging the national costume and at the same time of eliminating the Spiritual Authority as constituted in their particular traditions. These dictators were no fools, at least

in a worldly sense, and if they have agreed in associating these two things in their minds and in making them the first target for their attack, even to the neglect of other seemingly more urgent matters, that is because in both cases they instinctively sensed the presence of something utterly incompatible with the anti-traditional movement they wished to launch. As they rightly divined, the costume implied a symbolical participation (*bhakti*) in that "other-worldly" influence which the Spiritual Authority was called upon to represent more explicitly in the field of doctrine.

The Tsar Peter I of Russia seems to have been about the first to perceive how much hung upon the question of dress, and when he decided that his country should "face West", politically and culturally, he made it his business to compel the members of the governing classes to give up their Muscovite costume in favour of the coat and breeches of Western Europe, while at the same time he seriously interfered in the constitution of the Orthodox Church, with a view to bringing it under State control on the model of the Protestant churches of Prussia and England. Likewise in Japan, after 1864, one of the earliest "reforms" introduced by the modernising party was the replacement of the traditional court dress by the ugly frock-coat then in vogue at Berlin, by which the Japanese officials were made to look positively grotesque; moreover, this move was accompanied by a certain attitude of disfavour towards the Buddhist institutions in the country, though government action concerning them did not take on an extreme form. In many other countries of Europe and Asia reliance was placed rather upon the force of example from above; the official classes adopted Western clothes and customs, leaving the population at large to follow in its own time, further encouraged by the teaching it received in westernised schools and universities.

The classical example, however, is that afforded by the Kemalist revolution in Turkey, a distinction it owes both to its far-reaching character and to the speed with which the designed changes were effected as well as to the numbers of its imitators in neighbouring countries: in that case we have a military dictator, borne to power on the crest of a wave of popular enthusiasm, as the leader in a *jihad*

in which his genius earned him (falsely, as it proved) the title of *Ghazi* or "paladin of the Faith", who no sooner had overcome his foreign enemies in the field than he turned his power against the Islamic tradition itself, sweeping the *Khalifat* out of the way like so much old rubbish and plundering the endowments bequeathed to sacred use by ancient piety; while under the new legislation *der-vishes* vowed to the Contemplative life were classed with common vagabonds. It was another of Kemal's earliest acts to prohibit the Turkish national costume, not merely in official circles but throughout the nation, and to impose in its place the shoddy reach-me-downs of the European factories. Some thousands of *mullahs*, who dared to oppose him, earned the crown of martyrdom at the hands of the hangmen commissioned by an arak-drinking and godless "Ghazi". Meanwhile, in the rest of the Moslem world, hardly a protest was raised; in India, where the movement to defend the *Khalifat* had been of great political service to Kemal in his early days, only the red Ottoman *fez*, adopted by many sympathisers with the Turkish cause, still survives (though proscribed in its own country) as a rather pathetic reminder of the inconsistencies to which human loyalties sometimes will lead.

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It may now well be asked what, in principle, determines the suitability or otherwise of any given form of clothing, and indeed what has prompted Man, in the first place, to adopt the habit of wearing clothes at all? It is evident that a change so startling as this must have corresponded to some profound modification in the whole way of life of mankind. To discover the principle at issue, one must first remember that every possibility of manifestation—that of clothing for instance—has its root in a corresponding possibility of the Unmanifest, wherein it subsists as in its eternal cause, of which it is itself but an explicit affirmation. Metaphysically, Being is Non-Being affirmed, the Word is but the uttering of Silence; similarly, once Nakedness is affirmed, clothing is "invented". The principle of Clothing resides, therefore, in Nakedness. In seeking to throw

light on this fundamental aspect of the doctrine, one cannot do better than refer to the Cosmological Myth common to the three branches issued from the traditional stem of Abraham, of *Seyidna Ibrahim*. According to the Biblical story, Adam and Eve, that is to say, primordial mankind in the Golden Age (*Satya yuga*), were dwelling in the Garden of Eden at the centre of which grew the Tree of Life or World Axis (*Meru danda*). The Axis, which "macrocosmically" is assimilated to a ray of the Supernal Sun (*Aditya*) and "microcosmically" to the Intellect (*Buddhi*), occupies the *centre* of human existence, all other faculties of knowledge or action being grouped hierarchically round the Intellect as its ministers and tools, none encroaching, each keeping to its allotted work in conformity with its own norm (*dharma*); this state of inward harmony being, moreover, externally reflected in the peaceful relations existing between Man and all his fellow-creatures around him, animals, plants and others. It is also recorded that Adam conversed daily and familiarly with God, that is to say, the individual self was always immediately receptive of the influence emanating from the Universal Self, "one-pointed" (*ekagrya*) concentration being for it a spontaneous act requiring the use of no auxiliary means. Such is the picture given of the state of normal humanity, or the Primordial State as the Taoist doctrine calls it, which corresponds to that state known as "child-likeness" (*balya*) in the Hindu or "poverty" (*faqr*) in the Islamic doctrine, the latter term betokening the fact that the being's Self-absorption is free from all competing interests, here represented by "riches"; for this state "nakedness" would not have been an inappropriate name either.

The Bible story goes on to describe the loss of that condition of human normality by telling how Eve, corrupted by the Serpent (an embodiment of the *tamasic* or obscurantist tendency), persuaded her husband to taste of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, with fatal results; that is to say, the original unity of vision gives way to *dualism*, a schism takes place between self and Self, in which essentially consists the "original sin" of Christian theology, containing as it does the seed of every kind of opposition, of which "myself" versus "other" provides the type. And

now comes a detail which is of particular interest for our thesis: the very first effect of Adam and Eve's eating of the dualistic fruit was a feeling of "shame" at their own nakedness, a self-consciousness by which they were driven to cover their bodies with fig-leaves, thus fashioning the earliest example of human clothing.\*

The rest of the symbolism is not hard to unravel. For one still in the state of *balya* the thought never could arise "I must be clothed", because *balya*, by definition, implies the clear recognition that the individuality, including all its sheaths (*kosha*) variously diaphanous or opaque, is itself but a cloak for the true Self; to clothe it would be tantamount to piling dress upon dress. From this it follows that, for one who has realized that primordial state, the most natural proceeding would be to discard all clothes; one is on sure ground in saying that the unclothed ascetic or *nanga sannyasin* adequately represents the position of one who is intent on rejoining the Self.

Once there has been a departure from the indistinction of this primitive nakedness, the various traditional ways part company thus producing a wide diversity of types in each of which certain aspects of the symbolism of clothing are predominant, to the partial overshadowing of others; this, indeed, is the general principle of distinction as between any one traditional form and another, by which each is made to display a "genius" for certain aspects of the truth, leaving to its neighbours the task of emphasising the complementary aspects.

Space does not allow of a detailed study even of the main types into which clothing can be classified; there are, however, one or two which must be mentioned: the first of these, as a letter received from A.K.C. himself once explained, represents the most characteristic constituent of Hindu clothing both ancient and modern, and

\*In connection with Adam's "shame" a Jewish traditional commentary (Philo, IA 11.55 f.) offers a strikingly concordant testimony, as follows:—"The mind that is clothed neither in vice nor in virtue (i.e. does not partake of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), but is absolutely stripped of either, is naked, just as the soul of an infant (= *balya*)."  
It should likewise be noted that in Judaism the High Priest entered *naked* into the Holy of Holies—"the noblest form, if stripping and becoming naked," noblest, that is to say, as distinguished from e.g. Noah's nakedness, when he was drunk.—In the same connection Shri Krishna's theft of the *Gopis'* clothes (*Vastraharana*) has an obvious bearing.

consists of a length of material woven all of a piece, without joins—the “tailored” styles, as worn by Indian Muslims for instance, come into another category. In this type of single-piece wrap as commonly worn by Hindus, therefore, we are dealing with a “seamless garment”, like that of Christ.

It will be remembered that at His Crucifixion the soldiers who stripped Jesus of His raiment were unwilling to tear the seamless robe, so they cast lots for it. As for the Saviour Himself, He was raised naked on the Cross, as was only fitting at the moment when the Son of Man was discarding the last remaining appearance of duality, assumed for “exemplary” reasons, and resuming the principal nakedness of the Self. Christian theologians have often pointed out that the symbolical garment of Christ is the Tradition itself, single and “without parts”, like the Supreme *Guru* who reveals it; to “rend the seamless garment” is equivalent to a rupture with tradition (which must, of course, not be confused with an adaptation of its form, in a strictly orthodox sense, to meet changing conditions).

Tradition is a coherent whole, though never “systematic” (for a “system” denotes a water-tight limitation of form); once torn, the seamless garment cannot be “patched” simply by means of a “heretical” (literally “arbitrary”) sewing on of elements borrowed at random—those who think of saving their tradition by compromising with a secularist outlook might well take note of the words of Christ: “No man putteth a piece of new cloth into an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse” (St. Matthew, ix, 16).

Some mention must also be made of what might be called the “monastic habit”, founded on a general type consisting of some plain material shaped to a rather austere design or even deliberately put together from rags, as frequently occurs in Buddhism. These forms of apparel are always meant to evoke the idea of poverty and may be taken to symbolise an aspiration towards the state of *balya*. To the foregoing category might be attached, but in a rather loose sense, the self-coloured cotton homespun (*khaddar*) which, in Gandhi’s India, had become the emblem of a certain movement. In this case, too, the idea of poverty had been uppermost; but it must be said,

in fairness, that some of its supporters, possibly affected by an unconscious bias towards westernisation, often were at pains to disclaim any other purpose for their hand-spinning than a purely economic one, that of helping to reclothe the many poor people who had been deprived of their vocational life and reduced to dire want under pressure of modern industrialism. This was tantamount to admitting that *khaddar* had a utilitarian purpose but no spiritual significance and that the movement to promote its use was essentially "in front of (=outside) the temple", which is the literal meaning of the word "profane". It is hard to believe, however, that such could have been the whole intention of the saintly founder of the movement, since he had never ceased to preach and exemplify the doctrine that no kind of activity, even political, can for a moment be divorced from faith in God and self-dedication in His service, a view which, more than all else, earned for him the hatred of the "progressives" of every hue, who were not slow in applying to him the (to them) opprobrious epithets of "mediaeval", "traditional", and "reactionary".

Apart from the two special examples just given, we must confine ourselves to a few quite general remarks on the subject of traditional dress, for all the great variety of types it has displayed throughout the ages and in every part of the world. By calling a thing "traditional" one thereby relates it immediately to an idea which always, and necessarily, implies the recognition of a supra-human influence: to quote a phrase from A.K.C.'s writings: "All traditional art can be 'reduced' to theology, or is, in other words, dispositive to a reception of truth." Thus, the costume which a man wears as a member of any traditional society is the sign, partly conscious and partly unconscious, that he accepts a certain view of the human self and its vocation, both being envisaged in relation to one Principle in which their causal origin (*alpha*) and their final goal (*omega*) coincide. It is inevitable that such a costume should be governed by a *Canon*, representing the continuity of the tradition, the stable element, Being; within that canon there will, however, be ample room for individual adaptation, corresponding to the variable element in existence, impermanence, Becoming.

In tribal civilizations, which are most logical in these matters, the

art of dress and self-adornment is carried to a point where the details of human apparel are almost exact symbolical equivalents of the draperies, head-dress and jewels that indicate its *upadhis* in a sacred image (*pratima*); moreover, such costume is usually covered with metaphysical emblems, though its wearers are by no means always aware of their precise significance; nevertheless, they reverence them greatly and undoubtedly derive a form of spiritual nourishment and power (*shakti*) from their presence. Furthermore, it is at least rather suggestive that tribal costume often entails a considerable degree of nudity, and is, in appearance, extremely reminiscent of the dresses of gods and goddesses, as portrayed in the ancient paintings and sculptures; so much so, that a friend recently suggested that the forms of tribal life in general constitute survivals from a period anterior to our present Dark Age (*Kali-yuga*). It is not surprising that both "Christian" missionaries and the apostles of modern materialism (the two seemingly contradictory motives being, indeed, not infrequently found in the same person) should be glad whenever they succeed in inducing some simple-minded peasant or tribesman to forego the natural safeguards provided for him by his native dress and customs; for after that he is only too easily demoralised and will fall a ready victim to their properly subversive persuasions.

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One last type of clothing now remains to be considered, that specific to modern Europe and America, which is also the type that is threatening to swamp all others, to the eventual abolition of every distinction, whether traditional, racial or even, in more extreme cases, individual. This "modern dress", through its development parallel with that of a certain conception of Man and his needs, has by now become the recognised uniform to be assumed by all would-be converts to the creed of "individualism", of mankind regarded as sufficing unto itself; it is somewhat paradoxical that partisans of a violent nationalism (which in itself is but an offshoot of individualism) have often been sworn opponents of their own national costume, just because of its silent affirmation of traditional values; some examples

illustrating this point have already been given in the course of this chapter, and readers can easily find other similar cases if they but care to look around in the contemporary world.

In this context some mention should be made of a variant on human clothing of recent occurrence, that of "party uniform" as introduced in the totalitarian states of the last decades. One has but to remember the "Blackshirts" of Mussolini's Italy or the "Brownshirts" of Hitler's Germany, for instance, whose respective uniforms were so designed as to suggest ruthlessness and brutality together with a kind of boisterous "camaraderie", indicative of party loyalties. In totalitarianism of another hue, it is a wish to affirm the "proletarian ideal" that has been uppermost. A striking example of party uniform having this idea in view is provided by that in vogue among members of the Chinese Communist party which in its calculated drabness expresses its purpose in a way that verges on genius: nothing could better indicate the total subordination of the human individual to the party machine than that shapeless tunic-like jacket, buttoned up to the chin, sometimes with a most hideous cap to match such as lends a peculiarly inhuman character to any face which it happens to surmount. The most interesting point about this type of costume is that it amounts, in effect, to the parody of a monastic habit; that is to say, where the austerity of monastic dress, in all its various forms, is imposed for the purpose of affirming a voluntary effacement of the individual in the face of the Spiritual Norm, the party uniform in question likewise is meant to suggest an effacement of individuality, but one that operates in an inverse sense, in the face of the deified collective principle known as "the Masses", supposed source of authority as well as admitted object of all human worship and service. It is the ideal of a humanity minus Man, because none can be truly human who tries to ignore his own symbolism as reflecting the divine image in which he has been fashioned and to which his whole existence on earth should tend by rights. Moreover, it is no accident that all these types of uniform have been derived from Western, never from a native form of clothing.

The above admittedly represent extreme perversions, not less in-

structive for that. When one turns again to western dress, however, under its more ordinary forms, it is at least fair to recognise that it has lent itself, more than other forms of clothing, to the expression of profane values: this has been true of it, in an increasing degree, ever since the latter half of the Middle Ages, when the first signs of things to come began to show themselves, in the midst of a world still attached to tradition—or so it seemed. It took a considerable time, however, before changes that at first were largely confined to “high society”, and to the wealthier strata generally, were able seriously to affect the people as a whole. Over a great part of Western Europe the peasant costume remained traditional, and even with all the extravagances that had begun to affect the fashions of the well-to-do a certain “aristocratic” feeling remained there that it took time to undermine completely.

Now if it be asked which are the features in modern dress which correspond most closely with the profane conception of man and his estate, the answer, which in any case can but be a rather tentative one, will include the following, namely: the combining of pronounced sophistication, on the one hand, with “free and easiness”, on the other, coupled with the frequent and gratuitous alterations introduced in the name of “fashion”, of change for the sake of change—this, in marked contrast with the formal stability of traditional things—without forgetting either the manifold effects of machine production in vast quantities by processes which so often denature materials both in appearance and in their intimate texture—unavoidable or not, all these are factors that tell their own tale. Also chemical dyes, which have now swept across the world, are playing their part in the process of degradation and even where traditional costume still largely prevails, as in India, they and the excessive use of bleaching agents have together done much to offset such quality as still is to be found in the forms themselves; in most of the East the same would apply. Nor must such factors as the enclosing of feet formerly bare inside tight shoes or the disturbance to the natural poise of the body resulting from the introduction of raised heels be underrated. These and many other more subtle causes have operated in turning Western dress into a vehicle of great psycho-

logical potency in a negative sense. Besides, there is the fact that wherever ornamental features occur in modern clothing, these never by any chance exhibit any symbolical character; in other words, ornament, at its best as at its worst, has become arbitrary and therefore profane.

An objection might, however, be raised here which is as follows:—the Western dress of today is, after all, but a lineal development of what formerly had been, if not a specifically Christian form of costume, at least one that was habitual in Christian Europe, one that could therefore claim to be in a certain degree traditionally equivalent to whatever existed elsewhere; it may be asked, how comes it then that its present prolongation is opposable to all other known types, so that it alone is compelled to bear the stigma of providing a vehicle for anti-traditional tendencies? Historically the fact just mentioned is incontrovertible, no need to deny it; but far from invalidating the foregoing argument it but serves to render it more intelligible: for it must be remembered that error never exists in a “pure” state, nor can it, in strict logic, be opposed to truth, since truth has no opposite; an error can but represent an impoverishment, a distortion, a travesty of some particular aspect of the truth which, to one gifted with insight, will still be discernible even through all the deformations it has suffered. Every error is *muslim*, as it were in spite of itself, according to the first of the three degrees of conformity as defined in a preceding section, and it cannot be referred back to any separate principle of its own, on pain of accepting a radical dualism in the Universe, a ditheism, a pair of alternative, mutually limiting realities. Anything can be called “profane” in so far as it is viewed apart from its principle, but things in themselves will always remain essentially sacred.

In the case of dress, this it is that explains the fact that many Westerners, though now wearing a costume associated with the affirmation of secularist values, are less adversely affected thereby (which does not mean unaffected) than Asiatics, Africans or even Eastern Europeans who have adopted that same costume; with the former, alongside anti-traditional degeneration there has been some measure of adaptation bringing with it a kind of immunity—the disease is

endemic, whereas in the second case it has all the virulence of an epidemic. Furthermore, since, as we have seen, some positive elements, however reduced, must needs persist through every corruption, those to whom this form of dress properly belongs are enabled, if they will, to utilise whatever qualitative factors are still to be found there; though the reverse is equally possible as evidenced both in the case of the affectedly fashionable person and of his shoddier counterpart, the affectedly unkempt. The position of the Eastern imitator, however, is quite different—for such as he the change over to modern dress may easily involve so complete a contradiction of all his mental and physical habits as to result in a sudden violent rending of his personality, to the utter confusion of his sense of discrimination as well as the loss of all taste in its more ordinary sense. Indeed such cases are all too common.

Some people affect to believe that a movement to submerge specific differences reveals a unifying tendency in mankind, but they are suffering under a great delusion in that they mistake for true unity what is only its parody, uniformity. For any individual, the realizing in full of the possibilities inherent in his *svabhava* marks the limit of achievement, after which there is nothing further to be desired. As between two such beings, who are wholly themselves, no bone of contention can exist, since neither can offer to the other anything over and above what he already possesses; while on the supra-individual level their common preoccupation with the principal Truth, the central focus where all ways converge, is the guarantee of a unity which nothing will disturb; one can therefore say that the *maximum of differentiation is the condition most favourable to unity, to human harmony*; an immensely far-reaching conclusion which René Guénon was the first to voice in modern times, one which many may find difficult of acceptance just because of that habit of confusing unity with uniformity that we have just referred to. Against this peace in differentiation, whenever two beings are together subjected to the steamroller of uniformity, not only will both of them be frustrated in respect of some of the elements normally includable in their own personal realization, but they will, besides, be placed in the position of having to compete in the same artificially restricted field; and

this can only result in a heightening of oppositions—the greater the degree of uniformity imposed, the more inescapable are the resulting conflicts, a truth which can be seen to apply in every field of human activity, not excepting the political field.

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Enough has now been said to enable the reader to appreciate the general principle we have set out to illustrate: if the subject of dress was chosen, that is because it lent itself most easily to such an exposition; but it would have been equally possible to pick on some different factor pertaining to the Active Life, to the *Karma Marga*, such as the furnishing of people's homes, or music and musical instruments or else the art of manners; since each of these is governed by the selfsame law of *svadharma* and it is only a question of effecting an appropriate transposition of the argument to fit each particular case. Behind the widespread defection from traditional dress and customs there undoubtedly lurks a deep-seated loss of spirituality, showing itself on the surface in a corresponding diminution of personal dignity and of that sense of discrimination that everywhere is recognisable as the mark of a character at once strong and noble. In the East, as we have seen, the tendency in question has gone hand in hand with what Henry James described as "a superstitious valuation of European civilization" and this tendency, despite the much lip-service paid to the new-fangled idea of "national culture", is far from having exhausted itself. This is further evidenced by the fact that imitation rarely stops short at those things that appear indispensable to survival in the modern world, but readily extends itself to things that by no stretch could be regarded as imposed under direct compulsion of contingent necessity. The operative cause therefore is to be sought in an overpowering psychological urge, the urge to experience certain possibilities of the being which tradition hitherto had inhibited, possibilities which can only ripen in forgetfulness of God and things divine: traditional dress being a reminder of those things has to be discarded; the modern civilization being the field for realizing those possibilities has to be espoused. Naturally, when one comes to individual cases, all manner of inconsis-

encies and oscillations will be apparent; the inherited past is not something that can be expunged for the mere wishing. All one can do, in discussing the matter, is to treat it on broad lines, leaving any given case to explain itself.

By way of striking a more cheerful note in an otherwise depressing story, the fact should be mentioned that Indian women, with but few exceptions, continue to wear the *sari*, that most gracious form of feminine dress, both at home and abroad. Their gentle example has actually spread to unexpected quarters; many African women visitors to this country have appeared clothed in an Indian *sari*, the colours and designs of which were however drawn from the African tradition itself. This adopting of a foreign traditional model instead of the ubiquitous Western one, by adherents of an emergent nationalism, is hitherto quite unprecedented; in its way it is a small and heartening sign, one of which all former subjects of colonialism might well take note. Indeed, sometimes one is tempted to believe that West Africans, in these matters, have tended to show more conscious discrimination than many of their fellows belonging to other continents and this impression has been strengthened by the frequent sight of Nigerian Muslim visitors of commanding stature and of both sexes walking our streets properly clad in their splendid national costume. May this example offered by Africa find many imitators!

To finish, one can but repeat the principle governing all similar cases: one's native attire—or indeed any other formal “support” of that order—is an accessory factor in the spiritual conditioning of a man or woman and this is due both to any associations it may happen to carry and, at a higher level, to its symbolism as expressed in various ways. The assumption of modern Western dress has often been the earliest step in the flight from Tradition: it would be but poetic justice for its divestment to mark the first step on an eventual path of return—too much to hope perhaps, yet the possibility is worth mentioning. In itself such action might seem little enough, for dress is not the man himself, admittedly. Nevertheless, if it be true to say that “clothes do not make the man” yet can it as truly be declared that they do represent a most effective influence in his making—or his unmaking.

most vivid commentary on that doctrine which, above all else, has given to that life both shape and direction.

The last remark calls for some additional comment, since it contains an allusion to a question of very wide import, one that is of general applicability to all traditional civilizations and not merely to Tibet—namely, the question of what is the principle of discrimination between one form of the Perennial Wisdom and another, causing them to be externally distinct as well as consistent internally; for without the operation of some such principle there would be no excuse for a formal discontinuity as between the several traditions, serving as they all do as ways of approach to the imperishable Knowledge, from which every thought of distinction is manifestly to be excluded, whether of form or otherwise.

The fact is that every civilization that can be called authentic is endowed with a principle of unity peculiar to itself, which is reflected, in varying degrees, in all the institutions of the civilization in question. By a principle of unity is meant a predominant idea, corresponding to a given aspect of the truth, which has been recipient of particular emphasis and for the expressing of which, if one may so put it, that civilization shows a peculiar "genius". Emphasis on an aspect must, however, have its price: that is to say, the highlight of attention cannot be focused on one aspect of reality without producing its compensating shadows, affecting other aspects. Each separate formal embodiment of the traditional wisdom, therefore, corresponds, as it were, to a difference of intellectual perspective; and the key to the understanding of whatever is explicit or implicit in any given form resides in a thorough assimilation of the dominant idea running through that form—in other words, of its principle of unity.

In seeking to determine which is the principle of unity animating the Tibetan civilization one must beware of being satisfied with an easy answer, such as saying that this principle is no other than the Buddhist doctrine itself; for though this statement is correct as far as it goes, it lacks precision, failing as it does to indicate which one, out of a whole body of ideas comprised within the one doctrinal plan, has been recipient of that greater emphasis required for the

moulding of an entire traditional structure according to a particular form, and, as it were, in its image. Though one knows that Buddhism, by imposing certain fundamental ideas, has become the rule of life over very wide areas extending from Ceylon to Japan and that this has produced a certain community of outlook among all the peoples that have come within the Buddhist orbit, one cannot fail to recognize that in this general whole certain clearly distinguishable forms of civilization are to be found, the intellectual frontiers of which are not primarily determined by the Buddhist influence. The common presence of Buddhism does not, for instance, warrant one's placing the Chinese and Tibetan civilizations under one heading, even though they are next-door neighbours; and if Buddhism is admittedly a factor affecting both, this fact has been insufficient to produce any very marked likeness in their respective points of view, let alone identity.

The chief difference between them lies in the fact that whereas in Tibet the Buddhist tradition is everything, having completely replaced its Bön-po predecessor, in China Buddhism was something in the nature of a graft, admittedly a most timely and successful one, upon a civilization of which the pattern, in all essentials, had already been set before the importation of the foreign influence. Since nothing in the existing Chinese form was found to be actually incompatible with the Buddhist point of view, the latest arrival from India found no difficulty in taking its place in the traditional life of the Far East on equal terms with its two other great constituents, namely Taoism, representative of an intellectuality so refined as to be adapted for the use of an exceptionally qualified *élite* only, and Confucianism. This latter is not, as is commonly supposed, a separate creation, still less a "religion", but corresponds to that side of the Chinese tradition in which all without exception are able to participate, concerning itself as it does with social institutions and human relationships in general—the latter being given expression especially through its characteristic concepts of the race, the family and the family ancestors. It might also be mentioned, in passing, that in the course of time Buddhism and Taoism engaged in many intellectual exchanges, some of which gave rise to that school, so rich in spiritual

the other principal traditional forms of the world. This is possibly due in part to the incorporation of such features of the previous Bön-po tradition as could usefully be readapted; it seems unlikely, however, that any element specific to a form actually in process of replacement by another form would retain sufficient intrinsic vitality to provide a whole civilization with its principle of unity, in the sense given to that term at the beginning of this chapter—that is to say, with an idea both distinct and powerful enough to create and nourish its own forms, conferring on them the means for perpetuating their own character through long ages and of impressing it firmly and unmistakably upon the face of things and upon the thoughts of men.

In fact, the idea that enjoys pride of place in the Tibetan tradition is one that figures in the Buddhist doctrine as originally introduced from India. This presiding idea, colouring the outlook of sage and simple peasant alike (as we were repeatedly enabled to observe during our journeys), is the conception of Bodhisattvahood, the state of the fully awakened being who, though under no further constraint by that Law of Causality which he has transcended, yet freely continues to espouse the vicissitudes of the Round of Existence in virtue of his Self-identification with all the creatures still involved in egocentric delusion and consequent suffering. Such an attitude must not, however, be confused with a kind of sentimental "altruism" in the social sense; indeed a moment's reflection will show that one who has finally been set free from the false notion of a permanent "I", personally experientable, is at the same time automatically rid of its correlative notion of "other". The Bodhisattva behaves as he does precisely because, for him, any kind of conceptual polarization is inoperative, because, to his singleness of eye, all contrasted pairs such as the Round of Existence and Nirvana, Bondage and Deliverance, Body-Mind and Spirit, together with all the subsidiary oppositions born of such contrasts, are alike cancelled in the unity—or, as the Tibetans would say, in the "two-lessness"—of That which he himself realizes as the All-Principle (Tibetan *Kun-jī*), eternal Cause and ground of all phenomenal existence.

The Bodhisattva's compassion, or what in human language is described as such, translates into individually intelligible terms the

universal "non-altruity" of his point of view; even while in Nirvana he experiences the world, according to that measure of reality which belongs to it—and one must not forget that suffering, in the deepest sense of the word, is inseparable from the very fact of becoming, which cannot in any sense be experienced without it. Likewise, even when dwelling in the midst of a changeful world, he does not cease to know the changeless bliss of Nirvana, and if to us the two experiences seem distinct and mutually exclusive, they are not so to the possessor of true insight, because such a one never feels tempted to abstract one or other of them from the unity of their common and transcendent principle, so that, from his point of view, they are not even conceivable apart. Thus the Bodhisattva, through a perfect realization of his own essential identity with all beings, thereby suffers with them and for them, as the eternal victim self-immolated upon the altar of their existence; but even in that suffering itself he perceives the joy unspeakable—both the light and its inseparable shadows alike yield up their closest-guarded secret under the scrutiny of his incorruptible impartiality.\*

The status of a Bodhisattva has been defined (though, strictly speaking, the very word "definition", implying as it does the idea of limitation, is here inapplicable) as that of one who realizes Wisdom as Knowledge of the Void, and Method as Universal Compassion; the first-named representing the purely transcendent aspect of his realization, while the second implies an unblurred recognition of the Face of Divinity even through the veil of separativity as constituted by the worlds—in other words, a not merely theoretical but an effective awareness that the transcendent aspect of Truth is not other

\*A parallel, though one very different in its formal expression, can be established by reference to Christian theology, in that it can be said that the ultimate goal of the Christian life consists in giving complete effect to the Doctrine of the Two Natures, central theme of the Christian tradition as such, whereby Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, and the Glorified Christ eternally seated at the right hand of Power are simultaneously realized as one and not two; or, in other words, the Christ who suffered crucifixion temporally upon the tree at Calvary and upon the cross of His own incarnation as a finite being, and indeed cosmically upon the very fact of Creation itself, and that Word of God by whom all things were made, though they respectively suggest notions of suffering and blissfulness that to the eye of ignorance seem mutually exclusive or, at best, successively realizable, are essentially inseparable conceptions neither of which can be fully realized in isolation from the other.

than the immanent and vice versa. Thus, if the being is first called upon to seek "deliverance" from form and its restrictions in order to become awake to that reality which dwells "beyond names and forms", yet, in the deepest sense of all, it can be said, following the Lankavatara Sutra, that there is really nothing to be acquired, nothing to be delivered from, no Way, no Goal, no Round, no Nirvana, nor indeed anything needing to be done or undone. However, lest this kind of paradoxical statement, so common in the Mahayanist writings, should be unconsciously twisted into an excuse for taking up a "quietist" position, it is well to remember that the knowledge in question itself implies the most intensely "active" attitude conceivable, a concentration so impenetrable that it is a matter of indifference to its possessor whether he happens to find himself in the most secluded of mountain retreats or engaged on exemplary and redemptive work among the crowded habitations of men, or else in one of the heavens—or the hells. His is not a solitude that depends on any special conditions of place or time, true solitude being indeed but another name for that Voidness which is also the Fullness, a first-fruit of that self-naughting which is also Self-knowing.

Three levels are broadly distinguishable in respect of the comprehension of the Real: first, things may be regarded from the point of view of Ignorance, which is that of the ordinary man, concerned as he is with appearances and with his own reactions to them. It is he, the "common man", held up to flattery in our day as if he were a very pattern of humanity, who is the pathetic dreamer, the incorrigible sentimentalist, the romantic, in contrast to the spiritual man, now at a discount, who is the only true realist, the "practical man" in the widest sense of the word. From an ignorant or "profane" point of view things are considered under the aspect of separativity only, and treated as if they were self-contained entities, that is to say, as if each of them were "carrying within itself its own sufficient cause". Under such circumstances the manifested world appears in the guise of an unresolvable multiplicity, in which the individualization and consequently the opposition of persons or things (through their mutual limitation and inescapable competition) is raised to the highest possible power, thus spelling insecurity and

suffering for all concerned; such being, moreover, the inevitable fruit of dualism, of participation in the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Secondly, there is the view that comes with an awakening perception of the fallacy underlying the world and its formal appearances. In that case the disillusioned being seeks deliverance in the formlessness of the Unmanifest, where all things subsist unchanged and unchangeable within the bosom of their parent cause, in a state that might be described as one of permanent actuality, whence their coming out to be manifested in one of the worlds can only partake of the nature of an illusion; that is to say, their existence pertains to a lesser order of reality that masks, by the various phenomena it gives rise to, its own lack of true selfhood.\* This point of view corresponds with the attainment of a Nirvana still able to be regarded as one of the twin terms of an opposition, the other term being that state of Ignorance mentioned previously, whereby beings remain imprisoned in the Round and subject to change and suffering. Those who attain such a state of knowledge are usually referred to, in the Mâhâyanist books, under the name of *Pratyeka Buddhas* (the Tibetan equivalent means Self-Buddhas), with whom are also coupled those whom the Tibetans call "hearers" (in Sanskrit known as *Sravakas*) and who are supposed, though somewhat unfairly, to represent the devotees of the rival Hinayanist school, that to which the southern Buddhists, those of Ceylon and Burma, belong. These two types have provided a favourite target for criticism on the part of all the Mâhâyanist writers, whose mention of them has come to constitute a kind of refrain, a matter of "method", probably, rather than one to be taken as referring to actual facts. Thus it is said that the *Sravakas* and *Pratyeka Buddhas* rest content with deliver-

\*One must remind the reader that current loose speaking has practically converted the word "illusion" into a synonym of "unreal"; and this in turn has given rise to frequent misunderstandings on the subject of the Buddhist teachings about the illusory nature of the world and its contents. Nothing can ever be opposable to reality; something that is truly unreal cannot enjoy any kind of existence, not even in imagination; whereas an illusion is something that more or less makes game of the senses of an observer by seeming to possess a character other than its own; typically by appearing more self-sufficient than it really is.

ance as far as they themselves are concerned (hence the name *Self-Buddhas*), but fail to include in their point of view all their fellow beings still condemned to struggle in the whirlpool of the Round; in other words, they succeed in breaking loose from the world and its illusion, but they are unable to reintegrate it positively, stopping short, as they do, at negation. For such as they, therefore, *Nirvana*, Deliverance, though undoubtedly attained in one sense, yet remains essentially as the *Non-Round*; just as the Round itself continues to be similarly regarded as *Non-Nirvana*, without any means being found of reducing the contrasted experiences to unity. Thus the withdrawal of attention from the world as such, which marks a legitimate and indeed a necessary stage in the process of enlightenment, if it should ever be taken for a final term, can land one in an intellectual blind alley, bringing about a kind of lofty self-imprisonment, a withdrawal into a blissful supra-consciousness which yet implies privation of the one essential thing, since it stops short of the supreme non-duality.

Thirdly and lastly, there is the point of view (if one can still describe as such what is really a total synthesis embracing all possible points of view) of Bodhisattvahood, whereby the essential non-duality of the Round, represented by Form, and of Nirvana, represented by Voidness, is clearly perceived as Knowledge compared to which, as a typical Mâhâyanist writer would probably have added, "all the virtues and achievements of countless millions of *Pratyeka Buddhas* and *Sravakas* during successive aeons are nothing worth." This supreme realization, goal of the spiritual life, goes under the name of the *Prajna Paramita* or Wisdom Transcendent (the Tibetans actually give it as "the transcending of Wisdom"); and a Bodhisattva is one who has succeeded in realizing this doctrine effectively, so that it can be said that possession of the *Prajna Paramita* constitutes the characteristic *note* by which the Bodhisattva is to be known.\*

\*There is a famous formula that expresses this doctrine as concisely as possible; it is taken from the *sutra* bearing the same title of *Prajna Paramita* and runs as follows:—

"Form (it is) void:  
The Void Itself (is) form."

By these words the Supreme Identity is given expression, hence this sentence

important in its way, since it affects those people—and they are not a few—who have come to yearn for a life of non-attachment, but who think that they will attain it by a premature and purely external casting-off of the bonds of form, whether religious or other. This state of mind on the part of the would-be “mystic”<sup>\*</sup> is frequently evidenced by the habit of ceaselessly tilting at “orthodoxy”, professedly in the name of “the spirit” as against “the letter”, and by an instinctive fear and suspicion of whatever pertains to the formal order in general. Into this attitude of mind many different elements have entered—individualism, sentimentalism and humanistic influences generally. What these people miss is the fact that there are two ways of being outside form, the one supra-formal, because form has been transcended, the other infra-formal, because its possibilities as a “support” of realization at a certain level have been neglected. The one gives access to the formless Truth, seat of freedom and universality, the other represents the most abysmal kind of ignorance, compared with which the formal attachments affecting even the most narrow-minded person must be looked upon as a state of comparative liberty. Form, to be transcended, must first of all be realized and thus integrated; it is impossible to *skip* the experience of form, and the wish to do so, in the name of personal liberty, merely betrays a futile kind of self-conceit. This temptation is especially strong among Western advocates of a return to spiritual values at the present moment, by reason of the individualistic turn of their minds, fostered in the course of their education. On this whole subject of form a great confusion of thought has occurred, which has not spared even those who appear, in other respects, to be highly gifted. What so many people refuse to face is the fact that in a time of intellectual confusion, form, “the letter”, provides almost the last thread connecting fallen man with the sources of his spirituality, so that it would be almost true to say that today it matters more to observe forms

<sup>\*</sup>It should be noted that any thoughtless use of the term “mystic” and its derivatives has here been carefully avoided. Whatever meaning this word may originally have borne, later and, more especially, recent usage has so confused the issue as to make it difficult of application outside the sphere where it belongs historically, namely that of Christian theology coupled with certain modes of realization attached to the same.