AMOR INTELLECTUALIS DEI

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Our destiny and our future, as well as every chance and change through which they work themselves out, are subject to eternal love. So long as we do not perceive this central truth our activities become scattered and chaotic, often purposeless and sometimes destructive, but in love they all become integrated round a central purpose. Love is like an electric charge that flows from man to God, and from God back to man. All our impulses naturally group themselves round this central and invisible force. Love is the gravitation of the spirit. It draws together all warring impulses.

"Common as light is love,
And its familiar voice wearies not ever.
Like the wide heaven, the all sustaining air,
It makes the reptile equal to the God."

(Prometheus Unbound, II, v, 40–43.)

This point of view is reiterated by Shelley in Epipsychidion where he says,

"I know
That love makes all things equal: I have heard
By my own heart this joyous truth averred:
The spirit of the worm beneath the sod
In love and worship, blends itself with God."

(125–29.)

If God is the highest of values it is because all the values of life are the values of love, and God is love. It also follows that there can be no more escape from God than there can be from life or love or from our own personality. In the noble words of Emerson God is at once the doubter and the doubt. God is life, for God cannot be death. In so far as our lives represent a growing fulness, it becomes necessary from time to time to restate our idea of God in the light of our advancement in knowledge. It becomes essential that we should eliminate from our conception of God what is no more than the dead growth of ages. If in the past men did not have the courage of their conviction to restate their knowledge of God the religion that we now have will mark no advance on the religion of the stone age. Both reason and precedent demand that we should follow their example. That is why even those who are conventionally minded and
dare not deviate from the high road of human experience are reluctantly forced to concede that there is more faith in honest doubt than in half the creeds. If God is truth, the quest for truth cannot be the devil. The reformer, the agnostic and even the atheist are the allies of the good. In the words of Gandhi, "God is the atheism of the atheist himself".

But the common people take a different view of him, for he challenges their faith. They consider him to be a wanton disturber who is not content to let what is well alone. The reformer who pulls down their cherished opinions has his reputation torn to pieces when alive, and when dead his views are buried under a conspiracy of silence. The position of the reformer is like that of Samson: he destroys himself and others at the same time. But with every assertion of life over death a better idea of God comes to prevail, and the reputation of the reformer is rehabilitated by posterity to the measure of its understanding him.

The contemporaries of Shelley understood him only too well when he poured out all the vials of his wrath on the accepted God of his fathers. But when with deeper understanding he came to give expression to a truer idea of God he was not understood. His contemporaries had not gone through a similar education of error. They therefore dismissed the truth which he wished to teach them as the vague reveries of a pantheist. They settled down in their own faith with the comfortable assurance that "Shelley the great atheist went down by water to the everlasting fire".

I

At this distance of time when orthodox Christianity has shifted a good deal from what it held to be true in the days of Shelley, and considers portions of the Bible as poetical attempts at reconstruction of the past, our task of dealing with the Book of God becomes comparatively easy. It must also be kept in mind that Shelley's attack on Christianity does not mean that Christianity is particularly bad. His point of view may be maintained almost with reference to any other religion. All that he desires to point out is that there is a subtle conflict between the letter and the spirit, and that while the letter killeth, the spirit reviveth.

When in the atheistical Queen Mab with its motto from Voltaire, Ecrazes l' infame, Shelley writes that there is no God, what he maintains is that there is no personal God seated somewhere in the clouds. He does not reject God as the principle of goodness but the mythology woven about God, as to how He awoke from an eternity of idleness and having created man planted also the tree of evil so that he may eat and perish. A God Who
condemns man to an eternity of torment without caring for virtuous deeds or purity of thought is a malicious fiend. While the conduct of Satan the agent provocateur of God who plays the part of tempter, betrayer and accuser is at least humanly intelligible, the conduct of God lacks sufficient motive. When God created man He either knew his limitations or He did not. If He did not know the limitations of man He could not have been all wise. If knowing man’s defects, He still condemned him, He is not all merciful. The poetry of Milton may save it as literature, but as religion it is as lifeless as the religion of Homer.

In *A Refutation of Deism* Shelley’s attack on religion is based on other grounds. If we say after Paley that the presence of design in the universe argues the existence of a designer, we make God responsible for order as well as for disorder, and for evil as for good. Shelley further points out that according to Locke intelligence must be based on sensations, and sensations on an organised body. The rational theosophist who endows his God with intelligence reduces God to the level of a vast and wise animal. The deist who attributes moral qualities to God degrades God into man, and makes Him strictly limited both in power and wisdom. On this assumption, “The Deity must be as rough as a bear, as voracious as a tiger and as docile as an elephant”.

It is Shelley’s contention that if the deist’s God is a false God, the God of the church is an unreal God. Following in the wake of Spinoza, Shelley points out that in so far as orthodoxy demands faith in miracles and prophecies it errs on the side of materialism and of supernaturalistic dualism. He dismisses miracles “those tales which imposture recites till terror credits” as due to fabrication, deceit and a heated imagination. He thinks that it is much more likely that a few Jews were in the wrong than that the immutable laws of the universe should have undergone a violation. Prophecies he thinks may have been invented after the event. The only genuine prophecy, the second coming of Christ, which brought in so many converts to Christianity, yet remains unfulfilled.

The beginner in atheism, says Shelley, begins with doubting the existence of the devil, and then goes on to doubt the existence of the Father and the Holy Ghost. He is very sarcastical with those who would condemn him to everlasting damnation merely for denying the existence of the devil. In an essay *On Devils* he thinks that the devil is a Chaldaean invention introduced in the Bible after the captivity; that it first occurs in the Book of Job, and that it degrades the Christian conception of God by permeating it like salt in sea-water. In so far as the God of the Old Testament is
vitiated by anger, jealousy and the desire for blood-shed, God is not marked by any moral superiority over the devil. He is no more than the tribal God of an inferior people. To speak of God as oscillating between the conflicting motives of justice and mercy is to make an earthly potentate of Him.

Shelley further points out that in so far as the propagation of Christianity was due to violence, darkness and deceit, and in so far as it has been maintained not by the unaided light of truth, but by persecution and by relying on the strong arm of the State, it is as violent and bloody as the old Paganism which it displaced. It is not necessary to enter into the controversy between Shelley and the church. Let us eliminate the heat of the struggle, and seek only the light of the mind. Let us not attempt to read God in the light of our darkness. There is not a greater thing of wonder than Nature, nor a more beloved child of faith than life. The greatest of all miracles is the rise of spiritual values out of conflict and suffering. In this sense alone is it true that whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

II

Self-deception, says a Spanish proverb, is the cheapest and dearest thing of all. Granted that every one of these charges is true, and that we give Shelley the privilege of "tearing every one of the leaves of the accursed book of God", what is it that he will leave us? If "there is no religion higher than truth", let us follow the enquirer whithersoever he may lead us so long as he does not deface the fair face of truth.

Even if religion should ever be compelled to give up every one of its outworks humanity will not cease to exist. As long as humanity lives, its spirit of reverence for its highest ideals cannot be effaced. May not the term God be used as signifying the collective ideals of common humanity in which every one, sinner and saint, oppressor and oppressed, may feel at one? It is in this way that God is understood by Shelley in *Hellas*. In *Queen Mab* Shelley makes the wandering Jew Ahasuerus deny the existence of the conventional God of formal religion. But in *Hellas* he is the protagonist of the new Gospel of acceptance. As in the legend of the phoenix the new is reborn out of the ashes of the old. The man cursed by God becomes man raised to Godhead, and Sultan Muhamed says of him, "Thou art like God whom thou contemplatest". How did this transformation take place? When we look at the inner life of Ahasuerus we see that he has done no more than contemplate the cosmos. The stars have rolled before him like a flock of sheep or like bubbles in a stream. By contemplation he has so identified himself with the rest of Nature that he can feel as though whole
rivers are flowing in his veins, and as though the mountains form part of his bones. Past and present cease to have any meaning for the deathless wanderer. Time and place vanish leaving behind nothing but the eternal flight of thought. The universe becomes “a reflected thought of God” and the man of thought becomes God-like. When he says that just as a forest lies potentially in the cup of an acorn so also the total lies potentially concealed in every part of it, he is speaking, as it were, with a God's vision of life. In so far as the possibilities of the infinite become manifest in and through the finite it overcomes its own finitude. To Ahasuerus God becomes manifest as immanent individuality. We may go further and say that in man this immanence becomes manifest in the perception of the good by the will of man.

This great truth which came to Shelley with the urge of a personal conviction, and as the result of repeated suffering, is brought out in *Prometheus Unbound* also. Prometheus differs from his brother rebel Ahasuerus in the sense that he is 'collective man'. While Ahasuerus as an individual is compelled to wander homeless, the protagonist of the collective idea is pinned to a rock as though either method of punishment will keep them mutilated in mind, and by implication make them accept an imperfect God. The story of Prometheus shows to us that when the human heart is impelled by the purest and truest motives, when life is directed to the task of saving humanity, we create the 'open society' of humanity. This open society is represented as collective man,

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"Man, one harmonious soul of many a soul,
  Whose nature is its own divine control,
  Where all things flow to all, as rivers to the sea."

(Prometheus Unbound, iv, 400-402.)
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The collective man of Shelley differs from the mass man with his known imperfections and limitations by the fact that in Shelley each individual is collectively adapted. Prometheus is the hero of the Platonic idea. It is because he is collectively adapted to life that the divine in man takes shape in him and he is invited by the spirit of the earth to take his place as the embodiment of God in the temple of Man. The Earth-spirit says,

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"Beside the windless and crystalline pool,
  Where ever lies on unerasing waves,
  The image of a temple built above,
  Distinct with column, arch and architrave,
  A palm-like capitol and over-wrought
  And populous with most living imagery,
  Praxitelean shapes, whose marble smiles
  Fill the hushed air with everlasting love.
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It is deserted now, but once it bore
Thy name, Prometheus, there the emulous youths
Bore to thy honour through the divine gloom
The lamp which was thine emblem, even as those
Who bear the un tarnished torch of hope
Into the grave across the night of life
To the far goal of time.”

(Prometheus Unbound, Act III, scene iii, 159–176.)

The living imagery on the architrave of the temple of man is symbolical of the biological unity of man with the rest of creation and with the entire cosmos. The soul of man is elicited out of his environment. It is in the words of Bosanquet, “a range of externality come alive” by centring in the mind of man. Bosanquet writes in The Value and Destiny of the Individual,

“Being moulded on the one hand, and moulding circumstances on the other—coming alive as a world, but as a world re-shaping itself and transcending itself through striving towards the unity which is completeness—are the double aspects of the soul or self which is essentially a world—the conservation of it being in absolute space and time.”

(Vol. II, p. 229.)

What makes the immanent individuality possible either in the case of Prometheus or of Ahasuerus is that in both the divine idea is centred in good will. The will becomes the means of realising the highest value and fullest expansion into reality. In so far as the will becomes the directing agent of feeling and thought, life becomes (as Keats said) ‘a vale of soul making’. Religion becomes only a mode of realising ‘a sincere and unselfish self-transcendence’. If the present age feels inspired by such a conception of life it is because, as Woodburne has pointed out, it makes the individual a partner with God in undertakings that are of cosmic worth. It is true that the Stoics regarded man as ‘the friend behind phenomena’, but Shelley’s point of view differs from that of the Stoics in that he regards love rather than the abstract idea of the good as the growing point of life. Shelley has said that even the worm that loves becomes, to the measure of its love, one with God. There is no life so mean which is excluded from love: there is no life so high the essence of which is not conserved in love. Thus all communication between man and man itself becomes spiritual. We should therefore regard God, as Shelley wished that we should, as “synonymous with the collective energy of the moral and material world”.

Transcendence is as much a quality of the Deity as immanence. The transcendence lies in power and value in the whole, and it follows that the
unrealised possibilities of the whole are always greater than the realised possibilities of the parts. Plotinus says, "The divine Mind is part of us and towards It we are ever rising". Plotinus does not however contemplate that at any time this process will come to an end for lack of fresh materials for growth. The fact is, we are not thinking here of the false infinite—the infinite of the demons—which staggers us by numbers, but of the true infinite which is the infinite of the gods, the essence of which lies in knowing oneself more and more fully. We know ourselves more and more fully as we perceive that divine Mind is the burning fountain of all life, light and knowledge. The love of God sustains the world from below and kindles it from above. Shelley's idea of God is in harmony with the highest of European traditions as exemplified in the teachings of Plato and Plotinus. While giving expression to his confessio fidei he pays a tribute to his great masters. In a fragment entitled On Life, the poet says,

"The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of the intellectual philosophy is that of unity. Nothing exists but as it is perceived. The difference is merely nominal. Pursuing the same thread of reasoning, the existence of distinct individual minds, similar to that which is now employed in questioning its own nature, is likewise found to be a delusion. The words I, you, they are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind.

Let it not be supposed that this difference conducts to the monstrous presumption that I the person who now write and think am that one mind. I am but a portion of it. The words I and you and they are grammatical devices, invented simply for arrangement, and totally devoid of the intense and exclusive sense usually attached to them."

Shelley here reconciles the immanence with the transcendence of God. According to this view God is 'the solemn purpose of humanity', and as real to it as its purpose. He is our social bond and the home of our spiritual ideal. In so far as we realise this truth God is reborn in us and we become to the measure of our ability a fragment of the life-force.

The divine effect does not descend on us from without but springs from our own inner nature. We find the redeeming formula of life by retiring into ourselves. In this sense life itself becomes a revelation. Whether we think of God as gradually revealing Himself to man, or of man as gradually discovering God by becoming master of the chaos of his heart, we come to agree with Shelley that the perfection of the human and the divine characters are identical. In An Essay on Christianity Shelley observes,
“Man by resembling God fulfills most accurately the tendencies of his nature, and God comprehends within Himself all that constitutes Human perfection. Thus God is a model through which the excellence of man is to be estimated whilst the abstract perfection of the divine is the standard by which we judge the actual perfection of man. Thus, that nation which has arrived at the highest step in the scale of moral progression will believe most purely in that God the knowledge of whose real attributes is considered as the finest basis for true religion.”

Apart from its ethical significance, Shelley’s idea of God has considerable bearing on the concept of revelation. The just man is in God only because there is a trinal unity between God, man and Nature. It is this unity that makes it possible for us to conceive of God as the highest value of and the fullest expansion into reality. Just as light is the liberated energy of matter, so also the person who has liberated himself from the limitations of materialistic considerations becomes an enlightened soul. In a world grown spiritual he feels at one with God, with Nature and with fellow men. Plotinus has justly observed that “true getting up is not bodily, but from the body”. In so far as we rise from the body of Nature, it is not we alone that rise. Nature herself rises in the scale of values, and becomes flooded with beauty, light and an ineffable sense of spiritual radiance. It is in this sense alone that revelation becomes a human possibility, and the essence of all mystic communion. Bergson observes that the essence of every personal religion lies “in the establishment of a contact, consequently of a partial coincidence, with the creative effort of which life is a manifestation. This effort is of God, if not God Himself”. (Two Sources of Morals and Religion, p. 118.)

Thus interpreted revelation is not merely the essence of a personal religion; it is also the basis of a scientific religion. The moment we tear aside the obscuring curtain of matter, we no longer grope in the dark and gather dust and chaff, but we catch the very blaze of light. This psychic experience is known to Eastern philosophy as the true tapasya of the soul. In such tapasya or yoga the essence of which lies in the perception of the central truth Tat-twam-asi (thou art that) there is established a complete harmony between the inner life of man and his outer environment. Bliss or Ananda is the outcome of such immediate perception. Such experience seems to have been known to the philosophers of Greece also. Plotinus has observed that just as the vibration of one lyre affects another which is in tune with it, so also the mind attuned to the infinite realises that its material environment is also its spiritual home.
"The truth is in the universe,
In earth, and sea, in sky and air,
In man and beast and holy book,
The truth is everywhere,
For God is truth."

(Quoted by Woodburne in The Religious Attitude, p. 138.)

Bosanquet gives expression to this eternal truth in the aphorism, "If the infinite has existence only through the finite, the finite is intelligible only through the infinite". He further observes,

"What is certain and what matters to us is that the finite is plainly a partial world, yet possesses within it, the principle of infinity, taken in the sense of the nisus towards absolute unity and self-completion."

The divine idea is released in greater and greater fulness with every ascent in the scale of evolution. An Eastern seer has observed, "Life sleeps in matter, breaths in plants, feels in animals and comes to self-consciousness in man".

Mysticism is a scientific religion, for it lends itself to the method of verification by experience. Its starting point is reason. But as it grows it transcends reason and becomes intuition. It gives us an inner vision of things which ipso facto cannot be wrong. In so far as its starting point is reason, it cannot give different values for different people. It must hold true at all times and in all places.

But in so far as we are tied down at one end of the scale of perception to what is material and lower in us, we can never be absolutely certain as to when exactly we have liberated ourselves from these limitations, and are in complete harmony with the life-impulse which manifests itself in the total. Shelley therefore speaks of the divine impulse coming to man as an evanescent visitation, blowing like the wind as it listeth. All that the individual can do is to wait upon its impulse. However short its experience may be, it leaves behind an abiding impression and saves life from perishing. We are sure that Shelley has himself felt these moods of mystic communion. A Hymn to Intellectual Beauty is one of the earliest and clearest expressions of it. The poet has given expression to similar psychic experiences in some of his later poems. He writes in a fragment of 1820,

"Within a cavern of man's trackless spirit
Is throned an image so intensely fair
That the adventurous thoughts that wander near it
Worship, and as they kneel, tremble and wear
The splendour of its presence, and the light
Penetrates their dream-like frame
Till they become charged with the strength of flame."
In a fragment of 1821, Shelley speaks of

"The immortal Deity
Whose throne is the depth of the human heart",

while in another fragment of the same year he addresses the

"Great Spirit whom the sea of boundless thought
Nurtures within its unimagined caves,
In which thou sittest sole, as in my mind,
Giving a voice to its mysterious waves."

In so far as men perceive that they are themselves the function of God, they realise their value and destiny. The good life is one and indivisible. God is the ultimate Reality of life. Love is the process by which this Reality becomes manifest. It therefore follows that the prophet is ideal Man. He is nearer God than man only because he is far above average humanity. From this point of view the Ahasuerus and Prometheus of Shelley may be classed as prophets. And in this sense alone is it true that Jesus Christ is also a prophet. We remember the fine praise of Christ in *Prometheus Unbound*. But it is forgotten that in *Hellas* Christ is referred to as a Promethean conqueror. Within his heart is love, and that is the lamp of God. He conquers by his benign nature hell, sin and slavery. But he is not the redeemer in the sense in which the Christians have understood him. If in the past he was not a saviour in the accepted sense of the word, he will not be one in the future, and it is futile to expect him to come again. But in so far as Christ is the benefactor of humanity, his glory is preserved

"In the omnipresence of that spirit
In which all live and are."

(*Hellas*, 600-601.)

The redeemer is in us; in what is dead in us coming to life. It comes to life when we live our lives truly. It is the conviction of Shelley that we should look to the life of Christ and make that the central picture of the religious life, and not gaze for ever upon the agonizing form of an expiring God stretched in one prescriptive attitude of torture. What Shelley desires to place before us for our imitation is the human character of Christ. Speaking of the sublimely human character of Christ, he writes in *An Essay on Christianity*,

"We discover that he is the enemy of oppression and falsehood: that he is the advocate of equal justice: that he is disposed neither to sanction bloodshed nor deceit under whatever pretences this practice may be vindicated. We discover that he was a man of meek and majestic demeanour, calm in danger, of natural and simple thoughts and habits, beloved to adoration by his adherents, unmoved, solemn and severe."

The earlier views of Shelley are not inconsistent with the point of view expressed here. Even in the ‘atheistical’ Queen Mab he has placed Christ foremost in the list of those true heroes who have died for the cause of liberty, and have braved poverty, contempt and torture in the cause of suffering humanity. Although Shelley does not use the term sacred with reference to Christ, he applies it to Milton, Plato and Socrates, the last of whom he calls “the Jesus Christ of Greece”. The pedestal on which he puts Christ is therefore a very human pedestal to which others may without blasphemy aspire to rise.

From Shelley’s point of view formal Christianity may be regarded as a crystallisation and cooling of what the mysticism of Christ has poured hot into the soul of man. Such a point of view is maintained by Bergson among the thinkers of our day. Bergson says that the mystic’s love of humanity is the source of all dynamic religion, for it is so like God’s love of life. According to him, all other forms of religion, in so far as they partake of the myth-making tendency in man, should be regarded as static. With every advancement in knowledge, what is static in religion decays and dies. It is Shelley’s contention that the Christians have misunderstood Christ. He points out in An Essay on Christianity,

“Jesus Christ represented God as the principle of all good, the source of all happiness, the wise and benevolent creator of all things. But the interpreters of his doctrine have confounded the good and evil principle.”

III

If such is to be our conception of God, how shall we respond to it? How will it affect conduct which is three-fourths of life? What is it that we shall eschew from the life religious, and what is it that we shall accept? Shelley observes that the one thing that we will have to shed is intolerance. Although tolerance is not a virtue, the absence of it is a vice. He writes,

“A Protestant is my brother, and a Catholic is my brother. I am happy when I can do either of them a service, and no pleasure is so great to me than that which I should feel if my advice could make men of any profession of faith wiser, better or happier.”

He observes in An Address to the People of Ireland from which the above extract is taken that his advice will be the same even if Ireland were inhabited by Brahmins. Virtue is independent of professions of faith. He therefore hopes for a time when conduct will be considered to be more important than creed, and

“when the Mahomedan, the Jew, the Christian, the Deist and the atheist will live in one community equally sharing the benefits which arise from its association, and united in the bonds of charity and brotherly love.”

Matthew Arnold observes that religion lightens up morality. It charges conduct with an emotional fervour and raises it to the plane of worship. Following a similar line of thought and discussing the need for worship in religion, Shelley writes, "The worship that a kind Being must love is that of a simple affectionate heart that shows its piety in good thoughts and good works". He observes that goodness of thought and purity of life are more valuable in the eyes of God who is the spirit of goodness than idle ceremonies like burials and processions. When our motives are not guided by charity we have the form without the spirit of religion. "Believe me", writes Shelley, "the gates of heaven are open to people of every religion provided they are good."

It may be urged that the God of Shelley is a metaphysical entity, but not the God of religion. In proof of it our objectionist may say that in Shelley's idea of God there is no place for that specific act of worship called prayer which is the normal response of the religious life. It is true that there is no place for prayer if by prayer we mean wearying God to give us more of the good things of life, or flattering God by singing His greatness, or begging Him to take us into heaven with all our known imperfection. But if we agree with Plotinus that "each of us is an intellectual cosmos, linked to this world by what is lowest in us, but by what is highest to the divine intellect", it follows that prayer becomes a mode of self-transcendence. It is meditation and attunement of the will of man with what is good in the universe. Prayer ceases to be a ritual, and becomes purified from its association with magic. It becomes religious experience. Prayer in this sense is our abiding possession, and it will remain with us as long as there is life on earth.

In mystic consciousness prayer becomes religious experience. The soul which feels at one with God as spiritual immanence undergoes a transfiguration. Psychologists of religion distinguish three stages of experience in mystic consciousness. They are the negative or purgative stage, the positive or meditative and the ecstatic or unitive. In *An Ode to the West Wind* we see Shelley going through these three distinct stages of psychic experience. The spirit of the West Wind is moving everywhere as the destroyer and preserver of life. This spirit has itself felt the unity of life. It has awakened from its summer dreams over the blue Mediterranean, passed over towers and palaces, and as it blows round the poet, it is engaged in the more cosmic task of driving away the dead leaves below and urging the clouds above. The poet desires to become an aspect of elemental Nature, to take wings and outstrip the winds as he used to do in the dreams of infancy. But the weight of years has bowed and oppressed one who was as wild and
untamable as the wind. He implores the West Wind to drive away from him his dead thoughts, as though they were withered leaves, or ghosts fleeing from an enchanter. Shelley here goes through the first stage of mystic experience—the purgatorial. As he goes through this process of purification, he cries out, "I fall upon the thorns of life; I bleed." But what falls is only the dead aspect of himself which corresponds to the dead leaves which fall on the thorns below. There is no compulsion here. The will of the poet is attuned to the spirit of renunciation. This forms the positive or meditative stage of his experience. Finally he arrives at the ecstatic stage of identification with the spirit of God as it manifests itself in Nature. Offering himself to this spirit in the true spirit of prayer, he says,

"Make me thy lyre even as the forest is."

We die to live. True prayer is self-surrender. He who surrenders himself wholly to the will of God becomes a prophet. Addressing the spirit of the West Wind, Shelley says,

"Be thou, spirit fierce,  
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!  
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe  
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!  
And, by the incantation of this verse,  
Scatter as from an unextinguished hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
Be through my lips to unawakened earth  
The trumpet of a prophecy!"

The prophecy which Shelley utters is given in the form of a parable that if winter comes spring shall not be far behind. Shelley feels that the mind of God is immanent in the universe, and is co-existent with eternity. It is the awful shadow of the unseen power of God that has clothed the universe with beauty. It has been sought in vain above and beyond the visible and the present. Truth has been waiting at the threshold of man, but he has gone round the world in quest of it. Shelley is no longer a disbeliever. But he is like one of those who having gazed at the very blaze of light find it difficult to convince those who have seen only shadows.

Even in his early 'atheistical' poems what he denies is a god seated somewhere in the clouds, but he never denies the principle of goodness itself. What he gives us in his later writings is a reinterpretation of Christianity within the frame-work of a natural religion. In so far as the dim consciousness of the beyond takes life in the soul of man, man becomes
revived in spirit as plants do after summer showers. The individual becomes, to the measure of his comprehension, a partaker in God.

What has orthodox religion, which has so often floundered on the rocks of materialism and has allowed us to choose between an unreal God and a God-less reality to say to such a view as that of Shelley? At first sight it may dismiss it as pure paganism. After some thought it may say that it is Platonism. But Platonism is the essence of every personal religion. Dean Inge writes in *The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought*, p. 34,

"In such a presentation of Christianity lies, I believe, our hope for the future. It cuts us loose from that orthodox materialism which in attempting to build a bridge between the world of facts and the world of values only succeeds in confounding one order and degrading the other. It equally emancipates us from that political secularising of Christianity which is just a characteristic attempt of institutionalism to buttress itself with the help of the secular power. This has always been the policy of the religion of authority. The religion of Christ, the religion of the spirit will not have a chance till it is freed from these entanglements."

IV

The life of religion is not one of being only but of becoming also. If we can have no religious life without adoration, it is because thought and feeling are both essential to gain cosmic consciousness. We can no more confine the spirit of the cosmos to a particular creed than we can put the sun in our pocket to shine upon us at will. The limitation which we impose upon the creed of another becomes in turn a limitation imposed upon our own. Just as in politics a conquering nation ultimately loses its own freedom, just as in economics a nation which exploits others loses its own wealth, so also in religion, a faith which offers incense to itself and shuts the gates of tolerance ceases to live and grow. If religion is to be consistent with philanthropy adoration is consistent only with the good will. If God is revealed to us only as the good will, it is futile to canalise it to flow along narrow lines and for special benefits. It should descend on all like the life-giving rain. If the value and destiny of the finite individual lies in his realising that he is but a fragment of a vast and infinite life force around him, it becomes obvious that goodness of conduct is not a mere means to an end but the end itself. Good is done because it is the means of self-expression: it is the way in which the soul feels its unity with the rest. When Shelley says that the gates of heaven are open to people of every religion, he is only taking the poet's liberty of talking in parables. He points out elsewhere that the two sayings 'the just shall see God' and 'virtue is its own reward'
are equivalent assertions. In so far as our sympathy for suffering makes us
go out of ourselves and embrace the misery of the world, we not only come
to see the significance of the lowly and despised, but also make our strength
subservient to the wisdom and happiness of the whole. In the place of a
narrow desire to dominate the world life becomes a manifestation of love
and good will.

We save ourselves from the sin of self-limitation in the infinite life of
the present which is the life of God, not by a quiescent acceptance of life,
but by making it the tool of incessant exploration in the realm of knowledge.
The only difference is that work is done neither with a competitive motive,
nor as a weary treadmill round, but because of the bliss or ananda that it
gives. Whether we dive into ourselves and seek our abiding spiritual reality
"behind the veil and the bar of things that seem and are", or go out of
ourselves and identify ourselves with what is external to us whether it be in
the infinitesimal or in the immeasurable, as long as we realise that the world
is spiritual to the core everything that is instrumental to a spiritual value has
its abiding place in it. In the words of Bergson, "Reality may be looked upon
as eating its way into the ideal, incorporating into itself, bit by bit, the
totality of eternal justice". (Two Sources of Morals and Religion, p. 63.)

Shelley’s point of view is not merely in harmony with the conclusions
of philosophy, but is also borne out by modern experimental science. The
old days of orthodox materialism which brought religion and science into
conflict are over. We have done with Huxley’s materialism as well as with
Gladstonian literalism. We have now come to have an outlook on life
which is at once scientific and spiritual. In a recent work entitled The
Great Design which is a co-operative work written by a number of eminent
scientists we see how writer after writer comes to the conclusion that the
kingdom of God is the only reality. One of them writes,

“All else, however beautiful and interesting, is temporary and evanes-
cent. It is the one reality, which gives meaning to existence, enriches our
daily task, encourages our hope, energises us with faith whenever knowledge
fails, and illuminates the whole universe with immortal love.”

(The Great Design, p. 18.)