

## MAN AND NATURE.

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WRITING as one who, for many hours together, has been able to contemplate Nature in some of her grandest, most awe-inspiring and even mystical aspects, I may be pardoned for putting together some reflections upon those causes of, and the effects involved in, that wide range of intuitions and emotions which a contemplation of Nature stimulates without any definite appeal to conscious reasoning processes. The hypercritical reader may say the pages of the journal of a medical corps are not the place for these philosophizings. To him I would say that a medical corps is a scientific corps whose outlook should be and is wider than the study of purely technical topics of a professional life, and that the scientific status of that corps involves not only catholic views but that very catholicity is a measure of its culture. The day is not yet when we must think that the highest wisdom is enshrined in biological facts; all these have their beauty, and even a mysticism of their own, but they are hurtful if advanced as an adequate description or explanation of existence at large and of life in particular. Science describes Nature, but it does not feel Nature; still less does it account for that sense of kinship with Nature which impresses every thoughtful man. Even primitive man interpreted the events and changes around him on the analogy of human activities and as manifestations of living wills. He could not do otherwise, for he knew of no mode of activity other than his own. The beast of prey, the noisy brook, the rustling of the trees, the mountains, the avalanches, the sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds, the storm, the ocean, the caverns, light, darkness, water and fire, were all phenomena on which his intellect worked, producing in him emotions of awe, terror or joy. To all these he ascribed mental life like his own. From these beginnings each century has brought a wider outlook, but even now the original animism persists, and is to be found not only among the uninstructed but in the ranks of philosophers and scientists. Mythology succeeded animism, to be followed by many quaint and curious theories; but, though these beliefs have all gone, the fundamental belief in some form of universal life or consciousness has survived the ages, and in this day a true wave of mysticism is passing over all civilized nations. It is welcomed by many and distrusted by more; still it is a factor

at work among thoughtful men and one worthy of our notice. The crude and uncritical animism of primitive times fell before the philosophers and scientific inquiry, and as knowledge of natural law grew so the idea of mentality in external nature withered. The climax of the reaction found expression in mechanical views of the universe. Just as criticism undermined the immaturities of the older animism, so has it undermined an exaggerated and soulless materialism. We find ourselves now in an atmosphere in which speculation is tending back to a critical animism, but enriched by all that physical science can give, and Man begins to realize that the connexion between body and soul defies the old distinctions between matter and mind, and that a universal life is pulsating in the whole. This article, therefore, starts from the point of view that life is something more than a blind play of physical forces, but that genuine impulses, not mechanical strains and stresses, are the causes of the ceaseless striving to a fuller consciousness and richer complexity of experiences.

In attempting to discuss the subject, it is difficult to avoid a certain metaphysical element, which, such as it be, assumes three spheres of existence; that which is within the individual mind, that which is external to the individual mind, and that in which both these two are fused together. One accepts the hypothesis of evolution and the more certain conclusions of science, but one demands as a fundamental proposition that the world of external objects must be essentially of the same essence as our perceiving minds. As to what one means by "Nature," it is held to cover only such natural objects as are independent of, and unaffected by, human activities.

Equally difficult, in contemplating Nature, is it to avoid the perilous danger of mysticism. As a matter of fact, a complete divorcement from mysticism is impossible to the true student of Nature, but its pitfalls are negligible if we are careful to avoid its obscuring our ideas both as to the Absolute and Reason. In its full sense, mysticism is not easy to define, as it embraces a large group of special experiences which deal with material supposed to be beyond the reach of sense and reason. In a word, we are carried back to the illusive mysteries of the Greeks, to the subtleties of the ascetic East, and to some aspects of the Platonic philosophy. So far as this article is concerned, it may be stated at the outset that it is planned without ulterior motive and has no aim to shed light on any royal road to communion with the ultimately Real. One repudiates the idea of the ultimately Real being a super-sensuous,

super-rational or unconditional Absolute One, but by allowing value to Nature, one recognizes the polyphasism and reality of phenomena, that the world in which we live is real, and that this life is no dream. By discarding all attempts to crystallize our views of ultimate Reality, we seek only to analyse Man's communings with Nature and see how far that communion is existent, possible and helpful towards placing ourselves in living touch with the basis of existence.

Man's communion with the cosmos, of which he himself is but a part, must be grounded on the reason which permeates the whole. All that communion with Nature is based on sense perception which is but a form of intuition and independent of any conscious exercise of reasoning powers. Although no thought can create a sensation, yet the sensation of Nature's phenomena is at the base of all thought on Nature. These sensations furnish material which Reason works up. Therefore, any reflections dealing with the phenomena presented by Nature by sensation have the threefold task of finding out the nature of the object, of tracing their causes and of tracing their effects. If each intuitional experience seems to stand alone, our Reason groups those single experiences together, inquires as to their condition and makes them subserve definite conscious purposes. In so doing Reason has to take care that the form of thought is not confused with the matter of thought. With that safeguard coupled with intuition, supported by conscious reasoning processes, man gains much of the knowledge which is power and comes face to face in Nature with the idea of a larger self, of misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realized, and of obstinate questionings of sense and outward things. In this spirit we can and should consider Man's relation to Nature.

## I.

Anyone sitting down in some solitary spot and contemplating Nature, is at once confronted with the thought, am I an interloper or am I an integral part of this whole? Unless he be a modern Pygmalion and wishful to beseech Aphrodite to animate the world for him, he recognizes that he himself is the highest outcome of a vast upward movement in the sensuous world around him. As he reflects, he even goes farther than that; he realizes that his own knowledge links him to other ages and other worlds. He cannot suppress the thought that cosmic evolution is one vast whole, and that he himself has his own special place in that whole, and that Nature all around him is alive, and that man is an

integral part of living nature. He sees the beauty and the ugliness as well as the utility of Nature, and realizes that in the beauty and ugliness which he sees around him there is the smile of a spiritual and friendly Being. These aspects of beauty and ugliness in Nature are agents in moulding man's own character; they suggest ideas of life and death, of power and weakness, of hope and despondency. He recalls the early gropings of his race for truth, and understands how these external phenomena have stimulated the imaginations of the infant human race and, even now, exercise a power to move the sensitive mind. If what he sees is so wonderful, what must be that which he does not see?

If Man and Nature are therefore livingly related, the question is, what is the factor which enables physical phenomena to exercise an influence on man's psychic development? Apparently, what one may call intuition. By this one means that passing of the mind, without reasoned process, behind the phenomenal world into a world beyond the reach of sense. We may dismiss at once the Oriental ascetic idea that this intuition is purely passive or potent only after the mind is quieted and the will suppressed; on the contrary, one regards the mind as going out to meet that which comes to it. Let anyone who has contemplated calmly the stars, the ocean or the mountains, think of the feelings which these aspects of Nature have raised in himself; doing so, who can deny that there was ever some movement from within, be it desire, sympathy or emotion? The answer comes clearly that the self was active, not passive, and that in Wordsworth's words, one felt "a Presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts." Of course, one realizes that there are degrees of intuition rising from a simple sense perception to ecstasy; but one's point is that, assuming the conditions of life are normal or natural, all grades of feeling for Nature are universal though often inarticulate. I would go farther and say that intuition is not independent of mental development, culture or discipline. The full appreciation of Nature is not for every man. Personally, one has long enjoyed the wonders of Nature, finding companions in every bee, flower, and pebble, nor has every stream or tuft of heather failed to present a fairy tale of which one could read and decipher perhaps a line or two. The child may not see the fuller meaning of things as apparent in later years, but in this matter the child portrays in brief the stages through which the human race has passed in its upward progress. The child may lack the delicacy of æsthetic discrimination, but its imagination is active and powerful. So, too,

we may safely assert that for the race, as for the individual, the modes of cosmic emotion grow fuller and richer in the course of ages. Man, be he what he may be, is instinctively a student of Nature and no slave to erudition but, as an alert and eager absorber of things new and old according to his abilities and opportunities, he looks to Nature for some of his joys and fruitful lessons; he sees in the outward shows of earth and sky manifestations of a Reality which rarely fails to commune with him, and in this manner Nature is for us all a means of both development and discipline.

One has laid stress on intuition, interpreting it as direct insight quite independent of reasoning processes and conceptual constructions. It follows that one accepts no symbolism in Nature as its prompter. As one sits on the bank of a mill stream and listens to the croon of the water wheel, one feels that life is there and wants the secret of the wheel itself, not what the wheel suggests. So when one walks the fields and feels oppressed with an innate feeling that all one sees has a meaning, if one could but understand it, one regards those objects not as substitutes for something else not really present, but things that have a being and a meaning in their own right, and that they are akin to the soul of Man. The idea is well expressed by Emerson, who says:—

“Spirit that lurks each form within  
Beckons to spirit of its kin;  
Self-kindled every atom glows,  
And hints the future which it owes.”

## II.

The sceptic may say this communion with Nature is mere emotion and its results have no subjective character, or that the results evaporate with the mood which brought them into being. He is tempted to say that modern sympathy with Nature is æsthetic feeling which has broken away from the fetters of mythological thought. This argument is worthy of consideration. Not long ago I had the opportunity of seeing a sunrise in association with some of the highest Himalayan peaks, and a profound impression was made upon me. The same or very similar phenomenon must have been seen by men thousands of years ago. Am I to assume that their interpretation of it was very different to my own? So far as astronomical inferences are concerned, yes; because modern knowledge has advanced me to a freedom which they had not attained. In respect of æsthetic inferences, the difference between

those earlier observers and myself is possibly but one of degree. The same objective facts were before them as before me. As knowledge grows interpretations become more adequate to the objective facts, but it does not deny them. The æsthetic feeling for Nature in me or other moderns is the direct descendant of the mythological form of the feeling for Nature which was present to the ancient. Such continuity could be secured only on some basis in the world of fact. That basis is the circumstance that Man is related to all below and all above him by ties which permeate his whole being. We can no more think of man's emotions, thoughts and feelings being isolated from his physical environment than we can think of his relation to that physical environment to be external in its physical aspects. There must be correspondence between cause and effect, and when certain moods are stimulated by certain physical phenomena there must be some kind of real causation. Any or every scene cannot harmonize with or foster any or every mood; neither is the mood wholly a subjective creation, nor is the object which stimulates the mood without quality or power corresponding to or essentially connected with the mood. There is a blending of elements which suggests that Man and Nature share a common spirit. Even cold science postulates a vital relationship between man's inner nature and the inner nature of his material environment, and assumes the behaviour of external objects to be in harmony with the workings of human reason.

It happens that one is writing this at a time just following the completion of an unedifying journey across the Punjab plains in June. As one recalls the incidents and aspects of that journey, one is tempted to say there is nothing human in Nature. One thinks of the parched earth and feels that it would let me perish on the ground and bring forth neither food nor water; one recalls the brazen scorching sun that merely burnt on and made no effort to assist me; the trees cared nothing for me; and even the distant sea, could I have reached it, would have offered me but salt water which I could not drink. It is a plausible argument, but maturer reflection tells me that therein lies a fallacy, in that it is too much from the standpoint of the individual human being. As a man, I am a centre of self-consciousness; my wants, pains, fears and pleasures are particular. I am forgetting that the infra-human objects in Nature have not attained to my particular mode of consciousness. Because a tree, a hill or a wave does not enter into personal relations with me or with one another, it is not for me to deny that they may possess a consciousness which, though different from mine, is yet



akin and linked to it. The fault lies rather with myself, in that I am or was oppressed with a feeling that Nature was remote and that I was not in a condition to understand her well enough. There was beauty, goodness and reason in all those apparently harsh aspects of Nature, though I could not comprehend them. Though incomprehensible in that garb, Nature was not and is not necessarily alien to me and to other men. Neither I nor anyone else should regard Nature as a mere æolian harp re-echoing tones emitted by the human mind; she is but an indispensable agent in their reproduction, and the action is reciprocal.

### III.

If one's argument has been understood, the reader appreciates the fact that external objects, by sensation, obtain admission into our minds and become a part of it, as experience. Reflective thought works on this material and weaves portions into what we call knowledge. Much, however, never passes into clear consciousness; it is felt rather than known, some is not even felt, though it influences our minds. This is intuition, and presents or contains what thought and reason try to make clear. One takes the position that the human mind and the external world are of the same stuff, or mind is invisible Nature and that Nature is visible mind. From this, Nature is but a manifestation of the same mental factors which we realize when we analyse our inner experience, and Man and Nature are manifestations of the same Reality. At the very dawn of reflective thought, the conviction of the essential sameness of all existence dominated man's speculations. We find it running through the Greek philosophies, culminating in Plato's doctrine of ideas in which Reality is but a system of thoughts called ideas, and the world of objects obtaining its reality by sharing in them or by copying them. Our senses cling merely to the copies, but the mind apprehends the true reality by general ideas. These ideas are no mere products of the mind but real existences; in fact, so real that without them there would be no objects at all. In this manner, there is in each object an immanent idea which presents itself to our conscious thought as an objective manifestation of the Real.

In handling the term "idea" in this way, one regards it as embracing psychic existence in its entirety, that is feeling, will and reason. How many of us can truthfully deny within ourselves an identity between ourselves subjectively and Nature objectively, or of the realization of a Presence? Probably none, and yet neither

Science nor Reasoning can give us an explanation. It is difficult to explain, but the position or conception may be more apparent if we say that the nature of a thing in itself would ever be a secret to us were we not able to approach it, not by knowledge of external phenomena, but by inner experience. It is entirely by our own self-consciousness that we can approach Nature. Communion with Nature, though it rest on passive intuition, must be associated with consciousness; that is Nature's self-activity is analogous to but not identical with our own. Our normal waking consciousness is but a special type of consciousness; all about it, parted by the filmiest of screens, lie potential but different forms of consciousness. Many of us go through life without suspecting their existence, but, supply the requisite stimulus and at once they are there in their completeness. No conception of the universe in its totality can be final which ignores these other forms of consciousness. One may say there is an uncommunicative Nature, or a Nature where psychic processes are not attuned sufficiently to ours for us to appreciate their vibratory messages, but we have no right to speak of a really unconscious Nature. Nature being then but a vast conscious process, evolution becomes but a series of processes suggesting to us degrees and types of conscious processes. From this point of view, the human mind is nothing but the highest development on our earth of the mental processes which animate and move all Nature. As one sits out in the still night and looks at the stars above, one regards them as no mere physical atoms in an incomprehensible universe, but one greets them, shining in their own right, as members with ourselves of a living cosmos. The idea is no new one, for Wordsworth says, "And 'tis my faith that every flower enjoys the air it breathes," while, Emerson echoes the same by saying, "The sun himself shines heartily and shares the joy he brings."

## IV.

So far, one has attempted to enunciate the fundamental postulates and principles underlying a close relationship between Man and Nature. One desires now to review briefly the details as they have impressed one in reflective moments, and as one finds them evidenced in the records of Man's mentality. In so doing, one disclaims any arrogation to oneself of inner experience seemingly denied to others. They are not denied, for all normal members of our race share in varying degrees the faculty of intuition and



communion with Nature. The moulding force of the immanent idea and inner life of things is for all mankind, and for certain peoples is continuous and cumulative. One finds evidence of this in the characteristics of the great religions. The Greeks of classical times, living in an equable and soft climate, developed their soul-life in an environment of light, colour and warmth. Recall their word pictures of Apollo, of Athene, or of Aphrodite; throughout, we see an evolution of brightness, disciplined thought, philosophy, proportional art and spiritual aspiration. Think of the hardy Norsemen and Teutons. These were men nurtured under stormy skies and ever striving against the hardships of long and rigorous winters. No wonder they filled their heaven with titanic conflicts of the gods, and emphasized it with the rioting of feasting or the wild whirl of hunting. Throughout, we see their lives and religion free and fierce, but tinged with a tone of melancholy. Look at the nomads of the desert, swallowed up in vastnesses familiar with the impressive silences of time and space, and ever under a brazen vault and envisaged by a thirsty land. To them, in such an environment, the premonition of a spiritual unity of existence found an ideal encouragement. Pass to India and the Aryan race; to them the development of the Vedic god of fire was a natural corollary to their associated surroundings or, as Max Müller says, man being what he was could not help thinking, saying, and seeing what he saw. All these are simple instances of the broad principle that external Nature has ever exercised a definite and continuous effect upon the development of man's ideas, impulses and conduct.

## V.

Of all the phenomena of Nature, water, air and fire have always held foremost place in the attention of man. Though not the first to note the idea, Thales was the first to gather together into a definite theory the vague intuitions which, for ages, had been operative and indicative of the idea that water was the elemental world-stuff. It is true his speculations were crude, but we cannot deny to him both acuteness and originality. That old-world thinker saw in the mobility, volatility and changeability of water the clue to the flow of the whole cosmic process. Though Thales did not separate moving water from the moving force, he regarded water and life as inseparable, and that not only was moisture essential to germination and development but that, by virtue of water, all matter had plastic life. Throughout the ages, moving water has

ever had the power of stimulating man's emotion and prompting intuition. This is particularly the case when the source from which water issues and the goal to which it flows is unknown, as in the case of subterranean water. Even in modern times, we find Coleridge voicing the idea, in the fragment "Kubla Khan," in which from a deep chasm the sacred river Alph throws up a mighty fountain and, wandering for a space through wood and dale, plunges into measureless caverns to sink in tumult to a lifeless ocean. He says, "And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far ancestral voices prophesying war."

In mythology, water, especially that of the underworld, plays a big part and nowhere more so than in the Graeco-Roman conceptions of Hades. We recall the words which Homer makes Circe say to Odysseus, "But go thyself to the dank house of Hades. Thereby, into Acheron flow Pyriphlegethen and Cocytus, a branch of the water of Styx, and there is a rock and the meeting of the two roaring waters." No difficulty to see in this the prototype of the swamps and dismal streams of Virgil's Hades, nor of the mystical meaning to be read into the subterranean waters of the Greek mysteries and of the Phaedo myth of Plato. The mystic meaning of the underworld waters is even more exaggerated in the Teutonic myths. In them, under the forms of subterranean fountains that well forth physical, spiritual and æsthetic life, is mirrored the life of the universe which wells from unknown depths only to return to the deeps from which it emanated. Those myths are expressions of primitive intuitions embodied to form a primitive philosophy of life. The gap between this idea of a circulation of the waters and the notions of Thales is not wide. Both to him and to the Teuton child of Nature, the substance of the universe is living movement. It is difficult to avoid seeing in these historical records a complement to present day ideas and subjective experiences which testify how subterranean waters, flowing from an unknown source and falling into an unknown abyss, convey a sense of the limits of the knowable, combined with a sense of inexhaustible power. Carry the thought to the whirling electron of modern science, and is the analogy not recognizable? In them all, the beyond is vague and unsubstantial, but it breathes life and purpose.

Setting aside all ideas of Naiads and the water-sprites of classical mythology, if we think of springs and wells, who of us can fail to remember familiar associations between these natural and common objects and sentimental beliefs? In Eastern lands, where the sources of water are rare and distant from one another,

these centres of Nature's bounty present a rich store of family and tribal legend. Further, the intuitions they prompted are peculiarly transparent and spiritual. Under Oriental conditions, the water is literally "life," and as the conception of life deepened, so did intuition become more delicate. No matter where we look, be it from the earliest ages to the present time, the continuity of the feeling that in the phenomena of water gushing from a source there is a manifestation of self-activity, mysterious power and spontaneous life, is not only definite, but has wielded and still wields an influence over man. Our poets are full of sweet allusions to the running waters and all they convey to man. In modern garb, they voice merely the philosophy of early man. Are we wiser now? Is our glib talk of liquids in unstable equilibrium, following lines of least resistance, any nearer the discovery of the secret of water movement in brook and stream than primitive man's view of water-spirits, "that are as souls which cause the water's rush and rest, its kindness and its cruelty"? It is rash to answer yea or nay. One prefers to let "the well" speak in Brown's poetic words:—

"I am a spring—  
 Why square me with a kerb?  
 O cruel force, that gives me not a chance  
 To fill my natural course;  
 With mathematical rod, economizing God;  
 Calling me to pre-ordered circumstance  
 Nor suffering me to dance  
 Over the pleasant gravel,  
 With music solacing my travel."

## VI.

All the mystic influences of moving water are emphasized by rivers. Think of all that has been associated, by the peoples who have dwelt on their banks, with those historic rivers, the Nile and the Ganges. To the Egyptian the Nile was the sacred river, one of the primitive essences, and ranking with those highest deities who were not visible objects of adoration. Its phenomena left distinctive features on his religion. That religion was one of contrasts, representing the world as a scene of titanic conflict between the creative power of Osiris and the destructive influence of Typhon. The master influence was the Nile. On one side barren rocks and parched sands, and on the other the fertilizing power of the sacred stream. All around, vast solitudes, and along the river the hum of teeming cities and the rich fullness of

prosperity. Secondary to these influences, on the religion of the Egyptians, from the Nile was the fact that from the river the Egyptian grasped and developed the doctrine of immortality. The ever renewed gift of life which the Nile brought from an unknown and unseen world was the germ of the conception of Osiris as the god of the resurrection. We know how the Egyptians influenced thought among the Hebrews, the Greeks and the Romans, and how these again have influenced ourselves and others. The effect on the human mind of the physical phenomena of this single river is hard to estimate.

If we turn to India, we find the story of the Ganges and its mystical concept of purification. This clearly was suggested by the cleansing qualities of water, and has exercised a profound function in the development of spiritual ideas throughout India. Of course, we have the same idea in the case of Christian baptism, supplemented by the new birth and the higher life of the spirit. Apart from this, all the larger rivers of India are identified with the abodes and vehicles of the Divine essence, and therefore possessed of power to cleanse from moral guilt. Probably, in no land on the face of the earth has the river obtained a greater hold upon the affections and imaginations of the people than in India. Generation after generation, in all parts of the world, has responded to the influence of rivers and found them capable of stirring peculiarly the emotions, and of stimulating profound thoughts on the mystery of life. We are forced to recognize that all rivers have had, and still have, a big part to play in the cosmic drama and in the development of man's nature.

Moving water, it has been shown, is suggestive of life; curiously enough, we find in it a suggestion of death. Its most elaborate example is in the ancient myths of the nether regions, and of how, from the seven streams that watered them, Lethe, the river of oblivion, runs. This sombre train of reflection is recognizable in and deducible from the old adage, "Follow the river and you will come to the sea." Old age and death cannot fail to assert themselves in the minds of those who sail down some large river. As the banks fade dimmer away and the breeze brings murmurs and scents of the infinite sea into which a river ends, we get the suggestion of the close of life as we know it here, but coupled with the intuition that the substance remains diffused in a vaster whole, but not lost. With such an insight, consistent with the conservation of energy or of values, man reads into the phenomena of a river flowing into the sea the concept of a transition only,

not of an abiding state, and thinks to himself, surely we die to live more fully. Morris puts it well when he says: "As the stream flowed it will flow: though 'tis sweet, yet the sea will be bitter; foul it with filth, yet the deltas grow green and the ocean is clear."

## VII.

As we stand on the seashore or on the decks of a ship and regard the ocean, it is difficult to escape the feeling of a community between it, ourselves and our lives. We see the ocean before us, infinitely varied and yet unchanging, gentle yet terrible, radiant yet awful. There is not a mood of ours with which it cannot link itself, nor a problem to which it cannot hint a solution. The simplest intuition from the ocean is that of a beginning and an end. We think, with Tennyson, of the time "When that, which drew from out the boundless deep, turns again home." Or, we recall the words of Milton, who said aptly of the ocean, "The womb of Nature and perhaps her grave." These are poetic phrasings, but they convey the meaning of thoughts within us all. Apart from this aspect, the ocean compels us with a sense of our own helplessness and its own power and majesty, and again at times it stimulates moods of sadness, or even of exhilaration.

This sense of exhilaration is peculiarly associated with the sight of waves. Some reader may recall his readings of Æschylus in boyhood, and remember how Prometheus, looking from his Caucasian rock, appeals to primeval Nature and says: "Ether of heaven and winds untired of wing, rivers whose fountains fail not, and thou sea laughing in waves innumerable." The ideas immanent in ocean waves are as varied as the human experiences to which they are akin. No one who has sat on a deserted shore can fail to have been affected by the spell of the waves. Whether it is the tiny ripple, or the merry rustling crested surf, or the storm billow, in each and all one finds intuitions, suggestions and spells difficult to analyse, but which hold our gaze and impel us to ponder. It is not only the might and infiniteness suggested by the wave which affects us to sadness or serious thought, but we feel the loveliness of the wave. Think of the fine myths of Poseidon, his sea horses and his bands of Tritons, Nereids and Oceanids; they are full of vague intuitions and give substance to subconscious perceptions of the ocean's beauty. In the present day, one needs no imaginary personifications such as those to bring us into communion with the wave. It is hard to define one's modes of experience, but the

most commonplace of men cannot at one time or other have failed to respond to the calls which from the waves speak to him in language too plain to be ignored or misinterpreted. I write this, having been at a ball overnight, and recall the fact that, as one watched the dancers and noted some specially charming maid, the thought was irrepressible of Shakespeare's words, "When you so dance, I wish you a wave o' the sea, that you might ever do nothing but that." Its fittingness here is too obvious and tempting to leave unrecorded. And thus the mountain tarn, the bubbling spring, the river reach, the placid lake, the still deep pool, and the boundless sea have each and all their soul language, and man finds himself a sharer of joys, sorrows, hopes, fears and regrets with those aspects of Nature.

## VIII.

One has so far dwelt on intuitions from water; but there are other aspects of Nature, such as winds, storms and clouds, equally pregnant with ideas. What Thales saw in the motion of water, so Anaximenes of Miletus in ancient days saw in air the clue to the world-substance and the universal vehicle of vital and psychic force. One may quote one of his dicta: "As our soul, which is air, holds us together, so wind and air encompasses the whole world." He taught that the simple world-substance was air, that rarefied it became fire, and in its condensed state it progressed from liquid to solid. These notions seem crude to us, but, odd as they are, we find that his insistence on the primal function of air in the cosmos runs through a widespread group of animistic conceptions, and survives to our time. A perusal of Max Müller's fascinating books throws an interesting side-light on the question. Take such words as *ruach* and *neshamah* in Hebrew, or *nefs* and *ruh* in Arabic, or *atman* and *prana* in Sanskrit, or *psyche* and *pneuma* in Greek, or *anima* and *spiritus* in Latin, or *duch* and *duk* in the Teuto-Slavonic dialects, or *geist* in German, or *ghost* in English, and we find how the Jew, the Arab, the Brahmin, the Greek, the Roman, the Slav, the German, and the Englishman each use words which mean that the soul or spirit is synonymous with the air or breath, as being the least material image of the soul which they can conceive. It would seem that man's fleeting breath fostered the idea of immortality, and the wind that bloweth where it listeth was the idea of a realm of changeless spirit.

From air we pass to winds and cloud, and Pope's well-known lines, "Lo, the poor Indian, whose untutored mind sees God in



clouds or hears Him in the wind," express a multitude of possibilities. The old Red Indian of America had a vigorous and beautiful myth of the four winds, as we know from "Hiawatha"; while our own Bible is full of word-pictures of the winds as intermediaries between man and his Creator. Speaking for myself, I know of nothing more awe-inspiring than to be unsheltered and at the mercy of a high wind. The winds were bound to make indelible impressions on the primitive mind, hence wind gods are of world-wide diffusion. Those of the Greeks and Romans are best known, but the Mâruts of the Vedas and Odin and Wodin of the Teutonic myths, to say nothing of Jehovah of the Hebrews, all betray a continuity of the intuition. Even we, in this day, are emotionally responsive to the winds: they sob, they sigh, they moan, roar, rush or bellow; they exhilarate or depress and raise a varied train of thought; and most of us, in spite of our modernity, have glimpses of "heaven's cherubims, horsed upon the sightless couriers of the air."

The clouds are not less genuine echoes of primitive feelings. Sitting one evening on Pabbi platform waiting for an Indian train, and gazing at a gross mass of storm clouds over the Ambeyla and Malakand heights, it was impossible to suppress ideas of vagueness, unsubstantiality, ever-changing pageantry and dreams of majesty, or glorious possibility in association with those cloud masses. They were just the kind of cloud-scape which one can think must have influenced Shelley, when he wrote: "Like mountain over mountain huddled, but growing and moving upwards in a crowd." Again, often and often have I watched a cloud form as if a nursling of the sky, then break into rain and be no more. The whole sequence of phenomena was pregnant with the conceptions of mutability, and yet of continuity. So much so that one can imagine the cloud saying, as Shelley puts it: "I silently laugh at my own cenotaph, and out of the caverns of rain, like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb, I arise and unbuild it again." The honest reader will readily confirm these experiences, and agree with Keble in saying that "The clouds that wrap the setting sun . . . seem they the breath of life to breathe"; or, if more solitarily inclined, re-echo Wordsworth's words, "I wandered lonely as a cloud that floats on high o'er vales and hills." Thinking of cloudland, can one forget the bow in the cloud? No, it has been too great a symbol and an influence in the past; it is still in spite of our spectro-analysis of its nature. We see in it now a harbinger of better things to come, and still a bridge from

this "solid-seeming earth to a rarer land beyond." Even the most prosaic of us have a latent sympathy, which carries us back to childhood, with the mystic sevenfold bridge. So let it be.

## IX.

The conception of a cosmic fire we owe to Heracleitus, who saw in it movement or the secret of the eternal change which characterizes all known phenomena. He regarded the soul as fire dependent on the cosmic fire for sustenance, the breath being the physical medium; he held also that sense perception was another medium, by this means the outer fire being absorbed by the inner fire. That a flame—dancing, flickering, flashing, appearing and disappearing, unsubstantial yet curiously potent—should early attract thinking man is not surprising. Heracleitus was an acute observer, and he saw in the flame of a lamp the appearance of a thing of form, existence, and yet never the same. He read into it motion, and when that motion ceased the flame went out with smoke, or an apparent return of volatile matter to solid form. It is difficult to deny to this old-world thinker's speculations a curious harmony with our modern, advanced theories. To primitive man, less endowed with brains than Heracleitus was, fire was a standing miracle—at once destructive and life-giving, material yet immaterial, and clearly of divine origin. A varied series of legends, belonging to many ages and climes, ring the changes on these fundamental ideas, and these emotional attitudes to fire led to its domestic use and the vesting in the domestic hearth an unmistakable religious aspect. The Greek Hestia and the Latin Vesta were goddesses personifying fire and guardians of the household altar-hearth. At Delphi was the oracle and the communal hearth. In India the fire-god Agni really means the "Mover," possibly from the leaping movements of a flame. Hephaestus of the Greeks and Vulcan of the Romans, were also fire-gods; and it is noteworthy that both Hephaestus and Agni were patrons of wedlock, associating fire with the life-giving forces of Nature. Out of these ancient myths or beliefs grew up the later conceptions of hell and purgatory, which find expression not only in theology, but in words for some of Milton's finest lines.

From veneration of, and the association of æsthetic and ethical ideas with fire it is but a step to the conception of sun-gods. These we find exemplified in Ra of the Egyptians, Apollo of the Greeks, and the various gods to be found in old Persian, Peruvian and modern Parsee literature; even our own Shelley says of Apollo, "I am the

eye with which the universe beholds itself and knows itself divine." Some of the finest conceptual intuitions of the sun are identified with the effect of light upon man. In the Babylonian cosmology we read of Marduk, the god of light, with Tiamat as his antithesis. The deadly contest between Light and Darkness is traceable through all ages and among all peoples, typifying the conflict between good and evil. Behind these two great cosmic facts of Light and Darkness lie vague intuitions. The physical effects merge insensibly into the æsthetic, the moral, and the spiritual. Throughout we are conscious of the emotional effects of fear, horror and negation suggested by darkness; while joy, energy, beauty and purity are intuitions from light. Modern science does not break the continuity so far as light is concerned, for the phenomenon of light is linked with electricity, and electricity with life. Thus, at both the dawn and noon of human thought, light and life are dimly yet persistently felt to be of kin, if not identical.

## X.

And what about "That orb'd maiden, with white fire laden, whom mortals call the moon"? No object in the sky has given greater sense of kinship with man than the moon. Apart from her function as a lighter of the night, many worldly happenings are dependent on her motion and position. She affects our tides and, as Wordsworth puts it: "Through the cottage lattice softly peeping, dost shield from harm the humblest of the sleeping." Think of the rising moon, which seems as if she were looking for us; and we cannot but wonder how often she will wax and wane and still look for us, but one day look in vain. Who among us is not familiar with the maiden's face in the moon, and has not fancifully brought her to earth to sit beside us? I confess I often have, and even felt a real companionship when sitting out at night, looking at the cold, calm wanderer of the silent sky. In such mood, one sees in her a desire of the night for the morrow, and a devotion to something far away. Again, think of the harvest moon and all it means. Who can fail to see in her a mild herald of plenty, and greet her beams as those of a queen of mountains, forest and glen? I fancy few, and that all of us can say, with Clough, "Thou rollest, stayest not, lookest onward, look'st before, yet I follow evermore."

The stars, perhaps, least of all appeal to man. They are too remote, and yet somehow very near. But even they start trains of passive contemplation, thought, and, not infrequently, stimulate

active emotions, with a passionate yearning to know the unknowable. Sitting out at night under a cloudless sky, one has often been struck by the thought that at no other time is Nature more aloof from Man. This feeling of aloofness is peculiarly associated with the stars; it is not a constant nor perhaps a normal feeling, for, whether in its friendly or its alien aspects, the all-embracing sky affects one. Nowhere more so than in fiat or desert regions. In India it has played a great part in fostering abstract universalism, and tempted Man to views which are hostile to human initiative, or to a belief in objective reality. This is an extreme position, and finds an easy corrective in the sense of harmony, unity, and an all-embracing deity which the universal span of the sky gives; perhaps nowhere better expressed than by Keble, who wrote, "The glorious sky, embracing all, is like the Maker's love."

## XI.

If any reader has put in a summer at Chirat, or even wandered through the valleys of the Gomal or the Tochi, he will understand that direct form of Nature feeling which prompted originally this article, and appreciate the mystic sense which Shelley implies so well in his lines: "Eagle-baffling mountains, black, wintry, dead, unmeasured, without herb, insect, or beast, or shape, or sound of life." This allusion to the effect of inhospitable regions is but typical of the theme upon which one has dwelt and, more especially, emphasizes how a solitary place turns the human mind or spirit inwards or upon itself. It does more; those craggy slopes of naked rock or sun-baked loam, by their very grotesqueness of contour, raise often whimsical fancies of men and animals. One is unaware of any literary recognition of this comic side of Nature, but it is there and suggests the question whether it is something peculiar to Man, or whether it has a place of its own in the Universe. To me, the comic seems hardly so legitimate evidence in support of a kinship between Man and Nature, as are the æsthetic and more spiritual intuitions; but, for all that, it is occasionally present. The comic side of Nature is probably purely subjective and concerns only Man himself, by virtue of certain external phenomena reflecting his affairs. One cannot admit it to have a place of its own in the universe as a whole.

One has said nothing of the trees, yet they are a part of Nature and have their emotional and mystic setting. Since immemorial time, the tree has been the emblem of life. If trees do not talk,

they certainly manage to supply a good substitute for speech. Trees are not only alive, but they have character and individuality. I recall a fine old elm at home: often have I laid beneath its shade and felt "the soft-eyed music of slow-waving boughs," and its branches wrestling with their inmost stalwartness giving, as it were, a virtue to me. That tree was a veritable friend to me in boyhood, ever dumbly eloquent, suggesting at once imperturbability, serenity in all weathers, innocence and yet a savagery. When at home, I never fail to visit that tree which still stands, a living link to me with pleasant childhood's hours. Similarly, I recall a group of pines near the seashore which, bent and bowed by the sea-blast, ever suggested women fleeing from the sea with their hair all loose. Locally, they were known as "the witches," showing that the least instructed of those parts felt the subconscious play of primitive intuitions arising from the life, shape and movement of those trees. In later life I came across the following lines which aptly explain not only one's earlier, but one's maturer feelings towards those objects of a familiar landscape:—

"Yon row of black and visionary pines  
By twilight glimpse discerned. Mark how they flee  
From the fierce sea-blast, all their tresses wild  
Streaming before them."

Those lines are no mere poetic imagery, but a word picture true, suggestive, and descriptive of Man in touch with the inner spirit or meaning of certain objects in Nature.

## XII.

The matter-of-fact reader may, perhaps, be tempted to dismiss all that one has written as so much dreaming. Before he does so, let him pause and think whether so hasty a judgment is not but a drawing of attention to his own limitations. The psychologist, with the experience of poet and musician to guide him, knows better and grasps fully the reality and significance of mysticism as a part of that experience on which Art and Religion depend for their inspiration. To the doctor, who is not a psychologist, the question is equally of importance. By him, particularly, should it be recognized that the scientific understanding is not the basis of our mental life; but, that this mental life rests upon those elemental value-judgments which Nature makes from the outset, long before consciousness supervenes upon the unconscious life of feeling. We are slowly being forced to adopt the old aphorism, "Omnia exeunt in

mysterium," for the very motive springs of our being lie deep-rooted in our subconscious personality, a region of darkness illumined only by the lightning flashes of intuition.

Not a few of the difficulties and prejudices associated with or suggested by this article will be removed by a right appreciation of what is called a myth. Unfortunately, the word has been degraded in meaning until it has come to signify an idle tale without truth in it. This is quite at variance with its true and real significance. The true function of myth is identical with that of poetry and music. It appeals from the world of the senses and scientific understanding, that is from the conscious plane, to that major part of man's nature which is not articulate and logical, but feels, wills, and acts, that is to the subconscious self. Its function is but the regulation of transcendental feeling for the service of conduct and science, enabling Man to view life "*sub specie aeternitatis*" in one stupendous vision. One may put it in another way, and say that reason is sometimes transcended by emotion and that the scientific understanding itself only functions, so to speak, on sufferance, through the tacit assumption of those very truths which are revealed subconsciously in myth.

One is constrained to enter into these arguments as, in the light of them, it is hoped that any false impressions raised by a casual perusal of these pages may be corrected. If it does nothing more, this article may direct attention and thought to a study of Nature, not only for herself but also for the sake of Man. It is in Nature and in her subtle but potent effects upon the human mind that lies at least one corrective or antidote for the stress and tension of modern life. One writes from personal experience of the ease and comfort which result from Nature contemplation, carried out as a form of mental discipline and education of powers of observation, but not as a cult. Convinced that Nature is spiritually akin to Man, the deduction follows that the proper study of mankind is human nature as part of a living whole; or, to alter slightly a well-worn tag from Terence, one concludes by saying, "*Homo sum, et mundani a me nil alienum puto.*"

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