

grasp the central drift of the ideas of the Gita.

Very obviously a great body of the profoundest teaching cannot be built round an ordinary occurrence which has no gulfs of deep suggestion and hazardous difficulty behind its superficial and outward aspects and can be governed well enough by the ordinary everyday standards of thought and action. There are indeed three things in the Gita which are spiritually significant, almost symbolic, typical of the profoundest relations and problems of the spiritual life and of human existence at its roots; they are the divine personality of the Teacher, his characteristic relations with his disciple and the occasion of his teaching. The teacher is God himself descended into humanity; the disciple is the first, as we might say in modern language, the representative man of his age, closest friend and chosen instrument of the Avatar, his protagonist in an immense work and struggle the secret purpose of which is unknown to the actors in it, known only to the incarnate Godhead who guides it all from behind the veil of his unfathomable mind of knowledge; the occasion is the violent crisis of that work and struggle at the moment when the anguish and moral difficulty and blind violence of its apparent movements forces itself with the shock of a visible revelation on the mind of its representative man and raises the whole question of the meaning of God in the world and the goal and drift and sense of human life and conduct.

India has from ancient times held strongly a belief in the reality of the Avatara, the descent into form, the revelation of the Godhead in humanity. In the West this belief has never really stamped itself upon the mind because it has been presented through exoteric Christianity as a theological dogma without any roots in the reason and general consciousness and attitude towards life. But in India it has grown up and persisted as a logical outcome of the Vedantic view of life and taken firm root in the consciousness of the race. All existence is a manifestation of God because He is the only existence and nothing can be except as either a real figuring or else a figment of that one reality. Therefore every conscious being is in part or in some way a descent of the Infinite into the apparent finiteness of

name and form. But it is a veiled manifestation and there is a gradation between the supreme being¹ of the Divine and the consciousness shrouded partly or wholly by ignorance of self in the finite. The conscious embodied soul² is the spark of the divine Fire and that soul in man opens out to self-knowledge as it develops out of ignorance of self into self-being. The Divine also, pouring itself into the forms of the cosmic existence, is revealed ordinarily in an efflorescence of its powers, in energies and magnitudes of its knowledge, love, joy, developed force of being,³ in degrees and faces of its divinity. But when the divine Consciousness and Power, taking upon itself the human form and the human mode of action, possesses it not only by powers and magnitudes, by degrees and outward faces of itself but out of its eternal self-knowledge, when the Unborn knows itself and acts in the frame of the mental being and the appearance of birth, that is the height of the conditioned manifestation; it is the full and conscious descent of the Godhead, it is the Avatara.

The Vaishnava form of Vedantism which has laid most stress upon this conception expresses the relation of God in man to man in God by the double figure of Nara-Narayana, associated historically with the origin of a religious school very similar in its doctrines to the teaching of the Gita. Nara is the human soul which, eternal companion of the Divine, finds itself only when it awakens to that companionship and begins, as the Gita would say, to live in God. Narayana is the divine Soul always present in our humanity, the secret guide, friend and helper of the human being, the "Lord who abides within the heart of creatures" of the Gita; when within us the veil of that secret sanctuary is withdrawn and man speaks face to face with God, hears the divine voice, receives the divine light, acts in the divine power, then becomes possible the supreme uplifting of the embodied human conscious-being into the unborn and eternal. He becomes capable of that dwelling in God and giving up of his whole consciousness into the Divine which the Gita upholds as the best or highest secret of things, *uttamam rahasyam*. When

¹ *para bhāva*. ² *dehī*. ³ *vibhūti*.