CHAPTER I

THE PHILOSOPHY OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

I

In vast life's unbounded tide
They alone content may gain
Who can good from ill divide
Or in ignorance abide—
All between is restless pain.
Before Thy prescience, power divine,
What is this idle sense of mine?
What all the learning of the schools?
What sages, priests, and pedants?—Fools!
The world is Thine, from Thee it rose
By Thee it ebbs, by Thee it flows.
Hence, worldly lore! By whom is wisdom shown?
The Eternal knows, knows all, and He alone.

OMAR.

"The condemnation which a great man lays
upon the world is to force it to explain him." ¹
Rabindranath Tagore has not failed to force

¹ Hegel.
the world to come with its magazine articles and monographs to expound his views. The world-wide interest and popularity of his writings are due as much to the lofty idealism of his thoughts as to the literary grace and beauty of his writings. Rabindranath's teaching, with its vital faith in the redeeming power of the spiritual forces and their up-building energy, has a particular value at the present moment, when the civilised world is passing through the crucible of a ghastly war which, whether or not it purges the nations of their pride and hate, lust for gold and greed of land, at least proclaims, in no uncertain tones, the utter bankruptcy of materialism.

To be great is not merely to be talked about, it is also to be misunderstood, and Rabindranath has not escaped this fate. The many attempts made to explain him contradict each other, for "from the words of the poet men take what meanings please them." There are two views regarding his philosophy of life. If we believe one side, he is a Vedantin, a thinker who draws his inspiration from the Upanishads. If we believe the other, he is an advocate of a theism more or less like, if
not identical with, Christianity. Rabindranath inclines to the former view. "To me the verses of the Upanishads and the teachings of Buddha have ever been things of the spirit, and therefore endowed with boundless vital growth; and I have used them, both in my own life and in my preaching, as being instinct with individual meaning for me, as for others, and awaiting for their confirmation my own special testimony, which must have its value because of its individuality." Rabindranath's philosophy by life is viewed by this school as nothing but the ancient wisdom of India restated to meet the needs of modern times. His writings are a commentary on the Upanishads by an individual of this generation on whom the present age has had its influence. The soul of ancient India is mirrored in them. His idealism is a true child of India's own past and his philosophy is thoroughly Indian both in origin and development. In Dr. Coomaraswami's words, "the work of Rabindranath is essentially Indian in sentiment and form." The other view holds that Rabindranath Tagore, like other regenerators

1 Sādhanā, p. 8.
of Hinduism, has freely borrowed from Christianity and Western teaching, and has woven these alien elements into the woof of his own faith. If he does not confess his indebtedness to the West, it is, in the words of the Spectator's reviewer, a case of "local patriotism," "in-gratitude," and "insincerity."¹ "We have Mr. Tagore employing his remarkable literary talents in teaching borrowed Ethics to Europe as a thing characteristically Indian." "There is a fatal flaw of insincerity in its most seemingly elevated utterances."² These critics believe that the morals and philosophy underlying Rabindranath's thought are essentially Christian. They identify the Vedanta philosophy with a doctrine that makes the absolute an abstract beyond, the world an illusion, contemplation the way of escape, and extinction of soul the end of man. Obviously Rabindranath is not all this. He gives us a "human" God, dismisses with contempt the concept of the world-illusion, praises action overmuch and promises fulness of life to the religious soul. These are essentially the features of the Christian religion, and what is

¹ Spectator, February 14, 1914.
² Ibid.
Rabindranath Tagore if not a typical Christian of the type spiritual India would produce in larger numbers in years to come? The Rev. Mr. Saunders remarks: "The God of Gitanjali is no impersonal, imperturbable absolute of Hindu philosophy, but in fact, whether He be explicitly Christ or not, He is at least a Christ-like God, and the experience of His suppliant and lover is one with the deep core of all Christian experience." 1 The Rev. Mr. Urquhart observes: "He opened his soul to the ideas of the West and he has drawn from Christianity, especially, ideas the influence of which upon his whole trend of thought has not always been acknowledged. The Eastern dress which he has given to these ideas has often concealed both from his own eyes and those of his readers their true origin, and although truth is one and inhabits no particular clime, absence of indication here has sometimes led to consequences prejudicial to the development of truth itself. The ideas of Rabindranath, like those of so many thinkers of modern India, have often been quite wrongly assigned to Indian

1 International Review of Missions, 1914, p. 149.
Mr. Edward J. Thompson, who calls it "nonsense" to say that Gitanjali represents "true Hinduism," observes: "The man who henceforward must rank among the great religious poets of the world does not call himself a Christian: but in him we get a glimpse of what the Christianity of India will be like, and we see that it is something better than the Christianity which came to it."  

There is no use dogmatising at the very outset, for that would be to attack the central question at issue. An impartial exposition of Rabindranath's views would set at rest all doubts and disputes. We do not find any systematic exposition of his philosophy of life in any of his writings. Even Śādhanā is a book of sermons, or mystic hymns, or perhaps meditations. It is a sigh of the soul rather than a reasoned account of metaphysics; an atmosphere rather than a system of philosophy. But we feel that the atmosphere is charged with a particular vision of reality. In his writings we have the reaction of his soul to the environment, his attitude in the face of life.

His personality is completely revealed in his poems, which are the unconscious expression of his soul, the outpourings of his devotional heart, and the revelation of his poetic consciousness. His writings must and do contain suggestions of his intellectual creed. Though poetry is not philosophy, it is possible for us to derive from Rabindranath's works his philosophical views.

II

Human consciousness is the starting-point of all philosophic inquiry. The contradictions of human life provoke the quest for truth. Man is a finite-infinite being. He combines in himself spirit and nature. He is earth's child but heaven's heir. "At one pole of my being I am one with stocks and stones . . . . but at the other pole of my being I am separate from all."¹ As a link in the natural chain of events, man is subject to the law of necessity; as a member of the spiritual realm of ends, he is free. It is this contradiction, which we come across in science,

¹ Sadhanā, p. 69; see also Fruit-Gathering, XXXIII.
art, and morality, that demands a solution. The individual aspires after perfect truth, perfect beauty, and perfect goodness. But in the finite world he can only approximate to, but never completely possess, them. We can see the ideals as through a mist. Intellectually we aspire after an ideal of truth which is complete, harmonious, and all-comprehensive. The world of isolated facts is at best finite and conditioned. Intellect, with its separatist tendencies and dissecting habits, finds itself unable to grasp the whole. On the moral side, we feel the break between ideal aspirations and actual facts. There is a struggle between the infinite within, which makes the soul yearn for an ideal, and the lower finite, which is the heritage from the past evolution. "O Great Beyond, O the keen call of thy flute! I forget, I ever forget, that the gates are shut everywhere in the house where I dwell alone."  

There is a tension between the higher and the lower. The two elements have not attained a harmony. The higher self presents us with a moral imperative which we recognise

1 The Gardener, 5; see also 6.
to be right, but our actual lower self contests its higher birth and pays homage to the delights of sense. This conflict is described in *Gitanjali*, 28.

Obstinate are the trammels, but my heart aches when I try to break them.

Freedom is all I want, but to hope for it I feel ashamed. I am certain that priceless wealth is in thee, and that thou art my best friend, but I have not the heart to sweep away the tinsel that fills my room.

The shroud that covers me is a shroud of dust and death; I hate it, yet hug it in love.

My debts are large, my failures great, my shame secret and heavy; yet when I come to ask for my good, I quake in fear lest my prayer be granted.\(^1\)

Even if we identify ourselves with the higher and fight the lower, it sometimes happens that we feel worsted. The natural forces seem too much for the moral. In this distress the finite individual asks: Is the moral

\(^1\) These lines remind us of the classical passage in St. Augustine's *Confessions*: "Often does a man, when heavy sleepiness is on his limbs, defer to shake it off, and, though not approving, encourage it; even so was I sure it was better to surrender to thy love than to yield to my own lusts; yet though the former course convinced me, the latter pleased and held me back. There is nothing in me to answer thy call, 'Awake! thou sleeper,' but only drawling, drowsy words, 'Presently, yes, presently; wait a little while.' But the 'presently' had no present, and the 'little while' grew long, for I was afraid thou wouldst hear me too soon, and heal me at once of my disease of lust, which I wished to satiate rather than to see extinguished" (*Confessions*, xi.).
ideal a dream, and am I a fool to fight for it against the tremendous odds of nature? Have I a fighting chance of victory, or is the enterprise foredoomed to failure? Is the struggle between good and evil presided over by a higher Being on whom I could depend, or is it a great hazard where the result can be anything? As a rational being he craves for a working probability. So long as nothing definite is known, the finite soul, struck by the galling injustice and evil of the world, wrings his hands in despair and cries out to Heaven: What must I do to be saved? Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The contradictions of finite life clearly establish that the finite individual is not the ultimate in the world but only an incomplete something requiring supplementation. The need for a philosophy which would reconcile the opposing elements of life, self and not-self, is felt to be urgent.

III

If what our intellect reveals to us is true, if the world is a chance congeries of individuals
attempting without success to fight and conquer nature, the best thing for the wise man would be to withdraw from the universe and contemplate the noble ideals in his cloister, leaving the world to rack and ruin. Mr. Bertrand Russell represents this tendency very forcibly in his brilliant article on "The Free Man's Worship": "That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast depth of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins,—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand." ¹ "Blind to good and evil, reckless of

¹ *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 60-61.
destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way."¹ Spiritual tempers recognise the high worth of human aspirations and require of men a contemplation of the ideals sacred to humanity. The way to escape from the sway of fate lies in giving up the ties binding man to the external world. We are exhorted by Mr. Russell "to abandon the struggle for private happiness, to expel all eagerness of temporary desire, to burn with passion for eternal things. This is emancipation, this is Free Man's Worship."² The pessimists of all ages demand an extirpation of desires and an attainment of inner freedom. The world is full of contradictions and human life is a great discord. The external world appears to be so awry that it drives man into the deepest solitudes of the soul. A sort of other-worldly mysticism which treats with contempt both nature and man develops. The Absolute is said to be quite different from the world, just the opposite of the finite. The characteristics we are acquainted with in the finite universe can only be denied of it. It alone is real and the world is unreal. Such

¹ Philosophical Essays, p. 70.  
² Ibid. p. 69.
an intellectualist philosophy will make the Absolute an abstract beyond, the world an unreality, contemplation the way of escape, and extinction of soul the end of man. But the Absolute will then be left in a perilous state, having nothing to do with the universe. This view is a confession of the defeat or discomfiture of man and can never satisfy his real needs. In this conflict of forces, self and not-self, right and might, there are thinkers who ask us to take up sides with might and wickedness. Nietzsche demands worship of force. The God of earth is a God of might and vengeance and not a God of right and conscience. This view is so patently absurd that we need not waste words over it.

A different view, meant especially to emphasise the religious needs of man, prevails in the West. According to it self and not-self are opposed. "The West seems to take a pride in thinking that it is subduing nature, as if we are living in a hostile world where we have to wrest everything we want from an unwilling and alien arrangement of things."  

1 Sādhanā, p. 5. Professor Baillie, of Aberdeen, concurs with this view, and thinks that the characteristic differences in mentality between
The world of nature is regarded as a refractory force hard in resisting and slow in giving in. Man in his battlings with matter presided over by Satan requires the help of God. God along with mankind struggles to overcome the forces of evil and darkness. All such theistic conceptions generally end in making God a finite being. Leibnitz, in his famous *Theodicy*, makes God a limited one. He says the existing world is the best of all possible worlds. Evidently all worlds were not possible to God; He selected the best possible, and it has turned out to be not quite a good one. Mill holds to a limited God in his *Essay on Religion*. Doctors James, Schiller, and Rashdall postulate a finite and personal God. These thinkers hold to a

religious Asia and scientific Europe can be traced ultimately to this difference in view regarding man and environment. He writes: "The scientific movement arises from a peculiar attitude of the mind to the world found amongst certain peoples of the globe, and without this attitude science will always appear a curiosity or an irrelevance. The attitude may be shortly described as due to a sense of the detachment of man from the world as something alien and external, to a sense of the supremacy of his aims over the process of the outer nature. In the East man seems to feel no sense of alienation; he seems to feel himself as much a part of the universe as a plant is inseparable from its environment. So much is this the case that man's life is felt to be part of the very current of the stream of the vaster life of the world" (*Hibbert Journal*, April 1917, p. 363).
pluralistic conception of the universe and find themselves unable to account for the unity of the world-process. No religion can finally rest in a God who is engaged in a conflict with evil in which He requires the help of man. We can never be sure of the outcome of the struggle. It is quite possible that a God who is limited by the resisting evil may have, like man, defeat for His end; only, if man fails with the help of God, great is his fall indeed. The defeat is more fearful when God has not deserted the side on which man is. A suffering God, a deity with a crown of thorns, cannot satisfy the religious soul. He is one among many, subject to the limitations of man. There is a great gulf fixed between humanity presided over by God and nature led by His opposite. So long as one principle has not universal sway, so long the basis of pessimism is sound and safe. How can man, without the joy of hope and confidence in victory, bear up against the pressure of alien force? The fear of what the unknown and the unknowable energy might do fills his life with doubt and misery, weakness and distraction. Only a universal principle can deliver human life from despair. The
Absolute is nothing short of the universe in its totality. It is the whole of perfection in which the opposition of good and evil is overcome. But the theist's God is identified with a part of the universe, the good, while the evil is left in its own independence. God is the virtue of the virtuous, and there is another opposing Him; the wickedness of the wicked. The God of theism is only an aspect of the Absolute, an appearance of a deeper reality. Modern theism, aware of this difficulty, lays stress on Divine immanence, thus watering down the personal God into the Absolute whole.¹ The views here referred to "read the world wrong" and do not give us a philosophic synthesis of God, world and self, for in a true synthesis we cannot have absolute divisions between man and nature. We need a principle, superior to them all, which would assign to each, self and not-self, its appropriate value, and give harmony to their mutual relations; a principle of synthesis which would comprehend both elements and transform their apparent antagonism into an organic relationship.

¹ See Dr. Campbell, *New Theology*, and *Foundations*, by Oxford thinkers, especially Dr. Moberly's essays.
A closer scrutiny reveals to us the kinship of nature and spirit, not-self and self. The fact that we are able to interpret nature, know it, appreciate it, fight and conquer it, shows that it is akin to human consciousness: "We could have no communication whatever with our surroundings if they were absolutely foreign to us." Man is "reaping success every day, and that shows there is a rational connection between him and nature, for we never can make anything our own except that which is truly related to us." If we separate man from nature "it is like dividing the bud and the blossom into two separate categories, and putting their grace to the credit of two different and antithetical principles." "The Indian mind never has any hesitation in acknowledging its kinship with nature, its unbroken relation with all."¹ In India where civilisation developed in forests near to nature, there was no thought of an antagonism between man and nature, no idea of forcibly wrestling treasures from nature.

Human consciousness, animal life, and inanimate nature are different grades of the

¹ Sādhanā, pp. 5-7.
same energy, stages of the same development. Self and not-self into which the universe has been dichotomised are no rivals, but are the different expressions of the same Absolute, different modes of its existence. Nature is not antagonistic to spirit; not-self is there for the purpose of being used up by the spirit. It is fuel for the flame of the spirit. The Taittiriya Upanishad calls matter *annam* or food. The human will converts its environment into food. Objective nature is capable of being determined in accordance with the subject's wishes. The past progress of the Universe clearly establishes the success which has attended man's attempt to utilise the environment for the ends of life and spirit. The not-self is a means for the manifestation of spiritual power. Only through nature can spirit realise itself. "The earth, water and light, fruits and flowers, to her were not merely physical phenomena to be turned to use and then left aside. They were necessary to her in the attainment of the ideal of perfection, as every note is necessary to the completeness of the symphony."¹ If we adopt the right attitude

¹ *Sadhanā*, p. 7.
to nature, we feel the pulse of spirit throbbing through it. A true seer sees in natural facts spiritual significance. The poetic temper hears the voice of spirit crying aloud in nature.

"The man whose acquaintance with the world does not lead him deeper than science leads him, will never understand what it is that the man with the spiritual vision finds in these natural phenomena. The water does not merely cleanse his limbs, but it purifies his heart; for it touches his soul. The earth does not merely hold his body, but it gladdens his mind; for its contact is more than a physical contact, it is a living presence. When a man does not realise his kinship with the world, he lives in a prison-house whose walls are alien to him. When he meets the eternal spirit in all objects, then is he emancipated, for then he discovers the fullest significance of the world into which he is born; then he finds himself in perfect truth, and his harmony with the All is established."\(^1\) The eye of an artist is needed to perceive the spiritual beauty of the things of nature. Only his eye can penetrate through the confusing

\(^1\) Sādhanā, p. 8.
chaos of shadows and appearances, and see the cosmos within. Rabindranath has the eye which pierces into the secret of which the natural fact is the sign and prophecy. He is a poet of nature in whose hands the crudest stuff of existence acquires a poetic colouring. The spiritual phases of nature leap up to his God-filled eyes, kindle devotion in his heart, and set song on his lips. To his soul touched by God the physical world of science appears in all its sweetness and simplicity as to a child. It is a "fairy universe where the stars talk and the sky stoops down to amuse him, and all nature comes to his window with trays of bright toys." To him "the touch of an infinite mystery passes over the trivial and the familiar, making it break out into ineffable music." "The trees, the stars, and the blue hills" ache "with a meaning which can never be uttered in words." A breath of divine passion passes over the whole world, making it pure and perfect. He feels "a thrill passing through the air with the notes of the far-away song floating from the other shore."  

1 See "Baby's World" in The Crescent Moon.  
2 Sādhana, p. 43.  
3 Gitanjali, 21.
never escape the divine presence, twist and turn as he will. The deep shadows of the rainy July and the stormy night suggest God's presence. He is a mystic soul who can hear the voice of God in the tempest and see His hand in the stilling of the wave.

It is no wonder that Rabindranath advocates life in nature and in the open as the best means of spiritual progress, for in nature the religious eye will see the infinite lying stretched in silent smiling repose. Rabindranath sings not of the cloister or the retreat, but of the open highway and the King's Post Office. He revels in the open air and is not afraid to stand under the golden canopy. According to him the best way to derive divine inspiration is to lose oneself in the contemplation of nature. In silence and in solitude we have to enjoy the presence of the divine in nature.

I woke and found his letter with the morning.

When the night grows still and stars come out one by one I will spread it on my lap and stay silent.

The rustling leaves will read it aloud to me, the rushing stream will chant it, and the seven wise stars will sing it to me from the sky.¹

¹ Fruit-Gathering IV; see also XV. and LXVIII.
He does not lay stress on religious instruction in the Bolpur school, but believes that religious feeling and piety will work their way into the life of the students if the environment is pure and noble. "We do not want nowadays temples of worship and outward rites and ceremonies. What we really want is an Asram. We want a place where the beauty of nature and the noblest pursuits of man are in a sweet harmony. Our temple of worship is there where outward nature and human soul meet in union." Recognising the influence of environment upon temperament, the ancient teachers chose the forest shades or the banks of holy rivers as the sites for their Asrams. When we are filled with the sense of the divinity that surrounds us, then we feel impelled to give ourselves up to reverie or meditation on God.

To-day the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and the bees are plying their minstrelsy at the court of their flowering grove.
Now it is time to sit quiet, face to face with thee, and to sing dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure.¹

¹ *Gitanjali*, 5.
Again:

In the busy moments of the noontide work I am with the crowd, but on this dark lonely day it is only for thee that I hope.

If thou showest me not thy face, if thou leavest me wholly aside, I know not how I am to pass these long rainy hours.¹

In moments of such exaltation when we silently adore the living presence that reveals itself through the grandeur of nature, which makes itself heard in the soul through the contemplation of the world of immanent divinity, a great peace steals over us. The infinite then murmurs its secret into our ears, and tells the story of the soul and the legend of the earth. To commune with the unutterable, we should get away from the noisy world of action, escape from the machinery of life which kills the soul. Dull mechanical work degrades and brutalises the individual, while a life of nature elevates and purifies the soul. Rabindranath beautifully depicts how an enthusiastic surrender to the spontaneity of natural scenery leads a man to his goal.

I laid myself down by the water and stretched my tired limbs on the grass.

¹ Gitanjali, 18.
My companions laughed at me in scorn. They held their heads high and hurried on; they never looked back nor rested; they vanished in the distant blue haze. They crossed many meadows and hills, and passed through strange, far-away countries. All honour to you, heroic host of the interminable path! Mockery and reproach pricked me to rise, but found no response in me. I gave myself up for lost in the depth of a glad humiliation—in the shadow of a dim delight.

At last, when I woke from my slumber and opened my eyes, I saw thee standing by me, flooding my sleep with thy smile.¹

We then lie exposed to all the winds of heaven that blow. We feel a presence, all love and peace. The load slips off our heart, and the soul is lifted above life, petty, vexatious, and harassing, and slides into a perfect harmony. The divine light floods the soul, the divine music ravishes it, and the soul expresses its joy by humming the hymn of the universe. So running "upon the dusty path of the despised" takes us nearer to God.² In The Post Office, the child Amal, rid of the prejudices of the sophisticated Madhav, wistfully yearns to get away from the clank of crowds, the noise and glare of the town, into countryside with its hills and dales. Even though his

¹ Gitanjali, 48.  
² Fruit-Gathering, X.
continuance in the world is said to depend on his keeping indoors, the cage bird longs to be a free bird and enjoy the freedom of the woodland. For as it is put in *The Cycle of Spring*: "This outer world has been made with a lavish expenditure of sun and moon and stars. Let us enjoy it, and then we can save God's face for indulging in such extravagance."  

Rabindranath's conception of nature is antagonistic to the view which makes nature opposed to the self and its aspirations. He has a positive view of the relation of spirit to nature. The two are aspects of the Absolute. Nature and society are revelations of the divine spirit. The same light dwells in the world outside and the world within. This ultimate oneness of things is what the Hindu is required to remember every moment of his life. "The text of our everyday meditation is the *Gayatri*, a verse which is considered to be the epitome of all the Vedas. By its help we try to realise the essential unity of the world with the conscious soul of man; we learn to perceive the unity held together by the one Eternal Spirit, whose power creates the earth, 

1 Page 51.
the sky, and the stars, and at the same time irradiates our minds with the light of a consciousness that moves and exists in unbroken continuity with the outer world." 1 The song of the soul and the music of the spheres are but the expressions of the divine harmony.

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures. 2

The same spirit dwells in the most distant sun and in the darkest depths of the soul. Nature is not a hostile power harassing man at every turn; the universe is not foreign to us.

When in the morning I looked upon the light I felt in a moment that I was no stranger in this world. 3

Rabindranath's conception of the unity of the world gives us the assurance that the ideals of Science and Morality are real, and sustains us on the path of right untempered by the grim realities of pain and crime. It makes us realise how the spiritual forces of the world co-operate with us in our endeavours. If the distinction of man and world, self and not-self, were the last thing,

1 Sādhanā, p. 9.    2 Gitanjali, 69.    3 Ibid 95.
then "there would have been absolute misery and unmitigated evil in this world. Then from untruth we never could reach truth, and from sin we never could hope to attain purity of heart; then all opposites would ever remain opposites, and we could never find a medium through which our differences could ever tend to meet."¹ Then our life would become a hideous tragedy of waste and wrong, fear and weakness. But progress in the realms of Science, Art, and Morality shows that self and not-self are only relatively opposed. It is the business of man to break down the opposition, and make both express the one spirit. This view restores the balance between nature and spirit, and makes life worth living. "It were well to die if there be Gods, and sad to live if there be none."² If there is the all-embracing spirit, the glooms and shadows of life lose their edge and bitterness. Then we feel that we are not battling with an unknown antagonist on a doubtful issue, but that we are trying to realise progressively a victory that is guaranteed to us. Perfect confidence takes the place of blank despair. The confused and

¹ Sadhanâ, p. 105.
² Marcus Antoninus.
shadowy world of experience becomes quite clear and transparent. Doubt is vanquished; the contradictions of life cease. "All that is harsh and dissonant melts into one sweet harmony." ¹

IV

The creation of the universe is only the realisation of the Absolute, the revelation of its freedom. "God finds himself by creating." ² It is the creative joy that gives birth to the universe, which is not only separate from God but also united to Him. God is the basis of the whole universe. It is the self-sundering of the Eternal which calls into existence the universe of men and things. But this must have "duality for its realisation." ³ The whole breaks up its individuality into the two aspects of self and not-self, Iswara and Maya, Purusha and Prakriti. "When the singer has his inspiration he makes himself into two; he has within him his other self as the hearer, and the outside audience is merely an extension of this other self of his. The lover seeks his own other self in his beloved. It is the joy that

¹ Gitanjali, 2. ² Stray Birds, 46. ³ Sādhānā, p. 104.
creates this separation, in order to realise through obstacles the union."\(^1\) The not-self or Prakriti or Maya is generally conceived of as the passive and the self as the active principle. It is their mutual supplementation that promotes the unity of the universe. The Eternal One realises itself by the action and interaction of the two principles. The principle of negativity impels the Eternal One to realise itself in the world. It is the woman "in the heart of creation." "She who is ever returning to God his own outflowing of sweetness; she is the ever fresh beauty and youth in nature; she dances in the bubbling streams and sings in the morning light; she with heaving waves suckles the thirsty earth; in her the Eternal One breaks in two in a joy that no longer may contain itself, and overflows in the pain of love."\(^2\) The first existent out of the Absolute is Iswara with the not-self over against him. Iswara is the personal God who represents the ideal of goodness to the finite minds. He is the father, creator or governor of the universe. The not-self is the negative reflection of the affirmative Iswara. The whole universe

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1 *Śādhanā*, p. 104.  
2 *Fruit-Gathering*, LVI.
develops in, through, and by means of, the interaction between these two.

Whatever being is born, the unmoving or the moving, know thou, O best of the Bharathas, that to be owing to the union of Kshetra and Kshetragnya (matter and spirit, finite and infinite).  

Between the poles of the conscious and the unconscious, there has the mind made a swing: Thereon hang all beings and all worlds, and that swing never ceases its sway. Millions of beings are there: the sun and the moon in their courses are there: Millions of ages pass, and the swing goes on. All swing! the sky and the earth and the air and the water; and the Lord Himself taking form: And the sight of this has made Kabir a servant.  

The universe is the eternal sacrifice of the supreme. The Bhagavadgita says: "The whole world rests on sacrifice. It is the law of the universe." He is sacrificing himself that nature and humanity may live. This self-sundering of the whole in which the world is contained is but the expression of his joy and the law of the universe. It is "the joy that makes the earth flow over in the riotous excess of the grass, the joy that sets the twin brothers,  

1 Bhagavadgita, XIII. 16.  
2 Kabir's Poems, XVI.  
3 III. 14.
life and death, dancing over the wide world, the joy that sweeps in with the tempest, shaking and waking all life with laughter, the joy that sits still with its tears on the open red lotus of pain, and the joy that throws everything it has upon the dust, and knows not a word.”¹ The outburst of joy is needed for the realisation of the concrete richness of the world. The universe is new-born continually, as a result of this joy.

This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.²

This lesson that “the old is ever new” is the central theme of The Cycle of Spring.³ The Absolute realises through separation and union.

The child finds its mother when it leaves her womb.

When I am parted from you, thrown out from your household, I am free to see your face.⁴

This separation is needed to make the eternal concrete.

You did not know yourself when you dwelt alone. I came and you woke.⁵

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¹ Gitanjali, 58.
² Ibid. 1.
³ Page 35.
⁴ Fruit-Gathering, X.
⁵ Ibid. LXXX.
Thou settest a barrier in thine own being and then callest thy severed self in myriad notes. This thy self-separation has taken body in me.

The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky. With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me.¹

It is the pang of separation that spreads throughout the world and gives birth to shapes innumerable in the infinite sky.²

But the separation of the two is not the last word. The universe is not merely a going forth from God, but is also a coming towards Him. The union of the two is complete, but in the universe it is being made. The finite represents to us the tension of the self to become the infinite. The universe is the struggle of the finite to reach the infinite. It is a play of hide and seek between the two, God and man. All objects of the world are finite-infinite, but the tension between the two is at its highest in the human consciousness. Man approximates to the ideal but never qua man reaches it. The world is the process of becoming infinite, but not the consummation. Should man completely realise the infinite, and should the world reach its goal of becoming

¹ Gitanjali, 71.  
² Ibid. 64.
the infinite, then there will be no universe and necessarily no Absolute.

O thou lord of all heavens, where would be thy love if I were not?¹

Though God is everything, everything is not God. While the whole universe is regarded by Rabindranath as the expression of God, still different things express God in different degrees. He thus admits the conception of degrees of reality. "The revelation of the infinite in the finite, which is the motive of all creation, is not seen in its perfection in the starry heavens, in the beauty of the flowers. It is in the soul of man."²

Man, the animal with the upward look, is a higher revelation than the mere animal, and the animal is higher than the worm, which is higher than the clod. "To all things else you give; from me you ask."³ Subject to this reservation we can say that the objects of the universe are parts of God aspiring to be the whole. God is the infinite ideal of perfection. Man has yet to become what he is. On account of his finiteness he does not realise his

¹ Gitanjali, 56. ² Sādhanā, p. 41. ³ Fruit-Gathering, LXXVIII.
aim. The content of his ideal passes beyond his existence. It has a reach beyond his grasp. He strives towards it, but it eludes his effort. He sees it as a vision beheld in dreaming, something ardently longed for. The finite universe of persons and things represents to us the passage from the imperfect to the perfect. We see the road, the end is not yet. Through the world, the opportunities it affords, "they are coming, the pilgrims, one and all—coming to their true inheritance of the world." The world is but the progress of pilgrims in their quest for the infinite. Every object in it cries out, "I want thee, only thee," and struggles to attain immortal life.

V

Man cannot reach the ideal so long as fragments of finiteness stick to him, so long as his intellect, emotion, and will are bound in the realm of finite nature. The finite intellect reduces the universe to the opposites of self and not-self, organism and environment, and leaves us there without revealing to us the final unity in which these relative opposites

1 See Gitanjali, 13.
2 Sādhanā, p. 34.
rest. The ultimate unity breaks itself into the two factors of subject and object, man and nature. Intellect reads the manifestations, but misses the unity in which the two are gathered together. It exults in the strife of the opposites which is the play of the universe. The whole in which these distinctions are, not abolished, but overcome, the unity which is the final or the ultimate explanation of the things, is not grasped by it. What it does is to break up the world-poem and discover in it "the law of its rhythms, the measurement of its expansion and contraction, movement and use, the pursuit of its evolution of forms and character." These are no doubt "true achievements of the mind," but Rabindranath says, "We cannot stop there." Our thought cannot finally rest in them. We are in the hands of opposites still. The Upanishad says: "You will have fear so long as there is dualism." The universe of intellect "is like a railway station; but the station platform is not our home." The world of intellect, with its distinctions of good and evil, truth and error, self and not-self, beauty and ugliness, is only a stage on the pathway to

1 *Sādhana*, p. 99.
The intellectual vision is full of hard-and-fast lines of distinction. It makes the opposites absolute, and the system becomes full of contradictions; but if we pierce behind it we shall find that the rigid distinctions of intellect are fluid, and mingle in a wondrous whole. "This screen that thou hast raised is painted with innumerable figures with the brush of the night and the day. Behind it thy seat is woven in wondrous mysteries of curves, casting away all barren lines of straightness."

Beyond the two, beyond the finite and the infinite, we have the Absolute, which the finite intellect cannot grasp. Our mind cannot reach it. Our soul looks into the dim unknown to catch sight of it, but cannot find it where we come across motor cars and aeroplanes. Our vision is external, and God is not there; our vision is turned inside, and God is not there.

If I say that He is within me, the universe is ashamed:
If I say that He is without me, it is falsehood.

We shall not see Him until we see Him everywhere, in and out, in darkness and in light. In the drama of Job it is put in the mouth

1 Gitanjali, 71.  
2 Kabir's Poems, IX.
of Zophar: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than Sheol; what canst thou know?" The intuitive insight by which we can see God, the intellect cannot give. The Absolute is the highest unity from which all being proceeds; but it is so exalted and so exquisite that none of our conceptions can adequately describe it. Its overflowing life breaks through all intellectual barriers. A simple childlike vision, purified and purged of all prejudices, can get at it. When the soul is absorbed in God, it sees Him. "The soul that knows Brahman becomes Brahman." Reasoning and argument are of no avail. Syllogism does not give us its spirit. It is deeper than demonstration. Intelligence cannot fathom the depths of that divine mystery. He is a God who hideth Himself. He can be "felt in the dark, but not seen in the day." He can only be known intuitively. Rabindranath says: "The vision of the Supreme One in our own soul is a direct and immediate intuition, not based on any ratiocination or demonstration at all."  

1 Stray Birds, 87, p. 22.  
2 Sādhanā, p. 36.
To the eye of the finite intellect, it is darkness, impenetrable darkness. God is the King of the Dark Chamber. We are in a dark prison, surrounded by walls which our finiteness has raised, which separate us from others. Outside it there is light and no darkness. If suddenly the great vision appears to our untrained eyes, which can see objects only in the pleasure garden, if it reveals itself unexpectedly to our ordinary consciousness, sticking to the small strutting ego as if it were everything of consequence in the world, the vision will alarm the eyes and shake that consciousness to its foundations. Even to the high-souled Arjuna, with his soul full of divine fire and heart full of devotion to God, the tremendous vision of the Universal Form of God was insupportable, too terrific and awful for him to look upon. By its exceeding brilliance it will dazzle the eyes of mortal man. God who shows himself in a moment of great suffering will look terrible.

Black, black—oh, thou art black like the everlasting night! I only looked on thee for one dreadful instant. The blaze of the fire fell on your features—you looked like the awful night when a comet swings fearfully into our ken
—oh, then I closed my eyes—I could not look on you any more. Black as the threatening storm-cloud, black as the shoreless sea with the spectral red tint of twilight on its tumultuous waves!

For one awful moment the Princess saw into the heart of things with the eyes of eternity, and had visions of suns grown cold, universes frozen. We cannot see either in perfect darkness or in perfect light. Both are dark to us—one with the excess of brightness, the other with the lack of it. We want a mixture of opposites everywhere, and that we have in our solid-seeming world. The Princess in the drama of *The King of the Dark Chamber*, which describes the eternal quest of the soul for its kindred, wishes to see her husband and dear lord in the empirical world, where we have summer houses and motor cars, in the world of time, space, and causation. She wants to see him as an object among objects. She cannot reach him thus. The scientist says: You can sweep the wide heavens with the telescope but will not find God. Even so the Princess, when her vision is confined to the empirical world, may grow sceptic about

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1 *Dark Chamber*, p. 110. "God's right hand is gentle, but terrible is his left hand" (*Stray Birds*, No. 211).
the existence of God. "It strikes me, Kaundilya, that these people haven't got a King at all. They have somehow managed to keep the rumour afloat." The existence of God is put down for a fiction or a hypothesis, contrived by the cunning, perhaps to keep the wretch in good order. Life becomes a despairing question and God a problem. He is near to her if she looks from the proper angle of vision, but He is far off if she adopts the empirical standpoint. The Absolute is a phantom that eludes her grasp. So long as the Princess wants to find God, who is ever in love with her, where she sees trees and animals, birds and stones, she cannot find Him.

The reason is that the Supreme is not an object which we can see with our finite eyes. It is the very light by which we see all objects. How can we see it as an object when it is both the subject and the object, when it is the light by which we see and the light which we see? There is nothing else than light to see it by. If we turn ourselves rightly, we shall see it everywhere. Ourself and the whole universe are eternal witnesses to its presence. It is the

1 Dark Chamber, p. 18.
life of life, the self of self. It is in our very heart. We need not fathom the sea, or sweep the sky; we need not ascend into heaven or descend into the deep to reach it. A conversion of soul is what is needed. If we break through the ordinary gaze we shall find it. Our cherished illusions must go. The vulgar wisdom of the masses should be recognised to be vulgar. An inversion of the secular into the religious consciousness is needed. If we get rid of the finiteness, and rise above the intellectual level and pierce behind the veil, we shall see it face to face. To see God we should transfer ourselves to another dimension of reality. We should break down the barrier of individuality and relax the despotism of the senses; our ignorance will then be removed. We escape from the light of separation and see God as the transcendent darkness in which the whole universe is bathed. Surangama says: "A day came when all the rebel in me knew itself beaten, and then my whole nature bowed down in humble resignation on the dust of the earth. And then I saw . . . I saw that he was as matchless in beauty as in terror. Oh, I was saved, I was
rescued.”¹ We shall then see our ordinary consciousness to be the real darkness and the transcendent one to be the perfect radiance of Eternity. The Princess says: “Your sight repelled me because I had sought to find you in the pleasure garden, in my Queen’s chambers: there even your meanest servant looks handsomer than you. That fever of longing has left my eyes for ever. You are not beautiful, my lord—you stand beyond all comparisons!” While the supreme is bright and clear to the religious intuition, it is misty and dark to the cold intellect. It is “dark from its surpassing brightness . . . as the shining of the sun on his course is as darkness to weak eyes.”² Vaughan in his “The Night” says:

There is in God, some say,
A deep but dazzling darkness, as men here
Say, it is late and dusky because they
See not all clear.
O for that night! where I in Him
Might live invisible and dim.

To the finite consciousness God is far away; to the religious soul He is quite near. God is present, yet absent. The Bhagavad-

¹ Dark Chamber, p. 43.
² Tauler.
gita says: "Near and far away is That." The Isa Upanishad says: "He is far and also near." "When you think that He is not here, then you wander farther and farther away, and seek Him in vain with tears. Where He is far off, there He is unattainable: Where He is near, He is very bliss." "They have sung of Him as infinite and unattainable: but I in my meditations have seen Him without sight." Tukaram, the Indian saint, says: "O man, why do you travel from place to place to search God? As the deer does not know that it possesses an invaluable thing called kasthuri (musk), so you do not know what is within you. Search God within you and you will find Him." Rabindranath says: "You were in the centre of my heart, therefore when my heart wandered she never found you."  

The traveller has to knock at every alien door to come to his own, and one has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end.

My eyes strayed far and wide before I shut them and said "Here art thou!"

In thus transcending intellect by intuition

1 Kabir's Poems, XVII.; see also XXI. and XXIII.
2 Fruit-Gathering, LXIX.
3 Gitanjali, 12.
we become childlike in our simplicity and innocence of the world's ways. Our knowledge is transformed into wisdom. "God waits for man to regain his childhood in wisdom."¹

The eyes of the body are closed as in sleep for the eyes of spirit to open as in dreams. "Yea, when it sleeps, the mind is bright with eyes."² Thus Rabindranath, in common with other mystics, discriminates between the path of intuition, which is the way of wisdom born of love, and the path of intellect, which is the way of knowledge born of observation.³ Intuition enables us to penetrate beneath outward appearances studied by science and see the life in things. It is a matter of experience or insight, which is coercive and certain. The design-argument, which makes God a matter of inference and not observation, is urged by Janardhan in *The King of the Dark Chamber*. "But look at the nice order and regularity prevailing all over the place—how do you explain it without a King?" This argument is put down for

¹ Stray Birds.
² Aeschylus.
³ See Fruit-Gathering, XX.
mere quibbling, as the question is to be decided by intuition. "Have you, or have you not, seen the King? Yes or no?" Kabir sings: "They are blind who hope to see it by the light of reason, that reason which is the cause of separation. The house of Reason is very far away." Reason, which can help us to weigh the dust or measure the air, cannot show us the face of God. The truly religious soul does not argue and infer, but meditates and waits for light. The poet, the artist, and the lover pursue this path of intuition; the mystic knows it, and lives in the full light of the vision.

VI

In the characterisations of God in the Vedanta writings and Rabindranath's works we find an identity of thought. The popular idea that the Brahman of the Vedanta is an abstract beyond is incorrect. Rabindranath protests against such a misconception. He says: "The infinite in India was not a thin nonentity, void of all content. The Rishis of

1 Dark Chamber, p. 20.  
2 Kabir's Poems, XCVII.
India asserted emphatically, 'To know Him in this life is to be true; not to know Him in this life is the desolation of death.' How to know Him then? 'By realising Him in each and all.' Not only in nature, but in the family, in society, and in the state, the more we realise the world-conscious in all, the better for us. Failing to realise it we turn our faces to destruction.'¹ The Vedanta thinkers do not place God in the solitude of a world beyond. The hymn or mantra chanted every evening at the Bolpur school, "The God who is in fire, who is in water, who interpenetrates the whole world, who is in herbs, who is in trees, to that God I bow again and again," is from the Upanishads.² The Vedantic Absolute as much as Rabindranath's God is a concrete spirit.

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones.³

The mystics of all faiths and creeds, from the Rishis of Upanishads downwards, are at one in this belief in the immanence of God. St. Paul says: "He is above all, through all, and

¹ Sadhānā, p. 20; see Personality, pp. 56-57.
² Swetaswatara Upanishad, 11-17.
³ Gitanjali, 11.
in all.” So too we read: “Raise the stone, and there thou shalt find me; cleave the wood, and there am I.” It is meaningless to argue that the Vedantic Absolute is a barren nothing and Rabindranath’s God a concrete something, and therefore Rabindranath is no Vedantin. The logic is irresistible; only the premisses are false.

Critics may urge that the Vedanta philosophy is ambiguous about the nature of God. True it says, God is All, but it also says God is nothing. “It is not this, not this.” This dilemma of mysticism which makes God sometimes the All, sometimes nothing, is not peculiar to the Vedanta writings, but runs through all mystic literature. Rabindranath’s poems are full of it. In some pages the Absolute is an abstract, formless, featureless unity, not a God who deserves to be adored and worshipped. It is “the inscrutable without name and form.”

But there, where spreads the infinite sky for the soul to take her flight in, reigns the stainless white radiance. There is no day nor night, nor form nor colour, and never, never a word.

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1 Gitanjali, 95.  
2 Ibid. 67.
On the other hand, in the same poem Rabindranath makes the whole universe the manifestation of God:

Thou art the sky, and thou art the nest as well.¹

Much the same thing is true of Kabir's utterances.

He is neither manifest nor hidden, He is neither revealed nor unrevealed:
There are no words to tell that which He is.²
He is without form, without quality, without decay.³
Only he knows it who has reached that region: it is other than all that is heard and said.
No form, no body, no length, no breadth is seen there:
how can I tell you that which it is.⁴

To represent the other current of his thought we may cite the following passage:

He Himself is the tree, the seed, and the germ.
He Himself is the flower, the fruit, and the shade.
He Himself is the sun, the light, and the lighted.
He Himself is Brahma, creature, and Maya.
He Himself is the manifold form, the infinite space;
He is the breath, the word, and the meaning.
He Himself is the limit and the limitless: and beyond both the limited and the limitless is He, the Pure Being.
He is the Immanent Mind in Brahma and in the creature.⁵

¹ Gitanjali, 67.  ² Kabir's Poems, IX.  ³ Ibid. XXVI.  ⁴ Ibid. LXXVI.  ⁵ Ibid. VII.
The Upanishads are full of such apparently contradictory descriptions, for they are only the records of the spiritual experiences of the sages of India. "He is not this, He is not that." 1 "It is neither coarse nor fine, neither sharp nor long, neither red like fire nor fluid like water; it is without shadow, without darkness, without air, without water, without attachment, without taste, without smell, without eyes, without ears, without speech, without mind, without light, without breath, without mouth, without measure, having no within and no without; it devours nothing and no one devours it." 2 To represent the other tendency we have the Chandogya, which says: "All this universe has the Supreme deity for its life. That deity is truth. He is the Universal soul. Thou art He, Swethakethu." 3 The Mundaka Upanishad says: "This immortal Brahma, to the right and the left, below and above, all pervading, Brahma is this All, this infinite world." 4 The contradiction between the two accounts is only apparent and not real. If by means of our finite intellect we

1 Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, ii. 3. 6.
2 Ibid. iii. 8; see also iv. 4. 22.
3 Ibid. vi. 7.
4 Ibid. ii. 11; see also Swethaswathara, iv. 2-4.
try to reach the Absolute we shall fail in our attempts. The Kena Upanishad says: "It is far from the known and above the unknown." The Taittiriya says: "Words together with the mind return without comprehending it." The Absolute unity is opposed to the intellectual duality, and the intellectual account of the Absolute remains a negative one. But when we rise above the plane of intellect to religion, poetry, and philosophy we see it face to face. When we say that the Absolute is above the grasp of intellect, we do not mean that it is opposed to it. Only in the Absolute the intellectual is realised. "In love all the contradictions of existence merge themselves and are lost. Only in love are unity and duality not at variance."¹ At the intuitional level the Absolute is the all-comprehending love with whom we can commune, whom we can love, adore, and worship. The Absolute is the whole Universe. The creation is the dance, leela, or the play of the Absolute. "The Creator brought into being the game of joy. The Earth is his Joy. . . . In play is the creation spread out. In play it is established."²

¹ Sadhanā, 114. ² Kabir's Poems, LXXXII.
Rabindranath's God as much as the Vedantic Absolute is a concrete Universal.

VII

Now the question arises, Is Rabindranath's God a person and not the impersonal Absolute of the Vedanta? Yes: *Gitanjali* makes of God a person. The Vedanta Philosophy in all its stages of development provides for such a conception. Art, philosophy, and religion are the specialised modes in which the Absolute presents itself to mankind. God is a trinity because man is. The human individual is a unity of intellect, emotion, and will, and the Supreme Ideal, to satisfy sentiment, will, and reason, appears as Supreme Beauty, Supreme Good, Supreme Truth. And as the human individual is a unity of the three, and as these elements cannot conflict with each other, and as no one of them can complete its idea except as it gathers into itself the two others, even so there is no discord between the different aspects of truth, beauty, and goodness in the Supreme Ideal. This ideal shows itself to man's capacity for joy as Supreme Beauty, to his capacity for knowledge as Supreme
Truth, to his capacity to act, as Supreme Good. The contents of the three do not vary, though their form does. Art, philosophy, and religion are different forms and expressions of worship and different ways of approach to God. The particular method depends upon the temperamental characteristics with which the Creator has enriched human nature. All souls—saints, sages, and seers—seek union with God. Mystic souls of an emotional and imaginative cast of mind express their devotion by love, worship, and adoration. They make a person of the object of their love. In Rabindranath the art aspect predominates. His wealth of imagination, force of feeling, and intensity of passion turn his words into music and poetry. The poems of *Gitanjali* are the offerings of the finite to the infinite. The relation between the two is conceived of as that between the lover and the beloved—an analogy employed by the mystics the world over. Throughout oriental literature, this analogy is constantly used to express the true relationship between the human soul and God. Radha’s passionate devotion to Krishna is the symbol of the soul’s yearning for God. When Krishna, to draw
all creation to him, sings the divine music of his flute, she listens to it and gives up her all for His sake. The analogy of human love holds, in that in perfect love we have two yet one, a single life led by a man and a woman. The surrender of the soul, the fulfilment of love, and the union with the other spirit, characteristic of human love, are present in the longing for the Absolute. But if we press this analogy too far we get all sorts of difficulties. Ultimately there will be no divorce between head and heart, reason and faith. Rabindranath is intellectual enough to recognise that the Vedantic Absolute which he believes to be the ultimate philosophical unity does not lend itself to intellectual description. But being an

1 The Persian poet sings:
   Four eyes met. There were changes in two souls.
   And now I cannot remember whether he is a man and I a woman,
   Or he a woman and I a man. All I know is,
   There were two, love came, and there is one.

Rabindranath writes: "In love, at one of its poles you find the personal, at the other the impersonal. At one you have the positive assertion—Here I am; at the other the equally strong denial—I am not. Without this ego what is love? And again, with only this ego how can love be possible?" (Sādhanā, pp. 114-115).

2 Cf. That Beauty, Good, and Knowledge, are three sisters
   That doat upon each other, friends to man,
   Living together under the same roof,
   And never can be sunder'd without tears.

   Tennyson, "Palace of Art."
artist, he translates his spiritual experience into material symbols. The language is metaphorical, and if literally interpreted would lead to absurdities and contradictions. Miss Evelyn Underhill remarks in her admirable introduction to *Kabir's Poems*: "It is a marked characteristic of mystical literature that the great contemplatives, in their effort to convey to us the nature of their communion with the supersensuous, are inevitably driven to employ some form of sensuous imagery: coarse and inaccurate as they know such imagery to be, even at the best." If from the poems of *Gitanjali* we infer that God is a person over against man, we make a mistake. To Rabin- dranath God is not a being seated high up in the heavens, but a spirit immanent in the whole Universe of persons and things. Rabin- dranath's love is a spiritual love above sex, unintelligible to the world at large, a love which loses itself in the sea of the Absolute to "melt and vanish away in the dark, or it may be in a smile of the white morning, in a coolness of purity transparent."¹ The Absolute of philosophy becomes the God of religion, to all

¹ *Gitanjali*, 80.
followers of the Bhakti school. Iswara, the highest manifestation of the Absolute, is the personal Lord of the Universe. The distinction of the lover and the loved is kept up till the last point, when in perfect love the two become one. The personal God is then dissolved in the Absolute. If Rabindranath is viewed as a worshipper of a personal God, he may be looked upon as the living example of the long and noble succession of religious devotees of whom India is justly proud, including among others Manikkavasagar, Ramanuja, Maddhwa, Ramananda, Vedanta Desikar, Jnaneswar, Namdev, Vallabha Charya, Kabir, Chandidas, Chaithanya, Nanak, Dadu, Tulasidas, and Tukaram. This Bhakti school has had a continuous history from the very beginnings of reflection in India. A Christian critic, Dr. Macnicol, says: "Theism is both ancient in the land and indigenous to the soil. . . . No one need suppose that the ideas that bhakti connotes are a foreign importation into India." 1 The

1 Indian Theism, p. 275. Rabindranath says: "We discern two opposite currents in India's divine lore (brahma vidyā)—the abstract God and the personal God, monism and duality. There cannot be worship unless we admit duality, and yet there cannot be devotion unless we fix our gaze on One." (Modern Review, August 1913). The two are aspects of the one Godhead.
critics who make Rabindranath a borrower from Christianity betray an astonishing lack of "historic conscience"—a charge generally urged against Indians. The Absolute of philosophy and the God of religion have both a place in the Vedanta system. Those who draw a hard-and-fast line of distinction between the two will never be able to understand the Vedanta philosophy. What Richard Garbe says of the Bhagavadgita is true of other Vedanta writings: "The doctrines which are here put into the mouth of Krishna present a remarkable combination of pantheistic and monotheistic ideas, of philosophical thoughts and of pure and deeply religious faith in God."¹ The formless Absolute has to be conceived as a being of form by the finite individual. To put it the other way, we can say that the Absolute, which is above the pairs of opposites of beauty and ugliness, truth and error, good and evil, still appears for the sake of man as perfect Beauty, perfect Truth, and perfect Goodness. "The Perfect decks itself in beauty for the love of the Imperfect."² The

¹ Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics, vol. ii. p. 536.
² Stray Birds, No. 62.
following words, quoted in Maharshi Deven-
dranath Tagore's *Autobiography*, admirably
depict the contrition of the devotee for the
confusion of spirit due to his finiteness:

O spiritual guide of the Universe, Thou art without form:
Yet that I have conceived Thine image in the act of
meditation;
That I have ignored Thine inexpressibility by words of
praise;
That I have set at naught Thy omnipresence by making
pilgrimages, and in other ways,—
For these three transgressions committed through
confusion of spirit, O Almighty God, I implore Thy
forgiveness.