

SUPERSENSUOUS CONSCIOUSNESS.

THE meaning of Buddha's illumination * under the Bodhi tree, Mohammed's prophetic sayings, and Zoroaster's inspirational messages to men all come under the head of extraordinary knowledge revealed to mankind—knowledge independent of sense and of mind. To enter fully into details of this here would occupy a much larger space than is intended, and so the subject will be specially dealt with in a separate article. Illumination or inspiration thus comes under the category of supersensuous consciousness. Let us inquire how the body is affected at such times.

Now how do the occultists differ from the scientists? The occultists affirm that there are higher states of consciousness than brain-consciousness, the development of the former constituting all the psychic phenomena with which they are conversant, and of which the most spiritually sublime kind is that from which all Divine and spirit knowledge is derived; while the scientists look on all psychological wonders as several forms of nervous disease. In the Indian Yoga, it is a well known fact that all Yogic process is a process of nervous education, or unfoldment of latent nervous energy which is not manifest to men whose attention and vital powers are mainly spent on worldly occupations, thus shutting them off from the avenues of knowledge which would open to them if their minds were but bent inwards, and the latent energy alluded to above were diverted along nervous paths, which, for want of such effort, remain closed. The nervous process commences, according to Indian Yoga, at the bottom of the spinal column, and extends up to the mysterious glands and ventricles located about the *corpus callosum* and *corpora quadrigemina* (*Sahasrāra*, Sans.).

The scientists call it all a disease of the nervous system, and an abnormal excitement of the brain. An eminent doctor expresses himself in this manner on the subject:—

“He who frankly undertakes that research in a complete and critical way will not fail to note in many instances that those who lay claim to select periods of ecstatic coalescence with the Deity have what physicians recognize and describe as the neurotic temperament, and those who

* Illumination is no other than the experiences of the soul rescued from the bonds of matter, when knowledge is revealed through inspiration. Thus Buddha is led to exclaim (almost like Archimedes):—

“Found! It is found! The cause of self-hood,
No longer shalt thou build a house for me;
Broken are the beams of sin,
The ridgepole of care is shattered,
Into *Nirvāna* my mind has passed,
The end of craving has been reached at last.”

‘Illumination,’ defines Anna Kingsford, ‘is the Light of Wisdom, whereby a man perceiveth heavenly secrets.’

claim to have them with most intensity have that temperament in its most intense degree. Thereby they are predisposed naturally to states of extreme nervous exaltation, which translate themselves into corresponding affections of consciousness—into extreme, irregular, and even perverted sensibilities, and into similar exaltations and perversions of sentiment and thought, before they undergo that spiritual new birth or conversion by which they enter into communion with the Divine; and into sublimated states of spiritual ecstasy, after they have undergone the transformation from spiritual death into spiritual life. The long and severe illness which St. Theresa had at the beginning of her religious career, when her body was contorted into a helpless bundle of pains and spasms, may have been a tremendous commotion of the nerves antecedent to or accompanying the opening of supernatural vision in her; but it certainly was exactly such a commotion of nerves in a neurotic temperament at a particularly susceptible period of life as is frequently met with and dealt with in young women by physicians at the present day, without being followed by the opening of supernatural vision in the patient. Is the neurotic temperament of the physician's classification, then, identical with the spiritually disposed temperament of the theologian's classification? And is the ultra-physiological or positively pathological outcome of it in ecstatic function no more spiritual and no less material in the one case than in the other?"*

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"It will suffice here merely to refer to the varieties of these remarkable seizures—ecstatic, cataleptic, hysteric, hystero-epileptic, and, when induced artificially, hypnotic, or mesmeric—without going into particulars. They will be found described at length in their proper places in medical treatises on nervous and mental pathology. Their general features are faint, incomplete, or almost extinguished consciousness of surroundings; absorption of mind in some strain of purely internal activity, with corresponding strain of vague delirious feeling; insusceptibility, partial or complete, to external impressions; more or less complete abeyance of movement, the muscles of the body or of a part of it being relaxed, or in rigid contraction, or in convulsions; acceleration in many cases, but in some cases marked lowering of the organic functions of respiration and circulation, which in extreme cases are almost suspended. For the time being there is a withdrawal of the individual, entirely, as a conscious and in large measure as an active living element of nature, from his external life of relation; he is, as it were, detached from and dead to the world—whether he is in the body or out of the body he knows not; but he is not dead wholly, seeing that his organic functions go on at a lowered rate of activity, and that his consciousness is absorbed in a purely internal strain of activity—in a special ecstasy."*

Our learned friends, the Doctors, have a special habit of attributing these phenomena to some disease or other. They might as well

* Pages 312-314: Maudsley on "Physical Basis of Ecstatic Intuition."

speculate on what kind of *disease* is birth, what kind of *disease* is man's hankering after worldly riches and tinsel glories, what kind of *disease* it was that made Christ proclaim himself as God incarnate on earth, what kind of *disease* is resurrection, &c. !!

That nerves are somehow related to all ecstatic and inspirational states, and that such states, if they are above and beyond the nerves, are yet first led up to by means of nerves, is a fact that is common to scientists as well as occultists, including the Indian gymnosophists, already noticed. Taking one passage from an occultist's book, this position is corroborated, and further, the passage shows where the scientist whose range of investigation is limited, errs:—

Question. "You have, then, seen an astral body?"

Answer. (Mrs. Annie Besant). "Yes; I have seen my own, among others. The astral world surrounds us on every side, and we very easily contact it."

Q. "Can you convince any one else that it was an objective and not a subjective impression?"

A. "I have seen astral appearances when in company with others, and those others have also seen them, but I do not see how I could convince people who were not there of their objective nature if those people were determined not to believe in anything that was not of solid physical matter. I can give my own testimony, and the testimony of others, but I might none the less be in the condition of the traveller who could not convince the Indian prince that water could become so solid that men could walk on it. To some people everything is hallucination which does not square with their own limited experience."

Q. "Have you ever been convinced that some one else saw such a thing?"

A. "Frequently. I have one friend who very readily sees astral forms when she is at all nervously overstrained. You know that as you stretch a string it yields a higher note, vibrating in shorter and more rapid waves as the tension increases. So, as the nervous system is thrown into a state of greater tension than in its normal and healthy state, it vibrates to the shorter and more rapid waves of the astral light. There is another reason why depletion of nervous energy tends to 'visions.' As was said before, every nervous molecule has its envelope of ethereal or astral matter; if the physical nervous molecule is partly emptied of its vitality, it is more at the mercy, so to say, of the vibrations of its astral envelope, and its own vibrations being feeble, the vibrations of the other make themselves more strongly felt. This is why very robust animal vigour conflicts with astral vision. If you want to catch a delicate sound, loud sounds must be stilled. You are aware, I suppose, that an astral form is often mistaken for a physical form, until some incongruity reveals the blunder? Thus, a member of the Blavatsky Lodge in London one day saw an Indian seated on the sofa; the sight was a

* H. Maudsley, M.D., on "Natural causes and Supernatural Seemings."

very usual one and did not attract his special notice until another visitor sat down plump in the lap of the Indian, who promptly disappeared, followed by a startled 'oh!' from the member who had not distinguished his unsubstantial character."*

Though the above extract has no direct reference to ecstatic states or inspiration, it yet gives us facts to show that nervous changes necessarily occur, which is the physical basis for all extraordinary mental manifestations; and also the reason for incredulity of men in general as regards super-physical facts, because they are utter strangers to such experiences.

The existence of the astral body, its separability, the soul travelling in it in full consciousness to the astral, the devachanic and nirvanic planes, are facts intuitionally believed in by the Indians, for to Indians are familiar the anecdotes related in their Purānas of their Rishis travelling to various worlds beyond the earth, and returning to earth with knowledge gained there—Arjuna, for instance, going to Indra's heaven, and Nārada being spoken of as the three-world traveller, &c., &c.—but in modern days, all explorations in astral bodies, to astral and devachanic worlds, seem to be peculiarly the gift of the few London Lodge Theosophical Society members.† Why the Mahātmās are so partial to but a very few European members only and never care to appear even once to the oldest Indian Theosophists, who can trace their descent to the Holy Rishis of the Vedas, is a problem which has been exercising our ingenuity to solve. Probably this is a hard enigma to thousands of our brethren. The only explanation we can find as to the cause for meriting non-recognition from our own Rishis must be our own degeneration: and we are, spiritually and morally, probably at the zero point when compared with the three or four Englishmen in the London Lodge who are favoured by the Mahātmās.

All the great religions of the world insist on the moral and spiritual development of man, and lay little stress on psychic developments such as that which Yoga-practice is said to bestow. The reason is two-fold. It may be dangerous, and powers acquired in the physical body seem to vanish with the death of the physical body. "You will readily understand," says Mrs. Annie Besant, "how easily mischief may be done to unfit men who try to artificially bring about this stage (gaining siddhis or psychic powers) before they are spiritually developed, before the time when they should reach it in orderly evolution. * * * * And so people—ignorantly taking up this practice, with the object of forcing their psychical development before their mental and moral development has fitted them to do it with safety—very often bring about results indeed, but results which work for evil and not for good. They often ruin their physical health, they often lose their mental balance, they often injure their intellectual faculties, because they are trying to pluck the fruit of the tree of life before it is ripe for the plucking; because

* "Annie Besant on Theosophy," pp. 19-20. † A great mistake.—Editor.

with hands unclean and senses unpurified they try to penetrate into the Holy of Holies. Within that faue the atmosphere is such that nothing unclean can live in it ; its vibrations are so powerful, that they break in pieces everything which is tuned to a lower key ; they shiver all that is impure, all that is not able to adapt itself to that subtle and tremendous motion.* ”

Secondly, pure physiological currents set up from the *Mûlâdhâra* (*sacral plexus*) may confer powers, but they must cease with the breaking up of the organism by disease or at death. But such is not the case with the intellectual, moral and spiritual cultivation, for they are the permanent possessions of the soul, and therefore endure and follow the soul on its long pilgrimage, serving it to better and better advantage, in its sojournings or repeated births in physical environments on earth or elsewhere.

Those then who have perhaps been trying for years to realize some kind of supernatural power in themselves, might well find comfort that in not having succeeded in developing such power there is nothing lost, except perhaps health, worldly luxury and peace of mind, which however are valuable things for spiritual life. The best thing for them to do is to lead a strictly religious life, which means a moral and spiritual life. And this must eventually lead to self-illumination, or the unfoldment of the spirit in man, which unlocks the door of universal knowledge. This is the knowledge that is referred to in verse 16, Book V. of Sri Bhagavad Gîtâ, knowledge, the light of which, like the sun, dispelling darkness, drives away all ignorance.

So advises Patanjali himself, the author of the Yoga system. After an elaborate exposition of the eight-fold constitution of Yoga, *vis.*, *yama*, *niyama*, *âsana*, *prânâyâma*, *pratyâhâna*, *dhâranâ*, *dhyanâ* and *samâdhi*, and after explaining how by the united effort comprised of *dhâranâ*, *dhyanâ* and *samâdhi*, many powers can be acquired (read Sûtras 5 to 37, Book III.), Sûtra 38 explains how these powers are obstacles to the procurement of soul-vision ; and that therefore to him who is wending his way towards realizing his own soul, which is his highest goal, all powers conferred by psychic development in the body, must be regarded as most trivial.†

If in the course of leading a spiritual life, powers come unsolicited, as in the case of saints ; let them, but powers should never be hungered after before one is spiritually pure and competent. Let us now read a page from (Laghu) Yoga Vasishtha, Engl. tr., pp. 216—217 :

* "Path of Discipleship," pp. 89-90.

† Says Swami Vivekananda in "Raja Yoga," (p. 197-19-8) :—" When he has got that discrimination he gets the *Pratibha*, the light of supreme genius. These powers, however, are obstructions to the attainment of the highest goal, the knowledge of the pure self, and freedom ; these are, as it were, to be met in the way, and, if the yogi rejects them, he attains the highest. If he is tempted to acquire these, his farther progress is barred " (Vide page 48 on *Pratibhâ* : Part II. of Lectures on Inspiration, &c.).

“After Vasishtha had delivered himself of what is contained in the last chapter, Râghava addressed him thus: ‘How is it we do not find in a Jivanmukta’s body such higher physical powers as walking the sky, etc., displayed?’ To which Vasishtha was graciously pleased to reply thus: ‘Those who not having full Jñâna are subject to bondage in this world, develop those powers through medicines, mantras, actions, time or skill; but these siddhis do not pertain legitimately to a true Jñâni. The latter will ever be engaged in the reality of âtmic vision. The Jñânis will ever try to rest in Jñânas (A’tma) through Jñâna (spiritual wisdom), but will never run after the desires of levitating in the âkâsa, &c.’ All the heterogeneities of worldly objects are nothing but mâyâ. Those victors who have trampled mâyâ will never sink into it again. If Jñânis will long after them, then no doubt siddhis will arise through the above-mentioned means. Medicines, mantras, &c., will but confer on one siddhis, but never the beneficent Moksha. If a desire wells up in one for attaining a siddhi then with proper efforts it will be developed in him, but desires of siddhis which do but tend to bondage will not arise in the hearts of Jñânis. With the extinction of all desires, A’tma-Jñâna without any disconcertation will dawn in one; but those who are sunk in siddhis which generate desires will not attain A’tma.”

“Have we any ideas independent of experience?” Experience is a word which itself first required a definition. Those who use the expression understand by experience only sense-experience, or experience garnered by the senses and translated into ideas. This is Baconic, but all the time a most important fact escapes the attention of the experimental philosopher, *viz.*, that no outward impressions would be effective, and no senses would perform their functions, if the latter were not under the direction of an inner spiritual intelligence. We are ordinarily aware of the phenomenon of absent-mindedness, which means that when the mind is fixed in contemplation on a certain subject, the senses do receive external impressions, but *there is no mind in the senses* to perform the work of translation into ideas. So then to the question, ‘have we any ideas independent of experience’ our answer is ‘yes.’ It was to find this answer that the questions of innate ideas, intuition, inspiration, ecstasis, were taken up and examined from many stand-points.

Sense-experience—what is it? It is never a stable thing. It varies from day to day as more facts gather, and as more and more of nature’s secrets are unravelled. Is human experience a fixed quantity, as David Hume presumes in his “Essay on the Miracles”? And David Hume refuses to credit miracles, because it is contrary to human experience. But what is human experience? Is it only that which is compressed in David Hume’s knowledge, and that which was known only up to his day? What would he have said if some one had told him that human experience would now be such as that of hearing the roar of the Niagara falls, five hundred miles away in New York; such as

that of seeing through boards and men by means of the Roentgen rays, and taking photographs of a man's bones, and the money in his pockets; such as that of hearing the voices of our friends living thousands of miles away; and of being able to boil the baby's milk by touching a button? And then human experience is varied, according to time, place, and circumstances. From sense to reason is a change of circumstance, and from reason to intuition is a change of circumstance. The mind which busies itself in the world is different from the mind which is intuitive. Introspection is a different circumstance from that of using energies outwardly. To be able to see the inner world, one must shut the soul's windows which look out on the world. It is only for the *Sanyāsi*, the world-weary, that the world of the soul unfolds. Swami Vivekānanda tells us in his experiences of Europe and America that "England and France are more prepared for *Sanyās* than America," for England and France have grown world-weary. "The people have had enough of worldly enjoyments, and there is already to be noticed, especially amongst the leisured classes as well as amongst the best intellects of the country, a feeling of unrest, of world-weariness, which looks about for something more positive, more substantial, something better, in fact, than what the world can give us." * * * "They are beginning to feel that a *Sanyāsi*—one who has renounced the world, a man who has conquered the flesh, who is every morning of his life exercising control over the passions—the man who can spurn away wealth, beauty and honor—the things that have made the world intoxicated—such a man must possess a Herculean strength of mind. The decision, resistance, the fixedness of purpose and tenacity of pursuit which are developed in the *Sanyāsi* by a long course of spiritual discipline must, they are beginning to think, be competent to bring at least within a measurable distance the solution of the great problems, in which all humanity is interested, and which have been hitherto pronounced 'insoluble' by themselves, and other 'giants' of the West."

It is evident from the above and all that has been written, that the mind has to be disciplined to look inwards, and to abstract itself from the senses. So long as the mind is a slave to the senses, no other knowledge comes to it than what the senses bring from the objective world.

Then again, is God a matter of ordinary human experience? Is soul demonstrable, experimentally? And then there are so many curious experiences of various kinds in the world, and so many world-conceptions, such for example, as the immortality of the soul and hopes for an infinite life beyond, which the human breast cherishes. How is it possible to bring them all at once under the restricted sense of Humes's 'human experience?' The existence of God, again, is no sense-knowledge; in other words it is not a fact of 'human (sense) experience.' And yet, how to account for such a belief? It is a belief which no amount of intellectual subtlety, and forensic legerdemain can displace from the throne which it occupies in men's hearts. And yet this belief is knowledge to man, though not sense-knowledge. We have as sources

of knowledge, not only the senses but the intellect and the intuitions of the heart. If the only source of knowledge were the senses, then on what are all the world's religions founded? On sense-knowledge? No. It is on something else. As I first said, God is not a fact of our sense-experience. "We cannot 'sense' God," says Swâmi Vivekânanda, in his lectures in America on *Jñâna Yoga*. "Nobody has seen God with his eyes or ever will see; nobody has God in his consciousness. I am not conscious of God, nor you, nor anybody. Where is God? Where is the field of religion? It is beyond the senses, beyond consciousness. Consciousness is only one of the many planes in which we work, and you will have to transcend the field of consciousness, to go beyond the senses, approach nearer and nearer to your own centre, and as you do that, you will approach nearer and nearer to God. What is the proof of God? Direct perception, *pratyaksham*, just as there is proof of this wall. I perceive it. God, has been perceived that way by thousands before and will be perceived by all who want to perceive Him. But this perception is no sense-perception at all; it is super-sensuous, super-conscious, and all this training is needed to take us off from the senses. This body, as it were, by means of all sorts of past work and bondage, is being dragged downwards; this preparation and discipline will make it pure and bright. Bondages will fall off by themselves, and we will be buoyed up beyond this plane of sense-perception to which we are tied down, and then we will see, and hear, and feel things which men in the ordinary state neither feel, nor see, nor hear. Then we will speak the language as it were, of madmen; and the world will not understand us, because they do not know anything but the senses. This religion is entirely transcendental. Every being that is in the universe has the potentiality of transcending the senses, even the little worm will one day transcend the senses and reach unto God."

In his "Raja Yoga" again the Swâmi, in order to explain Samâdhi or super-sensuous consciousness, tells us:—"The field of reason, or of the conscious workings of the mind, is narrow and limited. There is a little circle within which human reason will have to move. It cannot go beyond it. Every attempt to go beyond is impossible, yet it is beyond this circle of reason that lies all that humanity holds most dear. All these questions, whether there is an immortal soul, whether there is a God, whether there is any supreme intelligence guiding this universe, are beyond the field of reason. Reason can never answer these questions. What does reason say? It says, 'I am agnostic; I do not know either yea or nay.' Yet these questions are so important to us. Without a proper answer to them, human life will be impossible. All our ethical theories, all our moral attitudes, all that is good and great in human nature, has been moulded upon answers that have come from beyond that circle. It is very important, therefore, that we should have answers to these questions; without such answers human life will be impossible. If life is only a little five minutes thing, if

the universe is only a 'fortuitous combination of atoms,' then why should I do good to another? Why should there be mercy, justice or fellow-feeling?

* * * Whence come all these truths about human life, about morality, about the immortal soul, about God, about love and sympathy, about being good, and, above all, about being unselfish?

All ethics, all human action, and all human thought, hang upon this one idea of unselfishness; the whole idea of human life can be put in that one word, unselfishness." * * *

* * * What is the answer? The utilitarian can never give it. The answer is that this world is one drop in an infinite ocean, one link in an infinite chain. Where did those that preached unselfishness, and taught it to the human race, get this idea? We know it is not instinctive; the animals which have instinct do not know it. Neither is it reason; reason does not know anything about these ideas. Whence then did they come? * * "

Whence did they come? They came from beyond. They were inspired, as all the great teachers of religion declared. You may easily gather from the Swâmi's sayings that he means the intuitional or inspirational knowledge which he whose heart is pure will receive, a knowledge as good and true and reliable as the sense-knowledge or sense-experience. And all religions lay down a code of ethics to effect purification of the heart, and then that heart sees God, as surely as our sense of sight cognizes the wall opposite.

America, according to Swâmi Vivekânanda is not yet much world-weary, and yet an American, Dr. Turnbull, Ph. D., addressed a meeting in January 1897, in the Kombulia Tala Reading Room, Calcutta, as follows, showing that even America is turning ascetic. Ascetic life, hermit life, monastic life, &c., are specially suited for intuitional education. This was the life that all Rishis, saints and sages led. For a worldly man, therefore, to pronounce judgment on knowledge which these men derive, is preposterous.

Dr. Turnbull says:—

"We have looked to the East for light and guidance in the past and again we look for light and wisdom and understanding in the future. I wish to emphasize one point—a point which has engaged the attention of the Western psychologists. If we wish to evolve truths, then we must look both inwardly and outwardly—in us and out of us. We know that the mind acts in two directions, and when we wish (a truth to discern) we must look outwardly, and at the same time learn to look inwardly. Intellect and Intuition—these two modes work together, as is better understood in India."

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(To be concluded.)

* "Raja Yoga," pp. 76-77-78, by Swâmi Vivekânanda.