

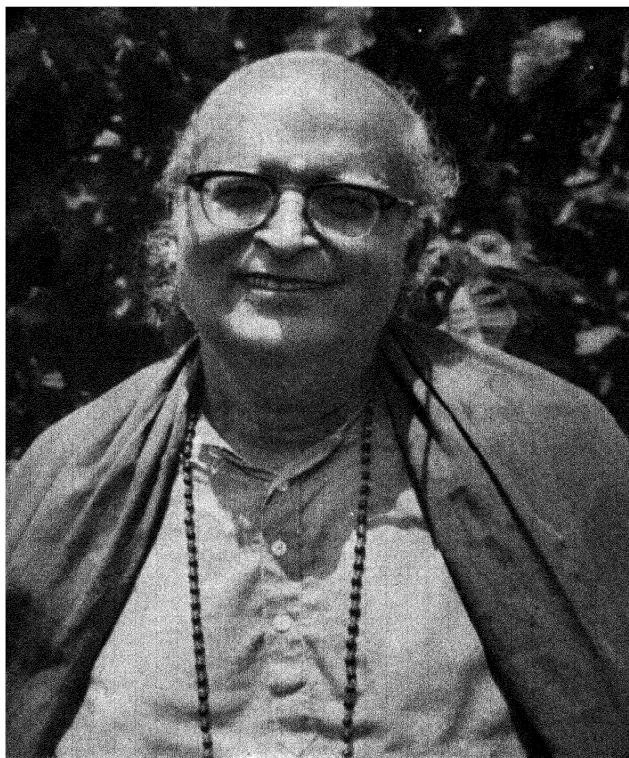
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IMMORTALS OF THE BHAGAVAT



DILIP KUMAR ROY

IMMORTALS OF THE BHAGAVAT
OR
(NECTAR OF IMMORTALITY)
&
Sri Ramkrishna's Parables

Dilip Kumar Roy

LAKSHMI NARAIN AGARWAL
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“My aim in writing or in encouraging others to write is not personal glory but to arrive at the expression of spiritual truth and experience of all kinds in poetry. You are right in saying that up till now the English people have not smiled on Indian poets writing verse in English. But the mind of the future will be more international than it is now. In that case the expression of various temperaments in English poetry will have a chance.”

—*Sri Aurobindo*

To our
dear twin sons,
Ekanta and Prashanta
(formerly Richard Miller and Don Taxay)
who
have responded to the message of the *Bhagavat* :

Krishna we hymn not to increase
His glory by our minstrelsy :
We sing that we may answer His
Deep love's Flute calling sleeplessly.

Nor do we pray because we dread
Hell-fires or paradise desire :
We pray because our prayers lead
Our soul-sparks back to the Parent Fi

Janmashtami, 1364
August 18, 1957

Hari Krishna Mandir
POONA—5

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Dedication to Richard and Don	
Invocation	
The Bhagavat : Sri Krishnaprem (a letter)	
Foreword : by Sir Paul Dukes, K. B. E.	
Preface : D. K. R.	
The King and the Sage	... 1
Ambarish	... 4
The Titan and the Dwarf	... 33
Bali	... 36
The Divine and the Devotee	... 75
Prahlad	... 77
The Flutist and the Milk-maids	... 117
The Singer and the Serpent	... 125
Kaliya	... 127
The Suppliant and the Fulfiller	... 141
Sridam	... 144
Parables and Similes	... 189
The Pigmy's Vaunting	... 191
The Ignorant	... 192
Discrimination	... 193

Sage Narad knows the world is thine
With all its play of ecstasy
And yet thou mak'st us heirs divine,
According us thy company !

O Friend, we cry to thee in tears :
When will thy blessed reign commence ?
We know when thy Star-grace appears
'Tis hell's demise, death's recompense.

Be thou our Guide : we cling to thee
Grant us Love's Haven at thy feet !
At life's long end give we may see
Thy fadeless Vision, passing sweet !

New York,
18.8.57

—PRASHANTA

THE BHAGAVAT

Sri Krishnaprem wrote this letter in 1946 when I sent him my *Bhagavati Katha* (*Gleanings from the Bhagavat*) in Bengali :

My dear Dilip,

Thanks so much for sending me the proofs of your *Bhagavati Katha*. It is a book which I am sure will be a joy to many who are looking for the Eternal Star which may guide them in the stormy sea of our present world. In the whole body of the Hindu scriptures I do not know of any book that is the equal of the *Bhagavata*—at least, to put it personally, there is none that has been such a profound and continuous source of inspiration to me. It was the first book I read with my Guru, and also the last: from the very first time I read it, almost spelling my way through a Hindi translation, I knew that here was what I had sought, the one fixed point in the everchanging flux of joy and sorrow, success and failure, life and death. True indeed are the words in its concluding chapter :

“The stars of other Puranas shine in the assemblies of the wise so long as the Sun of the *Bhagavata* has not risen into view. It contains the heart of the *Vedanta* and none who

has once slaked his thirst in its living essence will ever care to seek it elsewhere.”

Rājante tāvatanyāni purānāni satām gane
Yāvad Bhāgavatam naiva shruyate-mritasāgaram :
Sarva-Vedantasāram hi Shri Bhāgavatam-ishyate
Tadrasamrita-triptasya nānyatra syād-ratih kvachit.

(Book 12, Canto 13=14-15)

Out of a matrix of the calm Upanishadic wisdom shines forth its twelve-petalled Lotus, the marvellous Lotus of the heart. May your book help many to perceive its gleaming beauty !

Almora
October 26, 1946.

SRI KRISHNAPREM
(Formerly Ronald Nixon)

FOREWORD

Of the three greatest classics in the sacred literature of India—the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Bhagavata*—the last is probably the least well-known to English readers, so that the translation of a selection of tales from the *Bhagavata* rendered in free English verse by Dilip Kumar Roy must be heartily welcomed. Literal translations, however faithful, fail to bring out the beauties of the Sanskrit verse, while free translations are always open to individual interpretations. Mr. Roy frankly admits this and has not hesitated to allow his imagination rein in elaborating the terse and succinct Sanskrit text. It must be granted that if anyone has the right to embark on this literary adventure it is certainly the author, for not only is he qualified to do so by his superb command of the English tongue but also by reason of the fact that he has dedicated his life to the service of Lord Krishna, with the transmission of whose message to humanity the *Bhagavata* is so largely concerned. His magnificent flights of poetic fancy are resplendent with passionate love and devotion to the Lord. Indeed, if I may be permitted to state an impression gleaned

from personal observation, I would say they are fraught with that same spirit of exaltation that inspires the author in the conduct of the musical *kirtans* which attract so many of the devout to his Ashram temple.

Restraint in expression would be quite out of place in any interpretation of the great collection of poems gathered together in the *Bhagavata*. Its stories teem with fantastic miracles and impossible happenings which are of course to be understood allegorically. Only the most arrant pedant will treat such extreme imaginings with disdain—the type of person for instance who might scorn to read the *Pilgrim's Progress*, or for that matter *Alice in Wonderland*. Rather than conform to wearisome logic and reason, the authors of the *Bhagavata* preferred unbridled poetic fantasy, exaggeration, and hyperbole—a mode of expression, be it noted in passing, for which the founder of the Christian faith later also showed a marked preference, as witness the assertion that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The spiritual prescriptions of the *Bhagavata* are suited to every type of worshipper, whether his preference be for idols or abstractions. It is believed in many quarters in the West that idolatry is enjoined in the Hindu religion, but this is no more true than that the worship of images, graven or pictorial, because it is practised is therefore enjoined in certain branches of the Christian Church. The galaxy of apostles and major and minor saints to whom many devout

Christians appeal for intercession in their behalf with the Supreme Father corresponds in some degree to the saints and deities of the Hindu Pantheon. The fact that image-worship may sometimes take crude and, to many, repulsive forms is beside the point. The point is that this form of worship must often be recognized as necessary to those to whom abstract conceptions are insufficient or incomprehensible, but it is only a stepping stone. The matter is cogently put by Sir P. S. Sivaswami Aiyer in his Foreword to the condensed version of the *Bhagavata* translated by Pundit A. M. Srinivasachariar. The worship of idols, he points out, is recognized only as a preparatory step on the devotional ladder. "When the mind is educated and becomes capable of concentration, abstraction and meditation, the worshipper is gradually led on to the highest truths of religion. The *Bhagavata* recognizes the principle of relativity and its spiritual prescriptions are adjusted to the different stages of individual development."

The poems of the *Bhagavata* are pregnant with one all-embracing theme, that of absolute self-surrender to God and worship of the Father whose children we are—sparks, as it were, of that Divine Fire from which Creation was ignited. This dominating conception is summed up by Mr. Roy in a superb passage in the story of Prahlad, the divinely-conceived son of the demon-king Hiranyakashupa, who corresponds to Satan or Appolyon or Beelzebub or other lords of hell of Christian mythology. Prahlad, having

defeated the demon-king and rescued his victims, is urged by Narayan, the Lord of the Universe, to accept some boon in recompense, but the sole boon the self-effacing hero desires is that of offering his whole being unreservedly in the service of the Supreme Divinity :—

O grant, Lord, that my love I may translate
By offering all my fragrance at thine altar,
And lighting all my candles for thy temple
With no thought, prudence-prompted, of the morrow.

Grant that I may now dedicate myself,
With all I have and am, in adoration's
Unstinted prodigality of love.

For no love's worthy of the name of love
Which pauses at the thought of all-surrender,
The culmination of mortality's
Aspirings borne to azure certitudes.

This is the spirit in which to approach a study of the Bhagavata. It extols above all *bhakti yoga*, the *yoga* of love and devotion, but at the same time it warns against allowing the spirit's bodily vehicle to become debauched. "Sons," the Lord Rishabha proclaims in one of the stories, "this body deserves that divine discipline by which one's mind becomes purified and through which is obtained the permanent bliss of the Atman." Does this not herald St. Paul's later message to the Romans : "I beseech you, bre:

thren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” The student of the origins of Christian teaching will find much food for thought in the Indian classics. These ancient tales embody a message which is verily the essence of the Perennial Philosophy, and Western readers must gladly welcome this new and attractive version of the Hindu classic retold here by Dilip Kumar Roy with all the power and vigour of a rich poetic imagination.

—PAUL DUKES, K.B.E.

PREFACE

Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa was fond of retelling an anecdote about a worldly-wise pundit who went daily to a King to give discourses on the Bhagavat. But every time he explained a passage and asked : "Do you understand ?"—the King would reply : "You understand it first." The pundit felt discomfited as he did not know how to take the king's cryptic rejoinder till, little by little, love for Krishna, the Lord of the Bhagavat, flooded his heart with light and he began to see that one could not possibly get at the inner meaning and significance of the Bhagavat without invoking first the Grace of the Lord. As days passed, his heart opened more and more to the Grace that had come down to him till he felt a deep *vairagya*—distaste—for mere worldly wisdom and literary erudition. One day he could bear it no longer and decided to devote himself to meditating exclusively on the one Reality beyond the make-believes of Maya. On the eve of his final renunciation of worldly life he sent word to the King : "Yes : I have understood—at long last."

The moral of the parable is that scriptures like the Bhagavat are not revealed to us to be just discussed and commented on *ad infinitum*, but have to be imbibed with all our ardour and ache for the spiritual life. In other words, none can truly grasp the true message of a gospel like the Bhagavat's so long as he is content with enjoying its poetic beauty and philosophic profundity : one has to grow into it till one is utterly transformed by its mystic call.

This, however, must not be taken to imply that the Bhagavat is of little import to all but those few who are prepared to stake their all for the spiritual life it advocates. For no one who approaches the Bhagavat with an open mind can fail to discover that it is a scripture of scriptures unrivalled in the whole range of the Sanskrit literature. And he is likely to find it unique because :

(1) It brings vividly before our eyes the marvellous personality of Krishna in His many-sided vastness and universal appeal in a golden torrent of poetry, deep, withal, with a seer's vision and a devotee's fervour of rare inspiration and grandeur.

(2) It fills up a gap, left in the Mahabharat (as pointed out by Narad to Vyas in the Bhagavat) by delineating the flowering of Krishna's life through dramatic vicissitudes and bringing out the wizard spell of His radiant beauty, magic flute, unpredictable movements and elusive personality.

(3) Its stirring exhortations and marvellous hymns voiced through varied metres, similes and metaphors flow on

as it were with the ocean's rumble, alternately intoxicating and overawing the senses.

(4) And last, though not least, it is rife with the most rapturous descriptions, in incomparable poetry, of the celestial-human function of the Avatar revealing the purpose of the Divine descent, and as such is of inestimable value to those who strive to understand the logic of the Infinite with that of the mind.

One might add also that the Bhagavat is instinct, from its inception to the end, with a comprehensive vision, expressed through the lives of its Messiahs and devotees, to which it is difficult to find a parallel. To give but an instance. Akrur says to Krishna in Book XI, Canto 40 :

*Sarva eva yajanti tvām sarva-deva-maheshwaram
Tepyanya-devatā-bhakta yadyapyanyadhiyah prabho.*

All worship thee, in the end, O God of gods,
Even those who love the other deities,
Unseeing that they and thou are one, pay homage
To thee alone—as all gods are *thy* forms.

More explicitly (to put it in Sri Aurobindo's luminous words, by way of commentary) : "In all ways varying with their nature, men are following the path set to them by the Divine whom they can best follow when He comes to lead : in whatever way men accept, love and take joy in God, in that way God accepts, loves and takes joy in man : *ye yathā mām prapadyante tāms tathaiva bhajāmyaham.* (Essays on the Gita, Chapter XVII)

This vastness and catholicity of Krishna's teaching has been a source of the deepest inspiration not only to the religious life of India—where men have never been persecuted for a tenet, creed or dogma—but served all over the world as an eye-opener to those who truly aspire to see into the heart of authentic spirituality. Those who do not know Krishna may deny Him the homage that is His due, but that is only because they have not taken any pains to study His eternal message through His personality of fathomless beauty, compassion and profundity. To quote from a letter of the great Yogi Krishnaprem :

“As for those who say that seeking Krishna has no part in their Yoga—well, that is the ignorant talk of those who do not know what Krishna is and vainly plume themselves on their own vain ignorance. *Krishnātparam kimapi tattvam aham na jāne* (I know not what Truth there can be beyond the Truth that is Krishna). The words are not mine but those of the great Vedantin, Madhududan Saraswati.”

One is reminded of the hymn to Krishna sung by Brahma, the Vicegerent of Lord Narayan (Bhagavat.....X.14.38) :

*Jānanta eva jānantu kim bahuktyā na me prabho
Manaso vapuṣo vacho vaibhavam tava gocharah*

Let those who vaunt they know, Lord, fathom thee :
Vain words ! I'd only say : my mind, speech, senses
Stand baffled by thy infinite glory's splendour.

But, adds the Bhagavat reassuringly, Krishna who baffles the presumptuous mind is an experienceable Divine and gives

Himself utterly to those who open their hearts to Him in simple love and surrender. Has He not Himself given this assurance to His devotees ? (Bhagavat XI. 12. 15)

*Māmekameva sharanam ātmanam sarvadehinām
Tāhi sarvātamabhāvena mayā syā hyakutobhayah*

Give thyself, heart and soul, to me—the one
Refuge of all who breathe : then thou shalt win
Deliverance from all earthly fears and ails.

In other words, it is not through the little rushlights of the mind that His grace can be seen for what it is, because the Light wherewith we can truly see Divine Grace transforming our natures comes down only when we give ourselves to Him in love's utter surrender. Also, this world—says the Bhagavat—through its thousand snares leads astray all but those who have learnt to love Him as “the dearest Friend and Lord of all, the Soul of all who breathe.”* More explicitly, this world of pain and suffering must hold all in its grip of Maya till they grow to love Him with all they have and are, because love alone furnishes the clue to the last deliverance for which all hearts ache, unknowingly to start with, and consciously, in the end. The Bhagavat does not, indeed, frown upon the Yoga of knowledge (indeed, in the Gita as well as in the Bhagavat, Krishna explains at great length how true knowledge is to be attained and why it is indispensable to all aspirants on their way to God-love)

* *Suhrit preshhatamo natha atma chayam sharirinam*

(Bhagavat—XI, 8. 35)

but it does emphasise through its profound disquisitions and beautiful tales, that when love informs and motivates our quest of the Eternal Reality behind the endless phantasmagoria of life on its lower planes, knowledge must flow spontaneously from the higher to slay the darkness of cosmic ignorance. The twelve Books of the Bhagavat are replete with mystic discourses on the nature of spiritual knowledge and the conditions of its attainment. But its *Leitmotif*—dominant refrain—is Love, the ultimate mediator between the aspiring heart and the answering Grace. Narayan comes, indeed, to every sincere seeker to guide, protect and deliver from the ills of life, but He serves those alone who yearn for Him with the homesickness of a helpless child. The way of Knowledge may lead the aspirant into devious paths and thus delay his final attainment, but the way of Love leads the devotee straight to the Goal, endowing him at once with the deepest insight and highest strength. That is why the Bhagavat is at such pains describing how those who have loved the Lord have swiftly outsoared the world's vale of tears on the wings of Love and Faith. The cosmos was created to manifest various powers of the Omnipotent Divine, but only to unbargaining Love is revealed the highest mystery—*uttamam rahasyam*—of the personal dependence of the Creator on His creatures, the answering yearning of the Deep for the longing heart of the droplet. Seldom, indeed, has Grace Divine, made human, been limned with such consummate artistry and moving convincingness.

Not that the author of the Bhagavat is blind to the grandeur and majesty of the impersonal, transcendent and extra-cosmic Divine—the *Akshara* and *Nirguna Brahma*—but when all is said and done, his heart is given irrevocably to the God-man who seeks birth on earth, missioned to manifest a super-human play whose exquisite beauty and ineffable bliss can only be experienced by those who call to Him in love to be answered back in love. The Divine manifests, indeed, His endless powers (*bibhūtis*) through His endless lilt, but He opens His heart of love and compassion, the last, inviolate mystery, to none but His devotees who yearn to be utterly and irrevocably His.

It is only when one has grown to accept this as the central message of the Bhagavat that one can truly claim to have “understood” it and therewith the import of its ecstatic stress on *Naralila*—to wit, the Divine incarnating Himself in a human body to manifest a new play of love and redemption. But for this, the Bhagavat has to be interpreted with the light of the soul’s spontaneous devotion—not the firefly flickers of the mind’s presumptuous logic or learned commentaries—*bhaktiā Bhāgavatam grāhyam na buddhyā na cha tikayā*.

The reason is not far to seek. The Divine, as the Bhagavat proclaims time and time again, is beyond all conceptions of the mind. This is explained symbolically in Book IV, Canto 3 : *yat vishuddham sattvam vasudevashabditam tatra apāvritam Bhagavān Vāsudeva*, that is, the Supreme Lord, Vāsudeva, reveals Himself to that heart alone which is purified of the

ego's blurs, such a heart being called Vasudev, the earthly father of Vāsudev. In other words, the highest Truth and Love that is Krishna only comes down to reside in those whose hearts are purged of the last traces of desire, but eludes those who set out to measure Him with the mind's yardsticks. These may, indeed, speculate brilliantly about the nature of the ultimate Reality, but can never hope to perceive the Lord directly, far less live in union with His essential bliss and freedom. That is why the Bhagavat characterises the *Avatar* as *māyā-manushya*—One who is seemingly a man but essentially an incognito, being an Epiphany of the unfathomable Divine in a mortal frame. This, however, is difficult for the ratiocinating mind to conceive which, therefore, repudiates out of hand the unanimous testimony of the mystics down the ages that a finite human, when the Divine presides in him, can act from an infinite consciousness which utterly transcends his corporeal limitations. It will be going beyond the purview of this preface to attempt a rational or theological vindication of the Bhagavat's vision of the function of Avatarhood. I can only state briefly its formulation of the vision.

The Bhagavat asserts again and again that the Divine does come down in man from age to age to help humanity in evolving Godward. The Avatar is of paramount importance to humanity not only because He humanises the divine truths, but also (and primarily) because He makes it possible for us to perceive directly how the Divine helps in transforming our

human consciousness through the radiant lead and irresistible personality of His Deputy. Sri Aurobindo has explained this exhaustively in his masterly *Essays on the Gita* from which here is an excerpt :

"The Avatar," he writes in Chapter XVI, "is always a dual phenomenon of divinity and humanity ; the Divine takes upon Himself human nature with all its outward limitations and makes them the circumstances, means, instruments of the divine consciousness and divine power, a vessel of the divine birth and divine works. But so surely it must be, since otherwise the object of the Avatar's descent is not fulfilled ; for that object is precisely to show that the human birth with all its limitations can be compatible with the divine essence of consciousness made manifest, can be converted into its vessel, drawn into nearer conformity with it by a change of its mould and a heightening of its powers of light and love and strength and purity ; and to show also how it can be done.....the human limitations must be assumed in order to show how it can be overcome ; and the way and the extent of the overcoming, whether internal only or external also, depends upon the stage of the human advance : it must not be done by a non-human miracle."

Nevertheless, paradoxical though it may sound, the Avatar is, first and last, a miraculous descent in the sense that, do what we will, we can never, with our human reason, come within miles of understanding *how* He retains His inviolate status of divinity in a sorry human mould circums-

cribed by its seemingly insurmountable limitations. One is forcefully reminded of an admonition of the Mahabharat : *achintyah khalu ye bhāvas tāt na tarkena sādhayet* : the truths that are beyond the intellect cannot be appraised or explained by mental logic. Then, appealing to our human reason, Vyas says, in effect, that once we postulate the omnipotence of the Divine, we cannot rationally reject its inescapable corollary that He, being all-powerful, can assume the human (or even a sub-human) form for His *lila*, world-play, if He so chooses. So, the Mahabharat rightly adds, one's repudiation of such a power of the Almighty is tantamount to a final repudiation of His omnipotence : *tādrishim cha vinā shaktim na siddhet parameshatā*.

But although the Bhagavat does, sometimes—as a concession to the groping mind—meet mental enquiry with mental reasons, its dominant note is not appeal to reason but to faith and love. Put otherwise, it takes its stand, primarily, on either *āptavakyam* (the sages' findings founded on personal experience) or else on the direct pledge given by the Godman to the elect, His devotees, whom He assures authoritatively that He comes down from age to age for a cosmic play (*lila* or *sriti*) because He is so deputed by the Supreme whose divine consciousness is, in essence, one with His own. The Bhagavat prefers this mode of appeal because it is concerned not so much with the intellectual appraiser as with the loving believer. In other words—says the Bhagavat, in effect—the Lord in His human incarnation calls not so

much to His *vahiranga* (general) seekers—who will not go far, anyway—as to His *antaranga* (intimate) devotees whom He exhorts tirelessly to stake their all for the One-in-all who has sent Him and thus cooperate with Him as His blessed playmates. That is why Krishna invites such mature souls (like Arjun or Uddhava or the Gopis) to participate in His cosmic play and promote the Divine purpose by seeking fulfilment through love and love alone, as, *e. g.*, when He says (Book XI, Canto 14) :

*Atmā cha karmānushayam vidhuya
madbhaktiyogena bhajatyatho mām*

The soul transcends its karma's termless cycle
Of desires through the Yoga of devotion
To me and wins to my last Self of Bliss.

The six tales presented here embody this dominant message of the Bhagavat, to wit, that one who has truly learnt to love Him in simple faith and surrender is taken straight to Him on the wings of His Light and Grace/

To obviate a possible misunderstanding, I may add, in conclusion, that I have not attempted to *translate* the Bhagavat legends but followed freely my own inspiration while rendering them into English. But although I have always striven, be it understood, to stay faithful to the spirit and ambiance of the Bhagavat, I have not hesitated to take the liberty of elaborating here and there what the author of the Bhagavat has often left implicit or, at best,

thrown out as luminous hints but not followed up as we, moderns, love to do. This, I have felt, will be rewarding because mythology is no myth but embodies, at its loftiest, the highest wisdom of the wisest hearts and the most evolved minds of humanity.

Hari Krishna Mandir,

Poona-5.

DILIP KUMAR ROY

April 6, 1956

POSTSCRIPT

I must gratefully acknowledge a few debts :

To Sir Paul Dukes, Knight Commander of the British Empire, for having so kindly supplied the illuminating Foreword. I value it all the more because he is not merely an eminent man and a mystic (author of *Yogā for the Western World*, *The Unending Quest* etc.) but an understanding seeker who has read our scriptures with a rare sympathy and reverence. I thank him also for suggesting a few alterations here and there which only a man of his rare insight could have made.

To Professor S. R. Sharma, the savant and mystic, (author of *Wisdom Beyond Reason*, *Heritāge of Indiā* etc.) for having helped me in so many ways. It was he who first suggested that I should find a better title to my book than the one I had chosen—*Tales from the Bhāgāvāt*. He suggested the title, *Nectār of Immortality* which I have accepted but as a sub-title. He also suggested that I make mention of the fact that in the Bhagavat Sridam is the name of Krishna's famous friend who is popularly known as Sudāma.

Lastly, I owe to my daughter-disciple, Indira Devi, a deep debt for having typed my whole manuscript more than once as well as for the title she suggested which I have finally accepted, not to mention the beautiful vision of Sridam's (before the Image) which I have incorporated in this story—a vision she actually saw in her *samadhi* in our temple.

There have been many others, like Swami Pratyagatmananda Saraswati, Mahamahopaddhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj, Govindagopal Mukherji, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar who, on reading some of the tales, responded warmly to their message and wrote to me expressing their approval of the way I chose to convey it in varying metres which is not usually done in narrative poems in the English tongue. To all these kind friends I offer my thanks, as their warm appreciation of my humble efforts encouraged me not a little in so arduous a task.

Lastly, a word about the Appendix, *Sri Ramkrishna's Parables and Similes*. In these, too—even as in the Bhagavat stories—I have followed, in the main, my own inspiration and interpretation and have, at times, created the context in a somewhat dramatic vein to bring home the moral and point of his marvellous stories.

Baishakh, 1365
April 13, 1958

D. K. R.
Hari Krishna Ashram,
Ganesh Khind Road,
Poona—5.

THE KING AND THE SAGE

A great story often lends itself to different interpretations, each stemming from a different approach. In the famous conflict between the Sage Durvasa and the King Ambarish, we have one such story. One may, therefore, be allowed to stress how a devotee profits by its message and what moral he draws. The story, as related in the Bhagavat, is simple. A great King attains the Grace of Lord Narayan, the God of gods, having realised that a human being can only fulfil himself by offering all he has and is to the Lord and praying to be moulded by His will. Such an ideal devotee, says the Bhagavat, not only receives the Lord's guidance at every step, but also His protection from day to day. But Ambarish and Durvasa do not know this—which ignorance is the fulcrum of the drama. In other words, neither knows that the Lord Narayan's dread Discus, Sudarshan, created by Him to chastise the wrong-doers, hovers round His devotee, the King, like an invisible sentinel. So when the choleric Sage, for an imagined insult, conjures up a horrible monster and directs him to kill the King, Sudarshan

flashes out and decapitates the assailant. Durvasa, in terror, takes to his heels, pursued by the divine nemesis he has brought down on himself. He goes in turn to the Higher Gods but none of them, alas, can grant him a reprieve till, in an extremity of despair, he appeals to Lord Narayan—in His Elysian Abode, Vaikuntha—to pardon him. But the Lord only reprimands him severely and then reveals a divine secret: the Divine is not a free agent but depends on his devotee as a Servant of love, and so He can only pardon the Sage if the King first forgives him. What the God of gods divulged to the Sage has become memorable as a divine pledge given for all times: that all who have come to love Him in complete self-surrender, wins to the right to be served by Him: a startling pronouncement, in all conscience! For the great Lord All-Mighty to minister to a human devotee! The roles reversed: the Divine bows to the devotee in love! There are few stories in our scriptures where such a beautiful declaration-cum-pledge has been expressed in so heart-warming and *mantric* a language. So the Sage, now overwhelmed by the divine revelation, returns, penitent, to the King he had wanted to chastise and tells him all he has learned—to his bitter humiliation. The King, overawed by the import of the Lord's message, embraces the Sage in an ecstasy of tears, acclaiming him as a divine messenger sent by his one Beloved, his All-in-All. A daring story, illustrating the miracle power of love to take the Kingdom of Heaven by storm and compel

the Divine as it were to attend on His attendant. Also, the Bhagavat draws a corollary : the futility of mere occult powers pitted against the sovereign might of the heart's adoration of the Everlasting Lover. A moving tale, magnificently told.

AMBARISH

King Nabhag ruled his kingdom even as rules
The imperial sun the wistful vale of earth,
Hailed by all as the soul of strength and bounty :
Puissant and, withal, benevolent.
Even his enemies looked on him with awe,
Drawn by his royal grace and splendid valour.

His son and heir, the noble Ambarish,
Eclipsed his far-famed father. A born mystic
And solitary, averse to wielding power,
Who walked the earth but dreamed of stars and clouds,
He climbed to the peak of holy wisdom. A Yogi,
Masquerading as an Emperor,
A worshipper of Vishnu Narayan,
A dedicate from his boyhood to the hoary
Verities which life's dark maya shrouds,
With time he only shed, ever more and more,
What few regard as vain: the ego's cravings
For glory's glitter, passions' pomp, wealth's pageants,
With their deep legacy of sighs and tears.
His heart adored but the One-without-a-second :

On Him alone his soul's star-gazing eye
 Was fastened, like the sunflower's on the sun.
 His people idolised him, singing in chorus :
 "Behold the saint who rules, masked as a King !"

And so he was : a saint who, evermore,
 Grew into a seer of seers. A high-born dynast,
 He was humble as the proverbial blade of grass,
 Bowing to all as the Lord's own harbingers,
 Because in all he saw the Incognito,
 Whose maya of make-believe became translucent
 To his clairvoyant eye : he venerated
 All beings as his Omnipresent Master's
 Incarnate living rays his second sight
 Traced back to the Primal, Transcendental Source,
 The Sun of suns, deep with Divinity.
 He reigned on earth to serve that One-in-all,
 And in all saw Him who only played at begging
 To savour His own munificence. He sang :

"O thou whom none can see,
 Who withal, pervadest all :
 From the Bliss beyond the stars
 To the trampled insect's call !

May I ever, here below,
 Glimpse thee alone, my Lord !
 Who in thy play becomst
 The balsam and the sword !

"May I never deem my vain
 And feckless self as great :
 But only as thy slave
 Upon thy one will wait.

"Oh, may my yearning eye
 By this last vision be blest
 Of thee as the Doer Unique
 And as our sky and nest !"

His prayer was granted : he knew himself for a cipher,
 A willing agent of the One by whom
 All is sustained as jewels by a string,
 Who had made him, a King, to savour His own play
 Of serving all while seeming to rule all.
 He saw himself as a droplet in the Deep,
 An infinitesimal spark of the parent Fire,
 Longing for reunion with the Flame.
 He glimpsed in all the Divine Chameleon
 Who ruled as a King to obey as the commonalty,
 Condemned as a judge to be sentenced as a convict.
 He saw that man, sundered from Grace, is nil
 And that, as none can fall too low to be
 Redeemed by Grace, even so, none can claim
 He merits Grace as a mountaineer of prowess :
 Sinner and saint she hails with the same compassion.
 All who came to appeal to him for help
 He answered lovingly but never presumed

To be their healer even when he healed.
 He bowed to all as the Great Lord ensouled all
 And symbolled forth through all His marvellous Self,
 As the ultimate Lover and Beloved of all.

Only one thing King Ambarish did not know :
 That Narayan, in His solicitude,
 Had deputed His whirling Discus of flame,
 The dread Sudarshan, to protect his person
 Sleeplessly even as a bodyguard.
 The Lord had said to the justicer of doom :
 "I commend to thy charge my dear devotee.
 Be with him—O my faithful Sentinel :
 Above his head thy vigil keep. May he
 Come never to harm. Should ever a fiend draw near,
 Blaze out at once and slay him ruthlessly."

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King Ambarish had fasted
 For seven days and sung
 To the Lord of His own glory,
 Then his palace doors he flung

Open to all his people
 Who came to him and appealed
 For justice, alms or favours,
 He complied and then kneeled

In his shrine before the Image
And cried : "O Lord, behold :
How weighed down are thy creatures
With suffering manifold !

"How can I give them succour ?
I can dispense but things :
While only thy compassion
Fulfil, O King of kings !

"So I beseech thee, Master,
To initiate them in
Thy boon of Grace absolving
This loud world's dismal din."

On a sudden, the bright Image
Grew dim as the light was barred
By the hirsute sage Durvasa
With a face by wrinkles marred.

The King bowed down to the ground, then
Addressed the solemn sage :
"Glory to you who worship
The Supreme from age to age !

"The dharma of this dark peaceless
World only you saints sustain,

Lighthouses in life's eddies,
 You come to herald His reign.

"They say : you come to test us :
 Alas, we falter and fail !
 So how can I, sage, serve you ?
 It is for you to tell."

Now smiled the grim ascetic
 And said : "I would be fed
 By you, O King ! I'm famished
 And have been hither led."

The Queen then, intervening,
 Asked Brahmins food to bring.
 They placed two golden dishes
 Before the Queen and King,

Who said : "Pray sit beside us
 And bless us, haloed saint !
 Accept what is here offered,
 O guest of the blue's vast tent !"

Said the other : "Wait a moment :
 I must to the river wend
 To bathe and then, anon, I
 Will return, my royal friend !"

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The King and Queen with their retainers
waited silently before
The Image of the Lord while all
cast eager glances at the door.

But Durvasa played truant, alas !
the dishes served, untasted lay
Like orphans wan and ownerless
and none had a helpful word to say.

The hour of noontide nearer drew,
yet none could venture to advise :
For once noon passed, the King could break
his fast no more—so said the wise

Ritual shastras which the pious
durst not transgress. So the priest at last
Bethought himself of a compromise :
“Sip water, Sire, to break the fast.

“For drinking is not eating, nor
is it called fasting : so you may
With an easy conscience thus contrive
the shastra’s decree to obey.”

The King glanced at the Queen who smiled
approving forthwith, whereupon

The other, complying, water sipped,
then, waiting silently, prayed on,

When, on a sudden, the choleric sage
rushed in and challenged furiously :
“I espied you drinking from a cup !
Shame on your hospitality !

“Is it not written : the host his guest
shall even as a godhead venerate ?
And yet you waited not for me !
Forsooth, this you must expiate !

“For violating dharma now
I will chastise you—you must pay
Dearly with your life—behold !
I strike you down without delay !”

Grinding his teeth, the indignant sage
invoked a demon instantly
And bade him kill the saintly King
who prayed in a mystic ecstasy.

The Queen, in terror, collapsed in a swoon
as pounced the monster, fierce as hell,
Upon the rapt, unruffled King
who smiled as the ogre on him fell .

The priest and servants, horrified,
covered their faces : time stood still
when, lo, a yell rang out as all
Looked up and saw a mighty wheel

Of fire, a-whirl and hissing like
a flying dragon, smote the dread
Titan and sawing through his neck
severed his torso from his head !

The sage, in consternation, stared :
the discus hurled out flakes of fire.
He knew it was Sudarshan' roar,
the symbol of Lord Vishnu's ire

Which, once aroused, razed even the mountains,
and so he cried out in dismay.
The discus hissed : "Be silent, fiend !
Your wicked life shall end this day.

"Who called you a sage, O triple fool,
who'd do to death the devotee
Of the Lord Himself—a saintly King
who welcomed you so lovingly ?

"You have only grown in vanity
and stayed unversed in the rudiments

Of wisdom and so, in idiot wrath,
you dare insult the saint of saints !”

* * * *

Swift like the wind, Durvasa moved,
by Sudarshan pursued :
And through the window out he leapt
the Nemesis to elude.
He had acquired the power to fly
through air. By nature vain,
The miracle boons that dazzle the eye
he had striven to attain
By long austerities, and grown
in strength and manifold skill
To forfeit the highest Boon : His Grace
which can alone fulfil
The soul aspiring to the great
humility of the meek,
Whom he was wont to scorn as less
than men, supine and weak,
And so he flew, chased by the Discus
scattering tongues of fire :
His beard all singed, his face all black,
he winged on higher and higher.

Pedestrians, in amazement, stared.
The children clapped : “Behold !

A flying devil chased by a booming
Discus, flaming gold !
Look : through the clouds he upward zooms,
dogged by a whirling Wheel !
But can a devil fly ? Come, let us
to our King appeal !
A god-man, he will all explain."
And so to him they ran.
He sadly answered : "He is not
a devil but a man:
A blind unhappy sage." They were
astonished : "A blind sage !"
The King broke in : "I know not why,
alas, from age to age,
Many who might have won to real
greatness in their lives
Have dwindled into dwarfs, seduced
by power which oft deprives
The seer of his soul's deepest vision :
that nor pomp nor glory
Can lead us to his lotus-feet !
Alas, the old old story
Of the ego spurring us to phantom
conquests grand and high . . .
Ah folly ! for the soul never longs
for things that fade and die.
A Bird of Paradise, she pines
but for His Eden of Grace,

Singing : all all is maya save
the Beauty of His Face.”

* * * * *

Chased by the relentless Foe,
the fugitive at last
Outsoared the earth to appeal to Brahma,
the Maker of the vast
Cosmos and found him chanting : “O
thou Lord of all that is !
O Endless Cadence ! Cause of causes !
Being of Love and Bliss !
In whose one Light glows all that shines,
whose breath all lives sustains !
Whose Love makes fertile all that’s parched
even as the fecund rains.
Upon whose navel bloomed the mystic
Lotus, royal and lone,
Which cradled me, Father of the world
who yet have never known
What thou in essence art. I only
know, O unrevealed !
Thou gavest me an infinitesimal
power of thine to build
The daedal hierarchies of this
universe of thine :
Yet we, the Demiurges, claim :
we are the doers divine !”

Durvasa sat with folded hands
till Brahma paused, when he
Adjured in tears : "I'm come at last,
Lord, to petition thee.
Oh, save me from Sudarshan's wrath !
Thou knowest why and how
I fell and how condignly I
have been chastised by now :
An orphan of the storm, I wandered,
Harassed by the dread
Discus of doom, still mocked of all,
as through the skies I sped.
I have lived through days of living death,
borne agonies of hell :
But thou, Omnisicent, knowest all :
what more is there to tell ?"

Brahma appraised him coldly and said :
"I know, but you transgressed
The Lord's inviolable Law,
by demon rage possessed,
In a frenzy you disgraced yourself
and flamed out to assault
A devotee of the God of gods
and so He came to halt
The ogre you'd unleashed. O shame !
How shall my ruth avail ?

When a sage comports himself like fiends,
 how can he escape hell ?
 I am powerless to absolve you who
 have sinned against the holy :
 So expiate you must and reap
 the fruit of your own folly."

* * * * *

Pursued by Fate, he came to the great
 Merciful Shiva's home
 And beheld him dance and sing in a trance :
 "O thou, Hari Om—Hari Om !
 Who liftest Night to the pinnacle Light
 And slayest in the heart of Peace !
 O Thou song and thunder, terror and wonder,
 Matrix of all that is !
 Who criest in the waylost abysm in play
 To uplead despond to thy sky
 And steerst lone pain to thy rapture's domain,
 Through discord to harmony.
 As we bow to Thee, Everliving and Free,
 Thou bowest, in love, still lower -
 And revealest the hoary marvel and glory
 Of humility's fathomless power !"

Then the peerless Prince of dancers said,
 with a smile of irony :

"I know all, but when even a sage
 is stricken with lunacy
 And trespasses against our Lord's
 own devotee, alas,
 I dare not lift a saviour finger
 in his dire impasse.
 We all are made and unmade by
 our Master Narayan's
 One smile or frown : 'tis He that rules
 and the mightiest godheads owns.
 So wherefore are you like a comet
 hurtling through the spaces ?
 Appeal to Him, the Lone Compassionate,
 who even sinners embraces.
 For none but He, sage, can revoke
 the terrible nemesis
 You brought down on yourself : in the end
 prevail but His decrees.
 Him supplicate, for He alone
 can save you from the fate
 You have invoked by your own karma :
 we all His will await.
 In life's deep labyrinth none but
 His Grace can the Way reveal :
 No will but His can ever unloosen
 destiny's fatal seal."

In deep despair, Durvasa flew
 again and overpassed
 The glinting worlds that hung in space
 till he attained at last
 Vaikuntha's ultimate splendour-peak
 where reigned the Lone Supreme,
 Enthroned on His own sun-resplendent
 beauty's miracle gleam.
 Trembling, the sage fell at His feet
 and pleaded passionately :
 "Forgive me, Lord ! deliver me
 from this dread agony.
 In vain I roamed and roamed allwhere :
 thy Sudarshan still chased
 Relentlessly my distraught soul,
 by hell's nightmare obsessed.
 I implored the mightiest Gods, but none
 could rescue me—till I
 Resolved to throw myself on thy
 great ruth : Oh, must I die
 In infamy ? Have I not striven
 for years for thy last Light ?
 Did I not rise high in my Yoga
 till perfidious Night
 Inflated me with pride when I
 slid down into the Pit ?

In abysmal pain I cry : give, Lord,
asylum at thy feet !”

Lord Narayan appraised awhile
the derelict, then said :
“I would fain, sage, redeem you—now
that you have in part paid
For your black karma. But I dare
not grant you pardon yet
Before you first abase yourself
and fully expiate
Your crime, and seek forgiveness of
the King whom you were wrong
To assault so wantonly—one who
is hailed by the angels’ throng.
If he forgives—then only my
forgiveness you’ll obtain :
I dare not smile on you until
he smiles on you again.
For devoted to my devotee,
I’m not free but depend
On him who depends on me alone
as his one guide and friend.
I dwell for ever in his soul
who loves me more than life,
Renouncing all for my dear sake,
his children, home and wife.

My soul belongs to him for aye,
 as his belongs to me.
 How can I not seek one who seeks
 me everlastingly ?
 As a spouse becomes a slave to his loving
 mate who slaves for him,
 Even so, I bow to the one who bows
 to me as the Supreme.
 So him propitiate you must :
 the saint of saints who lives
 For me alone and whom I serve
 in love : if he forgives,
 Then only may I pardon you.
 Beware of passions hence.
 Remember : all you win you must
 unstintingly dispense
 For the good of all on earth. A Brahmin
 must live like a pure
 Lighthouse in life's desolate waters,
 like a peak endure
 The clouds and blizzards, rains and thunders
 that upon him fall :
 His strength and wisdom, vision and gifts
 he holds in trust for all."

From the sovereign world of the One-without-a-second
 The deflated Sage returned to earth and made
 For the palace of King Ambarish who prayed on
 Fervently in his temple—waiting still
 His unhappy guest's return, nor once had he
 Closed his eyes in sleep. To his Queen he said :
 "I will not break my fast till he returns."

Care worn and spent, the Sage addressed the King :
 "O saint ! I have come back to you at last.
 I am doomed and hell is now agape for me.
 All avenues of hope are shut against me :
 You are my unique life-line to salvation.
 So listen, I pray, to my long tale of woe
 And hear me to the end." He wiped his eyes
 And then resumed : "My life has been a lie.
 My austerities gave me power, and power conceit.
 Which hurled me finally into the maws
 Of Hades of degradation, shame and torment
 A Brahmin by birth, I fell from the highest status
 Given to man—the seer's high prestige
 Derived from the ultimate sanction of Vaikuntha.
 I know how idle it is to sigh and weep :
 What karma entails—no penitence can annul.
 So how can I expect to be redeemed
 When I returned your hospitality
 With dire malevolence ? Alas, my ego

My downfall proved and made me lose the little
 Height I had won of wisdom's mystic vision.
 But I became a puppet of my passions
 Because they had been hailed by my dear pride."

He sighed : "Yes, I betrayed my trust and so
 Forgot the Godward life's ideal and norm
 Of conduct : the zenith Truth and tolerance
 That flow spontaneously from humility.
 And then, disclaimed by Light, I hailed as kin
 The furies born of hate and bred by Night.
 Alas, I had lived too long in my lone
 Turret of self-encumbered arrogance !
 Wherefore I lost my foothold and was flung
 Down into the abyss that for me gaped,
 Whose pseudonym is ego and playground—pride.
 In the grip of demon anger, I invoked
 A monster with the powers I had gained
 By dint of years of hard austerities,
 Thus ruining, in a moment, all I'd won.
 But since I had aspired for long to Light,
 The Grace of Narayan, so even the wrath
 Of His Sudarshan was for three days stayed
 That I might come to assess my dark deep fall
 By visiting the mighty Gods in Heaven :
 Brahma and Shiva and lastly, the Supreme.
 I need not tell you all I learned from them.

Know only : I have traversed the inferno
 Whose denizens mocked at me. By Grace disowned,
 I have wandered like a pitiful, homeless wraith.
 Decapitated, I should have been now
 Their comrade in the sunless underworld.
 Lo, I hear still their weird laughter of welcome !
 From this disastrous fate which yawns before me,
 Only you, Sire, can save me if you will :
 So told me Narayan Himself today
 When I petitioned Him to rescue me.
 Then, as I vainly strove to understand
 His answer, He explained : 'I am not free
 Because I am dependent ever on those
 Who depend on me. I dwell everlastingly
 In those alone who love me more than life.
 And so the master of your destiny
 Is the great saint you have hurt : King Ambarish,
 My blessed devotee, whom serve I must.
 Naught but his ruth can save you now : if he
 Forgives you, only then may I forgive you.' "
 He rushed on in a voice, half-choked with tears :
 "I cry to you now as a derelict :
 Condemn me not to my deep doom—although
 I know—I have no claim on your compassion ;
 But the great of soul never dispense their mercy
 In grudging scales in the measure of our merits :
 And so I appeal to you, King, to redeem me. '

Reject me not even though I have behaved
 Like a fiend of hell—as said to me Lord Brahma.
 I know I am unworthy, Sire, but you,
 O envied of the Gods, decline not now
 To intercede on my behalf. A saint
 Forgives because it is his native dharma,
 Even as the blind man's is to stumble and slip.”

With a stifled sob Durvasa flung himself
 At the feet of Ambarish who, quivering
 Like a leaf in storm, lifted the stricken monk,
 Embraced him and then said, in a moved voice :
 “Oh, how can you consign me to my doom
 By falling at my feet ? I could not speak
 So long because I was bemused, O Sage,
 By your incredible tale. I stood aghast !
 'Tis not a dream yet how can it be real :
 For you, a Brahmin, to implore me thus :
 Me—a mere King, a Kshatriya—bound by duty
 To defer to the Brahmin and do his will !
 Oh, I feel lost ! Do you not, Sage belong
 To the glorious race of seers and saints and prophets ?
 Did not your soul's high invocation first
 Bring down the Light of Heaven to direct
 Our dark, unhappy earth to His saviour Gleam ?
 Is it not written in the hoary Vedas
 That Brahmins came from the mouth of the God of gods

And we, Kshatriyas, issued from His arms ?
 So how can you thus doom me to perdition
 By thus abasing your exalted self
 Before a subordinate ? How can you cry,
 In tears, to me for mercy ? Mercy indeed !
 How could you thus forget that I am vowed
 To venerate you for my own salvation ?
 I am dismayed : perhaps in listening thus
 To a Brahmin's tribulations I have sinned
 And so infer that I must still be far
 Far from the Light—or else could such a fate
 Have dogged me thus ? I feel disconsolate
 To have attested to what I now have :
 A monk, a Brahmin, who has power to meet
 The great Gods face to face—yea, such a Yogi
 Comes to petition me, a lowly seeker,
 Whose only claim to Grace is that he feels
 Without its inner support even as helpless
 As the cripple without his crutches or a suckling
 Without its mother's breasts—nay, even more so :
 Because he knows that reft of Grace he is
 A nonentity on earth and so he needs
 Its light to see, its solace to be heartened,
 Its strength to bear and wings to dare to fly.
 So you, sage, I'll implore now in my turn :
 Humiliate me no more by standing thus
 Supplicating one who has grown to worship

The Brahmin as the Lord's own deputy,
Sent by His ruth to us, benighted souls,
That we may learn to passion for His Light.
How could you, holy sage, fall at my feet—
You who first taught mankind to bow to the One
Unseen Transcendent dwelling in every heart ?
O Brahmin, it was you who were empowered
To initiate us all into the hoary
Wisdom's lore, the profoundest mysteries
Of the soul's aspirings that we may bring down
To earth the Heaven's Inviolable Fire
Of Love Divine which burns away life's ills,
'Twas you who visioned first the One-in-all
And sang : 'I have known the Vast, the Sun-resplendent,
Stationed beyond the Dark—Who, when once known,
Redeems mortality and outlaws pain.'
You revealed to us the starry secrecies
Of the Viewless Immanent in all we see.
You chanted with a rhythm that thrilled the heart :
'The One who keeps His everlasting vigil
Upon the Peak—sleeps in the blind abyss
Waiting to be awakened and led back
To Him, the Father, who still calls to us,
His loved children—only we, alas,
In our long, long exile have forgotten Him,
Our birthnight, and so grope on in deep Night,
Glimpsing His radiance sometimes in our dreams

Only to lose it once more in dark sleep.
 And so, you sang, we must ascend again
 The Zenith Consciousness whence we can see
 That we are no mere clods which leap to life
 Momently to be frozen again by death
 Nay, we are sons of Immortality
 And must rewin our long-lost heritage.
 O Brahmin, all this we have learned from you—
 You, who were missioned by the Lord Himself
 To teach us how to cherish Him and grow,
 Regard Him as the dearest of the dear,
 See all in Him and Him in all that is
 And live to serve but Him alone on earth.
 And so it was ordained that you alone
 Could be the Guru because *your* life first opened
 Spontaneously like a bud to the Light on high,
 Released its pent intoxicating fragrance
 And set us on the trail of the perfume's source.
 You sang : 'As the scent first calls to the honey-bee
 That she may find her way to the unviewed flower,
 Even so, the Ambrosial wafts His deep aroma
 To lead to His Mystic Lotus the pilgrim soul,
 Entrancing it by His lone Love's appeal
 Which rang through the universe from the dawn of Time :
 'My Beauty waits behind all that repels,
 My Love behind all hate, my joy behind
 All pain, my harmony behind all strife.'

And lastly, O my mighty messenger,
 Who brought me His tidings, can I ever repay
 What I have received from you ? My blessed friend,
 You know not what you have now given to me.
 O Sage, it is no longer blood but the ichor
 That dances in my veins ! To think : my Lord
 My one Beloved, loves *me*, a thing of clay,
 A flotsam on the waves of circumstance !”

The King now with far-questing eyes upgazed
 At the sky where twinkled countless angel stars,
 And cried in tears: “Lord, can this truly be
 That thou still guardst me like a Sentinel ?
 O fathomless, scarless, blissful Being of Light !
 Can this indeed be true that thou, God, leanst
 To *me*, a speck of specks, a sinner of Sinners ?
 What am I, Lord, and what art thou ! And yet
 For thee to hail such a flawed love as mine !
 To send thy message of Grace to *me*, thy slave,
 That thou hast need of *me*—a thing so frail
 And pallid, wan and futile, small and blind,
 Who cannot even perceive thy touch when touched !
 And yet thou sayest—thou dependst on me
 Whose only lodestar is thy Gleaming Grace !
 How can I answer this ? What gifts have I
 To offer thee when all I have is thine ?

The sole return I can make is to own
My impotence to make thee any return."

His voice in a crescendo of flaming rapture
Rose high and vibrant to the tingling stars :
"O thou, whose Love's mere rumour fills the heart
With a numbing uncontainable tenderness !
Whose lone Beatitude's one single Ray
Inundates the soul with a whelming bliss !
Whose mystic laughter's one faint trill is caught
By sinless babes to peal forth heaven's own bells !
Whose tear's one sparkle makes the sunbeams chant
The rainbow hymn with the clouds' own choral choir !
Whose footfall's one far echo sets the ocean
Adance to the breeze in million-crested joy !
Oh, how can I even venture to sing thy glory ?
Can the opening shy corolla ever convey
With her virgin smile her heart's pent gratitude
To the unstinting bounty of the blue
Whose benison boons her with the power to blossom ?
Lord ! I know little, but this I am given to know
That thou leanst down to serve us, thy own slaves,
To initiate us in humility
Grant now that I may never once forget
That I am a naught and thou art All-in-all."
Then with a beatific smile the King
Addressed the monk who looked on dumb, bemused :

“Hail, hail, benignant minstrel-messenger
Of Love Divine ! Accept my heart’s deep homage.”

Kissing Durvasa’s feet, he rose and fastened
His eyes on Sudarshan who, waiting, hovered
Over his head. And then with folded hands :
“O thou who still sustainest on our earth
The law of dharma ! Smiter of God-rebels !
High symbol of His Grace ! Who ever redeemest
Even when thou dost slay or make us pass
Through desolate nights of pain and tribulation
Who burnest with the fire of flaming Rudra
The massed impediment of our vile karma
And, like the thunder, even when thou strikest
Accordst us visions of far lost horizons !—
If I be truly a humble devotee
Of the Lord; if I have ever longed on earth
For Him and His one Grace; if I have yearned
Only for Love’s asylum at His feet
In true, unbargaining self-dedication,
Then I implore thee to forgive my guest
Who came to me as the last trump of doom,
But stayed—such is the Wizard’s miracle *lila*—
To convey the message of the Everliving !”

Sudarshan answered : “So be it, O King !
He is absolved. Blessed is he who draws

Near thee even once, O thou, incarnate Flame
Of Love Divine ! For even when he burns,
He shall be purified for ever on earth.

A paradox is our Master's riddling Grace
Which blinds with pride the seers but dowers with vision
The faithful who accept, on bended knees,
His Love's initiation in self-surrender."

THE TITAN AND THE DWARF

The Gods and the Titans (*devas* and *asuras*) churned the Ocean of Life to precipitate the latent Nectar of Immortality. The *devas* were sponsored by Lord Narayan, the Primal God, as they had aligned themselves with Light, eager to serve the Divine Will. The *asuras*, who were stronger, chose to tread the path of self-will—and darkness—which led them, inevitably, to abysmal God-rebeliousness. But, too strong to be routed on the battle-field, they could only be circumvented by a ruse. Thus, when the golden bowl of the Nectar of Immortality emerged from the Ocean, Lord Narayan metamorphosed Himself into a siren of irresistible fascination, inveigled the *asuras* into surrendering the bowl (which they had seized, to the discomfiture of the *devas*) and let the *devas* partake of the Nectar, thereby endowing them with Immortality. Baulked of the coveted prize, the *asuras* fell in fury upon their everlasting enemies who, now rejuvenated by the Nectar, routed their exhausted assailants. Their great leader, Bali, fell down wounded and was rescued by his loyal henchmen who carried him over.

to their mountain-fastness. There the survivors were tended and healed by the Sage Shukracharya, the preceptor of the *asuras*, and were reorganised into a formidable army.

Next he initiated them into an arduous course of Yogic discipline (*tapasya*) and military strategy which won them invincibility in war. Thereafter, exultant and fortified, they, in a blitzkrieg, ejected the *devas* overnight out of their Elysian Abode (*Svarga*). Ousted and chased, they fled, utterly helpless against the lightning assault of their redoubtable enemies. But worse was to come, because the cosmic worlds—*Svarga*, *Marta* and *Patal*—having been conquered by the *asuras*, the fugitives could find no place where they might take refuge and live out their prospective term of exile. So in the end, to escape capture, they had to metamorphose themselves into subtle invisible forms and lived suspended in interstellar space, covered with shame and ignominy.

Bali now ruled the universe as a despot with none to question his sovereignty. Although a born egoist and utterly sure of himself, he was just, magnanimous and generous to a fault. He dispensed alms liberally and justice impartially and so, with time, grew far-famed as a capable ruler, too strong to be challenged and too proud to stoop to a lie. Lastly, upheld by the Brahminical power of the time and guided by the advice of his wise guru, Shukracharya, he became the undisputed monarch of the three worlds of whom all stood in awe.

In this dire impasse, Aditi—the Mother of Gods—implored her husband, the Sage Kashyap, to engineer the downfall of the *asuras* and restore to the *devas* their lost kingdom. But he, knowing the secret of Bali's meteoric rise to power, shook his head and answered that only Narayan, the God of gods, could work the miracle by outmanoeuvring Bali. She took his cue and undertook a year-long vow of hard austerities, invoking the Grace of the Lord.

BALI

Aditi prayed on sleeplessly
in tears all day and night
To Narayan, the God of gods :
 “Oh, come, Redeeming Light!
Who but thy self of flawless ruth
 can the earth's sad pain redress ?
Disperse the phalanxed clouds of hate,
 reveal thy Sun of Grace.
Behold : in storm rocks life's frail boat,
 hell's furies are abroad !
The shore is far, no beacon shines,
 the demon-waves applaud
Death's deluge, on the earth unleashed,
 God-rebels laugh in glee :
If thou decline to intervene,
 who'll heal the agony ?
Thou mad'st me bear the gods and angels
 who, now exiled, stay
Away, alas, from paradise,
 invisible in dismay !

Look, the dread Titans dominate
 the three worlds ! How canst thou
 Remain withdrawn when monsters vaunt ?
 Wield, wield thy discus now."

Then suddenly a marvellous light
 outflashed above her head.
 She gazed on in deep ecstasy :
 anon the lustre spread
 And took the form of Narayan
 whose exquisite eyes outwelled
 A heavenly tenderness and all
 her questionings were stilled.
 He gave her a radiant smile.
 "O blessed Mother of gods !" He said,
 "The end of the Titans' rule is nigh :
 men shall once more be led
 By the laws of Truth and Dharma. After
 every fell earthquake
 Flowers a stabler harmony:
 The crash brings in its wake
 A swift renaissance of the spirit,
 a deeper vision of life.
 The Titans flourish from age to age
 because, through every strife
 I usher in a richer era
 of plenitude and peace.

Through falls I make man higher rise,
 through God-defiance increase
 The glory of his next surrender.
 Reason never can read
 What I design and foreordain
 and whither my worlds I lead.
 The night of anguish never would
 be sanctioned by my Grace,
 If it deepened not the ensuing
 redeeming loveliness.
 So grieve no more but be my docile
 instrument on earth :
 From out your womb I will, as a marvel
 mannikin, seek birth
 To liberate the three worlds groaning
 under the Titan sway.
 But this secret guard that the Dwarf shall come
 the Giant to outplay.
 My deepest purposes are best
 achieved when unavowed :
 Only a few, my intimates, can
 see through the Maya's shroud.
 So open yourself to my Light's will
 with a flawless loyalty,
 For Divine Grace imposes grave
 responsibility."

After a year Aditi bore
 A child whose limbs were made of light.
 The sages sang : "Behold : He comes
 From *Vaikuntha* His troth to plight !

"Oh, bliss ! how His four heavenly arms
 Hold discus, lotus, conch and mace
 Shedding a stream of radiance
 No cloud nor stain can ever efface !

"An amaranth-wreath adorns His neck,
 A golden robe bedecks His waist !
 His brow is crowned with peacock's plumes
 And the pearl of pearls gleams on His breast !"

And so they hymned, athrill, the great
 Resplendent Avatar when, lo !—
 He changed into a human child,
 Aureoled with a mystic glow !

The invisible gods and angels sang :
 "Hail, hail, sublime epiphany !
 Hail, Vishnu, pledged to rescue earth,
 Descending from Infinity !"

* * * * *

A dwarf He was and so they named Him Vaman :
 A mannikin made of the essence of light :

An epitome of loveliness and grace,
 Endowed, withal, with a mysterious power
 Which overawed all : friends and foes and strangers.

When He was a boy of twelve, He fared from home
 To visit Bali who was celebrating
 The royal festival of Ashvamedh.*
 The King was sustained by a pleiad of priests,
 With the great Bhrigu and Shukra at their head.
 Drawn by his matchless prowess and reverence
 For the Brhamin's wisdom, they had all forgathered
 On the bank of the holy Narmada to sponsor
 The imperial fete. Vassals and visitors
 From far and near flocked in a ceaseless stream
 To the bejewelled vast pavilion.

On that bright and memorable morn, the sun,
 Even as a minstrel, sang of Light Divine
 Triumphant over the myrmidons of Night
 And of the joy of life outlawing pain.
 On the bank of the ancient river men and women
 Had assembled to pay homage to their King.

A great king who aspired to be recognised as the Emperor was wont, of yore, to release a royal horse to gallop all round the country. Where-ever the royal horse fared came, officially, under the sway of the king. Anyone who questioned it and held the horse had to fight the royal army, to be defeated in the end. When the horse at last returned, the royal victory was celebrated with due eclat, by offering oblation to the sacred sacrificial Fire (*jajna*) lit by the priests.

They talked in whispers of his peerless valour
And power that had grown into a legend
Even in his life-time. Beautiful maids belauded
His towering personality; the women
Adored his versatility and strength;
Men—his magnetic charm and regal poise,
Brilliant intellect and flaming pride
That brooked no rival in the universe,
And even his enemies admired his great
Regard for truth—above all, his large heart
That counted no cost in dispensing largess.
To all who came to him for patronage.

On the King's right a pyramid stood of sacks
Of grains and rugs and robes and scrabs and blankets
For the succour of the sick and destitute.
On his left were heaped the royal treasures : shining
Presents from princes, merchants, chieftains, vassals :
Carpets and curtains, ivory and gold,
Caskets of rings and chaplets, glittering swords,
Fierce javelins, resplendent bows and arrows
And multifarious gifts from all who came
To propitiate the King of the triple worlds.
In the centre a roaring, sacrificial Fire
Burned wafting incense-perfumes. Priests and minstrels
The imperial glory hymned in a choral choir
Impregnating the air with a thrilled awe.

A premonition of something stupendous;
A fateful apocapypse was in the air.

A sudden murmur rippled through the vast
August assembly...A stir arose as all
Stared, bemused, at the marvel Mannikin
Who calmly stepped into the mighty tent,
A quizzical smile flickering on His lips,
Rathe even as shy rose-petals. His deep eyes,
With a far-off look, shone, twin inviolate stars,
His juvenile head was nimbussed with a halo,
His diaphanous skin glowed like a crystal
Unable to hide an irrepressible flame !
The holy transversal thread girdled His chest,
His body shimmered white with sacred ashes.
Upon His head lay coiled black tufted hair.
A few stray curls frisked on His ivory brow.
He held His head high, carrying in one hand
A *kamandalu**, in the other a staff,
The insignias of an anchorite of the cave.
A garland adorned His neck, a scarf His torso :
A hush fell on the audience as He stood,
A statuesque figure, facing the Emperor
Bali, who rose and greeted Him with a smile.
With one accord the great assembly rose,
Even the consistory of the sages—

An ascetic's vessel containing water.

Bhrigu, Shukra, and others who never paid
 Homage to strangers—felt impelled to rise
 And bow to the Dwarf who stood before the Titan.
 Bali beckoned to Vindyavali, his Queen,
 Who ran to the visitor with a bowl of water
 Wherewith she laved His tiny dawn-rose feet.

When all resumed their seats, the Emperor
 Addressed the marvellous pilgrim : “Hail my friend !
 We all accord you welcome. Be at home
 And give us all your beneficent blessing.
 Our sacrificial Fire gains in lustre
 By your spiritual glow, O luminous one !
 Your status is writ large on your radiant face.
 You have attained already the ultimate gnosis,
 Attested by your personality.
 You sanctify our royal festival
 And ourself by your great, effulgent presence.
 Accept our salutation, and command
 How we may serve you? What is your desire ?
 Horses and cows and land for tillage, houses,
 Chariots or elephants or retinue,
 Or is it a lovely princess you would wed ?
 You have but to name your wish and we’ll comply.”

The Dwarf smiled affably and bowed and then,
 Appraising him, said : “This behoves you, Sire !
 Your words and gestures are studied to perfection.

Born great, you never were content to rest
On your laurels. You enlarged your heritage
By reckless courage and loyalty to your kin
Who are sustained by you even as are trees
By the subterranean sap they need for growth.
You have, indeed, fulfilled the expectations
Of all who fawned on you since you were a child.
You have shed lustre on your race and kind.
Your noble ancestors look on you from Heaven
And sing in just pride : 'Blessed are we, thrice-blessed,
That our own scion has lived to achieve a glory
Undreamt-of by his forbears. What a King !
Who metes out justice like the Lord of karma
And mercy rains even as the angel clouds !'
You are pleased by adulation but never stay
Attached to sycophants. You flower in light
And plenitude but never have dreaded hardships.
Your feet tread earth but head consorts with rainbows.
You joy in life but life for you is not
A round of Bacchanalian orgy—cheap
Amusements with their legacies of boredom.
You live to grow and grow to wrest the stars
To serve as blooms for the vases of your Court.
You hanker not for peace but deep adventure.
You love the dare of the undaunted soul,
Inebriate of peril which spurs you on
With its clarion call : 'Arise and wing the blue,

Scorning the pull of earth and the hissing storm.'
 Your watchword is achievement, first and last.
 You draw your breath to evolve against the fates,
 To flower in face of blizzards. What lesser men
 Are baffled by, like the maw of the dread abysm,
 You nonchalantly stroll to span. The steep
 Ascent, the weak stare at appalled, exhorts
 The intrepid mountaineer in you to climb.
 Audacity is your mantra, O King ! The word
 'Impossible' you loathe. 'Twas not for nothing
 Your peerless mother crooned this lullaby
 Nightly to put her unique child to sleep :

'Who calls you frail, my flower ?
 When I know—your destiny
 Is the heart's pent fragrance to shower
 On all unstintingly ?

'In vain, my nestling, I sing :
 Sleep, sleep in peace in my breast.
 For I know—you will waken to wing
 The spaces, blue-obsessed.

'Who fears to lose and cries
 Forfeits the little he has,
 Who his all stakes wins the prize :
 The prudent stay paupers, alas !'

"And so a great mother's greater son, you grew
 Upon this alien earth—a lonely hunter
 Of the Unattainable, the Infinite.
 To build a garden of roses where koels call
 Was never your dream. Nor honeyed words of lovely
 Adoring women made you feel fulfilled.
 Still less were you enamoured in your life
 Of the holiday of the lotus-eating lollers.
 No wonder your insatiable spirit
 Explored the untrodden dangerous domains.
 Whenever your heart is kindled—you respond
 With your magnificent vitality.
 And so you long to lavish all you have
 For the succour of the homeless destitutes."

Vaman paused and smiled, then with a bow :
 "But I have come to seek a modest gift.
 I only need, to live, a patch of land,
 An area covered by three steps of mine.
 But promise first that this you will concede
 Nor go back on your word whatever transpires."

Bali, bewildered, smiled : "How can you ask
 For a gift so puerile ? And yet, I wonder :
 Can there be more in it than meets the eye ?
 A petition such as this, coming from you,
 Can hardly be dismissed as a pointless joke.

For although I know not your antecedents,
Nor why you come to me with such a strange
Request that makes no sense—this I do know :
You are no dwarf of human origin.
A light is on your face : you shall stand out
In any concourse, even as a snow-capped peak
Stands out among the lesser cliffs and rocks.
Mellifluous is your speech—like exquisite verse
Whose cadence lingers on in memory.
Your thoughts impinge upon the soul and open
Opalescent doors that give on golden vistas.
You have, besides, betrayed yourself, my friend,
By quoting my dead mother's lullaby
A dear old song which only I remember,
But known to none else. This is, in itself,
A proof that you are not a common seer,
A harmless hermit of forgotten forests,
But a wizard who can resurrect the past.
Your stunted body belies your giant spirit.
You seem to be an eagle of fire disguised :
And yet you do bemuse your audience,
Like a lion begging for a grape ! O Sphinx,
Cast now aside once and for all your mask
And tell me why you laugh at me, the King
Of kings, who can, even as the god of gods,
Vouchsafe to you any boons. Friend, when you come,
As a suppliant, to Bali, the Bounteous,

Know this: only the sky can be the limit.
 So pray for a boon more solid and less fantastic.
 A kingdom, sage, is yours now for the asking;
 But masquerade no more as a fool who jests—"

"But friend," the Dwarf rejoined, "I was not jesting
 Nor masquerading as a clown. I came
 To implore your Majesty to grant me but
 A patch of land to stand on. Sire, no Brahmin
 Dare garner wealth or vanities, nor crave
 On earth for more than the bare minimum.
 He knows in his soul that hankerings never are
 Appeased by being fed. Desire, like fire,
 Grows ravenously when plied with strong fuel,
 And so the wise never covet transient things :
 The ephemeral bubbly brood of circumstance
 That, leaping on Time's crests, dissolve in Time.
 The true sage yearns but for the starry train
 No clouds can quench nor tyrant Fate outrule.
 Even his will to life he longs to merge
 In the will of One who started the worlds in Time.
 His physical, mental, psychic energies
 He only marshals as a slave employs
 His initiative to serve the lord he loves.
 Aspiring to life divine this first I learned
 When, in my cradle, I heard my mother croon,
 Smiling over my head, her lullaby :

‘May you, darling, learn to see
 That the One who calls you His own
 Exhorts you sleeplessly
 To hark back to His Flute alone.

‘He invites you hourly to savour
 His world-play here below
 And sings : “Through courting my favour
 My children evolve and grow.”

‘The world when He’s unmet
 Is a vale of desolate pain
 Where even in sleep you fret
 And cry again and again.

‘But when Him you’ll know, my bird,
 And glimpse His marvel Face,
 You shall wing, fulfilled, skyward
 Sustained by His blue caress.

‘Hunting for pleasures vain
 You but clasp the shadows and moan,
 The highest you shall not attain
 Till the lesser loves you disown.

‘They stay life’s underlings
 Who aspire not to His bliss :
 He alone is the King of kings
 Who longs but to be His.’

“And so I humbly adjure you, noble King,
 To tempt me no more with spurious boons. I must
 Stay loyal to my dharma, nor ask for
 More than I *need* : a modest plot of land
 That but three of my tiny feet can measure.
 I only implore you once more, Sire, to swear
 Solemnly that you will fulfil your pledge.”

The Titan sighed and smiled indulgently.
 “Since you insist, I cannot choose but yield.
 So be it : I’ll announce now before all
 That I am pleased to make you over the plot—”

“Nay, tarry, Sire, I pray,” cried out his Guru
 Shukra in a voice of deep dismay. The King,
 Startled, appraised him, marvelling. The sage
 Rushed on indignantly : “I meditated
 And found out the identity of this stranger.
 He is no human, but the Lord Himself
 Who comes, incognito, to play a new
 And disastrous role : with a gigantic ruse,
 Through your own solemn pledge, He’ll wrest from you
 The empire you have won. His twin feet shall
 Expand anon : one foot to cover the earth,
 The other—interstellar space. A third
 Shall from his navel emerge. How will you then
 Accord him, Sire, the land you will have promised ?
 ’Tis good, indeed, to give : but how can one

Give all away ? The scriptures sanction giving,
But never squandering, far less the flaunting
Of generosity to impress the world.

The wise can never applaud the fool who will
Sign all away to another and dwindle, alas,
Into a beggar. Nay, no rich life flowers
On the barren soil of dismal penury."

The Titan flushed and answered in a voice
Quavering with a deep subdued emotion :

"For me, alas, 'tis too late now to retrace
My steps, O Guru ! Once I have said I will
Grant a suppliant's prayer, I may thereafter
Unsay it no more. Nor can I withhold
A gift I owe to my honoured, royal guest.

I hold : an Emperor is obligated
To cleave to his twofold dharma : one to fulfil
A promise given : the other to rebuke
Prudence that stems from fear. So, master mine,
Forgive me if I cannot concur with you.

Say, how can I play safe at this late day—
I who have ever despised the man who dreads
To grapple with fate ? Have I not been too proud
Even to genuflect to Providence
For boons I have not *earned* ? Have I not claimed
That man, in a hostile world, is the architect
Of his own destiny ? And, above all,
A King, to stay a King, must never palter
With Truth—even to stave off certain doom."

Shukra, the Guru, turned a fiery red
And countered acidly : "How would you, fool,
Define Truth's shadowy lineaments ? Truth is
No marble statue, nor a stable flower of flame :
It is but a principle that thrives on life's
Fertile ground even as a garden thrives
On the soil of earth and declines with the earth's
Fertility—changing, growing and decaying
With time and climate. So the wise have named
Truth a chameleon of multiple hues,
Or, if you will, a hydra-headed Circe
With whom one can not parley with rigid codes.
The scriptures say that Truth is, first and last,
A compromise, a bargain closed by prudence
Born of a varied experience of the world.
Earth-life can only live on what it needs,
Stirring in the soil as rich creative sap.
Truth only serves as this pervasive juice
When the tree of life can draw it for its roots,
Flowers, fruits and leaves. As a pure abstraction,
It allures but poets and philosophers
Who yearn in vain to live in its dream castles.
Gold in its pristine purity never lends
Itself to be moulded into ornaments
Even so, Truth, to be gainful, must admit
The alloy of life—then only comes the fusion
Which makes for growth and the ultimate fulfilment.

So when one's life is menaced by a hard,
 Intolerant pressure of the ideal Truth,
 One must repel it as an assault of Falsehood.
 Therefore, O fool idealist, never bank
 On the so-called Truth at war with the ends of life :
 Fame and success, delight and plenitude.
 To sum up : be this your one guiding mantra :
 'I'll only aim at self-unfolding through
 The discipline that deepens the soul's one thirst :
 To grow in power and rich expansive joy.'
 Yea, Truth, to be commended, must promote
 The impulses that lead to a flowering
 Of all that dormant sleeps in the seed of life.

"You say you are committed to your pledge.
 But what is a pledge ? A mere sonorous cry
 Which must be judged not by what it imports,
 But by the sole test : whether it upholds
 The last fulfilment of life's master urge.
 You are a King whose dharma is to rule
 And bring prosperity to all who look
 To you as the one pathfinder in life's darkness.
 How can you pledge yourself then to renounce
 Your Kingdom—to revel in what barren pride
 And senseless joy in penury ? For whose sake
 Would you accept dethronement—for what void
 Fool's paradise ? Renunciation may be
 The dharma of the hermit of the cave

Who truns his back on life to nestle in
 A featureless nonentity of hush.
 For him it may be a true call, but not
 For you whose destiny is dynamic living
 Here below and not the Nirvan's Nihil.
 The child thrives on its mother's milk—not adults
 Who must claim stronger meat. The vulture revels
 In carrion, the bee in honey. Man
 Must keep faith with his native aspiration
 To grow in girth and altitude. O King,
 Cast not aside your heritage of glory
 For the sake of a day-dream, a sky-born bloom.
 Truth, to be fecund, must bring in its wake,
 Like beneficent light and air, a climate
 Conducive to a flowering of life,
 Myriad-mooded, multitudinous.
 The formal, verbal Truth leads not to the heights
 Where break out glorious vistas of delight :
 More often is it a call calamitous
 Of the temptress, Maya, who intoxicates
 Our senses only to wrench us off our moorings:
 So held the wise in the immemorial scriptures,
 The mountaineers who won to the summit-vision."

A cloud came over the Titan's ivory brow,
 He brooded awhile, then answered in a tone
 Tinctured with melancholy : "I accept
 Your admonition, Sire, with gratitude.

Your loving and deep solicitude for me
 Has moved me like a dear remembered face
 Greeting one in a dream. And yet, alas,
 My heart declines to endorse what you have now
 Elucidated with such passionate fervour."
 His voice dropped to a whisper : "But I own :
 I feel a trifle sad. Never once, indeed,
 Did I surmise the import of my guest's
 Fantastic plea ! To think that the Lord Himself
 Should have sought birth as a dwarf to bring about
 My swift downfall ! How could I penetrate
 A superhuman mask that looked so human ?
 But still beg leave I must to follow my own
 Dharma and lights to the bitter end and face
 The consequence—whatever it may be.
 You know, O Guru, I am no seer or saint,
 But a God-rebel, a King, who came to clash
 With gods and angels because I resented
 Their monstrous conduct : we were duped and baulked
 Of the Nectar we had churned out of the ocean.
 But though they are immortals now, I rose
 Higher than they by dint of my own strength
 And courage and arduous self-discipline,
 Following sleeplessly my native dharma
 Of a noble Emperor whose one ambition
 Was to oust the gods and rule the three worlds. But
 I aspire to rule, enthroned on Truth and Honour,
 Still vowed unstintingly to answer all

Who come to me to beg for boons, depending
 On my magnanimous munificence.
 I live to grow and grow to pluck from sky
 The star-blooms for the vases of my Court,
 As complimented me my guest, the Dwarf.
 But I long, withal, to grow in fearless pride,
 Remaining loyal to my life's two codes :
 First, I must, never break a pledge once given,
 Secondly, I must never refuse to answer
 The appeal of a suppliant wooing my favour.
 I prize no other ideal more, nor can
 Admit the scriptures' dicta which my heart
 Declines to undersign. A rebel from birth,
 I only follow the lights that speak to me,
 Raising deep echos in my soul's lone chamber.
 A law unto myself, I cannot bow
 To an outer authority, present or past,
 A Titan I am and a Titan I'll remain
 Holding ever aloft the banner of Truth.
 Since childhood I have harked to the conch of strength
 'Rise higher—ever higher—pauselessly
 To dizzy heights, laughing at the abyss.'
 A pilgrim of the pinnacle of dare,
 I have only yearned to climb to the peak of power
 On a stair of storms burning to battle with fate.
 I have, perhaps, now come to my journey's end,
 Since Narayan Himself, has come, you say,
 To duel with me, armed with a mystic ruse

I know not how to meet : He holds me, alas,
 At bay with a solemn pledge I must redeem.
 But my die is cast, there is now no retreat
 Back to my safe imperial citadel."

He turned to VindhyaVali, his Queen, and gave
 A rueful smile : "Draw near, beloved mine,
 With the holy water of blue Narmada
 I must now take the inviolable pledge."

Wiping her eyes, the beautiful Queen complied,
 Consigning to the King, with trembling hands,
 The bowl of water. A chorus of stifled sobbing
 Broke out and rippled through the audience,
 As Bali held upon his palm the water
 And, standing, in a stentorian voice announced :
 "All, all who are here assembled, witness bear
 To my irrevocable vow : I will
 Give to my guest, the Dwarf, the land he begs,
 The area measured out by His triple stride.
 The sun may freeze, the moon belch tongues of fire.
 And the Himaloy may tumble into the ocean
 But I will redeem my promise, come what may."
 He turned now to his Guru with glistening eyes.
 "Forgive me, master, if I cannot bring
 Myself to follow your deep wisdom's lead.
 I love not kingdom less, but love Truth more
 And hold that staking all one has for Truth
 Is a mightier achievement than to die

In battle a hero's death. In history
 Millions have laid down their lives in war :
 But few are they who dare to stake their all
 At the altar of Truth. I can face all but the deep
 Stigma of a broken pledge. For Truth I would
 Bid adieu, unflinchingly, to all I cherish.
 As a boy, I heard earth's immemorial, lone
 And anguished cry, still ringing in my ears :
 'My breast can bear the dance of the fiends of hell,
 But the burden of shameless liars makes me quail.'
 'Tis even so with me. Let thunders fall
 To smite me, deluge abrogate my kingdom,
 Or black earthquake annihilate my race :
 I stand or fall by Truth and Truth alone."

A diapason of inviolable ecstasy
 Burst out aloft, then, from on high, rained down exultantly
 A stream of fragrant petals on
 the proud head of the king,
 As a thrilled, inspired choir of sages
 chanted : "Sing, all sing !
 Hail, hail divine epiphany, miraculous sunrise !
 Who comest to outrule dark brooding fears
 and lift the earth to skies !
 From out the blue a dream delight
 breaks out ! A loveliness,
 Unglimpsed by mortal eyes, unveils
 its visage, a high Grace

Repeals the yoke of old Despond ! O joy !
 pent hopes grow wings !
 Who dare hold now that life is doomed
 and men are underlings ?
 Lo, a time-born Titan at one bound wins immortality,
 Resolving Discord's Night into the Dawn of Harmony !

"Brave warriors have laid down their lives
 to attain a deathless fame :
 Great prophets have borne insults,
 preaching the Heavenly Father's Name :
 Lone saints have suffered wounds and jeers,
 forgiving those who hurt :
 But when did ever an Emperor
 take vow that he would part
 With all he had to abide by a promise
 given to a masked Foe,
 When before all had been unmasked His deep incognito?
 To die for a cause is great, but to live
 and stake one's all for a word
 Pledged to an enemy—who ever has a like tale heard ?
 In gratefulness, O Wizard Avatar, we bow to thee
 Who hast inspired this epic of sublime nobility !"

The Dwarf then gave a beatific smile
 To initiate a play divine whose moves
 Were inconceivable. All stood in awe
 As they appraised the Lord who manifested.

His Self before the Titan. His deep purpose
 In His new role was undecipherable
 As the lesson of the book of nebulae
 Writ with the alphabet of lonely flames.
 And 'twas to serve this purpose He had sought
 Birth in a woman's womb—to appease and free
 The pent sky-thirst of earth's Blue Birds of Light
 Who beat their bleeding wings against the walls
 Of dark invulnerable dungeons built
 By the phalanxed might of the Ego's citizens :
 A task no death-bound power could achieve
 Without the Immortal's lightning intervention.
 His pigmy stature now swelled and swelled until
 It choked the far-flung spaces, and His body
 Was rife with untold worlds whose denizens
 Challenged Infinity's boundless Vastitude.

Bali, the demon King, with wide-eyed wonder,
 Witnessed the magic increase of the Dwarf's
 Disparate limbs till each became a giant
 Continent of things that teemed and throbbed
 And loved and warred and glittered—to symbol forth
 The nameless Transcendental Consciousness
 That hurled the Cosmic march of names and forms.
 And he saw, a-heave with rapture that was pain
 And terror that was one with ravishment :

From Vishnu's feet hung darkling, the abyss
 With range on range of primal sky-capped mountains.

His garments dripped slow tender twilight shades.
His navel loomed even as the mystic sky.

His vast abdomen housed the demon hordes ;
His belly—the seas ; his breast—the stars and planets ;
Dharma indwelt His heart ; the moon—His mind :
And round His neck gleamed white the Goddess Beauty
Holding the lovelit Lotus of harmony.

The Gods were on His arms and on His head—
The Heaven beyond the clutch of sin and sorrow.
His tresses held the clouds, His breath—the winds ;
His eyes flashed suns, His mouth emitted fire ;
His tongue poured rains ; His Word—the Vedic lore.

His eyebrows gave command and disapproval ;
His eyelashes—day and night; His forehead—wrath.
His lips roused greed and touch—concupiscence ;
His steps created sacrificial works ;
His smile—the make-believe of siren Maya ;
His intellect—the Father of Comic Life ;
His senses—seers and angels ; His shadow—Death.

The spectators, wonder-hushed, gazed in rapt awe
On Baman's stupendous, space-engulfing form,
Rife with the cosmic worlds, even as skies
Are rife with stars and glittering galaxies.
The gods and angels, who had stayed so long

Invisible in space, now thronged, athrill,
 Before the Colossus and in chorus hymned
 His great delivering glory, to which Heaven's
 Damsels, the lovely Apsaras, danced in rapture.

When the psalm had come to a close and Barman resumed
 His human form, his mount, the giant Eagle,
 Garud, chained Bali. The women sobbed. The Queen
 Addressed the Dwarf, in tears, in a husky voice :
 "If you be the Lord Himself, how can you thus
 Humiliate a high-souled Emperor
 Who gave you all he had owned upon earth
 To redeem his promise—only for Truth's sake ?
 The great should, first and last, respect true greatness.
 How could you pinion him, a mighty King,
 As though he were a common criminal ?
 I appeal to you, not as a haughty Queen,
 But as a woman who feels outraged by
 A black injustice hurting the moral sense
 To which the soul is heir from birth : the sense
 That has evolved in courage, strength and beauty
 But tardily with life's slow uphill climb
 Against the background of an unmoral world :
 A rich and precious heritage hard to win
 But easy to forfeit in a moment's folly.
 How can you permit this if you be He
 Who first inspired in man the high ideals

And virtues which distinguish him from beasts
 And mark him as the crown of your creation ?
 How can you violate the sanctity
 Of the values you yourself have fostered, Lord,
 As the Father of the spirit's noblest dreams ?"

Bali now hotly interposed : "Nay, Queen,
 It is not dignified to appeal, complain :
 A Titan Queen must cherish the Titan pride
 And scorn to clamour even for fair play.
 Guard jealously from the vulgar gaze what only
 The elect, who love ideals, can understand.
 We, Titans, who have rebelled against the Gods
 Must never cringe to an alien, Saviour Grace,
 Even when we fall into the abyss
 Of dark defeat or deep calamity.
 Is not ours the gospel of strength and will
 And faith in the Titan's own invincible power,
 To rescue the soul and cleave to our Titan values
 We must hold with our native might alone ?

The Queen, in silence, bowed and quelled her tears,
 And startled, gazed as a third foot emerged
 From Baman's navel. The King, too, stared in wonder :
 Where was the space to offer as its foothold ?
 Brooding, he lowered his head. Narayan smiled :
 "How now, my boastful king of the three worlds ?
 How will you vindicate your royal vaunt :

You have the power to grant all what they ask ?
 Alas, how signally you fail to keep
 Your pledge to a simple dwarf who merely begged
 For a plot of land to hold his feet ! You saw
 Your mighty empire swamped by my two feet.
 Where am I now to place my poor third foot ?
 Redeem your pledge or be consigned to Hades
 To expiate the sin of a broken promise,
 And empty vaunt exposed by mocking Fate !
 For a Titan to be beaten by a dwarf !”

The proud King smiled and answered : “Dwarf ! I am
 Not beaten yet. My empire I have lost :
 But I’ll win again and mock at mocking Fate.
 To show it was no empty vaunt I voiced,
 I offer my head for your third foot and swear :
 Till death I’ll hold it—to fulfil my pledge.”

Then Baman smiled on Bali
 And placed his third foot on
 His crowned head as, in Heaven
 The thrilled sun, smiling, shone.
 The gods and angels, on high too,
 Now smiled triumphantly
 And smiled on earth the sages
 And prophets in ecstasy.

Anon, a subdued murmur
 Broke out and rippled through

The vast, august assembly
And suppliants, come to woo

The munificence of the Titan,
Whose flaming eyes and face
Grew tender as tears of rapture
Streamed down his cheeks apace,

And loved the Mannikin's third foot
He kissed adoringly,
In a world-oblivious passion's
Uncontainable ecstasy.

"Glory to thee, O Wizard !"
The saints sang marvelling,
"O Dwarf who couldst in a moment,
Transform a Titan King !

"We have heard of thy miracle power
That rules the earth and sky
And makes the heart's droplet mirror
Thy deep of eternity.

"But to impel a giant rebel
With a single touch of thine
To kiss thy feet in worship
This is sublime, divine !

“Lord, who can thy play fathom,
 Whose Love in time and space
 Has made the teeming starworlds
 Twinkle with its loveliness !”

The vibrant paeon trailed off into a hum
 When Bali, glancing up, met Rāman's gaze.
 He said, in a voice quavering with emotion :
 “I never thanked my fiery pride, my Lord,
 As I do now. For would you have come down
 From your Abode, had I not, in my pride,
 Proclaimed myself as King of the three worlds ?
 I own you have subdued me at long last :
 But have you not achieved this with a ruse,
 Swift as whirlwind, only to open my eyes,
 Blinded with the ego's mists, to the inherent
 Transience of all splendour of earthly pomp
 Which, like a castle of cards, is razed by a mere
 Whistle of mocking Fate—a breath, a tremor
 Of an ambushed Nihil waiting all mortal glory ?
 But this was not all : you, Compassionate, came
 To initiate me in the blessedness
 Of deep surrender at your lotus feet
 You laid me low to show me through my lone
 Abysmal fall that man can never build
 A palace of joy on desire's shifting sands ;
 That no enduring citadel of power

Can be erected save on the rock of Grace
 All earthly glammers are but phantom glints
 Luring the soul astray to a vale of tears.
 Or, winging to the siren rainbow, we clasp,
 Alas, but an arc of vapours—void and cold !”

A noble eloquence descended on
 The Emperor who rushed on : “So, my Lord,
 If still I claim I have not lost but won
 Against you in this inconceivable duel,
 Turning into victory my dire defeat,
 How would you prove me wrong ? And even this
 Is not all. I must voice a deeper claim :
 Your magic touch gave me a thrilling vision.
 I feel that the Grace I attained today
 Was not fortuitous, since you yourself
 Had made me its initiate and trained
 My soul to accept to see the ultimate Truth :
 That you alone are the Doer—not we who dance
 To the tunes you call though we claim 'tis our show.
 But at your touch the scales fell from my eyes
 And I saw : I had aspired to grow because
 This aspiration stirred my soul's unsated
 Yearning to glimpse infinity till I was
 Ripe for the great apocalyptic Vision.
 Then you came and touched me with your magic wand
 And lo, I saw, a thrill, that only the deep

Of Divinity could slake my quenchless thirst,
 But this I had not known before your Advent
 And so had ached for sovereign power alone
 Not happiness, nor a safe retreat of peace,
 Far less the senses' revelry with its void
 And inescapable aftermath of sighs.
 I passioned but for power with all its glory,
 As the thirst for power is insatiable
 And ambition grows with restless strength. And so
 I parted company with the gods and angels
 Who live in a static world of stagnant peace,
 Spinning on its axis round everlasting life,
 Wallowing in a pool of irised bubbles,
 Limited joys that pall because they stay
 Clinging to an anchor, sundered from the flow
 And surge of Time athrill to meet the Timeless.
 Nay, Lord, your gods live not the godly life
 For all their mystic halo they derive
 From the bounty of an alien Almighty."

He pursed his lips in wrath : "Hark, there they are
 Chanting triumphantly : 'The wicked Titans
 Have been chastised and we are masters again
 Of our lost Kingdom ! Glory to thee, O Lord !"
 He gave a bitter laugh : "Masters indeed !
 Who, in sheer dread of the Titans, lived so long
 Suspended in space—lone, incorporeal,

Unmourned and hunted spirits ! Or, perhaps,
 They delved deep down into the womb of earth
 To escape recapture and so, now grown blind,
 Fail to see that 'tis not a victory
 But the worst defeat they ever sustained ! To think
 You, Lord of the Vaikuntha, had to come
 And resort to ruse to give them back a kingdom
 They could not wrest from us with all their strength
 And nectar-endowed immortality !
 Yet hark, how they are flaunting a defeat,
 A reinstatement given to them as alms !
 How dare they call us 'wicked Titans'—we
 Who claim but what we earn—rich conquests' glory
 And real achievements won and buttressed by
 Our giant discipline and phalanxed might !
 Oh, how we, lions, despise the shameless dogs
 Who bark from afar when we lie prone, in sleep,
 And fly pell-mell at a mere leonine growl !
 Nay, Lord, you know we are no fiends of hell,
 But your true heirs in endless aspiration,
 Vowed pilgrims of the perilous, infinite climb,
 Yearning to soar up to your viewless zones
 Braving blizzards and thunders, storms and lightning ;
 'Tis not an accident that we have routed
 Time and again your nurslings, the mighty gods
 Who can only praise you—never emulate."

His flashing eyes grew dim as he resumed

After a pause : "Forgive me, Lord, my vaunt,
 The trailing cadence of a Titan cry,
 A ghost still to be laid. Bless me that I
 May die to my old world of pride and vaunt
 And be reborn to yours, of Love and Light.
 Forswear I must my ancient feuds and rancours
 And bow to your decree : let gods rule Heaven,
 But give that I may seek my last asylum
 At your twin feet—you who, by your magic touch,
 Have made me see that the heights our self-will scales
 Can never rival those the soul attains
 On the wings endowed by your supernal Grace.
 You made me see, thanks to this chastisement,
 That no achievement here below could equal
 The feat of Love's surrender to your will.
 For only the strongest, loftiest will can bend
 Our self-will to submit unquestioningly
 To your award, to do your will divine
 I ache now for that Boon of boons—the will
 To tame the ego's perverse rebellion
 With the might of radiant, adoring Love.
 Make me your Flute and you the Flutist be :
 For then, I know, shall flow through me the flawless,
 Inviolable melodies you will compose."

He bowed and went on in an ecstasy :
 "I bow to you and pray : my Master be.
 I call to you : take all I own on earth.

I cry to you : make me everlastingly
Your child, in life and death, from birth to birth.

“I know not what you are nor strive to know,
Nor whither we are bound through our dark pain :
I only see you come, incognito,
To golden our Night with Love’s Sunrise again.”

Releasing Bali from his chains, the Lord
Addressed him with a tender smile : “My friend,
I bless you : you have won the Eye of Light,
The supreme vision, coveted of gods.
You have reclaimed your long-lost heritage
By dint of your sincerity and strength :
Nay, not the strength which clamours blatantly
For phantam laurels—vaunting, challenging,
Rattling sabres, dealing lightning doom,
Proclaiming transient victories—but the strength
That can eschew the gospel of the Ego
For true humility’s—on bended knees ;
The sungold strength that comes when the soul awakes
From its age-long sleep of maya, with the light
Of morning in its eyes ; the strength which lies
Latent in one’s core as the flower in bud
And fruit in flower—the birthright, first and last,
Of the authentic sons of Immortality.
And you are right : you *are* my child and heir :
Wherefore you were born on earth, a lover of dreams,

A Bird of Fire, a nursling of the skies,
Who found no rest in life's dark cage—whose wings
Ached for the blue and beat *against* the bars :
Wherefore you yearned to grow and grow in rich
Achievements till you touched the zenith vault,
And loved the lullaby your mother sang
Of the soul longing to climb to dizzy heights,
Athirst for the highest vision that laughs at doom,
Vowed to conquer a Kingdom no dark Fate
Could menace with its cruel, fierce assaults.
No wonder you were not drawn by the finite
Happiness or peace or the senses' revels,
And pined, ever homesick, for the vanished glory.
As a whelp herded with sheep cannot forget
Its leonine pedigree, nor bleats to hail
Its fellows in the fold, but only growls,
Even so, you would growl to disown those
Ushered to you as your kin. For, O elect,
Deep down in your lone soul the lion in you
Knew what it hungered for : the thrilling call
To be esteemed as the King among your kind.
In the spaciousness of your imperial soul
Nothing petty or mean could find a niche.
A regal, authentic scion of the Vast,
You were sent down to be with Titans housed,
A heart of flame plunged into a world of frost,
For a deep purpose of mine : you came equipped
To play your part in a new gorgeous drama.

In a dark age where the rebel Ego rules
With Hades' lieutenants masked as Heaven's Messiahs,
You came, sky-missioned, to proclaim the Truth
That the seed of dawn sleeps in the heart of dusk,
And lustre cannot be dethroned by Night
You were elected by my mystic Will
To meet the challenge of the atheist mind
And attest, by your conversion, to the Deep
Waiting the wistful drop—to promulgate
That even over Hell broods Love Divine
Calling to dark hordes with the same tenderness
As it calls to the sons of Immortality.
But when Grace comes you must respond to a new
Bugle call of responsibility.
And so you must now rise to your summit stature
To accept my Love's behest : disclaim forever
Your Titan impulses to be reclaimed
By Grace Divine. In true humility,
Go down to rule dark *Patal's* underworld
There, in the empire of Inconscience,
Announce, with my authority, the message
Of Superconscience. Prepare the ground
In the unregenerate continent of dusk
For the advent of my sun-compassionate Dawn,
A gigantic task none but you can accomplish.
O noble despot, disown the gospel of Pride
For Love's—and henceforth act as my vicegerent.

Invested with the sanction of my Light
 And crowned with my resistless power of Bliss,
 The seed of the Soul's Awakening sow in the bleak
 Country of Sleep—the nameless No Man's Land.
 Sing there of my pledge that the nescient Void shall be
 Resonant with my sun-song of delight.
 Initiate the Abyss to receive the blessing
 Of my blissful Harmony that absolves the last
 Dualities : pain and joy, despair and hope,
 Darkness and light, death and eternal life.”

The Lord reposed His palm upon the head
 Of Bali, the Titan, and sang tenderly :

“Know this : I lean to all who turn to me :
 In those who ache to home in me I dwell ;
 And the ones who bow to my will—everlastingly
 I guard, in love, like a sleepless Sentinel.

“And so, my son, in whom I'm vowed to abide !
 Believe : the son the Father never can fail :
 In gloom my Gleam shall in your heart preside
 And my Grace shall stay your sleepless Sentinel.”

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THE DIVINE AND THE DEVOTEE

The story of Prahlad, the unforgettable boy-devotee of Lord Vishnu Narayan, is one of the most moving legends of the Bhagavat and Vishnu Puran, a perennial source of inspiration to millions of Hindus to this day. Hiranyakashipu, the Demon of demons, had conquered the three worlds and even the gods on high were impotent against him. So, in the end, they had to implore Lord Narayan to incarnate Himself once more and rescue earth from the Titan's tyranny. Accordingly, the divine plan was duly hatched once again and a son, Prahlad, was born to the Titan Emperor. The boy was, from birth, a sworn devotee of the Lord as against his father, the God-hostile demon-king. Deeply perturbed, Hiranyakashipu strove hard to persuade his obstinate son to forswear his allegiance to the Lord of Vaikuntha, the only world he had failed to conquer. But all his blandishments proving abortive, he commanded the demons to kill his disloyal son and heir. They, at his bidding, flung the frail, defenceless Prahlad into a raging fire, but the fire only caressed him like a spring breeze. They set him adrift on a boisterous sea only to find the waves subsiding and cradling him like a loving mother.

They hurled him from a mountain-peak into the abyss, but invisible hands broke his fall. Elephants trampled on him but not a rib was hurt. Do what they would, the boy survived all attacks on his person. They were all nonplussed.

In this dire impasse, the Prince's old teachers, Shanda and Amarka interceded on his behalf and implored the King to give him another chance, assuring the King that they would make the rebel toe the line. They took him to their boarding-school where the other Titan boys were being educated, and coaxed him in all sorts of ways to behave sensibly and follow the Titan traditions. His stunning rejoinder was given in action : one day, when the teachers had gone to the palace to report progress, he—the idol of his school-mates—started lecturing them and proselytized them all to worship Narayan exclusively, owning no other allegiance. In despair, the teachers brought him back to his father who, after a long altercation with the renegade, lifted his mace to smite him, when Lord Narayan (incarnate as Nrisimha—half-lion, half-man) emerged out of a jasper pillar and slew the demon after a thrilling duel.

Symbolically, Hiranyakashipu stands out as an incarnation of supreme egotism and God-rebelliousness and Prahlad as a symbol of utter surrender to the Divine will. An ideal spokesman of unbargaining God-love, he was born as a son to the mightiest God-rebel of the age—which signifies, symbolically, that it is in the darkest night that the brightest dawn is incubated by the Everlasting Redeemer. The rest is dealt with in the body of the poem.

PRAHLAD

Prahlad loved the Titan boys
 who came to the famous school
Of Shanda and Amarka. These
 declaimed how Kings must rule
And why the Titan Emperor
 should be by all obeyed
By whose great power even the gods
 in Heaven were dismayed.
“Remember, boys,” they roared,
 “in the universe there is but one
Divinity round whom, in awe,
 the stars and moon and sun
Sleeplessly revolve and so
 his glory hymn you must
Whose grandeur and imperial status
 none has ever surpassed.”

But Prahlad only smiled : the more
 he was lectured to adore

The Emperor as the God of gods,
 he turned within the more
 To Narayan in whom his guileless
 soul one-pointedly
 Dwelt in a flawless loyalty's
 inviolate ecstasy.

One day, in his teachers' absence, he
 addressed the Titan boys :
 "Brothers, attend to me. This world
 with all its transient joys
 Lures us away from life's one goal :
 the Lord of the cosmic play,
 The ruler of the galaxies,
 our friend and guide and stay.
 For Him alone our lives we live.
 This world from crust to core
 Is filled with His love's essence, so
 His Grace we must implore
 Who, in His mercy, leans to all
 To help and heal and bless
 And knocks at every door, a begging
 King of tenderness.
 Therefore, dear comrades, bear in mind
 the sooner we turn to Him,
 The easier 'twill be for us
 to find His deathless Gleam

That pilots us in life's reboant
 ocean of storm and strife
 To the harbour of His deep compassion :
 the everlasting life.
 We pine for joy and happiness,
 But follow frenziedly
 Our unappeasable desires'
 gospel of lunacy
 Which preaches that through senses' thrills
 the soul's peace can be found :
 What folly ! since all joy must entail
 pain on the rebound.
 And then, for the senses' pleasures we
 need hardly even strive :
 Of pleasure and pain, our first heirlooms,
 no fates can us deprive.
 Still, pleasures to buy we squander, alas,
 our lives' most godly treasures,
 Forgetting that peace none can win
 by hunting after pleasures.
 'Tis only when we see in all
 but Him that comes His peace.
 So brothers, pray : 'O Lord ! may we
 grow one with thy deep bliss,
 By surrendering our dark self-will
 to thine ordaining Light,
 For then alone shall thy Sun-grace
 repeal the yoke of Night.'

"But boys, invoke this Light from now,
 nor wait till you old grow :
 Begin today His Name's redeeming
 seed in the heart to sow.
 Our life-span is too brief, alas,
 at hundred it must end :
 Of this we half in slumber waste
 and twenty in play we spend.
 And then, as we reach youth, we forfeit
 twenty years or more
 In women's arms whereafter come
 sweet children we adore.
 To maintain them we slave like convicts
 oft at the cost of health
 And, missing life's one aim, we grow
 to idolise but wealth,
 Till greed becomes our ruling passion
 which, in the end, must blur
 Our sense of right and wrong, and then
 we know not where we are.
 So how can you still dally ? Hark,
 calls Narayan to you !
 Answer Him here and now : In life
 and death thee, Lord, we'll woo.'
 The world with its siren Maya hides
 His all-absolving Face.
 Know : not till we have glimpsed Him can we
 win to blessedness.

Who in their fool delusion think
 they can win felicity
 Unmeeting His last Grace—are doomed
 to pain and misery.
 Vainglory shall not save you, boys,
 far less pelf, power or pride :
 You only reach fulfilment—when
 in Him you learn to abide.
 Once Him you win—beside whose dazzle
 Grows pale the glorious glow
 Of a myriad suns—what more remains
 To win, boys, here below ?
 So flout you must your senile teachers
 and worship but the seer
 Who can alone lead us to Him,
 deliver us from fear.”

Profoundly stirred, the Titan boys
 sang of the One-in-all
 And laughed at their two teachers—when
 they came back at nightfall.
 Ridiculed by the boys, they ran,
 aghast, to the Titan King
 And said, in tears : “O King ! the Prince
 has coached the boys to sing
 The glory of Lord Vishnu, dubbing
 us ‘poor senile fools’ !

We cannot make them toe the line :
 your perverse son outrules
 All Titan discipline and so
 we must at last resign.
 We have, Sire, brought him back to you,
 or else he'll undermine
 Our authority as pedagogues.
 Henceforth deal with your own
 Mad son whose heresy all loyal
 Titans must disown.
 We idolise but hate and low
 to whatever you approve :
 But how is this ? your son, a Titan,
 Hymns a God of love ?"

Trembling in rage, Hiranyakashipu
 Summoned his son and yelled, in a voice of thunder :
 "Thou shalt not flout me with impunity,
 But fall at my feet, in reverence, like a son.
 And bear in mind that this I can exact
 From thee not only in my father's right,
 But a King's as well."

 As he harangued, his voice
 In a flaming wrath's crescendo rose : "My son !
 At thine own peril defy the authority
 Of the King of the three worlds. I reign today

As the God of gods, the One-without--a second,
Before whom trembles even Destiny."

Said Prahlad, inaccessible to fear :

"Nay, father : Nevermore breathe such blasphemy.
For there is but one God of gods : He is
Vishnu the great, the ruler of Destiny,
The King of Kings, the One-without-a-second."

"Silence !" the Demon yelled, "or I shall throttle
Thee here and now. Knowest thou not how this
Name is abhorred of demons ? Be perverse
And I will have thy blasted tongue wrung out
Before the populace."

Said Prahlad, smiling :

"Sire, gladly will I do without a tongue
So lost and redundant that it may not take
The holy Name which greets the soul like music,
Genesis of all thrills—O blessed Name :
Narayan, the great, everlasting God !"

The Demon gnashed his teeth : "Thou ravest, fool !
For how is one the Everlasting God
Who is a cipher pitted against my will ?"

"But father, it is thou who art now raving,
Like one possessed; for 'tis sheer lunacy :
A cipher—the Omnipotent Supreme !

Whose one soft breath can scatter mountain-ranges
 And invisible hold can make a blade of grass
 Immobile like the mountain—say the Vedas,
 As thou too knowest who didst raise the furies
 Again and again : wolves, serpents, trampling elephants
 Puissant witchcraft of perverted priests,
 God-imprecating mobs—all didst thou level
 Against my frail and unoffending body :
 But naught could harm me; why ? Because Lord Vish
 The Great Protector, folded me in His
 Invulnerable clasp of armoured love.
 Time and again this was borne home to thee
 Who art strong, indeed—but even sovereign power
 Upheld by earthly pomp is impotent,
 Pitted against a breath of the King of kings,”

“Thou at my hands shall die, then,” roared the demon
 “How canst thou smite me ?” answered the devotee.
 “Not one leaf of the dwarfiest tree may fall
 Into the sere and off its parent twig
 But that my Lord, great Vishnu, sanctions it :
 For ’tis His will that overarches all;
 His sentinel love broods o’er the universe;
 From galaxies to dew-drops ’tis His blue
 That blues our pallid hopes and His fresh green
 That canopies our dream exposed to flails
 Of Fate and scorch of pitiless suns; His power
 Sustains the feeble; His strength makes the cripple

Scale mountains; His immaculate radiance
 Outgleams in springs he hatches in the rocks,
 Transmuting sandy sepulchres to verdant
 Valleys aflower with laughter and dance of life."

The Titan thundered, in a cyclonic rage :
 "Insolent renegade ! How darest thou
 Before me stand and rant ? Thou knowest well
 Thou canst not prove this rhapsody of folly.
 I aver : thy Vishnu is a faery tale,
 A milky bubble by morons blown, a line
 Traced on the waters—a nonentity."

Prahlad smiled : "But father, 'tis thou who art
 A victim to folly. For how could He be
 A bubble, a nonentity—who is
 Allwhere, ensouling all that is or will be ?"

The Titan sneered : "Allwhere ! O maudlin priest
 Of sentimental spume ! Come now, what thou
 Contendest—I defy thee here to prove.
 I reaffirm : He's nowhere—since none ever
 Saw Him in life. Were He, thy Lord, allwhere,"
 He looked around and cried : "He would be there,
 In yonder jasper pillar."

Prahlad laughed
 And answered : "But He is, since all is He.
 Only, alas, our earthly eyes, now blinded

By the ego's hood, see even the light as darkness."

On a sudden impulse, the Titan with a guffaw
Of God-derision rushed to the tall pillar
And felled it at one blow.

"There now," he challenged,
"Thine Omnipresent Saviour I defy
To save thee from my despot wrath of doom,
Inexorable and ruthless even as Fate."

He raised his mighty mace, when lo, there flashed
From the yawning crevice of the jasper pillar
A nightmare dragon : the head—a bloated lion's,
The trunk—a man's, outbreathing flakes of fire !
A duel swift and terrible then ensued
In which the demon King was rent in twain
The incredible Apparition then turned round
And glanced at Prahlad, his young devotee,
Who bowed to the Man-lion, unafraid.
The blood-stained Avatar now smiled on him,
And all was in a moment transformed as though
By miracle, while a wondrous radiance,
Mellow like moon's, cascaded from His orbs
Of liquid lustre.

Prahlad stood like one
Dazed with delight and awe, oblivious
To the world around him Then he made his bow

And said with folded hands in a tremulous voice :
 "O thou, whom our earth's seers and saints and Heaven's
 Angels and gods with all their minstrelsy
 Never know how to hymn—propitiate,
 How shall I worship thee ?—Awaitest thou
 A song from my clay-born lips ? Canst thou be fain
 Of the homage of a pawn to ignominy,
 A son disowned by his own father and kin
 And born to a race whose every act and breath
 Waged war with thine of rainbow-hued compassion ?
 Could I, Lord, in my wildest dream, even dare
 Approach thy aura beyond the hail of stars
 And hymn thy topless, superhuman glory ?
 Thou invitest me to receive thy benediction,
 But what title have I to thy hand-touch, O thou
 Inviolable Holiness, whom even the gods
 Feel awed to accost ? Alas, how can I answer
 With my mortal voice thy immortal call, O Lord,
 Whose one wish calls the cosmos out of chaos ?

"But nay : thou reckest not of lineage
 Nor learning, genius or intellect,
 Far less of earthly power, pomp or splendour.
 Eternal Infant ! thou wouldst have us play
 As infants with thyself at love for ever;
 Unborn, thou dost, withal, ensoul us all;
 Upholding all, thou broodest over the world
 And, Resident in every heart, wouldst lead

Men to transcend their human limitations
 To win back their heritage : thy freedom's vast.
 Even an outcast, who has come to love thee,
 Grows higher in stature than the Godless Brahmin,
 Erudite and accomplished in the arts.
 Give that I may this thy high Grace remember
 When I offer my heart of song at thy twin feet;
 And, centred in thee, may I never forget
 That when thy Grace recedes, no parents can
 Protect the child, nor medicine heal the sick
 Nor boats the derelicts rescue in the ocean."

He heaved a sigh and then gave a sad smile :
 "I only rue the folly of those who still
 Hark not, alas, to the immemorial message
 Of the heart : that when thou stayest far-withdrawn,
 No earthly power can redeem our vain
 And precarious living. Lord, in thy compassion,
 Thou hast come down and leaned to me, and so
 I know that I, for one, shall swim across
 Life's stormy ocean with thy one star-name
 Upon my lips and thy strength in my soul.
 But I feel disconsolate that few on earth
 Even desire to be sustained by thee
 And prefer their pen of pride to liberation.
 To think that when they could have won thy Light
 And repeal life's anarchy by a simple act
 Of faith and love—to think they still should turn

To the ego's firefly flickers at the mercy
 Of Fate's black gusts ! So I implore thee, Lord :
 Thou come and win them over with thy beauty
 And lead them back to thy Love's one asylum."

The great God laughed and His laughter rang out like
 The first spring's bird-song after the winter's hush.
 Then, in a soft voice, dripping tenderness,
 He addressed His devotee :

"Prahlad, my son !

In answer to thy steadfast aspiration
 I have incarnated myself on earth
 In a form so terrible—to abolish terror
 And protect my loyal henchmen. 'Thou hast faced
 Horrors and agonies no mortal has
 Met ever before with such undaunted calm.
 I have come, indeed, to free unhappy earth,
 But also in response to thy lone faith
 Which never once fainted or faltered—when
 All hope had died. A courage such as thine
 Is seldom seen and ages into a legend :
 So high yet humble, proud as rocky reefs
 And soft as breakers dissolving at their base.
 Thy father, the insufferable tyrant
 And abhorred of all, now reaped what he had sown.
 But this, too, know—that thy high Godwardness
 Has expedited the demons' predestined fall.

For thou didst serve through thy receptiveness
As a perfect channel along which Heaven's blue Gracc
Could ripple in to irrigate sterile strands.
Without thy strong, unswerving faithfulness,
Impervious to all fear, without thy soul's
Deep adoration cleansed of the last traces
Of self, without thy heart's one-pointed yearning
And life's subservience to my star-will,
This ailing planet were not ripe today
For the purge of this black, suppurative sore
From her fair body. Thy lonely love's upclimb
Was indispensable to my descent,
That Heaven's compassion might rain once again
Its message of evolving loveliness
And lustre native to my paradise.
For this thou stoodst alone against the fiends
Of Hell—when these would drown my Flute with drums.
And thou hast shown, as none has in the past
With a like noble courage and fortitude,
That if men voluntarily would take
At every cross-road the Way toward the Light.
Then every such aspiring will must win
My saviour Dawn's swift answer even in midnight.

“I bless thee, O Light's ally, for thy great
Fidelity and purity of heart,
Who, pledged to a high steadfastness of will,

Stakedst thy all for thy faith in inner truths
 Which the world of God-denial waves aside
 With the ignorant perversity of the mind :
 Wherefore my Grace could act on thee, my child,
 So signally—though foolish people named
 These sorceries—as when they saw, amazed,
 That torches failed to burn thee, floods to swamp,
 Poison to numb and even the hungry blades
 Of pitiless executioners caressed
 Thy tender neck as though they were made of roses !

“A strange conception have men’s half-lit minds
 Of Divinity whose picture they still limn
 With sentimental daubs. Thus misled, they
 See in my moves but arbitrary awards
 Of Godhood against those of Destiny.
 “They peer with mental tapers into fields
 Of dappled shadows lapsing into glooms
 That scare and tempt—they cannot fathom why,
 And yet they claim that they ring in my Light
 With odes on darkness.

“A logic infantine :
 Into the self-same snares they, eager dupes,
 Will rush for interludes of nervous thrills,
 Impelled by gusts of dangerour desire,
 And when they discover—they have lost their way,
 They reprimand my Grace. They will sow seeds

Of dire disharmony and hate and feud,
 And when these grow up into grisly forests,
 Harboursing hordes inimical to life,
 They will reproach my Power for standing still.
 They will campaign for dark infernal glory,
 And then, when Heaven closes her golden portals,
 They will, self-righteously, indict my Grace
 As though she were pledge-bound to hold her candle
 At every bend of the devious paths they trod !

“And yet my Grace they need even when they vaunt
 They are life’s last almighty architects;
 For deep down in their souls is audible still
 A voice no rebel din can ever stifle
 That sings of a brooding Love absolving all
 Their criminal follies—burning with its sparks
 Blind dusks of centuries. They leap in frenzy
 Down into blind abysms and often find
 A tender ledge of moss breaking the fall.
 In fool conceit they still will summon Grace
 To serve them faithfully on their own terms,
 Approved of the intellect : they never can see—
 Grace would her status forfeit if she undersigned
 The legislation of the human mind.

“Thou sawest this as thou hadst learnt to aspire
 To attain my summit light through simple love.
 And so thy stature grew with thy authentic
 Humility without which none can ever

Receive the bounties of my Grace divine,
Fostering the values perceived by soul.

“And so it was that under my Grace’s aegis
Thou didst spontaneously and in joy
Open to my last light’s inerrable love
And offered to interpose thy fragile frame
Even as a diamond shield between the fierce
Titans’ fell darts and my soft Grace—their target.
For this thy service ask now any boon
Or boons : behold, the Heavens attend on thee !”

With this the Mammoth Form dislimned and there
Appeared the magic figure of Narayan :
Celestial-human, alien-intimate,
The one Sustainer of all sentient life.

The faithful contemplative silently
Made his obeisance to the peerless God
He had adored in wakefulness and dream :
One he had placed, in simple and childlike faith,
Irrevocably on his child-heart’s throne,
(The throne that never once brooked a second King,
Father or mother, country or race or duty)
One who though alien to all he had known,
To his own self of flame was knit with bonds
Of fire no clouds could quench. ’And twas He now
Appraised His devotee !

Was this a dream
Which the brute world of fact would break and hale
To its own rule of dust ?—As thus he marvelled
Gazing upon the form of his Beloved,
The world of fact was blurred out by his tears.

The rapture passed...He saw an answer was
Awaited by the ultimate Answer
Of frantic, anguished prayers of groping life
He kneeled to his Lord and then, in a moved voice,
With folded hands, said :

“O Compassionate
Giver of boons, and Rider of galaxies
And suns and moons and interstellar space !
A boon for me ? But could devotion ever
Ask for a boon ? Did one covet a bauble
Who glimpsed in his heart the Pearl of pearls, thy Love,
Beside whose gleam all earthly glimmers pale
Even as a million star-eyes pale at dawn
Before the Sun's one radiant eye of gold ?”

He paused, then overmastering his tears
That drowned his eyes—he sang :

“And yet, O Gracious !
Thou hast adjudged my heart of adoration
As loyal to thy light—because I faced,

Without a tremor, the challenges of those
 Hostile to thee, because I never flinched
 When I was tortured for my love of thee.

“Lord, was there ever on earth a worshipper
 Of thine who counted pain as penalty
 When the agony was borne for thy love’s sake ?
 Storms burst to lash us, whipped by destiny :
 Dark visitations swoop to cow the timid
 Who would play only for the smallest stakes
 Unmindful of thy mystic invitation :
 But was there ever one among the crew
 Who heard thy dangerous fluting’s call and still
 Eschewed thy luminous vasts for shadowy gains
 Of twinkling shore-lights ? Can one reck of risk
 Or even regard a shipwreck as disaster,
 Once he has glimpsed thy deep resistless main ?
 Thou knowest mine is no mere flimsy fancy’s
 Ephemeral effusion, nor a poet’s
 Dramatic ache for pain for pain’s own sake.
 For pain is pain and suffering flails the flesh :
 Only the pain is more than countervailed
 By a subterranean bliss when it is borne
 For the one Beloved’s sake. Then we perceive
 That all such pain is leavened by a nameless
 Caress of masked delight and we feel thy love’s
 Rapturous upheave in our lone heart-beats :

The darker our anguish, the whiter our soul's rapture.
 When consciousness is tuned to this strange bliss
 Lone-petalling within—a mystic hush
 Deepens with the ever-deepening storm without.
 And then an embryonic premonition
 Stirs in the womb of pain hailed for thy sake,
 Which sings : 'Beyond the Night waits the New Dawn.'
 O gratitude born of the recognition
 Of thy Love's pollens fecundating Life
 Flowering through sorrow even as through joy,
 Through separation as through union,
 Through din and silence as through life and death;
 "I suffered agonies ?—yes, my flesh was weak :
 My spirit never. For, however lowly
 And flawed my being, I have yearned to thee
 Not only with my present self so wan
 But with all my spirit's invincible aspiration.

"And that is why I could confront the shocks
 Even of the avalanches of blind hate
 As thy Love's own ordeals through whose deep call
 My loyalty to lustre would emerge
 Purged of all shadow-leaning. For I saw
 Time and again that the grislier the earthquake,
 The fierier flashed soul's battered peaks of courage
 In faith's new dawn. And I have verified
 The oracle whispering in the listening heart

That anguish can be changed to ecstasy
 When faith in thy transcendent Grace presides.
 I also know through trials and tribulations
 That in the womb of dire despondency
 Thou incubatest more effulgent morns.
 And how, Lord, shall one toil up steep ascents
 To cloud-capped peaks of stifling solitude
 While vistas of the cherished plains fade out
 With all their gleam of rivers and flame of flowers
 And hum of marts and homes of choral singing
 And causeless laughter which yet means so much,
 Unless thy godly breath thou mingle with ours ?
 And can one fret for long in wakefulness
 Unless thou come thyself to rock the torment
 With thy compassion's magic lullaby ?

"So how can I accept a recompense
 For what was in itself a privilege :
 This thrill to feel that thou too trampest, unseen,
 Beside us in our lonely pilgrimage :
 The bliss to feel that thy Grace constantly
 Reverses our fool mental and moral judgements,
 And lastly, Lord, to feel that 'tis thy Sun
 That weans us from our vales of phantom glimmers !"

The great Lord smiled : "My blessed son ! I know
 A devotee craves nought on earth because
 He is fulfilled by love and love alone.

But still ask for a boon as a guerdon now
To propitiate me."

Prahlad bowed his head,
Then lifting his twin lovely eyes said: "Lord !
I bow to thee for thy munificence:
But why a boon for guerdon ? When has ever
A devotee, on meeting the Divine,
In love's full panoply, in His own land,
Asked for a paltry boon ? How can I beg
For a thing so banal when I am face to face
With thy Grace's multitudinous bliss and bloom,
When thou, O Gleaming Goal of mortal life,
Incarnatest on earth in thy dream beauty
Beyond conception ?

"When I see thy feet,
Dawn-rose, outspraying liquid beams of blue,
Each trailing in its wake a luminous
Ripple of rapture wherein pain's insomnia
Seeks ultimate ablution plunged in sleep . . .
Lord, when I see thy hands of benison
Eager with compassion to touch the heads
Of sinners with an equal tenderness
As of the virtuous—a spectacle
That thrills and overawes the mortal eyes :
A dream come true !.....O thy celestial smile !
Impartial, gracious and yet a high suppliant,

Like a peak calling to abysmal gloom
 To share in its cloudless heritage of light,
 August yet not aloof—as only thy own
 Magical bounty could combine—a blend
 Beyond the power of earthly emperors.....

“And lastly, thy twin eyes wherein I gaze
 In rapture into the image of my self,
 So kin and intimate that it would seem
 That one could almost touch them when, lo, they
 Dilate, elusive, dissolving into the vast,
 Blue, unhorizoned ocean of compass

“Or is it sun and moon that there would play
 At hide and seek? Surely our human art
 Captured the hint of playfulness from this
 Mystic elusiveness in thy loved eyes’
 Ethereal glance!—for the moment I decide
 They are two suns and would bask in their strength
 In grateful joy—a tender loveliness
 Of twin moons comes to reign! And then as I
 Surrender to this lunar love, enchanting
 And delicate as the infant’s silver laughter,
 The spell is broken by a new sun-truth.

“Lord, in this riddling world where all that lures
 Trails off in disenchantment, where even sparks

Grow sceptical of their parent fire and where
 Our hopes are derelicts—only thy eyes
 Of sun restore lost solar verities,
 And of moon—the faith in dream's reality.
 How shall I then of such a Wizard's dual
 Beauty embodied ask for boons, when I
 Know how futile they are ? Oh, when has soul
 Begged for honey after savouring nectar ?

"Wine of success soon cloy. Exhilarations
 Of fame or pall or leave a dim bequest
 Of fear lest it decline—and when it does,
 No appeal can coax it back. The mightiest throne
 Is vexed with real or dark airborne anxieties
 No power of talisman can charm away.
 The senses' titillations are short-lived :
 Adorable curves of flowering forms seduce
 The eyes from afar.....covetously we draw
 Nearer—to find the glamour fading fast
 Like a twilight afterglow.....and then we run
 To new outflowering sepals for the savour
 Of novelty—to wrench their virgin sap
 By processes too coarse to prove romantic.
 Amours, alas, as known to earthlings now,
 Originate from cravings and end in sighs;
 Begin with fire awakening the body's hunger
 And peter out before the flame attains

Its peak of eager craving : only aches'
 Grey aftermath of questioning survives :
 The lonely legacy of vanished lust !

“Yet 'tis life's sum of all these siren phantoms
 That men have hymned as Heaven since the dawn
 Of Heaven's one dream in human consciousness :
 But when has the fool's paradise endured ?

“Who ever has embraced a shadow form
 And found it solid ? Are not our desires
 The most insuperable obstacles
 To love ? Do they not ever bind new knots
 Of darkness with hope's white-aspiring thread ?

“I know not what it is in life that answers
 These phantom calls. But this I know : in thy deep
 World-play the sable spirals of desire
 Are downward bent, their upward arcs are all
 Mere make-believes of maya—traitor serpents
 That gleam like dappled ribbons on the road
 But, hugged, reply anon with subtle fangs !

“If this be true, why wouldst thou lure me, Lord,
 With irised baubles, illusive speckled bands ?
 Can aspirant souls accept to be beguiled
 By transient interludes of passing dawns

Entailing nights of pain and disenchantment ?
 A truce to maya : I long for thy sky
 Of white deliverance beyond earth's blurs.

"And yet I would a boon from thee, Lord, crave :
 The Boon of boons, although not coveted
 By mortals as a celestial prize. One would
 Petition thee for gifts but not for the power
 'To make one's life a gift—an offering
 At thy lotus feet in ultimate surrender.
 If give a boon thou must—vouchsafe to me
 This power to erase my signature
 As author of all I do, think, strive, achieve.
 This bounty I ask of thy munificence
 Because this power of powers thou alone
 Canst grant to starless souls distraught by storms.

"Oh grant, Lord, that my love I may translate
 By offering all my fragrance at thine altar
 And lighting all my candles for thy temple
 With no thought, prudence-prompted, of the morrow.
 Grant that I may now dedicate myself,
 With all I have and am, in adoration's
 Unstinted prodigality of love.
 For no love's worthy of the name of love
 Which pauses at the thought of all-surrender,
 The culmination of mortality's
 Aspirings borne to azure certitudes."

His soft voice quavered, choked with tears, as he
 Fell prostrate at the feet of his dear Lord
 Who placed His hand of blessing on his head
 Of orange curls. So tenderly he touched
 His young adorer that it almost seemed
 His youthful locks were fragile golden tendrils
 Of a shy opening lotus.

Prahlad shivered

At the tender touch and knew that his deep prayer
 Was heard—at last his bark had come to port.
 Tears trickled down his cheeks now stanchlessly :
 The language of dumb pressure had been answered
 By silent tears betokening thankfulness.

“Beloved,” his voice now drooped into a whisper,
 “I know ’tis easier to talk of love,
 Far easier, than to love with adoration’s
 Total self-giving. This too I know well :
 We are persuaded far too easily
 Of our sincerity—that we may worship
 Our egoist emotions, fancy-free,
 In place of Him we’d worship. Maya, the Siren,
 Accosts us in her loveliest garbs and guises;
 And so the tiniest desire may make us
 Cast longing looks behind. Attachments lure
 In strange deceptive garbs and often, alas,

Will make us sigh for having spurned the joy
 Of certainty for the uncertain. But
 Love knows no middle way: 'either all or nil',
 Is the motto of the adventurous nomad soul.
 And for the All our all has to be staked :
 No weakling's watchword. And yet are we not, Lord,
 All weak as waifs—poor playthings of Desire
 When we are not fast anchored to thy Grace ?

"O thou Unseen, initiating in
 Thy spirit-certitude and the lost lore
 Of faith and love emergent !—Minus thine
 Untiring exhortation who can reach
 The inviolate self-perfection—not alone
 In the overt field of virile discipline
 But in the soul's arcana whither eyes
 Of the deepest penetration may not delve ?
 For naught is finally accomplished till
 The transformation of the impulses
 Is achieved through war with shadowy hordes of Falsehood.

"Not only in the loud outbursts of Life's
 Unlovely heat, but in thought's realm as well,
 A sleepless vigilance thou dost demand
 To keep the will alert and turn all our
 Rich sun-flower sparks to thy love's eye of Sun
 In swerveless loyalty to sceptred Light,

Till we repudiate the greatest right :
 ('The most refined—and yet it must be waived)
 The vision of the Formless Infinite
 In a body's mould of exquisite loveliness.

“How can one, Lord, face up to the immense
 And formidable adventure of adventures,
 Relying on a lonely discipline,
 Grounded in the uninformed ascetic will,
 Without thy Grace's deep affirmative ?

“But once one loves—one thrills with the need to love
 Thee more and more as thou com'st nearer...nearer...
 Leaning to help...and then, as one evolves
 In love, thy light evolves as well until
 Initial sparks are rounded into auras,
 When obstacles dislimn as though by magic
 And the soul realises clearer...clearer
 That she must abdicate her starry status
 If she nursed even an ember of desire
 Or expectation in the realm of love.
 For one who does—negotiates not love
 But the ego's multiplying dividends :
 A common trader—not a devotee.

“And so, Lord, even the yearning for thy vision
 Must be repudiated. All true worship
 Is a leap of Life's delight toward thy sky,

An impulse shooting from the heart of a spark
 To greet its parent fire...All argument
 Is insult to the trustful soul of love
 Which can know naught of barter : she approves
 Of one expression—votive offering
 Of her total self to the All-transcending Self.
 So, when a spark grows conscious of the Fire's
 Supreme significance—resign it must
 Its sorry self of sparkhood as apart
 From its empyreal status, for only then
 Can it win absolution from its finite
 Insular glimmer—merging in the Gleam,
 Where melts the last partition sundering
 The Loved, the Deep, from the human lover—a dismal
 Drop by himself, yet fathomless when fused
 In the indivisible Infinity :
 The One that is and never can cease to be.

“Wherefore the drop and Deep crave one another :
 Each to the other is drawn because all is
 Identical in rhythm, all being love.
 I know this as thou mad'st me drink devotion's
 Nectar and hence I know how, Lord, thy love's
 Appeal outflows from the soul to every cell
 Making its very plasm yield up the sap
 In utter disregard of self or safety.
 I have heard this cry, in my body's very atoms
 And so I say in royal humility :

"Sire, though I am a wraith, a cipher, I
 Am still thy shadow and must cleave to thee,
 Chase thee if thou elude me—wait on thee
 As tenderly as mother waits upon
 Her toddling child. And so in love, I feel,
 It were no sacrilege even to say
 That though thou art immeasurably great,
 My eye of love attends thee anxiously
 Even as a mother's love attends her babe
 Who needs her service and care ; and so I would
 My vigil keep that thou, Beloved, mightst sleep.

"This is no babble of folly but the mantra
 Of love, thine own, thou didst to me impart :
 That sunbeam glassed in dewdrop has the selfsame
 Inviolable solar status. So I say :
 I claim to love thee by my supreme birthright
 Because my right, at its peak and crest, derives
 From thine own high, inviolable right
 To love for love's own sake. Therefore I pray :

"Oh may I never, when I love thee, Friend,
 Chaffer with thee for ought even in my dream,
 Nor grow into a canny bargainer
 Who gives to get back more. May I abhor
 All thrift and foresight—cherish but one yearning :
 To give myself to thee with utter abandon.
 Nor may a shadow mar the light of this

My aspiration. O life's unfathomed, vast
 Recondite Resident whose moods are legion !
 O Marvel unexplored !—Lone Sphinx who yet
 Art multitudinous Life !—Immaculate White
 Who art, withal, the seven hues !—O blender
 Of incompatibles in whom resolve
 All paradoxes !—Friend, who art so close
 That eyes become incredulous when told
 That they can see because thou art their light
 And probe the spaces because thou invitest !
 O Eye within the eye and yet beyond
 'The mind's farthest conception ! O delight,
 Beside whose one stray rapture-throb the highest
 Human delights seem shallow and lustreless
 'Till they seem banal even as fitful foam
 On the unhorizoned main's expanse of sleep !

"Faced by such radiant Majesty as thine
 Whose Omnipresence is so marvellous
 That even the boldest fancy hesitates
 To affirm it as reality—before
 Whose single Glance the poorest heart achieves
 Ecstatic summits at one leap—a sweet
 Communion no mind can formulate
 Even with the most luminous images.
 Oh, tell me, Lord, when such a miracle Presence
 Incarnates in a living beckoning form
 Before my beauty-hungry bride-soul who

Has, for aeons, taken on her maiden beads
 Of dream thy Name of the Everliving Spouse,
 Father, Mother and Friend—how can I ask
 For the guerdon of a boon ? When thou, O Vast,
 Condensest, love-impelled, thy vastitude
 Into a human form my self to greet
 In a human accent—how can I express,
 With song or psalm, what thy Divinity
 Inspires in this my all-too-human heart ?

“I know not how to pay my homage to thee
 Who invitest us to home in thy oceaned Bliss.
 What art thou and what am I ! Can night and day
 Be more antipodal—abyss and peak ?
 And withal, can aught, essentially divine,
 Stay ever aloof—a static entity ?
 Is not Godhood, even as the eager fire,
 Pervasive, all-transforming, goldening all
 It touches, intolerant of all partitions ?
 Could we, flawed creatures, yearn to the last perfection :
 Dark waifs, aspire to thy snow-haven of sleep :
 With the voice of clay sing to the inviolate stars,
 Were thy divinity not ours by birthright ?
 Could ever a pitiful clod of rayless matter
 Pulsate for thy self-luminous consciousness,
 If thy sacrosanct Infinitude stood aloof
 And radiant Divinity declined

To initiate the shadow-centred pain
That is humanity ?

“All lustre longs

For things opaque to light—transfiguring
Hostility into swift allegiance
By dint of Light’s contagious ecstasy.
And that is why mortality still aches
For thy far bourneless Blue—because it knows
Thou wouldst dissolve its dissonances in
Thine ultimate harmonies. A broken arc
Of pale emotion must retrace love’s final
Cycle of primal flame, since all that weep
As fragments—on their tears’ backwash return
To the marvellous deep of Bliss. For it is bliss
That leavens desolate sorrow with its power
Of beauty, thy perfected language
Through forms of matter chiselled by the Master
Sculptor, thy Love. And so to thine inherent
Perfection one must answer with song’s worship.
Therefore I say, impelled by my own native
Impulse to worship :

“Make me hence thy pure
Authentic lover who loves because he must
And not because love makes him happy, though
This happiness trails in the wake of love.

Make me thine acolyte who burns out all
 He has—to the last drop of his heart's blood
 As holy frankincense at thy feet's altar.
 Vouchsafe : I stay thy bondsman unto death,
 And sublimate all I am into oblation
 From my most casual act to the last breath
 Of my self of name and form, of song and din
 To burst the hard shell of my subtle ego
 And mate, untrammelled, with thee in all moods,
 Disdaining naught on earth since all is holy
 With thy Godheave in mystic pilgrimage,
 Deciphering but thy dance in cosmic rhythms

"Thou smilest, O Benignant ! I hear thy silent
 Answer in my lone heart of adoration :
 The only title to thy last approval
 Is the rapt soul's self-lost worship. Who, O Lord,
 Has ever moved thee by the bribe of splendour ?
 Only the unsophisticated heart's
 Self- naughting love, the soul's primeval essence
 May alchemise our being. Only the viewless
 Insight's own Ray which delves into the core
 Of dark life's mutiny against thy dawn
 Can subdue the light-defiance of phalanxed shadows
 And win them to thy Timeless Sun in Time.

"Thou smilest sweetly, in token thou acceptest
 My humble heart's surrender—not because

Thou needest human homage for thyself.
 What canst thou need, Lord, who art self-fulfilled ?
 Or, couldst thou take an offering from pale earth
 But that thou wouldst return its benefit
 Unto the giver even as a mirror would
 Return the image of a lovely maid
 Unto her eyes for her own ecstasy,
 But claiming never the beauty for itself ?
 Mirror of Compassion ! thou acceptest honour
 From us that we be honoured of the world
 Which is itself ennobled and purified
 By honouring holiness.

“Incarnate Ruth !

Could desolate pain aspire to put on wings
 And soar to thy Empyrean, dreamed of gods,
 Did not thy passing tender face lean down
 To ailing things and rain thy smile's divine
 Compassionate radiance aureate like the sun's
 And argent like the moon's in a cloudless sky ?
 Could we—unhappy, restless souls—but build
 On Truth's eternal rock held by thy Grace,
 A larger, purer life might flower on earth.
 But this spontaneous and beneficent
 Unfolding of soul's thousand-petalled lotus
 Toward thy all-transmuting zenith bliss
 Was not to be—because we, fools, when called,

Still choose not to be chosen—fain of phantoms !
And so our egos repeal thy bounty's blue.

“And what a world is born when the ego rules !
Our hopes decline and aspirations wither,
Like trees whose roots are blasted by the thunder,
And flaming joys flare up and die like rockets,
Prologued by voids, with epilogues of ashes !
A world where no desire fulfils its pledge,
Where fevered hankerings' one antidote,
Detachment, brings such suffering in its train
As will quell even the strongest faith and fervour
Of giant aspirants who, for what long years,
Must climb against the cynic world's derision,
Winning each step against fate's fierce downpull,
And how precariously—through what reliefless
And seemingly termless struggle with their earth-nature,
Paying a fancy toll for every pleasure
Of the flesh ! As camels bearing sandal-wood
Know its dead-weight but not its heart of perfume,
Even so we, in this world, journey for long,
Carrying, indeed, its burden but never glimpsing
Its flame-import or song-significance.

“And last, O Master, in our stumbles and gropings
Even the saints and seers give little help :
Wed to their own salvation, they stand aloof,
When we cry out for light. So even they

Loom to us like pale phantoms, impotent
 As firefly sparks against the global gloom,
 Their hard-won glimmers but show up the appalling,
 Abysmal depth of human ignorance.

“I am not scared by thy fantastic form
 Which slew the demon-king. I only fear.
 The wiles of Siren Maya, whose pseudonym
 Is Attachment, who ensnares with lures of beauty
 And bribes of flaming thrills that end in ashes.
 And so my heart thee supplicates : ‘Lord, come
 To our rescue with thy last omnipotence,
 Thy inviolable sun-pledge promulgate
 To deliver earth-life from the atheist
 Death-rule of totalitarian Destiny.’

“I cry to thee with soul and flesh made one :
 Ring in the New Dawn of thy victor Light,
 Free us from the yoke of Fate which outlaws Grace
 To perpetuate its pitiless stranglehold.

“This life’s illusive fete which promises joy
 And brings in its train but pain and disenchantment,
 Still leads astray earth’s credulous, wistful heart.
 Gulled by our egos, subtle pleaders, we do
 Degenerate into purblind pleasure-hunters.
 Thou waitest for ages, hoping we will, with time,
 Grow wise from the sad experience of life.

But a strange perversity dogs our steps and we
 Continue cherishing still our fond illusions !
 Hast thou not waited long enough, inviting
 Us, derelicts, to sail for thy Promised Harbour
 Of beauty and bliss, captained by thy star-grace ?
 For aeons hast thou not called us, life's poor dupes,
 To hark to thy guidance whispered in our hearts
 And reject the strident gospel of desire ?”

His voice was choked by tears as he continued :
 “Desire, desire, desire—sings life, enthralled !
 Desire, desire, desire—pleads mind, athrill !
 Desire, desire, desire—Nature applauds !
 And such is the potent spell it casts on us,
 That even when we see, again and again,
 How desire misleads and breeds a progeny
 Of pain and disenchantment—we refuse
 Thine one redeeming gospel of detachment !
 Oh how we love to nestle in our folly !
 How blatantly our dark self-will opposes
 Thy radiant and beneficent Will’s
 Dictates of deep compassion ! And yet how simple
 Your Wisdom’s remedy : to focus all
 Our desires on thee alone—to grow to adore
 Thy Self of harmony, love and tenderness !
 For this aspiring love can, in a moment,
 Deliver us from the bondage of dark desires.

"But alas, our minds prefer to be driven by
 The blinding gusts of God-rebellious passions
 Which, like a dust-storm, blur our mystic vision
 And muffles the monitor voice of soul—and so
 We go ever down and down—pitiful victims
 To our cherished folly's mad philosophy !
 How can we ever outsoar this bedlam, Lord,
 Unless thou dower us with thine own Light's
 Ethereal wings that ache for thy blue of bliss ?"

He bowed his head and then in a tremulous voice
 Went on, as the great Boon-giver smiled at him :
 "Nay, Lord, now the weary world to thee appeals
 To come to the fore and announce : 'I have come
 To intervene : I'll brook no more the crazy
 Assertion of your suicide will against
 My saviour Will to lift you from the blind
 Abyss and lead you to the summit vision
 Where the liberated soul's sun wields the sceptre
 And Love Divine takes charge, in tenderness,
 To pilot home the pilgrims of the blue.' "

THE FLUTIST AND THE MILK-MAIDS

Strictly speaking, this is not quite a tale. Nevertheless it may well claim a place in this collection because it narrates Krishna's way of stimulating the Gopi maids' love for Him through the appeal of His beauty, music, playfulness and, above all, His mystic call to take refuge in Him alone. To none else among His devotees did the Lord ever say that He would remain their everlasting debtor. And yet He had tried them the hardest, not only by making them break away from all their cherished moorings, but by making Himself scarce when they had surrendered all they had and were at His feet. He left Brindaban, where they lived, for Mathura whither He had to go to slay the cruel tyrant, Kamsa, but thereafter stayed away to rule there, leaving His beloved devotees derelict in Brindaban where, in His absence, they could hardly bear to live with no anchorage left. They pined for Him and Him alone, living only in the world of a bitter-sweet memory of days that were no more. Life held no charm for them any longer now that He seemed to have left them for good. They did not know what to do or where to turn, not knowing of any way to

communicate with Him. When, at last, they had come to the end of their tether, He sent Uddhav, a friend and messenger, to reassure them that He had not forgotten them and would presently return. But they went on plying him with questions which have moved the hearts of millions of devotees to this day and inspired thousands of narrative love-lyrics in the most varied lilts of mystic poetry.

Nor was this an accident. For did not Krishna come missioned to reveal His heart-warming gospel : that divine love manifested through flawless beauty must lead to everlasting bliss? And could any gospel be higher than this—of the drop-let mirroring the deep through the miracle of love ? The Bhagavat has never hesitated to answer this question in the negative, holding that Krishna's highest message was given to the Gopis through His Brindaban Lila to start with, to be reaffirmed at the end (after the battle of Kurukshetra) when He blest them :

“I felicitate you because you came to love me as you did. For the self-effacing love (*bhakti*) that my devotees bear for me—who permeate all that is from crust to core—must endow them with the last Immortality.” (Book 10. 82. 44-45) /

THE GOPIS

O Messenger ! we run to you athirst
As nomads in a desert run to rills
They say : you bring us tidings of our truant
Soul-witcher ? Tell us—fares He well with those
Lovely enchantresses, His latest laurels
At Mathura, the gay metropolis
Of rich romance and beauty and adventure ?
But friend, impart to us the unvarnished truth,
Curtailling nothing. For do we not know :
Our peerless Runaway has ever been
The Cynosure of beauty-avid eyes,
The envied of the envied princesses
And damsels of fair Heaven ? Have we not seen
His high manoeuvres in the art of love ?
So fool us not and tell us all you saw,
Although we could divine the inevitable :
That such an Artist, wooed by honeyed words
And loving glances of His worshippers,
Would be drawn by them ! Alas, the woman's heart
Knows well the heart of man who must recede
From what he's once possessed...the bee discards

The buds drained dry to sue new virgin cores :
 The novel savour is sweeter than the old—
 We know too well !—But still we ache to know :
 When by His new flames' soft and bashful smiles
 And spendthrift eyes He's sieged—rains He, our Swain,
 On them the same caresses he rained on us
 When we to Him surrendered all we had
 In swift abandon ?

Ah, those bygone days,
 We roamed with Him the woods and dales and swam
 The lakes and rivers...when a year would pass
 Like a fleeting moment in this very land,
 Our Brindaban, which He, without a pang,
 Consigns to darkness—where a moment is
 Become an aeon—since Time has lost its wings
 Rueing His absence ! What a change is wrought
 By a single fragile form ! For when He reigned
 In this little hamlet how our light and air
 Throbbled with a heart-beat they had never known !
 How was our land idyllic then with morning
 Koels and noonday doves and vesper conchs
 And auspice perfumes of strange blooms that rode
 Blithe wings of zephyr that they might kiss His feet !
 And how with happiness and pride she heaved,
 Our blue-scarfed Jumna, as He vaulted in
 And sported with us gaily and made us sing

With Him the melodies He improvised !
And as He led the choir—the hush of Nature
Broke out into an applause with clapping leaves,
When the blue river's silence was reborn
As rhythmic lapping in answer to His voice !

And to crown all, how once He spoke of His
Fathomless love for us, His simple maids !
'Twas on an unforgettable night of moon
When we had sung and danced with Him in *Ras*.
He may no more remember, but we still
Daily relive that memorable eve
And hear in our dreams His words that made us lose
All sense of time and space. Ah ! how He sang :

'O my adorable maids, who left
Your dearest ones but for my sake,
Renounced your homes, nor wavered once
For me your lesser loves to stake !

'We come to cherish in our lives
What we consort with day by day
And hourly grow to hug our chains,
Content in our dark pens to play.

'Tis only when we hark to the voice
Of Love residing in our souls,

'That maya's veils fall off and we
Begin to glimpse the Goal of goals.

'But few are the ones who hear my Flute,
Still fewer those who answer its call
And recking nor of virtue nor sin,
Dare sacrifice for me their all.

'How can I, O my peerless maids,
The debt I owe you ever repay ?
Were I to live for aeons in this
My mortal body—I still would stay

'Your debtor to the end of time :
So let your love's surrender be
Its own reward—O blessed maids,
Fulfilled by love everlastingly !'

And often, as He sauntered, how the clouds
Dark with jealousy, hastened to outvie
The arbours in weaving for the royal Tramp
Cooler sunshades—and when He still would haunt,
Sometimes, the avenues, how overhead
They grumbled though not in a thunder-roar,
But in low murmurs—lest His status be
Questioned by too loud protests. So they would
But shed from time to time their timid tears'
Showers—because He was screened from their view

By selfish groves.....And then those magic eyes
 With the moon presiding over the rather blooms
 Who, shy in the glare of day, could only open
 At dusk their maiden lips to our Beloved,
 Although the vain and fair Queen of the sky
 Believed they smiled for her ! How things that thrive
 On borrowed lustre will forget the One
 Who loans all lustre !—Thus we babbled, mocking
 The foolish Queen : for it was given to us,
 His faithful worshippers, to know the Wizard
 That made dim spaces reel with His regal light.
 But can we hope—He sometimes still remembers
 Our helpless steadfast love that was a pain
 And a boon, withal—for it was centred in
 Him, our unique Lord and ultimate Pilot ?
 Knows He—how sleeplessly we cherish Him
 And always will—even as on those delirious
 Nights we sang and danced and raved with Him,
 Our sovereign breath and bliss and song and sigh.
 The warmth in our blood, the blue vault of our dream,
 Our laughter's echo—the ageless Evergreen,
 Defying the scorch of life—the embodied pledge
 Of the blue to cloudy soul—the incredible
 Lotus of Grace redeeming the heart of clay !

Oh, make us happy ! say : He still remembers
 The holy hours of *Ras* we lived in Him

And for Him, and how we left—without a tremor
 Of fear and shame—our home and hearth and honour
 And anchorage to old security,
 The shackles that bind and are so hard to cut ?
 And yet did He not test us on that night,
 That unforgettable night, when we had left
 Our homes and run to Him—did He not ask,
 With an arch smile, how we could have disowned
 Morality and our duty ? And we answered :
 ‘You know what is morality and duty :
 We only know of one morality,
 One duty : the call to surrender all we have—
 Our destiny, our present, past and future—
 To you, our Lord and King !’ Then how He smiled,
 Defeated in a battle of wits, and danced
 And sang with us all in love’s utter abandon !
 And tell us, Uddhav, dwells He ever on
 Those marvellous days when, called by His Magic Flute,
 The findings of our senses were annulled
 Till words like sin and virtue, good or evil
 Seemed less than meaningless to us—for then
 We stayed and moved and thrilled in Him alone
 And bowed to none but Him—no loyalties
 Present or past : for things that stood apart
 From Him, our Couch and Cradle, first and last,
 Loomed like far fantasies, dim shadow-mimes,
 When by His flame-apocalypse of Beauty
 Were expunged our worlds of self as stars by sun.

THE SINGER AND THE SERPENT

Kaliya, the hydra-headed Serpent is a symbol of virulence and malignancy inspired by Hades. He is not a mere reptile poisoning the very air he breathes ; he is incarnate Hate and Death even as Krishna is incarnate Grace and Everlasting Life.

The twain meet in a duel in the vast Lake of Life: Krishna a lovely boy playing His magic flute of conversion and dancing on the multiple hoods of the dreadful Serpent, and Kaliya, furious and hissing, stinging Him viciously—again and again : a picture terrible and weird and withal, how splendid and enchanting ! There are few passages in the whole range of Sanskrit literature where the breath-taking suspense of horror and the exquisite pathos of frail loveliness, apparently at the mercy of diabolic malevolence, have been brought out in such a radiant flood of vivid poetry. The description of Krishna's dawn-rose feet outspraying streams of red blood to incardadine the blue-black hoods of Kaliya does make one's heart stand still. And the suspense deepens fast as the duel deepens in intensity between Heaven and Hell, with the henchmen of Heaven staring at the scene from the

bank, horrified and helpless : how could a frail child of loveliness win against a gigantic progenitor of deadly malevolence ?

Krishna of Brindaban is a nursling of Beauty and Bliss. But the author of the Bhagavat is not concerned with Beauty as such. He sees behind the human beauty of Krishna the wand of Divine Compassion which transforms whatever it touches into its own essence : exquisite Godliness. Thus Krishna dives into Kaliya Lake ostensibly to chastise embodied hellishness, but at heart He aims but at one thing : to transmute Darkness into Light. He is out to achieve the impossible not only because to Him all is possible but also to reveal a deep secret : that darkness is but inverted light, pain the obverse of bliss, *ananda*. But the hidden has to be revealed by Him, the rebel has to be transformed into the loyal devotee whose status he had once enjoyed but forfeited because of his self-will. He has also to show that nothing is lost in a play He sanctions—no fall but can be redeemed by Divine Grace. Indeed, Kaliya symbolises all that is infernal and abominable. But the Lord, the Supreme Absolver, also symbolises all that is celestial and adorable in cosmos. And above all, Krishna is also a symbol of divine courage which can admit of no defeat. So the God-man, a spark of deathless fire, converts abysmal gloom to promulgate once more that all is He, the One-in-all, the Lord of Compassion, whose apparent ruthlessness is disguised Grace reclaiming the seemingly irreclaimable.

KALIYA

There was an ill-famed Lake in Brindaban
Wherein Kaliya, the hydra-headed King
Of monstrous reptiles, dwelt with his entire
Multitudinous brood—all terrible
Dark deputies of shadow-turbaned Death.
These often played, deep-hissing, in mighty rings
And made stray lollers, in horror, flee the mere,
Loathsome as hell. The poison from their fangs
Made the inviting waters swirl repellent,
Whence mounted a stabbing odour which had made
The young blades wither and the neighbouring trees
Widowed of leaves. And the eddies' exhalations
Hung in mid-air, a dangerous canopy :
An overt war declared on all that breathed,
Pitiless to winged life. Beautiful birds,
Pure, guileless denizens of sweet aerial climes,
Fell dead like crumpled blooms if they perchance
Entered the fatal, shimmering, voiceless zone
That brooded desolate—weaned from the skies,

While Kaliya glared and with his sibilant curses
Outlawed the blueborn warblers of delight.

One day at dawn rose Krishna, the ageless Prince
Of the ancient universe, who had come to wanton,
A reckless cataract, with humped, barren rocks
And made these teem with multifoliate grace.
Then sang and danced the perennial Evergreen
With ravishing rhythms which sent all animate things
Into a stone-still trance of ecstasy
And made the inanimate quiver like sentient beings.
Lastly He cried : "This day—all for the Lake !"
They stared at Him with silent, troubled eyes.
"Kaliya Lake," He explained ; then with a smile :
"The cows untether : come on all who will !
A new play to be enacted here and now."

"Kaliya Lake...a new play to be enacted !"
The rumour spread and all flocked to His side :
His friends and playmates and last, though not least,
His peerless Gopi-maids who hugged the clay
That bore the blessed impress of His feet,
Who, when He had called them His own queens of *Ras*,
Answered : "Nay, Lord, we only long to stay
Thy slaves and maids. Our highest rapture is
But to be possessed by thee. We yearn on earth
To bask for ever only in thine orbs' light,

To be havened at thy lotus-feet of Grace,
 To own no allegiance in life but thine
 And leave our nests to home in thy sky-bliss.
 O thou, our Idol, mad'st thou not the stars
 Twinkle upon the brow of night like eyes
 Which stole their beams from thine ! And is it not
 Thy breath that momentarily rejuvenates
 Each breath we draw—whether in plumbless pain,
 When thou wouldst stay away from us, or in
 The ecstasy of thy last union
 That makes us known through one heave of the heart
 All all the wisest never could explain !
 O Wizard Lover who, with thy mystic spell
 Of beauty and song, transmutes our inert
 Bodies into a charmed soul-ambiance
 Where dreamers' dreams are daily songs of service
 And every movement is an offering
 Of the being outpetalling to thee alone,
 And every act a holy sacrament,
 And every hope a mystic invocation,
 And every kiss a seal through meeting lips
 Of human soul betrothed to the Divine !”

Thus mused, athrill, the milkmaids as their sole
 Beloved marched them to the dismal Lake,
 When lo, they were all turned to stone with horror !
 For Krishna leapt upon a twisted branch

Of a dead tree which cast its wraithlike shadow
 On the waters of the inky Lake and then,
 Clapping His hands, dived straight into the hushed
 Waters which closed upon Him like a shroud.

They yelled in chorus—when they were once more
 Startled by a dear trill they knew so well !
 The curly head emerged, although the laughter
 Rang out in eerie echoes round the lake.

Helpless they gazed upon the fragile child
 Who courted certain doom for a whim—a play
 And blood stood frozen in their veins as they
 Followed His little arms outscattering lightning
 Against the sable waves that loomed like clouds.

“Ah, there He sinks enveloped by the monsters
 That glower and hiss at Him infuriated !”...

“No, there He floats again and laughs triumphant !”...

Mother Yashoda, in a frenzy, ran
 To rescue her nursling from the maws of hell,
 But Krishna's cry rang out imperiously :
 “Fear not, O mother mine ! I called you all
 To see enacted a new play of mine.
 Behold, but make no move to mar my rhythm.”

So they all stood and watched the marvellous
 Drama with pounding hearts and bated breath.
 Only his loyal cows in anguished bellows
 Sent out long wails—their wide eyes swimming in tears
 A fight unequal...tragic...a sunset gleam
 Pitted against the creeping hordes of Night !
 A fire-fly spark against the thunder-storm !
 A lonely hymn to love and harmony
 Opposed to an army drunk with lust for blood !
 But they were startled once again : O bliss :
 The Prince of lovers sang His Song of songs !

KRISHNA'S SONG

“O velvet waters !—me caress
 Now with your liquid lips alone.
 O primal cradle, old as space
 Of the parent-baby Narayan !

“Yon rose-red cloudlets !—me appraise
 With your indulgent sunlit eyes.
 O earthlings, heirs to loveliness !—
 How can you groan when hues surprise,

“And breezes blow and flowers bloom
 And honey-bees hum every morn,
 When daily in the dateless dome
 New suns and moons and stars are born ?

Pain is a phantom make-believe,
 A figment of our ignorance,
 A souging of wind, a bubble's heave
 A nonentity, a shadow-dance !

"Sweet mother mine !—shed tears no more,
 The clouds that bark still nurse a flame
 And symbol forth an occult lore
 Of fire no avalanche can tame.

"O maidens who so dauntlessly
 Have staked your all for the Unique
 And left your nests for an alien sky !—
 You are no damsels frail and weak.

"No life is life but's dearly won,
 The world's well lost for Beauty's Face :
 And Death's a mere chameleon
 Who changes hues for life's displays.

"Look, lightning sports with clouds' dim locks,
 Sparks burn the dusk of centuries !
 Whom all abhor—the Lover rocks
 In His arms and soothes with lullabies."

The commotion and the insolence of the music
 Awoke the hydra-headed King of snakes.
 He mounted to the water's edge and saw,
 Amazed, a rainbow's nursery where sunbeams

Played richly at hide-and-seak with truant sprays
 And hailed, a thrill, a strange and radiant guest
 Who splashed the irised billows and beat time
 To songs (He sang in a causeless jubilation)
 Deep insults to the sombre incarnate Hate !

Now incited by his dear and native lust
 To kill—he stung the Intruder's lovely limbs,
 Frail as a half-blown lotus, sweet as song,
 Tender as Cupid's lips and pure as virgins'
 Inviolat breasts where none save Love may sleep !

Blood spouted stanchlessly from Krishna's wounds
 And made the omniuous eddies a whirl of scarlet.
 The Gopis gave a scream of consternation :
 But Krishna sang on louder—blissfully.

The mighty Serpent, bloated now with rage
 Coiled him round with a horrific hiss.
 The splashes ceased : but his hostage, smiling, swelled
 His torso till Kaliya's tough spine ached
 Against the answering pressure. He released
 His mysterious captive who dissolved in laughter—
 Blither than bell—while His twin joylit eyes
 Challenged the other's burning, amazed orbs,
 Dilate with a new-born awe.

And then ensued
 A drama never witnessed upon earth.

The reptile—riveting his malignant orbs
 On his mysterious adversary's—now
 Chased Him as Krishna, elf-like, dodged him round
 With intermittent trills of impish laughter.
 They circled thus even as two wily fencers,
 Each forestalling the other's lunge to follow,
 And the strange human form looked half-divine
 As blood cascaded out from His smitten limbs
 Incarnadining the waves all around.....

An hour passed by.....or was it an aeon ?
 They knew not, as they all stood petrified,
 Marvelling how a myth had come to life,
 Real-unreal...a dream that none could dream...
 Or was it not a mystic paradox :
 This meeting of dark Hell with Holiness !
 None knew the answer even though all sensed dimly
 In the dread suspense and joy a pregnant symbol
 Of a something that descends to save, redeem.....
 Their reverie was broken : there rang out
 Another cry of Krishna who, like lightning,
 Flashed round his adversary's neck and then
 Even as a master-dancer, lo, He vaulted
 And, swaying, stood upon a chequered hood !.....

There reigned
 A hush outbreathing Death.....The multiple
 Hoods of the Python, ranged in a perfect circle,

Stayed motionless and waited as though baffled.
 'Twas changed, all in a moment : the sky on high,
 The light on the gravel below, even the mere's
 Black waters were aquiver !.....And from Heaven
 A stream of flowers rained on Krishna's head.
 The circumambient air was now transfigured
 And throbbed with a viewless angel audience,
 As the Flutist played His rapturous melodies
 No mortal ears had heard. He sang of the haunting
 Fragrance that led the pathlost in blind forest
 To the Way of liberation.....He sang of flowers'
 Souls that invited the homeless, bee-borne pollens
 And nursed them into blossoms.....He sang of stars
 Inviting vagrant comets to their cool
 Cradle of star-fulfilment.....And the rapt
 Spectators, in a trance of flawless bliss,
 Shed all their clinging dusky trepidation
 On the crests of a radiant, oceaned Harmony !

And then, at last, commenced the Dance of dances
 Giving to wing-clipped souls the power that soared
 Without blue wings.....kindled in sparkless mire
 Flame-rapturous roses.....dowered trees with leaves
 That whispered to the moon...and yet, alas,
 Was His not a far Rhythm at which they quailed,
 The dupes who hymned their vales of errant glimmers
 As the last Asylum of star-radiances ?
 Was not His Flute a luminous calling deep

Of bliss that was a pain because it made
 All lights they loved pale into meaningless
 Flickers that failed and dear things alien loom ?...

The song and dance cast even upon the Reptile
 A spell so potent that for an interlude
 His nature's tortuous propensities
 Forgot their native climate of hot passions.
 But then crept in a gnawing, shadowy fear :
 Might not this strange mysterious Lethe be
 A leaven of Light—a masquerador who
 Now sought admission as a passing guest
 To stay as the Ruler of his destiny ?
 A sapling that might grow into a tree
 Rending a plinth of rocks ? Or could He be
 A God in man, superior to him ?
 This last dismay whipped him into a fury :
 Superior ?—To Kaliya, the Serpent,
 The hydra-headed Lord of the underworld ?
 Was there a wielder of wind or storm or thunder
 Could front his wrath ?—"A God in man ?" he scoffed,
 "When God Himself is impotent—a rumour,
 At best—a pious puppet of His own
 Inexorable laws which only we,
 Titans, can defy with impunity !" .
 And thus the deep sky-call was countervailed
 By the downpull of his revolt approved of reason
 As serpentine as hell and obstinate

As long-drawn wrestlings of a fevered dream.
 And yet a deep regret within him stirred,
 Of a chance now missed through dark perversities
 Of self-will.....“For”, something within him said,
 “None are so blind as those who use their minds
 As veils to shut out God reborn as Man.
 What if that were the reason why I failed
 To see in the One—who came thus uninvited
 Repelled, derided, smitten—a sign of Grace,
 Who hailed my venomed fangs that spilt his blood
 With music adored of angels, saints and seers !
 Who save Divinity could woo a monster
 And answer his rage with song and dance and laughter ?
 Who else but God’s compassion dare declare :
 ‘No sinner is doomed—no worm’s too mean for mercy’ ?”
 So even the dreadful Snake had glimpsed a Vastness
 Beckoning unto him with human fingers
 And heard the call of Beauty—when he closed
 His eyes—and lo, the round of suffering
 Began once more with its old, endless cycle
 Of questionings no man could ever answer.

And so the Boa, maddened by the insult
 Of the rhythmic thud upon his haughty hoods,
 Hissed with a hundred bifurcating tongues.
 But each head he now raised was by the heels
 Of the Dancer trampled and left limp—as He

Played on His Flute with the ring of hoods to serve Him
 For stage with the Serpent's fiery eyes for footlights !
 And every head He blithely trod disgorged
 Long streams of blood till, Kaliya, exhausted,
 Implored the alms of the Lord's pity's grace.

Then emerged the Serpent Queens and hymned
their Guest
 Who had won high victory with the frailest weapons :
 Song, dance and beauty and laughter of a child !

THE SERPENT' QUEENS' HYMN

“Out from the womb of Rapture supernal,
 Out from inviolate Peace
 Who art thou risen, O fadeless New Dawn,
 Heralding darkness' surcease ?

“Krishna we name thee, Announcer of sky-thrill,
 Ultimate Bourne of all Gleam !
 Longing, for aeons, we waited thy Advent,
 Asking when thou wouldst redeem

“Desolate earth's lone heart-lost yearning,
 Groping in life's deep maze
 Still for a clue to thy radiant starland,
 Home of unwaning Grace.

“Armoured with lustre, embosomed in beauty,
 Heavenly Healer of pain !
 Core of compassion, Dispenser of justice,
 Comst thou, again and again,

“O everlasting Forgiver, absolving
 Flails of the Furies with laughter,
 Blessing the stricken—transfiguring Hades,
 Friend of this life and hereafter !

“Who ever plumbed thee with intellect’s plummet ?
 Who ever visioned thy last
 Purpose of maya—creating the cosmos
 Founding with atoms thy vast

“Kingdoms of marvellous grandeur, O Master
 Builder and King of Kings !
 Glory to thee, Omnipotent Wizard,
 Soaring to Light on Night’s wings !

“Ignorant playthings of Destiny’s whimsies,
 Vengeful or sombre or gay,
 How shall we fathom thy infinite wisdom,
 Scanning with mind’s wan ray ?

“Vaunting on crests of ephemeral triumphs,
 Weeping in troughs of despond,
 Lured by Fancy’s phantasmagoria,
 How can we win thy Beyond,

“If thy Vaikuntha’s compassion to us, Lord,
 Sings not in Brindaban’s tender
 Accent of welcome—upleading, through worship,
 Soul to her Heaven : thy Splendour ?

“May we then worship, for worship is soul’s last
 Offering hailed by thy Love.
 O Ruth’s quintessence ! grant us thy Vision :
 Self’s fog with sun-smile remove !” *

* This hymn is composed in quantitative dactyl, with modulations of trochee, spondee, cretic, tribrach and anti-bacchius, as for example :

Out from the/womb of/rapture su/pernal
 dactyl/trochee/dactyl/trochee
 Desolate/earth’s lone/heart-lost/yearning
 dactyl/spondee/spondee/trochee
 Soaring to/Light on Night’s/wings
 dactyl/cretic/one syllable
 Self’s fog with/sun-smile re/move
 dactyl/antibacchius/one syllable

THE SUPPLIANT AND THE FULFILLER

Krishna of the Mahabharat and the Bhagavat is a Lord of moods, elusive and unpredictable and, above all, given to playing as a human comrade with those who are overawed by divinity. Besides, He insist on behaving like a chameleon changing hues either to enchant His intimates or, more often, to bewilder all and sundry who come to take His measure. But Sridam, his life-long friend and quondam brother-disciple, comes to find Him out : Krishna poses, indeed, as a human being in his dealings with humans but is, in reality, the Lord Himself who masquerades as a mortal only to initiate a new play. That is His way, His *lila*—the pundits explain. But alas, it explains nothing—this much is revealed to Sridam by the Grace of Krishna himself. So he knows that words and definitions are formulated by His *maya* to delude the unwary into the self-complacent certitude that we can understand His comic purpose. But how can we plumb the Unfathomable with the plummet of our sense-bound mind ? Furthermore, why strive at all to understand the Infinite Consciousness that is Krishna with our utterly limited powers of comprehension ? Rather let yourself be

carried along by Him on the crests of your love for him and you shall, in due course, come to port in life's uncharted ocean. Have no misgivings, for even if, on the way, the waves should come to buffet you or the hidden shoals hurt, the pain shall only make you the stronger so you may fulfil your destiny the more swiftly. That is how Krishna's Grace works on those who can love Him like a simple, trustful child. Realising this, Sridam only aspires to love Him—asking nothing and giving all he has and is to Him in unbar-gaining self-surrender.

But his wife is of a different persuasion. She says, in effect, to him : "But why must you starve in misery when He, the Lord, is there to help you out ? You were His old comrade. You have but to beg of Him just once and you will see what you will see. Why shy at begging ? Are we not all beggars at His door ?"

Sridam is finally half-persuaded by her argument and sets off to petition his heart's Lord to come to his rescue—his nonpareil Friend of friends, now the great King of Dwaraka, installed in His resplendent palace. But when, at long last, he meets Him face to face, he stays mute, unable to ask His Lord to give him the material help he had trudged a hundred miles to seek. Krishna welcomes Sridam with open arms and tries to draw him out : can He not be of some service to him in any way ? Sridam has but to give a hint and all will be done.....But in vain : the beggar devotee, in tatters, is just lost in dumb ecstasy,

contemplating his Friend's peerless personality, incredible beauty and fathomless love ! Krishna starts jesting and sparring with him ; has him tended by the Queen herself ; seats His dust-laden guest on His own royal couch—but all to no purpose : Sridam just cannot bring himself to voice his prayer to be relieved of his poverty. So, in the end, Krishna embraces him the next morning and sends him back to his native village home in a royal chariot.

When, at last, Sridam arrives, he cannot credit his own eyes : lo, a shining palace meets him where stood his mean hut—only a week ago ! Krishna, the Omniscient—*antaryami*—reveals Himself once more as a bewildering Boon-giver ! He loves the dramatic and loves to play His pranks, the divine-human *lila*, again, of the Eternal Child !

A simple and lovely story, revealing the heart of Love Divine which gives unasked and gives most when petitioned least.

SRIDAM

The King adjured the Sage : “Oh, sing again
Of Him, the Inviolable Gleam
Who came from a zone beyond the clutch of pain
Our groaning earth to redeem :
Who hailed from His Vaikuntha His truth to plight,
As the Lord and Friend of all
And yet, alas, how few saw Him as the Light
And answered His mystic call !

“We prefer the siren who misleads, O Seer !
And, lured by her, we chase
The Maya of vainglory, pomp, career
And cravings that debase.
But seldom we hail the lustre that comes to heal,
Like the bounteous sun of gold
Which might our vision bless and the gloom repeal
Of sufferings manifold,
Could we but consent His Image to install
In the adytum of our soul :
But misled by the mind, we turn to a lesser call
And forfeit the highest Goal,

Unheeding His message that our senses find
 Their fulfilment, here below,
 When they are centred in Him for whom we pined
 For aeons—for the heart doth know
 What the mind derides : that we must consecrate
 All we on earth possess
 To Him alone. But we, alas, forget
 His call to blessedness,
 And so His loving, guiding whisper miss :

‘Your ears can be fulfilled
 By harking back to His Voice ; eyes—when the Bliss
 Of His Light to them’s revealed ;
 Words—when they thrill in limning flawlessly
 His Beauty that never can wane,
 Translated through all that was, is or will be .
 Such songs to Him attain.
 The mind arrives when, overawed, it greets
 His elusive mystery ;
 The self-will—when to His Will it submits
 In love’s humility.’ ”

Shuka, the sage, shivered in ecstasy
 And tears his trance-eyes filled.
 Parikshit, the Emperor, looked on silently
 Till he glanced at him and smiled.

"You are ripe, O King!" he said, "At last your heart
 Has learnt to wave aside
 Circean Maya's sense-beguiling art,
 In Him alone to abide.
 So I rejoice to comply and will relate
 A profoundly moving tale
 Of a saintly Brahmin, Sridam, whom our great
 Lord Krishna loved so well."

* * * *

He and our Lord lived in their boyhood
 with the peerless Sage
 Sandipani who loved them as
 his sons in his old age
 And so initiated them
 in the Vedas' mystic lore
 Which, contemplating, they in wisdom
 grew ever more and more.

Twenty years passed.....Now Krishna was
 enthroned with due eclat
 In His unique metropolis,
 the sea-girt Dwaraka.
 But Sridam, His old friend and comrade,
 wed to a loving mate,
 Passed his days in penury. Such
 was the decree of Fate

That oft the couple had to starve,
 And though he never complained,
 His loving spouse lost heart and sighed
 and wept as she was pained
 To see her husband strain in vain,
 day after futile day,
 To eke out a living till, at last,
 she cried : "I see no way
 But one, alas !—you must petition
 Him, our bounteous Lord
 Of Dwaraka—who was your boyhood's
 comrade : His one word
 Shall charm away the gloom of poverty
 and we shall know
 No more the sting of destitution.
 So forthwith you go
 To Him, the King of kings, who with
 compassion overflows.
 Why must we go on starving when
 we know—if once He chose,
 We would be rescued here and now
 from all our suffering ?"

But Sridam was aghast : "How can
 I wend to him, the King
 Of my heart and soul, for worldly goods ?
 To Him how can I pray

For aught but love's surrender at
 His twin feet night and day ?
 How can I ask for pelf of One
 who taught me how to love
 Him, the Eternal Lover ? Can
 a devotee approve
 Of petitioning the Lord for the boon
 of aught but deep devotion ?
 It's not for paltry pearls the soul-stream
 runs to His nectar-ocean,
 But to merge therein in love's absorption !
 —that is love's one cry :
 Can those who truly love the Lord
 for aught but His Love sigh ?"
 His loyal wife, in a passion of tears,
 rejoined : "But if it be :
 He's dearer than the dearest and
 new-makes everlastingly
 Our destiny from birth to birth ;
 if what the scriptures teach
 Be true : that we and He are one
 and 'tis for Him we reach
 In joy and pain and life and death ;
 if, to our groping soul
 His Grace alone can hold the Light
 that leads us to the Goal ;

If, when we win, 'tis His hand blesses :
 if, through our tear-dimmed eyes
 But His star-eyes attend ; in anguish
 if the lone heart cries
 For the only balm that can heal pain ;
 if His Love sentinels
 Our orphan lives still sleeplessly
 and the alien earth compels
 To suckle us with rivers, thrill
 with blooms and feed with grains ;
 If, wherever a heart draws breath,
 'tis His heart's breath sustains :
 Then how can it be sinful if
 in our dearth to Him we turn ?
 If all we live by comes from Him,
 how can we claim to earn
 By our own merit ? O beloved !
 can it ever be wrong
 For the child to stretch its hands to the mother ?
 Who are here so strong
 That they could on their frail feet walk
 if He leaned not to them ?
 Are they not wise who cling to the One
 from whom all strength must stem ?"

Sridam, now startled, made no answer
 for a space, then said :

"I will comply, beloved, and
 by your advice be led.
 I'll leave for Dwaraka tonight.
 But tell me : what can I
 Carry with me to offer Him ?
 For though, from the stars on high
 Down to wan dew all He pervades
 and all belongs to Him,
 He comes to us to teach us how,
 in wakefulness and dream,
 To convey to Him all all we have,
 demanding no return.
 Begin we must from little things
 till, in the end, we yearn
 To surrender all we have and are
 to Him, our All-in-all :
 For the essence of true worship is
 to answer His one call
 To be His own by owning nothing :
 for every little thing
 Offered to Him must draw the attendant
 closer to the King.
 The Divine disdains not human presents
 even when they are small :
 A fruit, a flower, a leaf, an incense —
 our Lord welcomes all.

So what have we to offer that
 I may now take with me
 To be laid at His dear feet ? Oh, think :
 when, smiling graciously,
 He'll take what I, His slave, shall give
 and so make me fulfilled
 By receiving back what was His own !
 Beloved ! I feel thrilled !”

But she was far from thrilled :
 She had but puffed rice in her store,
 Given as alms to starvelings
 and the poorest of the poor.
 Indeed, on this the pious couple
 had for weeks to live :
 But could the Lord from His own servant
 such a gift receive ?
 Even if He, in Grace, smiled on
 this pitiful offering
 Of a pauper friend—how could the friend
 forget He was a King ?

But as nothing better was at hand,
 she, weeping, filled with this
 Mean rice his wallet—as gloom followed
 Sridam's ecstasies.

"Strange is your lila, Lord !" he sighed.

"You come incognito

And hold us in your deep embrace,

Yet you none ever shall know !

So when we yearn to offer all

we have and are to you,

We are bemused that you, the Deep,

should come the drop to woo !

The sun to smile on dew, the blue

to lean, in love, to dust

And claim it as its kin—O riddling

Friend ! we are aghast !"

* * *

For hours and hours he trudged alone

Under the full moon's golden glow :

The sky was drunk above, as was

His heart with beauty's wine, below.

He hummed in joy : "O mystic Bard !

Eternal Lover ! King of Kings !

Will I be havened at your feet ?

Oh, why was I not born with wings ?

"How long's the road ! may my soul's flame

This distance burn and time efface !

When shall I hear His voice that makes

Life's waste a flowering wilderness !

“O blessed am I that I was born !
 I'll gaze on His eyes, the light's delight,
 And drink in His Flute, envied of gods,
 And laughter that repeals the Night !”

The ecstasy sustaining him,
 He recked not of his weariness
 And destitution as he walked,
 Cradling in heart the darling face.

The sun had risen and set again
 When he reached at last the golden gates
 Of Dwaraka where minstrels sang :
 “Here none who seeks Grace vainly waits.”

Anon, the city's lights all laughed
 And the palace glittered like a Queen
 Bejewelled, who seemed, in pride, to announce :
 “Here reigns the Lord, the Evergreen !”

It was a festal day : “Long live
 Lord Krishna !” yelled the jubilant crowd.
 Here sang the youths, there damsels danced
 And soldiers marched with heads unbowed.

Noblemen stared : the sentinel
 Once glowered at him, then looked away.
 All frowned on him : “How dare a tramp
 And beggar loiter here today !”

Crestfallen, the simple Brahmin prayed :

“To whom but the Lord can I appeal,
Half-blinded by the dazzle of pomp ?

O Saviour, save—the Way reveal !”

A causeless impulse made him turn :

Lo, the haughty sentinel now dozed !
The portals opened and, as he
Passed in, behind him swiftly closed.

“A miracle !” blithely cried his heart,

“The darkest, steepest paths He lights !
Can the Master fail His slave ?—and who
Will dare impede when He invites ?”

He plunged into Lord Krishna’s own

Dream garden and walked on air, but then
As from all sides gay laughters thronged,
His heart misgave him once again.

He stood in a daze when, suddenly,

A voice, deep-resonant like the sea’s
Sent him aquiver with delight
And his soul sang out : “Oh, here He is !”

A gust now swept aside the blind

Of a window close to him—when he
Had a glimpse of Krishna on His couch,
Conversing with Queen Rukmini.

Abashed, he lowered his eyes and turned :

'Twas wrong to have trespassed thus, unseen,
Upon the Lord and King, engrossed
In love-talk with his lovely Queen.

Just then the Lord exclaimed in joy :

"Sridam ! Is it you, my boyhood's mate !
Oh, do step in—the door's in front
How can you, brother, hesitate ?"

But Sridam hung his head in shame

And stood transfixed, still in a daze,
Till, on a sudden, he found himself
Clasped in his Godly Friend's embrace.

Before he knew, he was haled to the Queen

Of Dwaraka. To her Krishna said :
"Go, fetch a bowl of water and lave
His feet : sit, Sridam, on my bed."

The news took wings : "A ne'er-do-weel !

A man in rags ! dust-ridden and lean !
But the Lord Himself embraced the tramp
Whose feet are being washed by the Queen !"

Intrigued, the men and women-folk

Thronged in at the door and whispered : "Lo !
There on our Lord's couch ! He must be
A great Sage come, incognito !"

The more the commotion waxed, the more
 The humble Brahmin felt distressed,
 Till the Queen waved them away and then
 The Lord his old friend thus addressed :

“O Sridam ! loyal friend ! How long ago.....
 And yet it seems as though ‘twere yesterday
 We roamed the hills and dales in joy, together !
 How marvellous were those days of gold.....ah, those
 Dear unforgettable days.....do you remember,
 When we, two brother-disciples, lived in a flawless
 Harmony under the aegis of our Guru
 Sandipani, who called us his ‘twin sons’ ?.....
 When, with not a care in our guileless souls,
 We, unappeased, would wrest from all we touched
 An ever-new and inexhaustible rapture !.....
 When hourly woodland Nature would unfold
 Secrets unglimped, un hoped-for, fathomless,
 Overawing us at every bend—imparting
 The mystic message of her virgin soul
 Through the whisperings of longing, sentient things !...
 When momentarily, from sunrise to sunset,
 We thrilled to the dramas of countless lives we saw
 Enacted upon Nature’s sylvan stage :
 A thrill that was old and yet stayed ever-young
 Because our never-waning zest in things
 Rejuvenated everything we met

Ane scanned—which, in return, conveyed to us
 Entrancing greetings of evolving life !
 “O Sridam ! those were days of pure romance,
 Now dead and gone.....and yet I feel, sometimes,
 A wistful yearning wafted on dream wings.....
 Or shall I say, a twilit intuition
 Which, missioned from the sky, visits the earth
 Now and again, and says in a prophet voice :
 ‘Nothing is lost.....the past can never be dead,
 Because it relives through its legacies
 Of memories extending our heritage
 Of Wisdom no dust of Time can ever submerge’.”

Rukmini, seated on the floor, looked on
 And avidly drank in His words as they flowed.
 His dark and beautiful eyes now seemed to glisten
 As He sat on the bed beside Sridam. He said,
 Placing a gentle hand on his friend’s shoulder :
 “But why are you so dumb ? You have not once
 Looked at my face nor even greeted me
 With a nod or smile ! How have you grown so shy ?
 Is it because I am a King today ?
 But nay, I am not a king to you, dear brother !
 I am your Gopal, Krishna—playmate, comrade,
 Whom once you loved so well. Do lift your eyes.
 Am I not the self-same friend with whom you played,
 And scoured the woods for wild fruit, coloured stones,

Birds'-nests and butterflies and God knows what
 We culled and showed our Guru who smiled at them
 And patted us on the head as we described
 The virtues of our great exhibits to him ?
 How rapturous were those halcyon days, my friend,
 When, lovingly, he would explain to us
 The hidden imports of whatever we learnt
 At his dear feet under the grateful shade
 Of murmurous trees and thus grew—as I hope
 We did—in wisdom even as in our stature !”

He laughed and rushed on in a mock-solemn tone :
 “Nay, we cannot be fools at this late day,
 After having drunk at the fount of mystic wisdom
 Night after marvellous night !” His face was flushed :
 “And what a wisdom ! What a profound knowledge !
 Torrents of golden speech ! Do you remember,
 How mighty scholars who came to flaunt their learning,
 Or to hold him at bay with logic, felt overwhelmed
 When, tranquil and serene, he discoursed on
 The Vedas’ mystic symbols or cryptic mantras,
 Whose shadowy implications he transformed
 With his mature and unerring intuition
 Into a light that eloquently spoke
 To the eager hearts of all who were true seekers !
 And how he would say : ‘Experience must distil
 Its essence into the coral core of wisdom’—

Do you remember' And how a dreamy smile
 Edged his lips whenever we talked of death
 He countered, with a radiant certitude :
 'Nay : the everlasting No of Rudra—echoed
 By Nature dying, gasping—is eclipsed
 By the everlasting Yes of Narayan,
 When the One willed to be Many in His play.
 So nothing in life could ever die completely
 Covering its traces : all all is conserved
 And Death is but a shroud, a make-believe ;
 For the Everliving flashes His mystic signals
 Through the abysmal maws of the Dragon, Death,
 Announcing that He fashioned this evolving
 And multitudinous life for a deep *lila*
 Of varying delight—of seeing Himself,
 The One-without-a-second, mirrored in
 A myraid names and forms (even as the actor
 Savours himself through the different parts he plays),
 Ever manifesting through the changing rhythms
 His Being's inviolate poise no change can mar.'
 Yes, how our peerless Guru, through his love,
 Initiated us all in his vision,
 Resolving the world's discordant elements
 Into a marvellous, harmonious whole !"
 He gave a shiver of joy : "But even his vision
 Vast though it was in its unwall'd purview,
 Could never outvie the deep incredible love

That emanated from his luminous self,
 Even as the mellow and argent benison
 Emanates from the beneficent moon :
 A love that was so intimately human
 And yet outsoared its human limitations
 Which dog and stultify all human love.
 Ah, shall we, Sridam, ever forget that day
 So cataclysmic and, withal, so rich
 And revealing, when, at dusk, to fetch good fuel
 For our Guru, we two pressed ever farther on
 And, to our dismay, suddenly discovered
 That we had lost our way ! We felt so sad
 To think he would miss the fuel when, in a flash,
 Barked clouds like hounds of hell and rain and sleet
 Howled in rage and the skies rang out with doom's
 Deafening trumpets—and the monstrous trees
 Like helpless infants shrieked, convulsed with terror,
 As, lightning's javelins intermittently,
 Laid low, in flames, some of the stateliest trees,
 Which the hissing winds acclaimed with cruel applause,
 Till, in the twinkling of an eye, the earth
 Under our feet became a mass of rushing
 And roaring swirl—a veritable deluge !
 And then, do you remember, how you and I
 (Two waylost striplings, delirious with fright)
 Deemed 'twas the end of the world and ran and ran :
 But who could refuge give when all were orphans ?

And it was you who said this on that night,
 Do you remember ? And I nodded wanly,
 When we spied a darkling mound nearby which we
 Clambered up, breathless, hoping against hope,
 Repeating but the Guru's saviour name !
 And how we prayed together fervently
 And what a prayer —indeed, irrational,
 But how moving in its simple penitence !
 We wept : 'O Guru, you who do know all,
 Must have divined that we had, wickedly, schemed
 To steal some straw from a neighbouring peasant's hut
 And so surprise you all the more. That's why
 Lord Shiva on high, in wrath, has punished us
 And made us lose our way. But you, being greater
 Than Shiva, should have circumvented Him.
 But, nay, perhaps this we deserved, since we,
 Delinquents, failed you in your hour of need.
 But in the shadows, alas, we could not see
 That we had strayed far into an alien tract !
 We grieve, indeed, that we are so chastised,
 But rue even more because we could not fetch
 The wood you need so badly in this cold.
 That we are made to expiate our sins
 Is meet : but, oh, what makes us saddest is
 That for our sins you, too, have had to pay !"

Then with a smile and glance at Rukmini :
 "And so we waited, clinging to one another,

Till, after a while, the storm and downpour ceased.
 Even then we dared not leave the mound when, lo,
 We sighted afar a torch-flash—and oh, then
 Did not our twin hearts bound with joy, joy, joy,
 When we saw our Guru's figure loom ahead !
 He called out : 'Ho, my children ! Are you there ?'
 We yelled back : 'Here, O Guru, we are marooned,
 Upon this mound !' He cried : 'Lord Shiva be praised !
 But do not move, it's pitch-dark, I am coming.'
 Oh, what a last-hour rescue, Rukmini !
 You'll never, never be able to imagine
 The relief we felt when he came to save !
 And when had a Guru ever looked on earth
 More like a heaven-sent saviour than he did
 On that memorable night when he held us close
 And we snuggled against him, smiling through our tears,
 Finding rest and asylum, at long last,
 Like babes in the mother's bosom !.....Then he spoke
 And how his voice was choked with tears, O Queen !
 It almost seemed he was, indeed, a mother
 And father and master and friend in one...and yet
 Too overawing and unfathomable
 To be greeted as a human intimate :
 He seemed like a dappled sky which overarched
 A sobbing city, ravaged by vandal hordes.
 He said : 'My children ! How you jeopardised
 Your precious lives to serve your humble Guru !

I feel too moved tonight...I know not how
 To express...but I feel blessed to attest
 To such devotion in two frames so frail !—
 A love that counts no cost...an adoration
 That, even when menaced by the furies, draws
 Only on the Guru's name ! For from afar
 I heard your prayer. When you yourselves were stranded
 In the deluge, you implored but my forgiveness,
 Because I missed the fuel you could not bring !
 Trembling in fear and clinging to one another,
 You placed a trivial need of mine above
 Your precious lives ! O my spiritual sons,
 Now grown so dear to me ! I bless you both :
 In tears of ecstasy, with all my heart.
 So I tonight, give you this boon of boons,
 That you shall both attain the peerless One
 Beside whose glorious beauty's single spark
 The world's avalanche of beauty glimmers as pale
 As the firefly twinkle beside the noonday sun.”

Queen Rukmini, with bowed head, wiped two tears
 That trickled down her rose-red cheeks. A silence
 Now supervened as Sridam appraised his Friend
 Who smiled, and then continued, as it were,
 In a rapt monologue : “Yes, such was he,
 Our godlike Guru, being one with God,
 Than whom none can be higher—as sang the sages.

And they were right, for even the father and mother
 Must take rank *after* him—for while they give
 But mortal birth, the Guru alone can grant
 The last spiritual birth—the initiation
 Into the Eye of Light without whose boon
 No seer, however great, can hope to glimpse
 The Sun of suns whose orb to our eyes of flesh
 Can only glimmer as a nebulous sheen,
 And sound to our mortal ears as a faint rumour,
 Too distant and elusive to be hailed
 As an abiding Presence who can be loved.
 For we, earthlings, born to night, must revel in night,
 Like worms in slime. Few are those blessed souls
 Who can walk, unguided, the Way of Light, and love
 Truly the great unmet Supernal Being :
 Wherefore He assumes the Guru's human form
 To cajole the human in us, through loving him,
 To love the One who, through His deputy,
 Smiles first on our human love in the human way,
 Till we have evolved enough to apprehend
 The authentic rhythm of high celestial Love ;
 And so, as Guru, He comes to lead us back
 To the heavenly Haven in loyalty's blue boat,
 Sustained by His Love, no Titan waves can wreck
 And steered by His Light, no demon clouds can quench.
 O Master, who came down as His Vicegerent
 To restore to us the heritage we have lost !

Who are born to clay to redeem mortality,
 And wear the human garb to mediate
 As a rainbow bridge between the abyss and sky
 And transmute to gold our unregenerate life,
 With the alchemy of your soul's last benediction !
 We are blessed to have glimpsed once what we did :
 The immortal Grace ensouling a mortal frame ?”

Sridam at long last spoke as he looked up
 And met Lord Krishna's beatific smile :
 “It's true I know but little, my great Eye-opener !
 Yet forgive me, if I cannot accept all
 You underline in your rich ecstasy.
 I know : the Guru is a blessing sent
 By the Lord Himself. But this, too, I do know
 That you are the Lord, while he's the deputy ;
 You are the Sun, he but a pencil ray ;
 You are the deep and he is a mere drop,
 One, indeed, in essence and yet there *is*
 A gulf which even you, O nonpareil
 Magician, with all your eloquence,
 Have failed to annul. I know your subtle *lila*
 Too well, O wizard Minstrel, who rejoice
 In deluding people with your melodies,
 Singing, entranced, that when a devotee
 Has loved you once, you lovingly become
 His slave—the servant's ministered to by the Lord ;

Child by the mother ; vassal by the King !
 I know your stratagems from age to age.
 They say : as the Dwarf you came to the Titan Bali
 To serve him as a sentinel at his portal !
 They say : once, clinging to your Radha's feet,
 You confessed that she had come to initiate
 Your simple self in the mantra of soul's surrender ;
 That before her advent you had been a rustic,
 At best, but an eager acolyte in Love's temple !
 But who is this Beloved you stooped to serve,
 This peerless paragon of love and beauty,
 You adored as Radha ? And lastly, who is the Guru
 You send to us, earthlings, as a messenger
 Of your Grace Divine ? All, all is but yourself :
 The Gods and priests, the Gurus and disciples.
 The Unique, you sang in the Vedas, became the Many.
 But you seem to imply as though you, Lord,
were merely

One of the Many, a bubble 'mid other bubbles,
 A human being with human needs, depending
 On us for ever for your love's own sport.
 This may, indeed, be true ; since you may have
 Elected thus, in love, to depend on us,
 To masquerade as a human being with humans,
 To play at hide and seek with us, fool children,
 Assuming our human modes and lilt to savour
 The more your native, deep divinity.

But, in the last analysis, O my grand
 And guileless weaver of words and veils and masks,
 You know full well you are the Lord Himself
 Who have come to this our earth, incognito,
 But panoplied with your godhood's plenary powers.
 Nevertheless you, O mystieried child—who seem
 Never to grow up—you do love to play
 At being a child, a tiro, a disciple !
 So you needs must apotheosize the Guru,
 As one who taught you your own lordly lore !
 You sang : 'twas Radha who changed you, a novice,
 Into an adept of love divine. But O
 My frolicsome Lord, who sought birth in our world
 To be educated, tell me : had not Radha
 Been fashioned by you yourself with your own soul's
 Quintessence and then projected as your mate
 And mirror—that you, in your love-play, might thrill
 In your own creation and behold, in rapture,
 While looking into her, your own creation,
 The shadow of your deep, inviolate self
 Of Love and Loveliness and Bliss and Lustre ?
 You hailed me, Compassionate, as your dear old friend,
 Playmate and brother-disciple, as indeed
 I once had been—in those days when we both
 Served our Guru. But then, one day, my Eye
 Of Light did open, as you know, when I
 Glimpsed your true self. Since then I ceased to be

The innocent who had taken you at your word.
 But though we may outgrow our human folly,
 You will persist in your caprice divine,
 Smiling sweetly when we vaunt we are wise
 Till, one day, you tear off the glimmering mask
 Of make-believe and show us what we are :
 Blind egoists who even know not their own selves
 Although we glibly speak of 'I and mine !'
 Yea, Lord ! among your countless modes of play
 You do love making fools of us by sparring
 And joking with us till we, beguiled by you,
 Take you, alas, at your face value, unknowing
 How you were laughing at us, although it was
 The laugh of love indulgent—or, shall I say
 Of the Humourist, amused to see a part
 Of Himself behaving as though 'twere the whole !
 Pray frown no more now that you are exposed :
 For one thing, please remember : though you are
 A great word-spinner—you happen to be a greater
 Boongiver, and so, in a munificent mood,
 You gave me once the eye that rends the Veil."

His eyes now glistened as a half-smile flickered
 Over his trembling lips. Gone was his shyness
 As he shot an eloquent glance at Rukmini.
 "I will tell you, mother, how it happened to me.
 You heard from Him how our great Guru gave us

His blessing. But alas, as the years went by,
 My yearning only deepened for Lord Vishnu
 Whom I still worshipped as the God of Gods,
 Never surmising once that He, as Krishna,
 Had played and fought, argued and joked with me,
 Masked as a human to deceive us all !”

He paused and laughed and then raced on :

“Now listen :

I'll tell you how transpired the miracle. I,
 Now married for ten years, had grown to love
 My lovely wife who worshipped me and strove
 Ever hard to serve me with her deep devotion,
 And, pure like virgin snow, sustained me with
 Her loyal support. But I still stayed unhappy.
 I brooded more and more as the sterile days
 Grew into months and months into barren years,
 Until another birthday came. In joy,
 She, with her hard-earned money, purchased for me
 A lovely present, an image of Lord Vishnu.
 But the moment she had placed it on the altar
 Of our bleak and dingy bedroom, I felt sad
 As never before. She looked me in the face
 In sorrow, but said nothing, as she knew
 Why I now grieved. I met her glance and said :
 ‘Forgive me, my beloved, it is wrong,
 I know, to wail on a propitious day,
 When I should remain grateful, heart and soul,

For all the Grace I have received from Him,
 Lord Narayan, the Resident of my heart.
 I know it is because His great compassion
 Had drawn me to Him that I felt ever more
 Lonely and desolate, as the barren days
 But deepened the yearning in my empty heart.
 I know, too, this nostalgia, this distaste
 For worldly things is a sign of His approval.
 For all that, a rooted sorrow is not bliss
 Nor void—fulfilment. I cannot resist
 A creeping, grim, inexorable despair
 (Born of a sigh I never can put to sleep)
 That in this life I shall not attain the One
 For whom I turned away from worldly life,
 Seeking nor wealth nor fame nor even the bliss
 Of conjugal felicity, as you know.
 As days pass by, I feel I am not destined
 To be happy on earth, still less to make you happy.
 I was wrong to marry, but what's done is done.
 I ask you to forgive me once for all,
 But my die is cast : I do not even wish
 To be happy with happiness as the others are.
 I seek no bliss save at His dawn-rose feet,
 No lustre save the love-light of His eyes.
 He has not shown Himself to me, my cruel,
 Elusive Lord, and though my friends and neighbours
 Have lavished on me all their love and blessings,

I have no peace, because my Lord still stays
 Withdrawn—beyond the clouds. Beloved mine !
 I fear I have lost : for Him I never shall win
 As long as I live and so I wish no more
 To prolong a pointless life I cannot bear.’
 As I said this she sobbed, clinging to me,
 And our tears of black despair, now flowing fast,
 Mingled when, lo, the Revelation came :
 I saw an Image in every tear that dropped
 And it was His, your Lord’s, not Narayan’s !
 And each of these now sang in irony :
 ‘You loved me, played and laughed and slept with me
 But not once recognised me ! I came to you
 All the way from my remote Vaikuntha,
 Only to find, friend, that you were content
 To parley with me as a human mate !
 So I had, at last, to enter and indwell
 Your human tears and lie prone on the floor
 Entreating you to accept me, as I trust
 You will now, in your mercy, so we may
 Live hence in flawless harmony together.’ ”
 He wiped his unbidden tears and then resumed :
 “O radiant Queen, you know what fools we are.
 We glimpse the star but then hark back to phantoms;
 We feel His Love—then turn to lesser loves.
 Still He forgives and comes from age to age

In different masks and woos us, mortals, singing :
 'Blessed are they who answer His Flute-call;
 Blessed are they who yearn for the summit vision;
 Blessed are they who, at one throw of the dice,
 Venture to stake their all for the All-in-all.
 Yea, they alone shall hear the Song of songs
 And, feeling His deep heart-beats in their hearts,
 Shall be fulfilled—defeating destiny.' ”
 He shivered, appraised Lord Krishna and then smiled:
 “And so I was delivered from my blindness
 By you yourself—as you, Omniscient, know.
 And this, too, you must know how, since that day,
 I died to my old self to be reborn
 To a magnificent unhorizoned life :
 The whole world changed for me since I had changed.
 I look, indeed, the self-same pauper, but
 I am no more the plaything I once was
 Of Time and Fate—a flotsam, at the mercy
 Of every gust and eddy. I see your greeting
 In every flower's nod; I hear your Flute-call
 In every melody ; I feel your touch
 In a friend's embrace, as in the foeman's blow.”

His voice now quivered as, in ecstasy,
 He rushed on : “How the incredible comes to pass :
 The drop returns to the deep and yet retains
 Its identity ! ...how the soul, when drowned in bliss,

Wins at one bound to Immortality—
 I know not, I confess, nor ache to know.
 For in the last resort, my Lord, how could
 Man, with his puny mind, ever divine
 Your inconceivable heights or plumbless depths ?
 So we are baffled when you vouchsafe to Night
 The boon of vision of the new Sunrise.
 To think that even we, Fate's feckless minions,
 Can climb, sometimes, to peaks whence we can see
 Like radiant sons of deathless Light and Bliss !
 And so I saw that you, the Guru of gurus,
 Had come to the Guru to play a triple part :
 First, to reveal on earth his godly role
 As a holy channel along which angel Grace
 Comes down to us to awaken in our dark
 And cabined selves the God who lies asleep.
 For you come to lead us up the path of Love,
 (Sweet Love Divine, whose other name is worship)
 By showing us how one must start : you come
 In the Guru's form—to draw us on to adore him
 As our one true friend and luminous guide, and then,
 As his true self of Godhood comes unsheathed
 Little by little, we grow to love the Lord
 At one remove by loving his Vicegerent.
 And lastly, you come, I saw, to open our eyes
 To the exquisite beauty of humility
 Which bows spontaneously and sings : 'I will

Set store no more by what I like or hate
 But yield to the Guru's judgment, first and last,
 And subdue myself to accept what he prescribes.'
 I found, O Lord, you came to the Guru's feet
 To teach us, mortals, how to worship him.
 And so I could not help but smile when you said
 That you had learned all from our Guru who won
 To his seerhood because *you* had given him vision !
 Strange is your *lila*, countless are your hues
 And masks of maya, Divine Chameleon !
 Whose real colour, beyond your moods, none knows ;
 You love to set us agape : but this your mood
 Of hymning the Guru's deep divinity
 And extolling him as your unique preceptor,
 Exceeds in strangeness all your previous mimes."

His bright eyes twinkled now as he resumed :
 "But perhaps it was not so strange after all.
 For you are no common Avatar, my Lord !
 Those who have seen you most have known you least.
 You played at being a child and then revealed
 To Yashoda in your mouth the universe.
 When still a boy, did you not disconcert
 Even the Demiurge Brahma who exclaimed :
 'The wise who boast of having known thee, Lord,
 Had best be left to wallow in their delusion :
 I, on my part, can only humbly confess

That all my powers of miracle divination
Stand baffled when they strain to appraise thy Self !'
And you do enjoy when you confound others
And revel in songs whenever they find you out !
For then, if they laugh—you outlaugh them all,
Amused even more at your own discomfiture !
Do you remember how once came to our portal
A growling tiger ? Even our Guru's wife
Screamed from the next room. But I knew at once
And beat the tiger's skin off with a mace
When, run to earth, you laughed and laughed—
acclaiming,
Even more than I, the blows you had received.
Yes, that is you all over, my Lord ! You love
To hoodwink simple folk : yet when they once
Have learned to pierce your maya's veil—you bless them,
Because, in the battle of wits, they won against you.
You have, I note, pursued the same technique
Tonight, great Artist ! You seat me on your coach,
Lavish honeyed endearments, talk with me
Without reserve and tell Queen Rukmini
That I was your quondam brother-disciple, friend,
So she must run herself to wash my feet
As though I were a mighty sage or saint
On a par with you and grew with you in wisdom
So rapidly (always keeping pace with you !)
That all who adore you must adore me, too !

Since once I played with you on equal terms,
 I am still your equal—is not that your logic,
 My subtle Friend ? But as we have seen through this
 Deep game of yours,—so once again, I guess,
 You will admit defeat and laugh the loudest,
 Whereafter you will let the curtain drop,
 After the climax of your comedy,
 So human and, withal, so heavenly !”

A silence fell. Then smiling
 Queen Rukmini said to the King :
 “Now that you are unmasked, Lord,
 We know you will start to sing
 And play the flute and dance on,
 Seeming to forget all,
 And make us all forget, too,
 The world’s gorgeous carnival.

“Since the dawn of Time, O Elusive
 Enchanter of the heart !
 This has been your wont—you visit
 Each time to play a new part,
 Which to all but yourself is baffling ;
 We only know : we are yours
 And you come in various guises
 To knock and knock at our doors.

“But then we are told : we earthlings,
 Are loath, Lord, you to hail !
 But is it fair, we ask you,
 When you cherish your mystic veil ?

“Pray think : your erstwhile comrade,
 Whom as your guest you acclaim,
 You asked not once how he prospered
 Or what is his wife’s name.

It may well be he comes for something
 Their children sorely need ;
 But you never gave him an opening :
 A strange compassion. indeed !

“I am sure, Lord, you could help him :
 Can aught hurt if you would heal ?
 But you race on—praising the Guru’s
 Grace which comes to fulfil !

Has he trudged long miles, I wonder,
 To be told what already he knows ?
 So his doleful sigh I echo :
 “The eternal child never grows ! ” ”

* * * * *

“But how could I ?” Lord Krishna laughed.
 “He was too shy, tongue-tied.
 So, to break the ice, I raced on—hoping
 he’d in me confide

But if I failed, whose fault was it ?
 I wooed him with all my art :
 But never, alas, he met me half-way,
 nor once played his part.
 He was voiceless as the tomb. But let
 that pass. Now Sridam, be
 Expansive—nay, but tell me first :
 what have you got for me ?
 I know you must have for an old friend
 a lovely present brought :
 You, who were generous to a fault,
 could hardly have forgot—
 Ah, here's your wallet ! I presume
 we have here something sweet
 And savoury—and I know 'twas offered
 by your spouse. Do greet
 Her thoughtful self on our behalf—
 you ratify, my Queen ?
 Look, here's the finest, whitest, purest
 rice you ever have seen !
 And how it melts in the mouth !
 Beloved Rukmini ! do try—”
 But, snatching from His hand the wallet,
 she said laughingly :
 “A truce, my gracious Lord ! once you
 accept what one has brought,

He's blessed—is there on earth a fool
 or saint who knows it not ?
 So hence it shall stay in my keeping
 and all who'll come to me
 Will partake of this as your sweet gift
 and bless him gratefully.
 I'll leave you now to your dear friend,
 since before me he feels so shy
 To tell you what he needs—which, Lord,
 you never can deny
 To a peerless devotee like him ;
 I feel he's in distress
 Which none but you, O world's Sustainer,
 finally can redress.
 Although I know you hear the frailest
 flower's softest sigh,
 Thrice-blessed is he—to whose cry you,
 in person, would reply."

When they were left alone together,
 Krishna smiled and said :
 "Now tell me, Sridam, all about yourself.
 Whom have you wed ?
 You told us she is pure and true,
 which I can well believe.
 But how about your household ? Though

Nor crave for worldly things—for all that,
 do tell me, my friend,
 If there be aught you lack. Know this :
 you can on me depend.”

But Sridam shook his head as tears
 of love leapt to his eyes.
 “You ask strange questions, Lord !” he smiled.
 “The heart to which replies
 Your answering heart is blessed—as
 said rightly your great Queen.
 And can one still of dearth complain
 who has known the Evergreen ?
 I knew you not of old—’twas then
 I was a pauper, indeed !
 But now that you, the Divine, I see
 in all—am I not freed
 From the clutch of Maya, the Circe ?—so
 how can I hanker still
 For anything—when you descend,
 in person, to fulfil
 My destiny—what can I ask,
 when, you, incarnate Grace,
 Have come to steer my derelict soul
 to the Haven of blessedness ?

Sleep came not to him on that night :
 He prayed and prayed, in ecstasy,
 To his heart's one King, as tears of bliss
 Coursed down his twin cheeks stanchlessly.
 Next morning when his friend and host
 Came in to bid him farewell, he
 Fell weeping at His holy feet.
 Then Krishna blest him tenderly :

“You have, indeed, attained through love
 A status millions crave but few
 Reach even after years of hard
 Austerities : so I greet you
 As a thrice-holy soul who won
 By dint of a rare simplicity
 To the Vision envied of great seers
 And the love of a God-owned devotee.”

* * * *

As Krishna's golden chariot rolled
 On the way to Sridam's village home,
 He sat in a half-trance and sang :
 “O Lord ! what fools we are to roam

The world still hunting after wealth
 And fame and the senses' transient thrills !
 When shall we learn that bliss attends
 But those to whom your Grace reveals

Your starry secrecies withheld
 From all save the ones who long to give,
 Unbargaining, their all to you :
 Yea, these alone you will receive.

“And so it was—I won the Boon
 Of boons for which the Gods still pray :
 Your loving smile, your tender glance !
 Oh, who shall plumb your mystic play ?

“O Timeless, Lone, Omnipotent
 Sustainer of this universe !
 Whose breath pervades the vastitudes
 And will drive sun and moon and stars !

“What am I, Lord ?—a speck of specks,
 A feckless flotsam caught in dark
 Eddies of Fate—and yet you came,
 King Flame, to hail a beggar spark !

“On your own couch you made me sit !
 My eyes with your holy glance caressed !
 Oh, what are you and what am I !
 And yet this clod you, God, embraced !

“I know, O great Omniscient,
 You guessed why this my little self
 Had come and so in your divine
 Solitude denied me pelf.

“For luxury being the snare of snares,
 Perhaps, if I grew rich, my soul’s
 Deep aspiration might be quenched
 And I would miss the Goal of goals :

“The Haven of your lotus-feet.
 Grant—this I never may forget.
 Even if I starve from birth to birth,
 May I, Lord, but on your will wait.”

* * * * *

His trance was broken. The charioteer
 Said : “Here’s your happy hamlet, but
 Although this alley bears your name,
 great saint, I see not a single hut.”

The Brahmin stared and stared wide-eyed :
 For on the precise spot where his
 Cottage once stood he only saw
 A sumptuous palace ! “What is this ?”

He mused, perplexed : “Am I awake
 Or dreaming ? For how can it be ?
 Surely, my little hut was—where
 A palace is all I can see !”

Alighting from his carriage, now
 He entered the portal, marveling :
 A gleaming garden ! A rippling lake !
 White swans swimming ! None but a King

Could such a royal mansion own !

There...men and women's voices gay
Came wafted on the breezes' wings !.....

He saw some antelopes in play

And plumaged peacocks proudly strut !...

He shook his head and turned round—when
He started : a familiar voice

Blithely accosted him, and then

Two loving arms entwined his neck...

He shivered, amazed...for it was she,
His wife, all smiles, but how transformed:
A figure arrayed resplendently

In shining silk and glittering jewels !

With a cry he sprang back—for who knew :
Perhaps it was a sorceress

Who, decked out thus, had come to woo

And wean him from his chastity !

He cried : “O Lord ! come, save me now
From this your maya.” The other laughed :

“But do, beloved, tell me, how

“You take me for His maya ? Look :

Do I not heave as large as life ?
Can raiments change a woman so ?

Fie ! am I not the self-same wife

“Of yours who rightly counselled you
 To implore our great Lord Krishna’s Grace ?
 And since to Him you had appealed,
 He came our suffering to redress.”

Sridam stayed silent, overwhelmed,
 With bowed head, till his soft eyes filled.
 Then, meeting her loving gaze, he said :
 “But nay, my love, I never appealed

“To Him for a material boon.
 How could I—when He came to embrace
 Me, His eternal slave, and then
 Squandered on me such tenderness !

“’Tis your petition He has heard
 Because, beloved, you begged for me,
 Because you saw me daily starve
 In a chronic, hopeless poverty.

“You are thrice-blessed, O my dear
 And faithful spouse, who cried for me !
 Whose anguished prayer had winged to Him,
 Our Lord, and so, compassionately,

“He willed this palace into being
 And changed you into a fairy Queen.
 Oh, I am blessed to have a mate
 Whose heart’s cry moved the Evergreen !

“Only, my love, I am afraid
 Lest all this wealth and luxury
 Deflect us from His Grace we seek
 To be absolved everlastingly.”

She smiled and said : “Beloved mine !
 For once you are wrong. For does one need
 To pray to Him to be fulfilled ?
 ’Tis not to remind Him that we plead,

“But only to open our hearts the more,
 Through supplication, to His Grace
 We only pray to be attuned
 To His Flute-note of blessedness,

“That our listless hearts may wake athrill,
 Resonant to His melodies,
 And lastly, we can pray because
 Our prayers reflect His harmonies.

“But why say : only they do pray
 ’To Him who pray with words and songs ?
 When all that is prays all the time
 And for His benediction longs ?

“Behold : the desiccated clod,
 The sun-scorched field, the leafless bower,
 The thin stream flowing listlessly,
 The dying grass, the fading flower :

“They cannot say for what they pine,
But He, as cloud, knows in the sky,
And yearns to answer earth, even as
She yearns to appeal to Him on high.

“All all we cherish here below
Are but His boons : the light, the breeze,
The grains and fruits that nourish life,
And rivers that our thirst appease.

“Only, alas, we seldom ache
To meet in all the One-in-all,
It is to know Him as our Soul,
We learn to pray and love to call.

“But even when we claim—we call
To Him, in love, we fail to see
That 'tis because He calls to us,
We dare call Him insistently.

“So dread no more what he vouchsafes,
But let us sing : all all is His !
How can we miss His Grace—if we
His gifts receive on bended knees ?”

PARABLES AND SIMILES

OF

Sri Ramkrishna

There is a Sanskrit saying "*Upama Kalidasasya*" which means : Kalidas fascinates by his similes and images. But those who have thrilled in the *Gospel of Sri Ramkrishna* will probably have been even more fascinated not only by his similes and images but by his parables and stories as well.

In all ages and climes the great saints and seers have, indeed, loved to speak in parables. But nowhere are parables and stories, legends and mythology as widely popular as they are in India. In fact our saints and seers often do seem to vie with one another in exploiting the picturesque to bring home the profound messages of the spirit. Some highbrow purists and sombre ascetics may deprecate this penchant as militating against high austerity. But then Sri Ramkrishna never believed in austerity and revelled in humour and laughter. So we find that his delightful similes and parables are shot through and through with *bonhomie* and sympathy, merry twinkles of the eye and kindly irony.

We fight shy, often enough, of the relentless missionaries and evangelists—and not without reason. For something within us warns us, rightly, against the loud dogmas of those proselytisers who go out, alas, to convert others before

converting themselves. Happily for us, Sri Ramkrishna was not one of their ilk—in that he remained, first and last, a guileless child of the Divine Mother and as such needed no conversion. That is why his parables and similes, images and stories speak straight to the child-heart in each of us—the child-heart which, never growing old, can never cease to love simplicity and spontaneity nor resist the appeal of vivid images such as his which titillate the imagination as much as they captivate the mind. I have tried to render freely this simple spontaneity of his parables and similes which have thrilled millions and borne home to them the millennial wisdom of mystic India through the beauty of his fascinating imagery and the appositeness of his telling rejoinders.

THE PIGMY'S VAUNTING

"I know the ocean," sang the moon.

"Was I not in her womb ?

I know, I tell you, what she is :
her depth but I can plumb."

"Hush ! none but I can read her soul,"
the sun said, "I confer
On clouds I raise the power the sea
to new-create, dear sir !"

The doll of salt laughed : "Nonsense ! who
but I can probe the deep,
Whose every atom I pervade
in wakefulness and sleep ?

"I'm diving in—you two just watch,
anon I'll tell you all
About her—" so it plunged and, lo,
dissolved beyond recall. !

THE IGNORANT

“Our God, the Brahman’s static and dry,
 He’s loveless, featureless, pale
And so,” the pundit thundered on,
 “Him we, men, must not fail.

“I mean—it’s up to us to endow
 Him with our human beauty,
And with our lovely love to make
 Him lovable is our duty.”

The God-lover laughed : “How dare you brand
 The Blissful Nonpareil,
One who’s the soul of Love and Grace,
 As loveless, featureless, pale ?

“Said a child who never had seen a horse :
 ‘Oh, how our cowsheds teem
With gorgeous horses—how they moo
 And how they pour us cream ! ”

DISCRIMINATION

"You say—all all on earth is God !

Guru, I thrill—I thrill !

Oh ! hailing Him in all I now

my destiny will fulfil !"

"The elephant's mad—fly, fly !" they cried.

The disciple smiled and said :

"Fie, fie ! Since all is He—let us

the elephant greet instead !"

The mahut pleaded : "Sadhuji !

Move off at once, I pray !"

He bowed : "Hail, elephant Lord !" and was

by the beast hurled out of the way.

Now maimed, he wept : "O Guru ! all

was God—did you not say ?"

—"But the mahut, too, was God, so why

did you not Him obey ?"

SELF-DEFENCE

The saint said : "Snake ! to be saved, you must
hence bite none and must pray
To Him, our Lord, the Friend of all."
The snake bowed : "I'll obey."

Now day and night he fasted and prayed
and so grew lean and weak :
One day a boy who found him prone,
belaboured him with his stick

And flung him, half-dead, into a ditch.
His Guru, passing by,
Tended him back to life and asked :
"Who hurt you, son, and why ?"

Relating all, he sighed : "But you
said : I must none sting hence !"
"But did I say you must not even
hiss in self-defence ?"

INSTINCT

The Muslim faith was forced on him
and so, against his will,
The Brahmin, with a sigh, resolved
to Allah to appeal.

“O Allah, Allah,” he adjured,
“Allah ! take pity on me !”
But now and then “O Mother Kali,
Allah the Great !” said he.

The Mullah drew his sword : “O fool,
if Kali’s name you breathe—”
The Brahmin pleaded : “I’ll explain,
your hungry sword do sheathe !”

“You see, I’m brimful, up to my throat,
with Kali who comes to shout
Down your Allah now and again
and so her name breaks out !”

AUTHORITY

The orator was hurraed when
 he thundered in the hall :
“As the sun and moon rain down their light
 unstintingly on all,

“Even so must we enlighten—help
 our poor and helpless brothers
Friends, bear in mind—*noblesse oblige* :
 uplift we must the others.”

The man of God broke in : “Brave words !
 But have you, sir, received
His mandate ‘the others’ to uplift ?
 Are you not self-deceived ?

“For your poor flicker never will
 suffice : the fireflies bold
Can help to show the gloom—but not
 repeal its stranglehold.

THE DIVINE AWARD

**“Rup, let’s to the temple—the priest there will
tonight on Bhagvat speak.”**

**—“Are you crazy, Bhup, to want to attend
such lectures dry as stick ?**

**“Let’s rather have fun : a ripping girl
at the party is singing and dancing—”**

**—“You’ll wallow in hell, O rake ! I hold :
Bhagvat is great—entrancing !”**

**Rup, at the party, swore : “I’m damned !”
Blessed is Bhup, he’s won !”**

**Bhup, with the priest, cursed : “I am an ass !”
Isn’t Rup having all the fun !”**

**After his death, Rup on the angels’
wings to heaven was flown.**

**And Bhup, alas, by the devil’s dragons
into dread hell was thrown !**

THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE

At the Guru's ashram they, two brothers,
had lived for twenty years,
Conning the scriptures, drinking in
the doctrines of the seers.

The mother asked : "Sons, tell us all
you've learned about the Lord."
The elder brother rushed on : "Well, He
is Silence and the Word,

"Immanent and transcendent, vast
and infinitesimal, lone
And multiple, omniscient, grand,
Omnipotent....." and so on.

She looked at the younger son who bowed
his head and remained dumb.
Said father : "You have known, for Him
none can define or plumb."

RESPONSIBILITY

“O Krishna,” sighed the King, “we are
thy helpless tools and so
The cow I shot in sudden wrath
was killed by you, you know !”

Krishna appeared incognito
before the King and said :
“Who owns this beautiful kingdom, King ?”
—“Fool ! have you lost your head ?

“I own it—being the King.”—“How great !
And who won the last war ?”
“My soldiers, ninny !”—“Oh ! led by—?”
—“By me—how dense you are !”

—“And who dispenses justice ?”—“Who
but I, the King, who rule ?”
—“Flawless ! so only the cow, it seems,
was killed by Krishna, the fool ?”

THE WIRE-PULLER

“Son, when you do things, bear in mind :
the final sanction is His.
For none can do what Krishna bans,
in the last analysis.”

—“How can that be—since in my bones
I feel so vividly
That I can do or undo things ?
So, sire, I hold I’m free.”

The Guru smiled : “Look there, in the pan :
the peas and beans are dancing !
Hark : they are singing : ‘We frisk because
we feel it’s vivid—entrancing !

“But remove the fuel and they shall cease
to caper and will agree
That ’twas the fire that made them jump
and feel that they were free.”

ALL IS HE

All loved the saint—the men and women
and the children of the town :
Only a jealous handful wagged
their tongues to run him down.

But the saint's fame only grew with time
till a hoodlum with a stone
Hit him on the head and left him in
a ditch—unconscious, prone.

Next day, a passer-by cried out :
they all thronged, weeping, apace.
A doctor nursed the great God-lover
back to consciousness.

He said : “Can you, saint, recognise
who's feeding you ? do say !”
He smiled : “I know : 'tis He, my friend,
who stoned me yesterday.”

THE ALERT AND THE WISE

“Mother,” said Kartic, “loves the alert :
the lazy she does despise.”

Ganesh demurred : “But she loves more
the tranquil, thoughtful and wise.”

Uma awarded : “The one who’ll round
the world and first return
Shall be my favoured one and thus
my wreath of blessing earn.”

Flew Kartic on his peacock and chuckled :
“The sluggard who rides a mouse
Is doomed as she, too, knows full well :
but the lout she wants to rouse.”

When he came back, lo, garlanded
sat in her lap his brother
And laughed : “I went round her who holds
a million worlds : the Mother !”

GRACE AND DISCIPLINE

“They all extol God’s Grace, but Guru,
how can Grace redeem
Our ages’ karma overnight ?
I hold it a pleasant dream.

“For how can we through a miracle win
what only effort can give ?
Can discipline be real and yet
Grace not a make-believe ?”

—“My answer is ‘yes and no ’—for Grace
and discipline both are true ;
The miracle, too, is real and does
come to deliver you.

“What seems to the mind a paradox
to the soul gleams clear as day :
For having passed beyond the mind,
it sees the One in play

“Through contradictions. Grace is the wind,
but if you hoist not high
Your sails with effort can you hope
to benefit thereby ?

“A centuried gloom has reigned in a cave,
but strike a match and, lo,
Does it dissolve in a flash or take
a century to go ?”

EVOLUTION

“O Guru, if Grace *is* a source of bliss,
 why do most men decry
Its reality—a boon for which
 all saints and sages sigh ?”

—“We appraise things in the measure, my son,
 we grow and evolve. Just go
And get this stone assayed in the mart,
 then what I mean you’ll know.”

The disciple went to a fruiterer who
 the jewel weighed and scanned,
Then said : “Three apples I can give
 for this—you understand ?”

The other appealed : “For such a prize
 you’ll surely part with four—”
The man laughed out : “What ? For this bauble ?
 Begone You’ll get no more”

He went next to a dealer in shawls
who said : "Well, well, for this
I'll offer ten shawls, but no more,
so do not haggle, please !"

He went, last, to a jeweller who
said, thrilled : "Oh do, friend, sell !
I'll pay ten thousand guineas for
this diamond nonpareil."

THE FOOL OF FOOLS

“It’s true one should be humble, saint !
but wise, too, you must add.
For I do feel like weeping when
when I see a fool—it’s sad !”

—“How admirable !” smiled the sage,
“But who can claim he’s wise ?”
The vain man said : “O good saint, you
do take one by surprise !

“For folly is folly : look over there
at the stupid camel, feeding
On thorny grass and brambles—oh,
look : how his mouth is bleeding !

“Now tell me : can you think
of a bigger idiot, alas,
Than one who, bleeding, will still go on
munching thorny grass ?”

The saint asked sweetly : “Tell me, was
 it not your daughter who died
 Five years ago of snake-bite when
 for days and nights you cried ?

“And then did not your good wife hang
 herself, distraught with grief,
 When your dear eldest son was clapped
 in prison, proved a thief ?

“Also, did not your youngest son
 who killed some one in a brawl
 Abscond ? And do not people say
 aghast : ‘Oh, what a fall !’ ”

The old man sighed : “My life is now
 a hell, saint, I agree.
 But can one ever hope to stand
 against the Lord’s decree ?”

“Come, come ! Why be so hard on Him ?
 For surely ’twas not He
 Who enjoined on you to marry again
 to beget in four years three

“More sickly brats in a life of hell,
 nor asked you to outvie
 The camel in folly”—the other rose :
 “I must be going—good-bye !”

SECTARIANISM

A grave man said : “He has no form.”

“What nonsense !” snapped another,
“He’s Vishnu with four shining arms.”

A Shakta hurled : “Nay, brother,
“It’s Mother Kali who rules the world.”
“You never will understand
His greatness,” roared a Shaiva. “He
is Shiva—resplendent, grand !”

A Vaishnav sneered in scorn : “All wrong !
He’s Krishna the Evergreen,
The King of Kings, who dances in Ras
with Radha, Beauty’s Queen.”

And so they went on wrangling till
a saint said : “Listen to me :
Some years ago, a lovely lizard
lived upon this tree.

“The villagers would frequently
 debate in wrath. Some said :
 ‘He’s blue.’ Some countered : ‘Nay, he’s green’.
 Some others swore : ‘He’s red.’

“As they came to blows, I laughed : “You are
 both right and wrong, I say.
 For I who have lived here for years
 and watched him night and day,

‘Can testify that he, at times,
 outgleams as green or blue
 At others as red or pink or mauve,
 and often he wears no hue.’

“And so is He, our baffling Lord,
 the Divine Chameleon :
 To different men He manifests
 in different forms, the One’.

“Those who aver He’s this or that
 have yet to know him, friends !
 For the deepest definitions He,
 the Nonpareil, transcends.

“And then, how can we change with words
 the Unique that has no Name?
 We may call water differently,
 but the water remains the same.”

MIND VERSUS SOUL

The pundit thundered on : “We must
know more and ever more.
For we can grow divine but through
our hunger to explore.

“Yes, knowledge is our end and aim,
our noblest aspiration :
The Creator we can only know
by probing His creation.”

“Brave, brave ambition !” smiled the saint,
“as naïve as it is loud,
For how can knowledge liberate
When it makes you so proud ?

“Nay, only Love Divine can make
us, men, divine. Say how
Shall a puny mind or probe or plumb
the Fathomless here and now ?

“Can a cup which holds one seer contain
four seers of milk, my friend ?
Or our senses’ little mirrors reflect
the Light that knows no end ?

“A man once went to a mango-grove
and the mangoes were so sweet !
But the fool said : ‘Let me count the trees
and leaves and then I’ll eat

‘And I must also find out who
first sowed the seeds and how
He tended them and such a soil
how must one start to plough.’

“And so he went on counting till,
exhausted, on the grass
He fell asleep when a hail-storm blasted
all the mangoes, alas !”

The pundit, heckled, flared up : “Fie !
Man, noble Man, must grow
Omniscient and so we must
know all there is to know.”

“Once an ant,” the saint laughed, “ran across
a sugar-hill. A grain
It held in its tiny mouth and thought :
‘I must come here again

‘Tomorrow at dawn and then, oh joy !
I’ll carry home, I vow,
The entire mountain—easily—
in my royal hole to stow !’

“I tell you—none but those who meet
through Love’s deep blessedness
The One-in-all can truly know,
for Knowledge comes from Grace.

“If you want to know what the Great King owns,
do love and serve Him first :
Then if you’d know—ask Him and He,
in Grace, will slake your thirst.”

THE ATTITUDE

“O Sage,” the hermit cried, thou wendst to Paradise :
Wilt thou please ask Lord Krishna when at last I may
Live in His Light for which my soul in darkness sighs
Disconsolate ! Shall my night never win His Day ?”

“He answered,” said the Sage, returning, “thou must be
Reborn once more before His Light thou shalt attain.”
“Yet one more birth ! How unjust ! Oh, how cruel is He
Surely I merit better meed for all my pain !”

“O Sage,” the devotee implored, “shouldst thou perchance
In Heaven meet my Krishna, ask when may I view
His marvel Face in wakefulness and dream and trance
In unison with His song-grace : nought else I sue.”

“After a million birth, He told me,” the Sage said,
“Only a million births and then I’ll see His Face !”
He danced in ecstasy—when Krishna came and played
His flute and sang : “Behold, beloved of my Grace !”

ERRATA

<i>Page</i>	<i>Line</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Read</i>
15	4	by the	by the fierce
15	21	infinitesimal	infinitesimal
27	27	birthnight	birthright
33	8	rebeliousness	rebelliousness
41	3	maids belauded	maidens lauded
45	23	his all stakes	stakes his all
48	5	Dward	Dwarf
54	1	truns	turns
65	7	loved	laved
78	20	To help	to help
82	11	low	bow
84	5	elepha	elephants
84	9	Vish	Vishnu
84	16	demo	demon

