

All-Will and Free-Will

HIS IS surely a bounded soul who has never felt the brooding wings of a Fate overshadow the world, never looked beyond the circle of persons, collectivities and forces, never been conscious of the still thought or the assured movement of a Presence in things determining their march. On the other hand it is the sign of a defect in the thought or a void of courage and clearness in the temperament to be overwhelmed by Fate or hidden Presence and reduced to a discouraged acquiescence, — as if the Power in things nullified or rendered superfluous and abortive the same Power in myself. Fate and free-will are only two movements of one indivisible energy. My will is the first instrument of my Fate, Fate a Will that manifests itself in the irresistible subconscious intention of the world.

All error like all evil is born of a division in the indivisible. Because God has a myriad aspects, mind breaks up His unity; it creates a violent opposition and vain attempt at mutual exclusion in the united family of the Ideas and Powers that are convergently busy with the universe. Thus our thought erects a mysterious Fate or an equally mysterious free-will and insists that this or that must be but both shall not subsist together. It is a false and unreal quarrel. I have a will, that is plain; but it is not true that it is free in the sense of being a thing apart in the world determining itself and its actions and fruits as if it alone existed or as if it could at all shape itself except as visible crest and form of an invisible wave. Even the wave is more than itself; for that too has behind it the tramp of the whole measureless ocean of Force and Time. On the other hand there is no incalculable Fate, no blind, cruel and ineluctable Necessity against which the wings of the soul must dash themselves in vain as if it were a bird snared by a monstrous Fowler in a dim-lit and fantastic cage.

All times and nations have felt or played with the idea of Fate. The Greeks were pursued by the thought of a mysterious and ineffable Necessity presiding over the divine caprices of the gods. The Mahomedan sits calm and inert under the yoke of Kismet. The Hindu speaks of Karma and the writing on the forehead when he would console himself for calamity or failure or excuse himself from perseverance and masculine effort. And all these notions are akin in the general imprecision of the idea they shadow forth and the vague twilight in which they are content to leave its ulterior significance. Modern Science has brought in an equally formless and arbitrary predestination of Law of Nature and Heredity to contradict the idea of responsibility in a free, willing and acting soul. Where there is no soul, there can be no freedom. Nature works out her original law in man; our fathers and mothers with all that they carried in them are a second vital predestination and the dead generations impose themselves on the living; pressure of environment comes in as a third Fate to take from us the little chance of liberty we might still have snatched out of this infinite coiling of forces. The triple Moirai of the Greeks have been re-enthroned with other masks and new names. We believe once more in a tremendous weaving of our fate, but by the measured dance of immense material Powers. It is the old gods again, but stripped of intelligence and the chance of human sympathy, inexorable because they are conscious neither of themselves nor of us.

It is doubtful whether belief in Fate or free-will makes much difference to a man's action, but it certainly matters a great deal to his temperament and inner being; for it puts its stamp on the cast of his soul. The man who makes belief in Fate an excuse for quiescence, would find some other pretext if this were lacking. His idea is only a decorous garment for his mood; it clothes his indolence and quiescence in a specious robe of light or drapes it with a noble mantle of dignity. But when his will clutches at an object or action, we do not find him pursuing it with a less strenuous resolution or, it may be, a less childish impatience or obstinacy than the freest believer in free-will. It is not our intellectual ideas that govern our action, but our nature and

temperament, — not *dhī*,¹ but *mati* or even *manyu*, or, as the Greeks would have said, *thumos* and not *nous*.

On the other hand a great man of action will often seize on the idea of Fate to divinise to himself the mighty energy that he feels driving him on the path of world-altering deeds. He is like a shell discharged from some dim Titanic howitzer planted in concealment far behind this first line of trenches which we see thrown out by Life into the material world; or he is like a planet sped out from Nature's hands with its store of primal energy sufficient for its given time, its fixed service to the world-life, its settled orbit round a distant and sovereign Light. He expresses in the idea of Fate his living and constant sense of the energy which has cast him down here whether to break like some Vedic Marut the world's firm and established things or to cut through mountains a path down which new rivers of human destiny can pour. Like Indra or Bhagirath he precedes; the throng of the divine waters follow. His movement decides their course; here Indus shall flow, there Ganges pace yellow and leonine to the sea. Therefore we find that the greatest men of action the world has known were believers in Fate or in a divine Will. Caesar, Mahomet, Napoleon, what more colossal workers has our past than these? The superman believes more readily in Destiny, feels more vitally conscious of God than the average human mind.

A saying of Napoleon's is pregnant of the true truth of this matter. Questioned why, since he talked continually of fate, he thought it worth while to be always thinking and planning, he answered with just reason, "Because it is still Fate who wills that I should plan." This is the truth. There is a Will or Force in the world that determines the result of my actions as part of the great whole; there is a Will in me that determines, concealed by my thought and personal choice, the part that I shall take in determining the whole. It is this that my mind seizes on and calls my will. But I and mine are masks. It is All-existence that gives

¹ These are terms of Vedic psychology. *Dhī* is the intellect; *mati*, the general mentality; *manyu*, the temperament and emotive mind.

me my reality; it is the All-will and All-knowledge that, while I calculate, works in me for its own incalculable purpose.

For this very reason I am right in laying stress on my free-will. If a Necessity governs even the gods, yet is my will a daughter of Necessity with a right in the mansion of her mother; or even it is a face of the divine Necessity that in many forms plays with the world. If Kismet is the will of God, yet is that will active in my present moment and not only in the hour of my birth or of the birth of the world. If my past actions determine my present, my immediate action also determines the moment that shall be and is not utterly put off by a tardy mechanism to belated effects in a far-off life. If Law of nature and heredity and environment are powerful, yet do they depend on the individual for the use to which they shall be turned.

The fruit of my actions belongs not to me, but to God and the world; my action belongs to God and myself. There I have a right. Or rather it belongs to God in myself; the right is His, but I enjoy it. The Will that works in me is the indivisible All which only seems to separate itself from itself in my body and personality, *nāmarūpa*, as the whole sea throws itself upon a particular coast in a particular surge of waves. The All and the I are at play of hide and seek with each other in a corner of an infinite universe.

I may play entirely at cross-purposes with the All-Will in me. That is when I lend my will-power to be a servant of the nervous part of my mind which, ignorant and passionate, adores self, openly or under many pretences, as its own god. It is this in me, this egoist, this hungerer that feels upon it in the heavy hand of Fate the oppression of a tyrant or the resistance of a blind and unintelligent power. For always absorbed in its own need and view-point it helps the All by that friction and opposition which are so essential to the mechanism of the world. Therefore it misunderstands the firm Teacher and His stern, yet loving compulsion in things and must progress by self-will and struggle and suffering because it cannot yet learn to progress by obedience. But also I may, by an intuition in my nature, an aspiration in my heart and a reason in my mind, put myself at the service of

some strong ideal, some intelligent Force that serves God with or without knowledge of Him. Then is my will a true will; it does its share, it leaves its quota, it returns to its Master with its talent used or increased. And to a certain extent it is free; for a great liberty is this, to be delivered from the Animal and the Rakshasa in ourselves, free to choose the right or be chosen by it.

But how different a thing would it be if I could persuade my ego to break and emerge from the mould in which it has taken refuge from its divine Pursuer! The great antinomy would then be abrogated and not simply mitigated. My free-will would become God-will and Fate put off her mask. By consenting to be the mere slave of God and consciously but one instrument of That which is not bound by its instruments, I should know a freedom which sings on the harps of heaven, but which no speech of man can utter; I should be washed and rolled in the waves of pure puissance and pure ecstasy, the immeasurable and unfathomable ecstasy of all-being and all-life and all-force. I should see Fate illumined melting into Will and Will glorified passing into God.