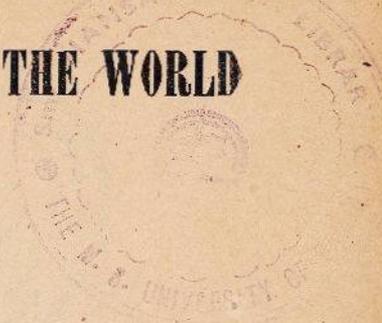


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regards of the writer.

THE
MORAL DRAMA OF THE WORLD



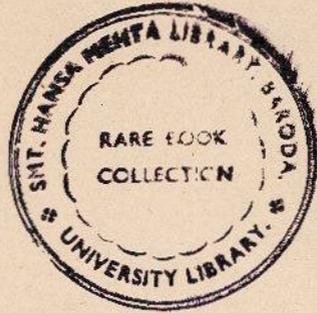
BY
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“ All the World's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players :
They have their exits and their entrances ;
And one man in his time plays many parts.”
Shakespeare.

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To
THE SOURCE OF ALL LIGHT,
THE FOUNT OF ALL ENERGY,
THE SUSTAINER OF ALL BEING,
AND
THE DISPENSER OF ALL GOOD.

PREFACE.

The following pages suggest a theory which may be visionary or consistent with facts. As the line between hypothesis and theory—nay even between theory and fact—is not always clear, it is difficult to say at least in some cases whether what is propounded is a theory or a mere hypothesis. In fact, the range of experience and the degree of conviction and insight may lead one to shift the line a little to this side or that. Is, for example, the existence of human personality or the spherical shape of the earth a fact or a theory? Is the explanation of tides by reference to the attraction of the moon or of the production of light by reference to the vibration of ether a theory or a bare hypothesis? Is, likewise, the doctrine of *Karma* or of heaven and hell simply a hypothesis—a dream—or more than that? Without venturing an answer to this question, I may only say that I have tried to present before the reader a perspective of the world from the moral standpoint as distinguished from other perspectives from other standpoints; and it is for the reader to judge how far the representation here is true or correct.

As the book is meant for the general reader, I have briefly explained the preliminaries in its earlier parts (Parts I and II), reserving the treatment of the main topic for the subsequent portion (Part III).

CALCUTTA,
November 26, 1920.

A. C. MITRA.

CONTENTS.

PART I.

INTRODUCTION.

CHAPTER I.

THE WORLD AS A SYSTEMATIC WHOLE.

| Section | PAGE |
|--|------|
| 1. Experience of the World | 1 |
| 2. The Real and the Phenomenal World | 2 |
| 3. The World and Its Laws | 6 |
| 4. The World as a Unity | 8 |

CHAPTER II.

FACT AND FICTION.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Perception and Imagination | 10 |
| 2. Science and Hypothesis | 11 |
| 3. History and Drama | 12 |
| 4. Fancy and Metaphysics | 13 |
| 5. Life and Philosophy | 14 |

CHAPTER III.

PLACE OF MAN IN THE UNIVERSE.

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Forms and Grades of Being | 17 |
| 2. Man and His Surroundings | 18 |
| 3. The Supremacy of Man | 20 |

PART II.

CONDITIONS OF HUMAN LIFE.

CHAPTER IV.

PHYSICAL CONDITIONS.

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| 1. Life and Food | 22 |
| 2. Exercise and Rest | 23 |
| 3. Span of Life | 25 |

CHAPTER V.

MENTAL CONDITIONS.

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| 1. Intellectual Conditions | 27 |
| 2. Emotive Conditions | 29 |
| 3. Conative Conditions | 31 |

CHAPTER VI.
MORAL CONDITIONS.

| Section | PAGE |
|---|------|
| 1. Knowledge of Moral Distinction | 34 |
| 2. Springs of Activity | 35 |
| 3. Opportunities for Action | 36 |
| 4. Choice or Volition | 37 |
| 5. Personality, Human and Divine | 38 |

PART III.

THE MORAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE WORLD.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MORAL CONSTITUTION OF MAN.

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Place of Conscience in the Human Constitution .. | 40 |
| 2. Physical Conditions of Trial | 42 |
| 3. Intellectual Conditions of Trial | 43 |
| 4. Emotive Conditions of Trial | 44 |
| 5. Conative Conditions of Trial | 45 |

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ENVIRONMENT.

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. General Conditions of Finite Existence | 48 |
| 2. Natural Surroundings | 49 |
| 3. Social Surroundings | 50 |

CHAPTER IX.

METAPHYSICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MORAL ADMINISTRATION.

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Faith in the Supersensuous | 52 |
| 2. The Supreme Ideal | 53 |
| 3. Theism and Pantheism | 58 |
| 4. Subjective and Objective Morality | 65 |
| 5. Divine Justice and Benevolence | 75 |
| 6. Future Life | 79 |
| 7. Purity of the Moral Constitution | 84 |
| 8. The Doctrine of <i>Karma</i> or the Efficacy of Deeds .. | 89 |
| 9. Kingdom of Heaven on Earth | 96 |

PART I.

Introduction.

CHAPTER I.

THE WORLD AS A SYSTEMATIC WHOLE.

§ 1. Experience of the World.—It requires, gentle reader, no raising of the curtain to have an experience of the World, which is present before our senses with all its charms since our infancy. The panorama of the External World is so attractive and impressive that hardly anything else succeeds in engaging our attention during the major part of our life. The sights and sounds, the tastes and smells appeal to us with so much force and vividness that it becomes always difficult for us not to attend to them. To the child the sense-impressions furnish the sole materials of knowledge and enjoyment; and, with growing years, it finds other sources which are quickened into activity by them. Thus, to the boy or the adult things and their qualities—men and animals, plants and minerals, circumstances and occasions, places and times, activities and relations—are all objects of more or less absorbing interest. His hopes and fears, his desires and aversions, his thoughts, feelings, and actions are generally directed to them. The experiences of an ordinary life—embracing its pursuits and occupations, its friendships and quarrels,

its exultations and disappointments—involve evidently a reference to these things of sense and their relations. And, it may be said that the glitter of the world moves not merely the heart of the common man ; it indirectly influences the thought and conduct of even the scholar or the ascetic, who forms to himself a world of his own by reference to his worldly experience. No doubt, the ideal of the scholar or the ascetic may far transcend the actual or be apparently very different from it ; but still it can never exist or be conceived without a reference to the actual. In fact, it is but the actual etherealized. Thus, since our birth we all are more or less influenced by the sphere of our existence ; and our conceptions and inclinations are moulded by it, either in the positive form of pursuit or in the negative form of avoidance. And, if we view our present life as but a migration from celestial abode, we may say with Wordsworth—

“ Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own ;
 Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
 And, even with something of a mother's mind
 And no unworthy aim,
 The homely nurse doth all she can
 To make her foster-child, her inmate, Man,
 Forget the glories he hath known,
 And that imperial palace whence he came.”

§ 2. The Real and the Phenomenal World.—A distinction is often drawn between the world as it really is and the world as it appears to us. And it is urged by some writers that the phenomenal or apparent world is quite unlike the noumenal or real. It is said, for

example, that the world as known to us is conditioned by sense-impressions and other mental traits which compel us to construe the materials presented to us in certain definite ways ; while the real or actual world is beyond any modification whatever, being quite unaffected by our modes of knowing it. Without entering into any metaphysical controversy here, it may, however, be said that, even if there be any difference between the real and the phenomenal world, there is a connection between them. The very applicability of mental forms and conditions to the materials presented to the mind implies some affinity between them. Even if space and time, for example, be mere mental forms under which we view the processes of the external world, still the character of such a world must be supposed to be such as admits of its representation under these forms. Thus, it is never possible for us to represent love as a square nor a circle as sour. Some go to the extent of denying any real world behind the phenomenal ; and others, of denying any phenomenal world distinct from the real. According to either view, the world of experience is the sole world with which we are concerned.

From the moral stand-point it is likewise held that the world of moral distinctions is quite different from the real world which is above it. Thus, according to Spinoza, the world of imagination is quite different from the world of reason ; and, according to the Vedantists, the world of practice (अवहारिक) is quite different from the transcendent (परमाधिष्ठित) world. The distinctions of right

and wrong, which seem to be valid from a lower plane, disappear, it is said, from a higher and exalted standpoint. It is further contended that though apparently effects are produced by our agency, yet really everything is due to the agency of Providence. As Cowper says,

"Learn, all Earth! that feeble man,
Sprung from this terrestrial clod,
Nothing is, and nothing can;
Life and power are all in God."

But assuming here, as before, the distinction between the practical and the transcendent world, we must suppose them to be connected and not out of touch with each other. Observing the wonderful unanimity among mankind in regard to cardinal moral truths (in spite of minor differences due to custom or habit), we are inevitably led to the conclusion that they are not of our making. Whether such truths be due to our constitution or to the environment, they reveal the presence of conditions that are independent of our choice and that determine our judgments. Thus, the moral world, though phenomenal, is supported by the constitution of things: though moral distinctions are intelligible only by reference to our estimates, yet the estimate is determined by conditions beyond our control; and these conditions, teleologically construed, may have some ulterior purpose to serve. Hence, even if it be true that moral distinctions pertain only to motives and so to our personal experience and do not affect in the least the actual flow of events in the external world, still these distinctions do not

necessarily lose their meaning and value. And such a view is not inconsistent with belief in the Providential regulation of the events of the actual world in spite of the moral efforts of human beings. If ever such efforts are crowned with success, it is because they fall in with the ways of Providence. (*Vide* Chap. IX, § 4.)

From another stand-point a distinction is drawn between the world of appearance and the world of reality. It is urged, for example, that the world of strife and turmoil is rather the world of show and semblance, the real world being characterized by peace, perfection and resignation. Thus, the pursuit of pleasures produces only an insatiable thirst, which can be quenched only by shunning them and pursuing a life of reason and conscience. It is thus said—

"Blinded in youth by Satan's arts,
The world to our unpractised hearts
A flattering prospect shows;
Our fancy forms a thousand schemes
Of gay delights, and golden dreams,
And undisturb'd repose."—(*Cowper*.)

Reflection and adequate experience, however, gradually convince us of the hollowness of worldly enjoyments and so gradually lead us to the abiding world of peace and beatitude by weaning us from the evanescent world of sense. It is, accordingly, contended that the world of sense and imagination is a mere *māyā* or illusion; Brahman, God, or spiritual elevation alone is the everlasting world of true being or existence. Assuming

the contrast here drawn between the hollow world of sense and enjoyment and the substantial world of reflection and tranquillity, it cannot be denied that we can reach the latter world only through the former. No one can drop at once from the clouds into the serene world of reason and contentment: to reach it every one must previously pass through the world of allurements and charms. There can be no birth without travail; no peace without strife overcome. And it is questionable whether a life of feeling and instinct as such is an evil or an illusion. An individual dead to all appeals and unmindful of all wants and sufferings can scarcely be said to fulfil the mission of his life and be entitled to a place in the higher realm of peace and perfection. Thus, the two worlds can never be cut asunder. The one is but a step to the other: a life of conflict and temptation is but a means to the realization of a higher life.

§ 3. *The World and Its Laws.*—The World as found by us is a harmonious whole of many parts every one of which is governed by rule and measure. In fact, our experience, in the proper sense of the term, is possible only on the supposition of uniform relations among things and their qualities. If, without any fixed rule, the earth, for example, be now solid and now liquid, gold be now yellow and now black, the legs be now organs of locomotion and now organs of digestion, then surely no definite knowledge, no memory or expectation, no experience in the true sense of the word would be possible. If what I now find to be sweet be bitter

the next moment, what is now in my room be instantly in the street unawares, if infancy be youth and youth infancy, what room will be there for knowledge or expectation, efforts or disappointments? So, life and experience imply fixed and definite relations—a system—a concatenated whole.

Careful observation reveals the presence of laws everywhere—in Nature as well as in Mind. There are thus laws of the organic and inorganic world, of mental, moral, and spiritual experience. There are laws of life and motion, of sensation, memory, and habit, of moral estimates and even of expectation of experiences after death. It is urged, however, by some thinkers that these laws are but subjective syntheses of facts without any objective ground: they are mere formulæ without any underlying energy or design. But such a view is disproved both by the modern doctrine of conservation of energy and by the testimony of personal consciousness. Reciprocity of influence without any interchange of forces or uniform action without an invariable determination of some form of energy is an expression devoid of sense. Personal experience testifies to the fact that the flow of the states of consciousness is not simply a show without a substance, but a sequence of the modifications of an active self-conscious principle. Recollection or expectation, love or joy, desire or volition is not simply a state as such, but a mode of personal consciousness. To maintain that there is mere consciousness without a conscious agent is a suicidal position.

Even when laws are viewed as the expressions of energy, it is believed by some writers as essentially material or non-discriminative in character. Thus, an atomic constitution or blind force with chance as its handmaid is supposed to account for the multiplicity and harmony of the universe. But such an explanation of the unity and concord of the universe scarcely appeals to our intelligence. Chance is merely a cloak to hide our ignorance; and to explain the unity and beauty of the universe by reference to it is to render the clear comparatively obscure. It is more consonant with reason to suppose that the harmony of the world is due to design instead of accident. (*Vide* Chap. IX, § 2.) The laws of the world, accordingly, seem to be the ways of Providence to regulate the march of events as well as to beget definite expectations in the minds of His creatures by giving rise to invariable experience.

“ Nature is but a name for an effect
Whose cause is God.”—(*Cowper.*)

§ 4. **The World as a Unity.**—I simply reproduce here what I have said in my *Principles of Logic*. The world, as conceived by us, is a well-ordered system, the different parts of which are closely connected with one another. We, accordingly, find that the laws which are special to a particular subject are not altogether unconnected with the laws which hold good in the other departments of Nature. There is a close connection between, say, Physical and Chemical laws, Chemical and Biological laws, Biological and Psychological laws,

Psychological and Sociological laws, and Sociological and Moral laws. The modern doctrine of conservation of energy has established beyond dispute that one form of energy may be transformed into another, indicating a correspondence among the different laws. We not only find that the laws of the different sciences are closely connected with one another, but we also find that, within one and the same department, the different laws are interconnected. The world is thus a unity viewed as a whole as well as in all its parts: it beams with intelligence and beauty in every detail, no less than in its entire mechanism. It is not a chaos, but a cosmos. There are laws within laws—some more general and some less—so that to the Omniscient Mind the cosmos is compressed in a nut-shell of a few wide or comprehensive laws. The world is thus a type of Beauty, Harmony, and Consistency; and the lesson which it teaches is that of incessant activity directed to the good of creatures in the form of growth, repair, health, happiness, and perfection.

CHAPTER II.

FACT AND FICTION.

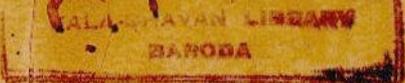
§ 1. **Perception and Imagination.**—Fact and Fiction, though often sharply distinguished, have some points in common. Fact is taken to be the real or actual which is revealed through perception, while fiction is believed to be an invention due to the exercise of imagination. But imagination as a faculty of representation is to a certain extent involved in perception ; and perception as a presentative faculty is also involved in imagination. When, for example, I perceive the object before me as a rose, I actually experience its colour, form and smell ; but I recall or represent at the same time its other qualities, such as touch, weight and taste. And, likewise, in imagining a rose, I must call back to my mind the percept as previously experienced. Thus, there can be no absolute separation between Fact and Fiction, between Perception and Imagination. The percept or fact is not wholly presentative ; it has in it a back-ground of representative factors. And imagination or fiction has also behind it some prior definite experience which is now revived and perhaps modified. The value of a percept or fact thus depends to a great extent on the correctness of the representative factors ; and the value of an image or fiction similarly depends on the degree of its correspondence with fact. If, for example, I fail to represent aright the touch, weight or taste of the rose, then my knowledge of it would be more or less imperfect ; and if

my perception of the rose be defective, then my representation of it must also be necessarily incorrect. We cannot ignore, then, the influence of imagination on our estimate of a fact ; and much less can we overlook the influence of facts on the character of our images.

§ 2. **Science and Hypothesis.**—The connection between Fact and Fiction, Perception and Imagination is illustrated not merely in the ordinary experiences of life but also in scientific inquiries. Science, which is taken to be concerned only with what is certain and definite, is closely connected with Hypothesis. And this is prominently illustrated in two ways. (1) As science has to treat of generals and not of particulars, it can prosecute its inquiries only by a stretch of imagination. The different laws which are believed to govern the materials of a science are not presented to sense : they are at first suggested by an exercise of imagination in accordance with acquired knowledge and then tested or verified by logical canons and experiments. On finding, for example, that an unsupported body falls to the ground in this case as well as in that, we are led to suppose that unsupported bodies fall to the ground always. And when the conjecture is proved by logical tests in numerous other cases, it is considered to be a law of nature. (2) A science is not content simply with deciphering the laws governing its materials ; but it tries to systematize these laws and arrive at a coherent account of its own subject-matter. This unification or comprehensive treatment, however, is not at all possible without a wider stretch of



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