He spoke of poetry, and how
Divine it was—a light, a love—
A spirit which like wind doth blow
As it listeth, to and fro.
A dew rained down from God above;
A power which comes and goes like dream,
And which none can ever trace—
Heaven's light on earth—Truth's brightest beam.

SHELLEY.

More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete, and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. . . . The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them, for having taken them seriously; and the more we perceive their hollowness, the more we shall prize "the breath and finer spirit of knowledge" offered to us by poetry.—MATTHEW ARNOLD.

I

In Chapter I., Section I., we have said that Rabindranath is essentially a poet and not a
philosopher, though it is possible for us to gather his philosophical views from his poetry. There are critics who consider Rabindranath's poetry not to be first-rate, because it is full of metaphysics and mysticism. The first two chapters dealing with the philosophical teaching of Rabindranath only strengthen the suspicion, and leave the reader in genuine doubt about the worth of Rabindranath's poetry. His departure from the conventions of poetic form adds to the difficulties and helps to make the suspicion gather in weight and become well-nigh certain. Let us here consider how far the criticism is just, and incidentally notice Rabindranath's views about the relation of poetry to philosophy, and topics of a kindred nature.

II

The question to be decided at the outset relates to the aim of art, especially poetic art. In *The Cycle of Spring*, Rabindranath says: "We [poets] set men free from their desires."¹ In these words he lays his finger on the true function of art as the pathway to freedom.

¹ Page 18.
The artist helps us to forget the bonds with the world, and reveals to us the invisible connections by which we are bound up with eternity. True art withdraws our thoughts from the mere machinery of life, and lifts our souls above the meanness of it. It releases the self from the restless activities of the world, and takes us out "of the noisy sick-room of ourselves." It disengages the mind from its imprisonment in the web of customary associations and routine ideas. The secret of all art lies in self-forgetfulness. The poet or the artist sets free the poet or the artist in us. And this he can do only if his artistic creation is born of self-forgetful joy. The true artist lifts himself above all worldly passions and desires, into the spiritual mood where he waits for the light. He turns away from all other objects, identifies himself with the particular subject he wishes to interpret, merges his consciousness in it, and loses himself. He calls out to the object whose beauty he wishes to be revealed:

... Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! be thou me, impetuous one.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Shelley.
When this forgetfulness of self and identification with the not-self occurs, when the life within the artist becomes one with the life without him, art takes its birth. It is because art is born of this joy that it produces joy. When we say that the function or aim of art is to produce enjoyment, it is not to be understood that either the artist, or the creator, or the enjoying man starts with any conscious purpose to delight or the deliberate design to enjoy. Artistic creation and enjoyment are both spontaneous and unconscious. The artist does not create his work with any specific motive of pleasing the audience or delighting the world. What is felt deeply in the soul of the artist finds outward shape in the work of art. Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh. "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom," says William Blake. Art has its origin, according to Rabindranath, "in the region of the superfluous." The surplus energy seeks its outlet in art. Art is the daughter of joy. It is due to play, the expression of the superfluous energies of man. Man speaks with his voice when he has a

1 Personality, p. 10
purpose to gain; but when he has none such, he sings. He walks with his feet when he has an end to reach, but when he has none such, he dances. Man writes with his hand, and works with it when he has an axe to grind, but when he has none such, he paints with it. But if all our time and energies are taken up by war and trade, science and industry, then we cannot afford to waste our precious time and energies in painting and chiselling, singing and dancing! Our society will have no place for those idlers, we mean the artists! But art is born of idle-ness, and not busy-ness. In art we do not seek for the fulfilment of our physical or intellectual needs. We only feel and enjoy, but do not analyse or measure. Repetition of facts that can be turned to use and advantage, such as "the sun is round, water is liquid, fire is hot, would be intolerable. But a description of the beauty of the sunrise," which has absolutely no economic or utilitarian value, will have "its eternal interest . . . because there, it is not the fact of the sunrise, but its relation to ourselves, which is the object of perennial interest."  

1 Personality, p. 15.
the world of personality. Art is the expression of personality. But it may be argued that all activity is self-expression, and so, to say that art is self-expression does not go far. But we have to remember that everywhere else, activity is a means to something else, while in beauty we have no ulterior aim.

We want to know a thing that we may use it. In art, self-expression has no other end. It is its own object. Self-expression occurs because it cannot but occur. It is not to satisfy any physical or economic needs. "When our heart is fully awakened in love, or in other great emotions, our personality is in its flood-tide."¹ Poetry is not work, but an outburst, or an effluence as Browning puts it. It is the expression of the excess where the whole soul comes out. As art is born of the joy of self-forgetfulness it fulfils the aim of delighting, or producing joy, and thus helps the soul to leap free of its fetters and attain peace with itself and the world. It lifts us up into a mood where everything actual becomes practically nothing. It helps the soul to enter its own natural home, and claim its citizenship in that

¹ Personality, p. 17.
kingdom of freedom and beauty where all are sovereigns and none subjects. At the same time it affects the greater life of which it is a part; for it brings the infinite into the common life. It thus adorns life and gladdens existence.

Art is not didactic. It is to delight and not to instruct. It is to stimulate us unconsciously to noble ends and not to teach lessons. Philosophy may argue and instruct; religion may exhort and command; but art only delights and pleases. Instruction and edification may be the results of art, but its aim is only to delight. While it shines by its own light, the light may produce other effects. As a species of art, the aim of poetry is to please and not profit.

The popular notion that Indian thought is not in sympathy with this conception of the aim of art is a mistake. "The rhetoricians in old India had no hesitation in saying, that enjoyment is the soul of literature,—the enjoyment which is disinterested."¹ When delight, the aim of art, is confused with pleasure interpreted in the vulgar hedonistic sense, then

¹ Personality, p. 8.
Indian thought enters its emphatic protest. When art caters to our craze for sensation, it is criticised and condemned. The ascetic note in India is the expression of the revolt against, not the spiritual aim of art, but the hedonistic degradation of that aim. The æsthetic emotion is a spiritual experience and not a mere subjective feeling. When art ceases to be a means of attaining spiritual freedom, and becomes merely the occasion for the amusement of the vulgar, it has forfeited its true nature as art.

Though it is not the aim of poetry as a species of art to tell us of a philosophy, still it cannot fulfil its purpose unless it embodies a philosophic vision. It must offer an interpretation of life, give us a fuller view of reality. Poetry would not delight and give joy if it did not reveal the eternal through its form. Poetry aims, in the language of Hegel, "to present in forms for the imagination features of the ultimate ideal of the harmonised universe." Aristotle has said that poetry is the most philosophic of all writing,
as its object is truth. The true poet is he who sees the whole in every part and makes his poetry express his whole vision. "The chief office of poetry is not merely to give amusement, not merely to be the expression of feelings good or bad of mankind, or to increase our knowledge of human nature, and of human life, but that, if it includes this mission, it also includes a mission far higher, the revelation, namely, of ideal truth, the revelation of that world of which this world is but the shadow or the drossy copy, the revelation of the eternal, the unchanging and the typical which underlies the unsubstantial and the ever-dissolving phenomena of earth's empire of matter and time." ¹ Poetry should give us a vision of the whole. We may well say that one of the decisive tests to help us to find out whether a particular work is poetry or not is this, whether it gives us a wholeness of vision or reads only the surface appearances. Instead, therefore, of saying that philosophy and poetry are incompatible, we should say that poetry to be poetry must be essentially philosophical, in the sense here explained.

¹ Churton Collins, *The True Function of Poetry*.
For it is only a mind that is at rest, a soul at peace with itself, that can produce good poetry. A disturbed soul or a worried mind cannot be a great poet. It is the rhythm of life that expresses itself in the rhythm of poetry. There will be melody in the tongue only if there is melody in the heart. The harmony of the soul is attained when the mind is not seized with doubts. It is only then that the soul sinks into a kind of passivity, surrenders itself to the spontaneity of creation, and finds its joy therein. The human soul to rise into poetic rapture should become attuned with the soul of things beyond. The inner and the outer self must melt into one sweet harmony. "This world, whose soul seems to be aching for expression in its endless rhythm of lines and colours, music and movements, hints and whispers, and all the suggestion of the inexpressible, finds its harmony in the ceaseless longing of the human heart to make the Person manifest in its own creations."¹ It is the universal joy that takes shape in the song of the poet. Poetry is the echo in the human heart of the melody of the universe. A

¹ Personality, pp. 32-33.
soul ill at ease with the world, which thinks that the world is given up for lost, as God is confined to His heaven, cannot be a great poet. The pessimist who sees an irreconcilable breach between the higher and the lower, the transcendentalist who looks upon the ideal as something beyond time and the world-process, and the world-negating ascetic who longs to fly from this life into nothingness, these cannot be great poets, as they are at war with the world. Pessimistic poetry is a contradiction in terms; for he who finds nothing valuable in this world cannot be a poet. The true poet finds his happiness in the world or not at all. The poet must have love of nature and of creation. Rabindranath thus describes the relation of the artist soul to the world soul: "The world asks the inner man,—'Friend, have you seen me? Do you love me?—not as one who provides you with foods and fruits, not as one whose laws you have found out, but as one who is personal, individual?' The artist's answer is, 'Yes, I have seen you, I have loved and known you,—not that I have any need of you, not that I have taken you and used
your laws for my own purposes of power. I know the forces that act and drive and lead to power, but it is not that. I see you, where you are what I am.’”

Disinterested love for the universe, as it is only a revelation of one's own soul, is the true artist's attitude to the world. A poet who wishes to see beauty everywhere must love the earth. The soul must be at home in the world and feel no strangeness in it. It must cry out, "Is not this earth also His who made heaven?"

The true poet hears harmony in the babel of sounds called nature, sees good in the heart of evil, and views eternity in time. The disturbances of the soul and the antinomies of the world do not make him think that God is either non-existent, or, if existent, has gone stark mad, but only strengthen his world-view in its wholeness. Of course he would feel ugliness and evil like pain. “When they had struck thee and thou wert pained, it pierced me to the quick.”

But in all true poetry as in all true philosophy, the end must be reconciliation. The poet may display his art in describing the tragic contrasts of the world, but

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1 Personality, p. 22.  
2 Fruit-Gathering, LV.  
3 Ibid.
he is convinced that the end of it all is peace and atonement, and not discord and despair. This does not mean that the fifth scene of the fifth act should be one of marriage or benediction. Nor does it mean that he should view the world as a pure paradise without any conflicts and contrasts. The poet should face the world with its ugliness and misery, horror and imperfection, but in the end let us feel that the world we live in is good enough. He may describe the tumult of the soul, but only to conclude that underneath it there is a settled peace. Pure and ennobling are the effects of great tragedies which describe the agonies of soul and the groanings of spirit. A tragedy which leaves on the mind an impression of disgust and dissatisfaction is a failure as a work of art. The ultimate feeling in true art should be one of triumph and satisfaction. The tragedy is an illustration of the law of the universal in the particular, and exhibits the realisation of the whole in the sorrows of the individuals. Any other course would be to give up the rationality of the beauty of the universe. The dull world may have discords and contradictions, but the world of
poetry which is nature idealised cannot contain them. Roughly speaking, only partial views, which are the monopoly of science and prose, can consider contradiction the end of things. To them the world may appear an interrogation, but to the philosopher and the poet it cannot be so. Their task is to show that conflict and confusion are not the last thing. They make a perfect round of the broken arcs of the earth. The beauty and order of the world are recreated alike in the vision of the poet and the mind of the philosopher. The philosopher argues that all discord is harmony not understood; the poet shows us the soul of goodness in things evil. The eternal harmony of the world is heard in the song of the poet. "My poet, is it thy delight to see thy creation through my eyes and to stand at the portals of my ears silently to listen to thine own eternal harmony?"

IV

On this view the naturalistic conception of poetry stands self-condemned. As art is distinct from nature, so is naturalistic poetry

1 Gitanjali, 65.
distinct from true poetry. The former requires mere observation, while the latter demands meditation on the material observed. While in the former our mind is in a relatively passive condition, in the latter it is in an active state, reflecting on the data observed. As philosophy is not common sense but a criticism thereof, even so poetry is not life but a criticism of it. As philosophy does not catalogue facts but reduces them to law and order, even so poetry does not copy facts but interprets them. Philosophy, by revealing the deeper meanings of things, criticises the superficial appearances, and the poet sets against the ugly show of things their inner spiritual beauty. Philosophy according to the idealist tradition is a construction of experience. The immediate facts of the world, which constitute the starting-point of the philosophic inquiry, are taken up into a synthesis where their immediacy and externality are broken down. Even so the imagination of the poet plays with the facts of the world and makes them express the spirit of the whole. Poetry is not therefore an unimaginative copying of life and matter. The aim of the poet is to reveal the
life within things, the soul within matter. The philosopher tells us that mechanism is not the ultimate category of the universe, while the poet sees the life in things which pass for dead. As truth is no mere correspondence to fact, so poetry is no mere imitation of the facts of nature or the flow of mind. Both are creative reconstructions. Both are mirrors of life, not of life at its surface, but of life at its deepest and the best side. If poetry consists in putting down exactly what we see without wavering, as some of our modern poets do when they sing of the kerosene tin and the telegraph wire, it is not true poetry. Beauty is truth, as Keats observed, and not naturalism. Poetry is creation, not copying. It is vision, not imitation. It is picture, not photograph. Indian thought never cared for nature divorced from spirit. Nature thus viewed is an illusive phenomenon. It is real as revealing the divine essence or spirit. Art is the effort of the human mind to grasp the spiritual meaning and inner beauty of the facts of nature. Things of the world are not beautiful by themselves; but as containing suggestions of things above, they are beautiful. But when poetry
attempts to photograph things it ceases to be poetry, and becomes prose or science, or something else. Poetry must attach greater importance to the inner informing spirit than to the outward semblance. Fidelity, not to nature but to the soul in it, is the principle of true poetry. So while it is right to say that poetry should be the expression of feeling, it should not be the expression of subjective or individual feeling. It should be the utterance of the universal mind or the general will. It should express feeling lit by reflection. As every natural fact is presented to us in the light of its ideal aim, so every subjective feeling should be given out as an illustration of the poet's whole experience. In poetry not merely a particular emotion, but the poet's whole perception should be released. Every feeling should be given out as an item of the poet's whole vision, which is the inspiration of the poet's work. Rabindranath writes: "Poetry is not a mere matter of feeling or expression, it is the creation of form. Ideas take on shape by some hidden subtle skill at work within the poet. This creative power is the origin of poetry. Sensations, feelings, or language are only its raw
material.”  

True poetry will be a compound of emotion and reflection. Mere feeling or emotion will have no voice or utterance. It would be speechless as subjectivism in philosophy is. Without restraint of feeling by thought there would be no realisation, and so no poetry. “The creation of beauty is not the work of unbridled imagination. Passion when it is given its full sway becomes a destructive force like fire gone out of hand.”  

This is Wordsworth’s meaning when he says that poetry is emotion remembered in tranquillity. The simplicity of the poetic garb sometimes misleads us into thinking that poetry is only the expression of a surface feeling; but spontaneity and simplicity are in inverse proportion to the training and thought involved. “That training is the most intricate which leads to the utter simplicity of a tune.”  

Poetry is not to be put down for a relaxation of our powers or a detention of our faculties. It involves much strenuous exertion and critical reflection. When the powers of man are at the highest, we feel as if they

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1 Letters, Modern Review, August 1917.  
2 Modern Review, September 1911, p. 226.  
3 Gitanjali, 12.
were at the lowest. It is similar to the optical illusion where both motion and motionlessness seem one. The artist lives a more intense life than the common folk; for only of intensity is insight born.

The transcendental view, which makes poetry, as distinct from prose, deal with ideals which have no reality in life, is at the opposite extreme to the naturalistic view, and is equally abstract and unreal. The classical poet, who "as a swimmer without the impediments of garments cleaves the water with greater ease," constructs a dream world or a fairy land, neglecting the pain and suffering inherent in life, is at the opposite pole to the realistic poet, who pictures the world as it strikes the retina of his eye, and gives us a photograph of the world at its surface. To say that poetry is unrelated to life is as incorrect as to say that poetry is a mere imitation of life. To the poet, earth is his home and heaven his hope. A true philosophy tells us that the distinctions between the actual and the ideal, nature and art, life and criticism, and observation and reflection are relative. The two become opposed when we draw a hard-and-fast line of distinction between
the surface view of things, which we call the natural, and the deeper one which penetrates the veil, which we call the philosophical. But art is merely nature deeply felt and meditated upon. "The art itself is nature."¹ The naturalistic and the transcendental views of poetry, which consider that poetry should deal with surface facts or abstract ideals, correspond to the two extreme positions in philosophy, represented by naturalistic realism and transcendental idealism. These have for their counterparts in ethics, hedonism in the utilitarian sense, and rationalism in the ascetic sense. All these are one-sided. True philosophy teaches us that the whole consists of ideals permeating actualities. The real is the rational. A divorce between the two is unreal and untrue to fact. Poetry should embody elements of actual experience, but set them in the light of the genuine ideal. In this we presume that the final truth of nature and man is the same, and this is the conclusion of sober philosophy. The earliest Upanishads of India with the latest systems of modern Critical Idealism assert that the principle which works

¹ Shakespeare.
in the human imagination as the ideal of man, and the end towards which nature moves by force of its immanent idea, are identical. What true poetry does is to shadow forth the identity of the whole, man and nature. Goethe's lines, as translated by Carlyle, bring out the true spirit of the poet:

As all Nature's myriad changes still one changeless Power proclaim,
So through Thought's wide kingdom ranges one vast Meaning, e'er the same:
This is Truth—Eternal Reason—that in beauty takes its dress,
And serene, through time and season, stands complete in righteousness.

The poets who lack this spirit are not of the right type, whatever their writings may achieve. The abiding judgment of man will put them down for counterfeit coin.

Rabindranath is of opinion that both realism and idealism in their extreme forms are wrong. To him realism, which would have art reproduce nature in all the coarse reality of its surface appearance, is as false a conception of poetry as idealism, which would not deign to walk the streets, but would fain fly in the medium of an ideal unrelated to fact. He adopts the true
view, which is a higher union of the two, limiting both and fulfilling both. Art is concerned neither with the actual and the imperfect, nor with the ideal and the hazy, but with the natural transfigured by the ideal immanent in it. "I believe in an ideal life. I believe that, in a little flower, there is a living power hidden in beauty which is more potent than a Maxim gun. I believe that in the bird's notes Nature expresses herself with a force which is greater than that revealed in the deafening roar of the cannonade. I believe that there is an ideal hovering over the earth, —an ideal of that Paradise which is not the mere outcome of imagination, but the ultimate reality towards which all things are moving. I believe that this vision of Paradise is to be seen in the sunlight, and the green of the earth, in the flowing streams, in the beauty of springtime and the repose of a winter morning. Everywhere in this earth the spirit of Paradise is awake and sending forth its voice. . . ." ¹ So deep is Rabindranath's love of nature that to him every aspect of nature becomes a symbol

¹ Shantiniketan, by W. W. Pearson; Epilogue by Rabindranath Tagore.
of beauty. He does not love nature for its own sake, but because he views it as an attribute of the divine; not for the abundance of joy that it brings into life, but for the intimations it gives of a higher spiritual life. To him even a blade of grass or an atom of dust brings a message from the unknown. To him every flower is a symbol of worship, every garland a gitanjali, every forest a temple, and every hill-top God's dwelling-place. The sound of the running water, the rustle of the leaves, and the song of the bird are so many hymns of praise to the great God. He has faith in the soul of the universe. He cannot be a great poet who has no faith in it. It is a philosophy of divine immanence that should be at the basis of true and great poetry. The East has faith in this universal soul. To the Indian poet this universal Presence is not a mere matter of philosophical speculation, but is as real as the sunlight or the earth under his feet.\(^1\) To him "in Art the person in us is sending its answers to the Supreme Person, who reveals Himself to us in a world of endless beauty across the lightless world of

\(^1\) Personality, p. 27.
facts." The actual hides the ideal; the natural the spiritual; and what art does is to reveal the hidden spiritual ideal. The destiny of nature is to become spirit. The function of the artist or the poet is to exalt the natural towards its destined spiritual perfection. The poet releases the spirit imprisoned in matter. When the poet, oppressed by the idealism which fills his body and soul, touches matter it loses its materiality. What is common loses its commonness, what is earthy loses its earthiness, and what is finite and imperfect its finiteness and imperfection. The poet's mind, dominated by an overpowering sense of the spiritual, penetrates through the veil of their earthly covering into the life of things. The Greek view that there are certain objects which are beautiful and others ugly, and the artist has only to take note of them, loses its force. The Greek framed his images of gods from perfect human models which he looked upon as beautiful. But the Hindu does not care for the human models, but simply surrenders himself to the spontaneity of the spiritual vision. "The artist,"

1 *Personality*, p. 38.
says Sukracharya, "should attain to the images of the gods by means of spiritual contemplation only. The spiritual vision is the best and truest standard for him. He should depend upon it, and not at all upon the visible objects perceived by external senses. . . . It is far better to present the figure of a god, though it is not beautiful, than to reproduce a remarkably handsome human figure."\(^1\) To Rabindranath, as to Indian thought in general, beauty is subjective. Anything may be made the vehicle for it. Even the grotesque is not useless. "In Art, man reveals himself and not his objects."\(^2\) We should have the spiritual harmony, and then the whole world will burst into music. Everything depends on us. "It is like our touch upon the harp-string: if it is too feeble, then we are merely aware of the touch, but if it is strong, then our touch comes back to us in tunes and our consciousness is intensified."\(^3\) So the harp-string is neither the one nor the other. Everything depends on our touch, whether it is feeble or strong; in other words,

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1 See Havell's *Indian Sculpture and Painting*, pp. 54-55.
2 *Personality*, p. 12.
whether we are full of spiritual fire or not. Or we may put it the other way, and say that the soul with the fire in it is like some stringed instrument, and any object which strikes it produces sound. "The one effort of man's personality is to transform everything with which he has any true concern into the human. And art is like the spread of vegetation, to show how far man has reclaimed the desert for his own." The things of the world are rescued from the flux of time and the relativity of space, and viewed under the light that never was on sea or land. To the eye of the genuine poet the spiritual aspects are as simple and natural and as real as the sea or the sunlight to the naked eye. In true poetry the real is idealised, and the ideal realised, and we have quite a genuine but a higher kind of real object. As Tennyson puts it, poetry is truer than fact. So the greatest poetry must embody an ideal vision or a true philosophy. Without this philosophic vision no great poetry can exist. Poetry may charm us by its wit, surprise us by its skill, thrill us by its richness, amuse us by its variety, lull

1 *Personality*, p. 29.
us into sleep by its rhythm, and satisfy our craving for extraordinary incident; but let it lack the vision, it sinks to the level of verse and ceases to be poetry.

V

Poetry is creative while prose is narrative; poetry is an end in itself while prose is a means to an end. A genuine poet has the creative vision which makes beauty. The peace of the soul will work out in terms of visible beauty, and the poet by swift image and noble phrase puts forth his ideal. If the creation is present, it is poetry whether it is in verse or not. Rules of prosody are for the poet and not the poet for them. Rules are his servants and not his masters. Technique is only a means to an end. Those who observe technique and make rhyming lines without any creative idea or spiritual vision are versifiers and not poets. Their products are verses and not poems. Verses can be turned out with a certain number of feet, but not poetry, which requires the artistic vision and inspiration. Technique will not make for vitality. It may even be said that
an art which follows rules is an art without beauty. It is like religion without faith, morality without heroism. There are people who imagine that it matters not what the poet says, provided he says it well. But this is to separate matter and form, which we cannot in justice do. To Rabindranath the vision and the form in which it is bodied forth are inseparable. The soul and the body are one; the outward is the expression of the inward.¹

"It is meritorious," writes Carlyle, "to insist on forms. Religion and all else naturally clothes itself in forms. All substances clothe themselves in forms; but there are suitable true forms, and then there are untrue, unsuitable. As the briefest definition one might say, Forms which grow round a substance, if we rightly understand that, will correspond to the real Nature and purport of it, will be true, good; forms which are consciously put round a substance, bad." Similarly S. T. Coleridge observes: "The form is mechanic when on any given material we impress a predetermined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material—as

¹ Personality, p. 20.
when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fulness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Such as the life is, such is the form."

Form and substance are of a piece; they are made for each other. As water makes its channel, so the substance creates its form. In poetry the spirit becomes incarnate and the body becomes instinct with spirit. The essential point is the creative vision, and if art should be the expression of it, it will do. Art should be the expression of life and should be informed by it. In the absence of the vision, poetry becomes merely an academic affectation or pedantic word-display. There are critics who think that Rabindranath is not a great poet because he disregards poetic form. But form is only the vehicle for the vision, the means for self-realisation. The end of art is not the realisation of form, but that of spirit. Art is more the expression of thought than the revelation of form. India never worshipped form for its own

\[1\] Lectures.
Indian theory of art agrees with Hegel in thinking that "the outward shape by which the content is made perceptible is merely there for the sake of mind and spirit."\(^1\) The artist tries to represent not the form but the ideal. He tries to materialise the idea, show us the subtle soul. The idolatry of form to be met with in the West is due to a confusion about the object of art. The aim of art is self-expression; and this it realises by the arts, sculpture and painting, music and poetry. Beauty happens to be the main element of this expression, and so it is thought that the production of beauty is the aim of art, "whereas beauty in art has been the mere instrument and not its complete and ultimate significance."\(^2\) It is this conception of beauty as the end of art that makes some people imagine that manner is more important than matter. A poetic genius like Rabindranath need not be bound by forms. He is a law unto himself, makes his own rules and breaks through the ordinary conventions. Feeling that convention is the curse of poetry, realising that rhymes have a restricting effect on the free flight of the

\(^1\) Aesthetics, i. 91.  
\(^2\) Personality, p. 19.
poetic spirit, Rabindranath employs the rhythmical prose which is turned to such good account in *The Song of Solomon* and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. How well the soul of Rabindranath's poetry has shaped its body may be seen by taking any of his poems at random. We have music and melody in his poems as well as sweetness and light. What, after all, is the good of poetry where the freedom of spirit is lost in the desert sands of dead forms? It does not come into the group of poetry at all, unless the breath of life blows over the desert sands and makes them blossom into fruits and flowers.

VI

If poetry is so closely related to philosophy, to what is their traditional opposition due? A false idea of 'philosophy is responsible for it. A philosopher is supposed to be one who merely feeds his intellect at the expense of the whole man. His heart and moral nature are left starving. We have a representative of this type in the Pundit of *The Cycle of Spring*, who, while talking glibly of renunciation and worldly wisdom, is most selfish, and wants to dole out by bits his learning to the king in "exchange
for the rich province of Kanchanpur," while the poet with true detachment "never accepts reward" for preaching love and charity.\(^1\) The Pundit, who, like "the newer people of the modern age," is "more eager to amass than to realise,"\(^2\) cannot see deeper than the surfaces of things, and his outlook is sordid, materialist, and utilitarian. To him—

\[\text{If bamboos were made only into flutes,}\\ \text{They would droop and die with very shame.}\\ \text{They hold their heads high in the sky,}\\ \text{Because they are variously useful.}\(^3\)\]

He is sorry that the "numerous stars in the midnight sky which hang in the air for no purpose," do not come down to earth for street lighting, and thus help the ratepayer.\(^4\) The Pundit has before him the ideal of usefulness, while the poet has that of enjoyment. One bows down before machinery, while the other worships personality. One has the practical, worldly, business point of view, while the other has the childlike, unforldly point of view. The poet is for dreams and not business. To him who is an infant in worldly affairs things appear in their spiritual significance. It is

\(^1\) P. 22. \(^2\) \textit{Ibid.} p. 32. \(^3\) \textit{Ibid.} p. 47. \(^4\) \textit{Ibid.} p. 49.
clear that mere intellect will not make a great poet any more than an honest trader or a good governor. The philosophical ideal, we have already seen, cannot be reached by intellectual categories. To catch sight of the philosophical ideal we require meditation and mystic insight. Intellect revelling in distinctions and opposites can give us, in the words of Bradley, an unearthly ballet of bloodless categories which is no substitute for the concrete riches of life. For the synthetic vision and the reconciling view we have to transcend intellect by means of intuition. "Full many an hour have I spent in the strife of the good and the evil, but now it is the pleasure of my playmate of the empty days to draw my heart on to him."  

An intellectualist plays with words, concepts, and categories, but misses the truth and reality. Mysticism is the key which would open the door to the shrine where the "invisible king" is. "The dust of the dead words cling to thee, wash thy soul with silence."  

So if the term Philosopher is taken in the sense of an intellectual metaphysician paying homage to the logical intellect and not an intuitive seer, then

1 *Gitanjali*, 89.  
2 *Stray Birds*, 147.
poetry has nothing to do with philosophy. In the story of "The Victory," Rabindranath gives us a description of the genuine poet as distinguished from the counterfeit. The intellectual poet Pundarik is contrasted with the true poet Shekhar, the poet of King Nārāyan. The king received Pundarik with honour and said, "Poet, I offer you welcome." Pundarik proudly replied, "Sire, I ask for war." But "Shekhar, the court poet of the king, did not know how the battle of the muse was to be waged."¹ Here is the contrast between the arrogance of the word-builder and the humility of the true poet. "With a trembling heart Shekhar entered the arena in the morning. . . . With his head held high and chest expanded, he (Pundarik) began in his thundering voice to recite the praise of King Nārāyan. . . . The skill with which he gave varied meanings to the name Nārāyan, and wove each letter of it through the web of his verses in all manner of combinations, took away the breath of his amazed hearers." Such is the way the world judges poets. The effect of the performance on the audience was one of astonishment

¹ Hungry Stones, p. 32.
at the intellectual profundity of the phrase-maker and the versifier. But Shekhar produced just the opposite effect. When he began he was full of feeling ready to burst out. "His face was pale, his bashfulness was almost that of a woman, his slight youthful figure, delicate in its outline, seemed like a tensely strung vina ready to break out in music at the least touch." And when Shekhar finished what was the effect? "Tears filled the eyes of the hearers, and the stone walls shook with cries of victory." Such is the effect of true art. When true music is heard, rafters ring, serpents sing, the very stones melt, and the whole world dances, as some Indian poets would have it. Pundarik stands for stupendous learning, and in the conceit of his knowledge he asks: "What is there superior to words?" To him "the Word was in the beginning, and the Word was God." But what did Shekhar prove? "Next day Shekhar began his song. It was of that day when the pipings of love's flute startled for the first time the hushed air of the vrinda forest. The shepherd women did not know who was the player or whence came the music. Sometimes it seemed to
come from the heart of the south wind, and sometimes from the straying clouds of the hill-tops. It came with a message of tryst from the land of the sunrise, and it floated from the verge of sunset with its sigh of sorrow. The stars seemed to be the stops of the instrument that flooded the dreams of the night with melody. The music seemed to burst all at once from all sides, from fields and groves, from the shady lanes and lonely roads, from the melting blue of the sky, from the shimmering green of the grass. They neither knew its meaning nor could they find words to give utterance to the desire of their hearts. Tears filled their eyes, and their life seemed to long for a death that would be its consummation.” The true poet forgets himself in his poetry. “Shekhar forgot his audience, forgot the trial of his strength with a rival. He stood alone amid his thoughts that rustled and quivered round him like leaves in a summer breeze, and sang the Song of the Flute.” He attains that exaltation and freedom where the individual becomes free from self-consciousness. The trappings of the world fall away and he sees things as they are, and sings his inspired
poetry. He feels the whole world to be a harmony and all nature music. He is not a man of words but full of feeling. When Shekhar took his seat "his hearers trembled with the sadness of an indefinable delight, immense and vague, and they forgot to applaud him." In other words, they were filled with freedom and careless joy. Pundarik challenged his rival to define who was the lover and who was the beloved, and "then he began to analyse the roots of those names. Each letter of those names he divided from its fellow, and then pursued them with a relentless logic till they fell to the dust in confusion, to be caught up again and restored to a meaning never before imagined by the subtlest of word-mongers." Who were the men to appreciate this wonderful gymnastics? "The pundits were in ecstasy." A thin, stiff, and straight vision was what the intellectualist conjured up. "The atmosphere was completely cleared of all illusion of music, and the vision of the world around seemed to be changed from its freshness of tender green to the solidity of a high road levelled and made hard with crushed

1 Radha and Krishna.
stones." But the king declared that Pundarik had the victory. Shekhar returned home and threw his writings into the fire, for they were "mere words and childish rhymes." At night "he spread upon his bed the white flowers that he loved, the jasmines, and opened wide his windows," and drank a poisonous juice. Then Ajita appeared on the scene, "and it seemed to him that the image made of a shadow that he had ever kept throned in the secret shrine of his heart had come into the outer world in his last moments to gaze upon his face."

"The princess whispered into his ear: 'The king has not done you justice. It was you who won at the combat, my poet, and I have come to crown you with the crown of victory.'"

As he was singing, joy, the secret of the universe, was being laid bare. Pundarik beats down his hearers by mere words, dumbfounds them by his intellectual subtleties, and makes them believe that giving names to things and calling relations categories is to explain them. In his arrogance he feels that the secret of the universe is to be found in his waistcoat pocket. He thinks that he has a key which would unlock the doors of all problems in
heaven and earth, and a good many in neither. Everything from the stars of heaven to the shells of earth had a fixed place in his scheme of the universe. But the pity of it is that intellectual legerdemain does not constitute truth and poetry. Poetry is a cry of the spirit and it has nothing to do with pretences born and bred of books, as these are useless to the spirit. The people along with the king who applauded him did so because they were "deluded into the certainty that they had witnessed, that day, the last shred of the curtains of Truth torn to pieces by a prodigy of intellect. But they forgot to ask if there was any truth behind it after all."¹ Victory was beaming from the breast of Pundarik and found response in the king's heart. And the people caught the suggestion from the king and were hypnotised into admiration of Pundarik. They neither considered nor questioned, but, carried away by the tide, threw their hats up, cheered him, and jumped for joy. No wonder Pundarik triumphed. Such is the way reputations are built in this world. Thus Rabindranath points out that intellectual

¹ Hungry Stones, chap. ii.
poetry is a contradiction in terms. So if by philosopher we mean an intellectual juggler, then philosophy has nothing to do with poetry. But if by philosopher we mean the intuitive seer who has risen above his small self, a man who has attained true freedom of consciousness, then he is one with the poet who hears the whispers of the soul and gives voice to them. Such were the ancient Rishis who broke away from the fetters and revealed their souls in the Upanishads. And such is Rabindranath.

It is often urged that poetry and philosophy are opposed because poetry deals with life, becoming, movement, while philosophy deals with stillness, rest, and immutability. Philosophy is represented as being thin, lifeless, and unsubstantial, while poetry is regarded as rich, warm, and glowing. But we have seen that this description of philosophy is unjust and one-sided. While a few systems conclude that being alone is real and not becoming, the attempt of philosophy is to gather in a whole both being and becoming. Modern systems of concrete idealism present us with such reconciling wholes. Neither philosophy nor
poetry deals with things as they appear, but concerns itself with things as they really are. Both poetry and philosophy are criticisms of life at first sight or interpretations thereof. Both protest against "the sloth which takes things as they are, and the poorness of spirit which is satisfied with first appearances." And so this charge that philosophy deals with abstractions while poetry deals with life is unfounded.

VII

The poet worships God as the spirit of beauty, while the philosopher pays his homage to God as the ideal of truth. Philosophy is the temple of truth, while poetry is the shrine of beauty. The two are not opposed, as truth is beauty and beauty truth. Reality is absolute, though there are many ways of realising it. Philosophy tells us how a synoptic vision which binds together all terms and relations in a concrete spiritual whole is the Real. Poetry individualises this vision of philosophy. Rabindranath, as is obvious from the chapters dealing with his philosophy, is a reflective thinker, but in him reason and reflection
are subordinated to imagination and emotion. His philosophical views are caught up in his spiritual vision and held captive in his poetic creations. The spirit of his poetry is the spirit of his life. The abstract and intellectual categories become suffused with the glow and warmth of things seen and realised. The example of Rabindranath Tagore, if examples were needed, would give the lie direct to the cry, which even the street urchin of the present day raises, that mysticism is incompatible with good poetry. To these critics it matters little if Dante and Goethe and many of the classical poets of religious Asia held the opposite view, and asserted and practised the doctrine that all true poetry is mystic. The authors of the Upanishads were poet-philosophers. Most of the great Persian poets were Sufi or mystic philosophers, who had for their aim the attainment of a state of spiritual perfection where the soul will be absorbed in holy contemplation to the exclusion of the pleasures of the world. Eternity is in the looks and eyes of these poets. Philosophy and religion are counted among the creative forces which moulded Asiatic art and poetry. Mr. Havell observes: "Indian
art is not concerned with the conscious striving after beauty as a thing worthy to be sought after for its own sake; its main endeavour is always directed towards the realisation of an idea, reaching through the finite to the infinite, convinced always that, through the constant effort to express the spiritual origin of earthly beauty, the human mind will take in more and more of the perfect beauty of divinity.”¹ The same point is thus described by Mr. Laurence Binyon: “Not the glory of the naked human form, to Western art the noblest and most expressive of symbols; not the proud and conscious assertion of human personality; but, instead of these, all thoughts that lead us out from ourselves into the universal life, hints of the infinite, whispers from secret sources,—mountains, waters, mists, flowering trees, whatever tells of powers and presences mightier than ourselves; these are the themes dwelt upon, cherished and preferred.”² It is the aim of Indian art to relate the seen and the unseen, the material and the spiritual, through imagination. The “building of man’s true world . . . is

¹ Ideals of Indian Art, p. 32.
² Painting in the Far East, p. 22.
the function of Art. Man is true, where he feels his infinity, where he is divine, and the divine is the creator in him.”  

1 Browning, speaking of the subjective poet, observes that he “is impelled to embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below, as to the one above him . . . not what man sees, but what God sees—it is toward these that he struggles.” We cannot therefore say that because Rabindranath’s poetry is mystic it is not good poetry. It is undoubtedly mystic, and on that account he should hold a permanent place in the firmament of world-poets.

VIII

While both philosophy and poetry aim at the same end, their starting-points are different. They approach reality from different angles. While philosophy aims at grasping the synthesis which gathers together all aspects of the universe, poetry aims at catching the vision which sees the things of beauty of the world as a whole. Philosophy is an attempt to conceive the world as a whole by means of thought. It aims at a theory of the universe; and if this

1 Personality, p. 31.
theory is held with a certain intensity and depth of feeling, if it captures the whole consciousness instead of being merely intellectually assented to, then the philosophic vision becomes creative and poetic. Thought suffused with feeling and the other elements of consciousness becomes exalted into contemplation. The soul in this mood acquires imaginative vision with its spontaneity and creativity. It is then called mystic. But so long as the theory remains a mere intellectual creed, the difference between philosophy and poetry is kept up. The philosopher has his hand firm on the distinctions which are reconciled in the thought synthesis, and his reconciliation remains abstract and conceptual. The poet does not reason, but intuits. He does not make guesses at truth, but feels the truth as deeply real, and fierce with meaning. He lives life, and distils his doctrines from life. The living unity of life is given in poetry in all its immediacy and concreteness, while it is only argued about in philosophical dissertations. The hard distinctions of philosophy melt into a sweet harmony in the flow of poetry. But the true philosopher with the true poet follows the intuitive method.
Both are characterised by self-forgetfulness and spontaneity. The vision creative and the poetic impulse burst out like a volcanic force. Plato's description of the poet as one who is bereft of reason but filled with divinity, holds good of the philosopher also. Our conclusion is, that a poet is nothing if he is not a philosopher. A true poet will be a philosopher, and a true philosopher a poet.

IX

Philosophy tells us that the world is rational; poetry tells us that it is beautiful. Philosophy reconciles the world to our reason; poetry to our feelings. Disorder and irrationality, philosophy cannot tolerate; ugliness and disgust with nature and society, poetry cannot accept. The greatest tragedies are tragic only at first sight; the poet finds in them a world of goodness. He shows us how sorrow "is not sorrow but delight."¹ The world is after all lovable. Poetry attunes our soul to the world and makes us feel that the world is a place worth living in. This he does, not by concepts and arguments, but by music and fancy. Poetry pleases

¹ Wordsworth.
by an immediate appeal to imagination, and convinces not the intellect but the soul. The vision which the philosopher sees, the poet recreates. He realises it in his work. In poetry, philosophy lives. It puts on flesh and blood. It gives us not the philosophic idea, but the idea as lived or the life of the idea. For the spread of philosophy and true knowledge, nothing is so good a medium as poetry. It spreads truth more quietly. Truth slides into the mind unconsciously, effortlessly, easily. Wordsworth says: "That which comes from the heart goes to the heart." Poetry is not intended to be a statement of truth, but only an expression of experience. It expresses what is held within the heart. By flooding the soul with emotions, by steeping the spirit in a bath of joy or delight, poetry puts the reader en rapport with the mind of the poet, induces him to sympathise with his temper, and breathe the atmosphere which floats before his eyes, and in which the poet lives, moves, and has his being. Poetry is a flower to be smelt, a sweet to be tasted or "drunk in every limb,"¹ and not taught. It does not cram the mind with

¹ Hegel.
facts and theories, but gives it a direction. It does not teach, but touches the heart, warms the emotions, and moulds the whole mind. As an instrument of propagating knowledge, it is better than philosophy; for while a philosophic conclusion may commend itself to the intellect, it may quite possibly be regarded as incapable of satisfying the other sides of human life, though a true philosophic conclusion would satisfy not merely the intellect, but life as a whole. Philosophy may satisfy man the knower, but he is "not fully himself." In poetry we need have no such fear; for the appeal is to the whole personality of man. The "world, which takes its form in the mould of man's perception, still remains only as the partial world of his senses and mind. It is like a guest and not like a kinsman. It becomes completely our own when it comes within the range of our emotions." Poetry "brings to us ideas, vitalised by feelings, ready to be made into the life-stuff of our nature." We have the assurance that the poet has lived what he is giving voice to, for he speaks straight out of life. "Consciously or unconsciously,

1 Personality, p. 13. 2 Ibid. p. 14. 3 Ibid. p. 15.
I may have done many things that were untrue, but I have never uttered anything false in my poetry,—that is the sanctuary where the deepest truths of my life emerge." ¹ The work of the poet bears the impress of his life and individuality, and what is a part of one man's life can surely enter others' lives. The poet speaks as man to other men. Poetry appeals to the mind as a whole, for it is the expression of mind's free and unrestrained work. Besides, all true poetry forces acceptance of the poet's message, as he expresses it with such a passion and feeling, force and fulness, that to read it is to be convinced of it. The appeal of the artist compels into acquiescence those who cannot grasp the reasoning of philosophy. If the truth of the world cannot be hammered into a man's head by the engines of argument and proof, the beauty of the poet's verse may yet win a way to the heart, and succeed where reasoning has failed. In the presence of its fancy and fragrance, music and sound, man feels helpless and his critical faculty sinks into silence. Poetry rouses the imagination and lets logic slumber and reason

rest. The soul thinks, feels, and enjoys with the poet. Poetry attunes the soul to the life of truth, and the reader sees truth with the eye of the mind, and hears it with the ears of the soul. By its music and melody, poetry induces consent, disarms criticism, and overpowers the soul. It has in it the power to coerce, or rather charm, the unwilling mind into homage. We do not ask for proof in poetry, for poetry is its own proof, "truth is its own testimony." If Rabindranath has touched Indian hearts, it is because he is first and foremost a poet and not a philosopher. But in all his works he has in view the great ideal of ancient Hindu art, viz. "to make the central ideas of Hindu religion and philosophy intelligible to all Hinduism, to satisfy the unlettered but not unlearned Hindu peasant as well as the intellectual Brahmin." 1 The highly abstruse notions of Hindu philosophy and religion are set free in his songs from their academic isolation and become a part of the common life of men. Rabindranath is following the tradition of the great Indian Rishis who spoke what they felt in the lyric songs

1 Havell, *The Ideals of Indian Art*, Introduction xviii.
of the Upanishads and their other creations. The devotional and poetic literature of India is embodied in poetry and music. By means of the epic poetry of India, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the priest and the peasant, the prince and the workman have become acquainted with the essentials of Hindu religion and philosophy, thought out by the sages of India. Art has penetrated so deeply into the national life of India that the Indian peasant-folk, though illiterate in the sense of unlettered, can challenge comparison in point of culture with their corresponding classes anywhere in the world. Mr. Yeats observes in his Introduction to the *Gitanjali*: "A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and the noble."¹ By making truth live in forms of beauty the poet forces his ideas into the life of man. Truth enters into man's nature through the gate of emotion. While it is true that poetry is not didactic and does not teach, still it thrills

¹ Page xiv.
the reality and burns its ideas into the emotional nature of man. True to the saying of Plutarch, that poetry should initiate us into philosophy, Rabindranath's writings are waking many to the possibilities of spiritual life. His songs have become national songs, replete with words that breathe and thoughts that burn. His words please the ear, his ideas sink into the heart. His poetry is at the same time a light that fills the mind, a song that stirs the blood, and a hymn that moves the heart. The voice of Rabindranath, vibrating with the passion of genius, and glorifying all his race, instils into the sinking heart of India faith in herself, faith in her future, and faith in the world.