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1934

780TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, MAY 14TH, 1934,
AT 4.30 P.M.

MRS. WALTER MAUNDER, F.R.A.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed, and signed, and the HON. SECRETARY announced the following elections:—As Members: Sir Cecil R. Harrison, K.B.E., B.Sc., and the Rev. D. E. Hart-Davies, M.A., D.D., from Associate, and as Associates, Martin Henry, Esq., L.D.S., and the Rev. Geraint L. Jones, M.A., B.D.

The CHAIRMAN then called on Mr. W. N. Delevingne to read his paper on "The Bible and the Bhagavadgita."

THE BIBLE AND THE BHAGAVADGITĀ.

By W. N. DELEVINGNE, Esq.

SOME time ago, Gandhi, who, as leader of the Indian Nationalist Party, was then looming large in the public eye in connection with the Round Table Conference on the reconstitution of the Government of India, was reported to have said that the Bhagavadgitā was his Bible and he found in it the guidance he needed for the due regulation of his daily life. This led people to ask what the Bhagavadgitā was and what peculiar merit it had that an interpreter of Hindu thought who commanded the respect, and even the reverence, of thousands of his fellow-Hindus, should consider it worthy to be placed on a level with the book which, in the belief of Christians, contains the direct revelation of God to man. I think it well, therefore, to preface what I have to say this afternoon on the Bible and the Bhagavadgitā with a brief account of the Bhagavadgitā and the place it holds in Hindu literature.

The Bhagavadgitā, or the Gitā as it is usually spoken of among Indians and as I shall call it for the sake of brevity, is, according to its literal meaning, the Song of God, or the divine

song. It forms a short episode in one of the two great national epics of ancient India, the Mahābhārata. The Mahābhārata (or story of the Great Bhārata) consists of eighteen Parvans, or parts, the sixth of which is named after the hero Bhishma. The Bhishma Parvan comprises thirty chapters, eighteen of which are occupied with the Gitā. The subject of the Mahābhārata is the struggle between the two branches of the royal family of Hastināpura (near modern Delhi) for possession of the kingdom over which it ruled. One of the branches was called the Kauravas and the other the Pandavas. The former conspired to deprive the latter of their share of the kingdom; and as all attempts to effect an amicable settlement of the dispute ended in failure, the Pandavas resolved to have recourse to arms for the enforcement of their rights. Both parties gathered their forces together, and the hostile armies met on the "holy field of Kurukshetra," which is mentioned in the opening lines of the Gitā. Nearly all the ruling chiefs in India at that time sided with one party or the other, and both parties eagerly sought the alliance of Krishna, the great prince of Dwārakā, who even then was regarded by many as an incarnation of the deity. Duryodhan, the eldest of the Kauravas, and Arjun, the third son of Pandu, proceeded to Krishna's camp to secure his favour, and Krishna, on hearing their requests, replied that one of them might have him alone and unarmed, and the other might have his vast army, every soldier in which was a brave and skilled veteran. Arjun prayed that he might have Krishna alone and unarmed as his ally, while Duryodhan readily accepted Krishna's offer of his whole army. It was then arranged between Krishna and Arjun that the former should act as Arjun's charioteer during the war.

Dhritarāshtra, the father of the Kauravas and brother of Pandu, was filled with grief at the prospect of an internecine struggle between his sons and nephews. He had been blind from his birth, but in the midst of his grief the renowned sage, Vyāsa, the reputed author of the Mahābhārata, appeared and offered to give him sight if he wished to see the course of the struggle that was about to take place. Dhritarāshtra declined the offer, but asked that he might hear an account of it, and Vyāsa, acceding to his request, bestowed supernatural powers on one, Sanjay, so that he might be able to see and hear all that happened and relate it to Dhritarāshtra.

The battle began, and after the conflict had raged for ten days and Bhishma, the leading general of the Kauravas, had fallen,

Dhritarāshtra put many questions to Sanjay as to the course of the struggle and received from him a full account of all that had happened. Among the earliest replies that Sanjay gave to him was a narrative of a dialogue that had taken place at the commencement of the struggle between Arjun and Krishna, the latter of whom, according to the arrangement between them, was acting as Arjun's charioteer. Arjun had become greatly dejected at the thought of having to fight against and kill his own relatives, and, filled with doubts as to whether he should continue to take part in the struggle, sought Krishna's advice. Krishna resolved all his doubts and expounded to him philosophically the duty of man and showed him why he would be failing in his duty if he withdrew from the battle.

The dialogue between Arjun and Krishna constitutes the subject-matter of the Bhagavadgītā. In the rôle he assumes as guide and instructor to Arjun, Krishna is not to be regarded as a mere earthly prince; he is represented as the Supreme Being himself in bodily form, and Arjun is fully conscious that the one with whom he is conversing is divine. It may indeed be said that Arjun stands for "Jīb-Atmā," or the spirit of man, and Krishna for "Param-Atmā," or the spirit of God. Man, subject to the limitations of his finite mind, is distressed and troubled by the seeming contradictions that beset the path of duty, and in his perplexity he seeks the advice and help of the Omniscient and Omnipotent Lord of the Universe, who has condescended to manifest Himself and to impart to man the instruction he needs. It will be readily understood therefore that the Gītā occupies a high place in the religious and philosophical literature of the Hindus, and that to read it or a portion of it every day is considered a work of great religious merit. To the modern mind it may seem strange and incongruous that what is in effect a religious and philosophical treatise should be introduced into an epic poem celebrating the heroic struggle of a royal family to recover its rightful kingdom, and some scholars hold strongly to the opinion that it is a late interpolation in the Mahābhārata. But a poem or collection of poems composed or reduced to writing (in much the same way as were the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer) some centuries before the beginning of our era cannot be judged by modern standards, and, though the point is by no means free from doubt, the better view seems to be that it belongs to the age of the Upainshads of the Vedas,

and that it was either composed as an integral part of the Mahābhārata or it was already in existence at the time when the Mahābhārata was composed and was woven into that epic as a poem setting forth in language of great beauty the highest philosophical conceptions of the age.

It is not my intention (and I doubt my competence for such a task) to consider the Gitā as a system of philosophy or to compare it with other philosophical systems that, from time to time, have been formulated by men in their search after knowledge. Philosophy, though its meaning has varied with different schools of thought, may be defined as the sum of all speculative knowledge and as embracing the study of the highest matters, metaphysics and the supernatural. It aims at discovering truth not manifest to the senses by the aid of human reason. The Bible, on the other hand, apart from the historical portions, contains Divine Revelation, and therefore what it reveals is absolute truth within the limits of the human understanding. In so far, then, as the Gitā propounds a philosophical system, it stands on a different plane from the Bible, and a comparison of the one with the other will yield little profit unless we can find some points of contact.

At the same time, it will help us to a clearer understanding of the doctrines set forth in the Gitā, if we know something of the systems of philosophical speculation that influenced Hindu thought at the time it was composed. I propose, therefore, to state very briefly what those systems were.

(1) First, there was the Sāṅkhya system, which held that the universe had sprung from a primordial essence called Prakṛiti, which itself was made up of three constituent principles, or "gunas," called "sattwa," "rajas," and "tamas." Twenty-three other entities, or "tattwas," spring from "Prakṛiti" by a process of evolution and make up the universe. The "Purusha," or soul, is a twenty-fifth entity not derived from "Prakṛiti" and devoid of "gunas," or principles. Individual souls are separate and each remains unchanged through successive transmigrations. The soul, however, is enveloped in "Prakṛiti" in the form of a body, and the aim of man should be the liberation of the soul from the envelopment of Prakṛiti by the acquisition of true knowledge. As regards the Supreme Spirit, or God, the attitude of the Sāṅkhya system is one of denial. The system is essentially atheistic.

(2) The Yoga system, or, as it is sometimes called from its reputed founder Patañjali, the Patañjal system, closely resembles the Sāṅkhya, and in both "Avidyā," or ignorance, is the cause of the soul being fettered by the body. In one important respect, however, the Yoga differs from the Sāṅkhya system, in that it acknowledges the existence of a Supreme Being. Further, it provides a new method of attaining the liberation of the soul from Prakriti, or nature, namely, deliverance from all disturbing thought, and it sets forth various means by which this may be secured. It is the aim both of the Sāṅkhya and the Yoga systems to effect the isolation of the soul from nature, and not union with an absolute.

The Vedānta System.

The Vedānta system as expounded by Śaṅkarachāryya, is the creed of pantheism. There is but one substance, or essence, and the doctrines of the system are summed up in the formula "*Ekam eva Adwitiyam*," one only without a second. Both creator and created are but parts of the one essence. Whatever else may appear to exist has no reality, but is the result of "māyā" or illusion.

The Vedānta expounds the doctrine of "Brahman," or the Absolute, as set forth in the latter portion of the Vedas, that is, the "Upanishads."

The fourth system is that known as the "Pūrvā Mimāṃsā," the doctrines of which form the subject of the "Pūrvā," or first portion of the Vedas. It sets forth in detail various kinds of "karma," or ritual, by the careful observance of which man may attain to the highest good, the *summum bonum*. Knowledge, it holds, is of but secondary importance. Man's first duty is to follow perfectly all the ritual laid down in the Vedas, and as this could only be done with the aid of those skilled in the interpretation of the Vedas, we can see at once how the system tended to the exaltation of the Brahmin class.

Two other systems of philosophy have been recognized by Hindu pandits, the "Nyāya," or that which holds that truth must be sought through logic, and the Vaiśeṣik, which is a development of the Nyāya, and divides the whole sum of human knowledge into seven categories, namely, substance, quality, action, generality, particularity, perpetual connection, and non-

existence ; but as there is no trace in the *Gitā* of the influence of either of these systems, it is needless to do more than mention them.

The *Bhagavadgitā*, as you may have surmised, is not a separate and sharply defined system of philosophy. The philosophy it presents is a strange and somewhat incongruous combination of doctrines widely different in character and, what is most striking, of widely different doctrines set forth in close proximity to one another without any apparent sense of their incongruity. This fact has given rise to very conflicting views as to the date of the *Bhagavadgitā*. Some authorities, like the late Kashinath Trimbak Telang (see the Introduction to his translation of the *Bhagavadgitā*) have held that it is "more than probable that the latest date at which the *Gitā* can have been composed must be earlier than the third century B.C., though it is impossible to say at present how much earlier." Others, such as Weber and Lassen, contend that the *Gitā* was not written before the third century B.C. ; while others again, struck by the similarity between the noblest conceptions in it and certain doctrines of the Christian religion, assert that the author must have been influenced by Christianity and assign to it a date as late as the second or third century A.D. But whatever may be the correct date of its composition, and however difficult it may be to explain its inconsistencies and contradictions as a philosophical treatise, the *Gitā* undoubtedly represents a great advance upon the old systems, which I have described. According to the *Sāṅkhya* doctrines, for instance, the universe consists of the primordial essence, "*Prakriti*," and the soul which exists apart from "*Prakriti*" and is unchangeable through successive transmigrations. But nothing is known of the Godhead or of the ultimate destination of the soul. In the *Gitā*, however, both soul and "*Prakriti*" are manifestations of the Supreme Spirit, the former a superior and the latter an inferior manifestation.

Again, in the *Yoga*, or *Patanjal*, system, while the existence of a Supreme Being is recognized, the end that man should set before him is not very different from that of the *Sāṅkhya*. In both, the liberation of the soul from "*Prakriti*" is the end to be desired, and when the soul has attained to this freedom and rests in itself, it has reached its highest good. In the *Gitā*, on the other hand, the liberation of the soul leads to a yet higher state, that of direct communion with the Supreme Spirit. The

summum bonum is "sayugya" or complete union of the soul with the Supreme Spirit.

And, lastly, while in the Pūrvā Mimāṃsā system, the Vedic rites and the benefits that flow from the due performance of them, *i.e.*, the attainment of the various heavens, are ends in themselves, according to the Gītā rites have value only as effective means of spiritual advancement.

It will be seen, then, that the philosophy of the Gītā, to quote the opinion of Professor Keith,* "has one decided characteristic, and that is its theistic tinge, which constantly intrudes and which is natural in an epic which had a far more popular appeal than had the more philosophical speculations which are here and there referred to in it." But while the theistic tendency of the Gītā is beyond dispute, there is no sufficient ground for believing that the author was acquainted with the doctrines of the Christian faith. In the opinion of such eminent scholars as Dr. Muir and Dr. Monier Williams, the resemblance between the passages in the Gītā, where devotion ("bhakti") to the Deity is inculcated, and the teaching of the New Testament is not greater than might be expected in works dealing with the same subject from similar standpoints.

What has gone before may seem an over-long exordium to my subject. But I do not think I need apologize for it. Not only are the position of the Bhagavadgītā in Hindu literature and its relation to other Hindu philosophical and religious works of peculiar interest, but, unless we know something of these matters, it is very difficult to draw any comparison that shall be at all profitable or instructive between that work and the Bible. I now propose to examine briefly what the Gītā tells us in regard to five great subjects of outstanding interest and importance to mankind in general, and then to compare with it what we learn from the Bible respecting those subjects. The five subjects are: (1) God; (2) Creation—the Universe; (3) Man and his duty toward God and his fellow-men; (4) Sin and its Consequences; (5) Life after death—the future existence.

1. *God.*

If we would state the essential difference between the Bible and the Bhagavadgītā in a few words, we might say that in the

* *The Sāṅkhya System* (The Heritage of India Series), by A. Berriedale Keith, D.C.L., D.Litt.

Bhagavadgitā, man is seeking God ; in the Bible, God is seeking man.

Of the character and attributes of the Deity, or the Supreme Being (called Brahman), we learn very little from the Gitā. What we are told may be summarized as follows :—

(1) The Deity, the Brahman, is the Supreme, the Indestructible (chapter viii).

(2) The Deity is unborn and his essence is inexhaustible ; and he is the lord of all beings. Nevertheless, he can and does take to himself bodily form (chapter iv).

(3) The Deity is unborn, without beginning, the lord of the world. He is the origin of all things and all things move on through him (chapter x, 1-12).

(4) Though unborn and without beginning, the Deity manifests himself through countless “ emanations,” and in countless forms and ways. Of created beings, he is the beginning and the end and the middle also, and nothing can exist without him. He, too, is the sum of all knowledge (chapter x, 20—chapter xi, 32).

In chapter iv, Krishna declares to Arjun that, though unborn, yet he has, by his own power, been born in the bodily form in which he has appeared. He declares further that, whenever piety languishes and impiety is in the ascendant, he creates himself ; that he is born age after age for the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, and the establishment of piety.

It will be seen from this summary that the Gitā reveals nothing concerning God that can touch the heart and soul of man. What it tells us is a curious mixture of theism and pantheism, and it does not enable us to formulate any consistent idea of the character and attributes of the Deity. It leaves us in a mist of doubt and uncertainty and affords no ground for supposing that the welfare of man is anything but a matter of complete unconcern to the Ruler of the Universe.

Contrast with this the God revealed in the Bible. The Bible opens with the words, “ In the beginning, God,” and after a brief account of the creation of the physical universe, the record depicts the creation of man, whom God made in His own image and to whom He would reveal Himself as he lived in communion with Him. But sin came in, and man fell from his high estate

through disobedience and was driven from the presence of God. With the punishment, however, God gave a promise of ultimate restoration, and thereafter we have unfolded before us the gradual fulfilment of that promise and the supreme manifestation of God's love to man in the incarnation of His Only-Begotten Son and the Son's offering of Himself on a Cross as a sacrifice for sin for the redemption of mankind. The record ends with a statement of all the blessings that flow from that sacrifice, the gift of God's Holy Spirit, and the deliverance of man from the power of sin and the final triumph of God's Kingdom over all the powers of evil.

The God of the Bible is a God of infinite holiness and righteousness, who cannot look upon sin and will by no means clear the guilty, and yet is a God of infinite love and mercy, who wills not that any should perish, but that all should come unto the knowledge of the truth. The revelation of such a God to man is the supreme, transcendent fact in the whole history of the universe. Well may we say, "Great is the mystery of godliness ; God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory."

2. *Creation : The Universe.*

As might be expected, there is very little in the Gītā to throw light on the problem of creation and show how the universe came into existence. I have already made one or two references to this subject in dealing with the Gītā's pronouncements in regard to the nature of the Supreme Being, but I will reproduce the leading passages in the Gītā in which the subject of creation is touched upon.

In chapter x, Krishna, in answer to Arjun's request to him to declare all his divine emanations by which he pervades all the worlds, says : " I am the beginning and the middle also of all beings . . . of created things I am the beginning and the end and the middle also. Among sciences, I am the science of the Adhyātmā (*i.e.* the manifestation of the Brahman as an individual self). . . . I myself am time inexhaustible, and I the creator whose faces are in all directions. I am death who seizes all, and (I am) the source of what is to be."

And again, in chapters xiii and xiv, Krishna declares that " He sees (truly) who sees the Supreme Lord abiding alike in

all entities, and not destroyed, though they are destroyed. . . . When a man sees all the variety of entities existing in one and (all as) emanating from that, then he becomes (one with) the Brahman. This inexhaustible supreme self, being without beginning and without qualities, does not act and is not tainted, though stationed in the body. . . .”

“Those who, resorting to this knowledge (*i.e.* the highest knowledge—the knowledge how to attain final emancipation), reach assimilation with my essence, are not born at the creation, and are not afflicted (*i.e.* destroyed) at the destruction (of the universe).”

In these and similar passages we can see the author of the *Gitā* groping his way to some solution of the problem of creation, some explanation of the great universe round him. The conclusion at which he seems to arrive is that the whole world and all in it has emanated in some way or another from a Supreme Being, and the souls of all men will finally be absorbed in the Supreme Being. The Bible, on the other hand, leaves us in no uncertainty as to creation having been the work of God. In the first two chapters of Genesis the various stages in creation are set forth in order and each begins with the word of God, “Let there be”; and the culmination of all God’s work in creation is His creation of man in His own image. How the infinite power of God was exercised, the finite mind of man can never know or understand. With all the wonderful discoveries that have been made in regard to the forces of nature and the laws that govern the universe, scientists are no nearer an understanding of the problem as to how the universe came into existence. The unfolding of the work of creation in simple, yet majestic, language in the first two chapters of Genesis reveals the omnipotence and the omniscience of the one True God, and man will never be able to penetrate the mystery until God condescends to grant a fuller revelation of Himself. For that we must wait until we stand in the glory of His presence.

3. *Man and his duty towards God and his fellow-men.*

We shall look in vain in the *Gitā* for anything like a moral or ethical code. It begins, as we have seen, by stating a moral problem, as Arjun asks, how it can be right to indulge in slaughter and destroy one’s own kinsmen merely for the sake

of satisfying one's ambition. Krishna first seeks to remove his scruples by philosophical doctrine. The human soul ("purusha"), the self, he says, is indestructible, immortal, and is not killed when the body is killed. As a man, casting off old clothes, puts on others and new ones, so the embodied self, casting off old bodies, takes on others and new ones. The self is everlasting, all-pervading, stable, firm, and eternal, and knowing it to be such, Arjun should not grieve at the thought of killing anyone. Moreover, Arjun is a Kshatriya (one of the warrior caste), and it is the duty of Kshatriyas to fight. "There is nothing better for a Kshatriya than a righteous battle. Happy those Kshatriyas who can find such a battle to fight, for it is an open door to heaven. But if you will not fight this righteous battle, you will have abandoned your own duty and your fame, and you will incur sin." Arjun is not satisfied, and urges that it would cause him intolerable grief to fight. Krishna replies that he must overcome that state of mind by the practice of "yoga," asceticism or spiritual culture. By this means man attains to freedom from all selfish attachments and desires, and though he will continue to perform all proper actions and fulfil the duties of his caste as prescribed in the Vedas, he will be wholly indifferent to the fruits, or results, of his actions, and through such indifference and self-control he will attain to perfect tranquillity and, absorbed in contemplation of Brahman, or the Supreme Being, of whom both nature and the soul are manifestations, will reach final emancipation and become identified with Brahman. This is the Brahmic bliss.

The foregoing is a brief statement of the means by which the soul—the self—can attain to everlasting happiness. But the Gītā seems to recognize that there may be a personal relationship between the soul and the Brahman—the relationship of the worshipper to him who is worshipped. In chapters vi, vii, and viii Krishna discourses to Arjun on devotion to himself—"bhakti"—and the blessings that flow from it. "Know, O son of Pandu," he says (chapter vi), "that what is called renunciation is devotion; for nobody becomes a devotee who has not renounced (all) fancies. To the sage who wishes to rise to devotion, action is said to be a means, as to him when he has risen to devotion, tranquillity is said to be a means. When one does not attach oneself to objects of sense, nor to action, renouncing all fancies, then one is said to have risen to

devotion." Krishna then describes the means by which a man can attain to the state of "devotion" and what is required of him as a devotee, and he concludes the first part of his discourse (see the end of chapter vi) with these words: "The devotee is esteemed higher than the performers of penances, higher even than the men of knowledge, and the devotee is higher than the men of action; therefore, O Arjun, become a devotee. And even among all devotees, he who, being full of faith, worships me, with his inmost self intent on me, is esteemed by me to be the most devoted." As he continues his discourse, he declares to Arjun that the "man of knowledge," that is, the man who knows how to attain final emancipation, is *dear* to him. "O Arjun," he says, "doers of good (acts) of four classes worship me: one who is distressed, one who is seeking after knowledge, one who wants wealth, and one who is possessed of knowledge. Of these, he who is possessed of knowledge, who is always devoted, and whose worship is (addressed) to one (Being) only, is esteemed highest. For to the man of knowledge I am dear above all things, and he is dear to me. All these are noble. But the man possessed of knowledge is deemed by me to be my own self."

There is one other passage I would like to quote. Still speaking of man's duty to be devoted to him, Krishna thus advises Arjun, "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever sacrifice you make, whatever you give, whatever penance you perform, do that as offered to me. . . . And with your self possessed of (this) devotion, (this) renunciation, you will be released and will come to me. I am alike to all beings: to me none is hateful, none dear. But those who worship me with devotion (dwell) in me, and I, too, in them."

These passages, though they do no more than indicate the path of approach to the Supreme Being, bring us nearer to the ideal of a personal relationship with and worship of God. But that is the most that can be said of them, and it must be admitted that they leave the inquiring mind and heart in darkness and uncertainty. Some passages, it will be noticed, are contradictory the one of the other; and of the love of God for those whom He has created and as seeking to attract their love to Him, nothing is said. Again, in regard to the duty of man to his fellow-men, the *Gītā* is silent. So far as I am aware, there is only one passage in which there is any indication that

an obligation rests upon every man to seek the good and promote the happiness of his fellow-men. Towards the end of chapter v, Krishna, speaking of the devotee, declares that the sages whose sins have perished, whose misgivings are destroyed, who are self-restrained, and *who are intent on the welfare of all beings*, obtain the Brahmic bliss. Nowhere else is it suggested, except very remotely, that the welfare of his fellow-beings should be the object of man's earnest consideration and endeavour.

Let us now turn to the Bible. Here we have the code of laws that, nearly 1,500 years before Christ, was given by God through Moses to the people of Israel for their guidance in their approach to Him and for the regulation of their conduct one toward another and toward the nations around them. The principal features of this code are the Ten Commandments and God's requirement of the people that they should fear Him, and walk in all His ways, and love Him and serve Him with all their heart and with all their soul. There are also special injunctions as to their love and care one for another and as to the protection of those less able to defend themselves and maintain their own interests. In the Book of Leviticus, chapter xix, 17-18, we read, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy (10-22) provision is made for the fatherless and the widow and the stranger within their gates.

The code of laws given to the Israelites was unique in character. One will look in vain throughout the annals of early human history for anything approaching its perfection, whether viewed from a religious or an ethical standpoint. It is indeed largely the basis on which human society to-day is founded. But perfect as it was in its adaptation to the circumstances and needs of the people to whom it was given, it was but a faint reflection of the love that God manifested toward men when He sent His Son into the world to be a sacrifice for sin and through that sacrifice to reconcile men to Himself and make them partakers of His Divine Nature. The doctrines of the Christian faith are universal in their application, and God's love and mercy, as revealed in the New Testament, flow out

to all men independently of race, creed, caste, class, or condition. The salvation that the God of the Bible provides for sinful men is a complete salvation, and while He is the justifier of all that avail themselves of that salvation, He Himself is just and righteous and holy in all His ways.

4. *Sin and its consequences to the human race.*

It is in its estimate of sin and the consequences of sin to the human race that the inadequacy of the *Gitā* to meet man's deepest need is most clearly seen. It recognizes the doctrine of "Karma," which lays down that every act must work out to the uttermost its inevitable consequences and receive its retribution, however many ages the process may require; that sins committed in this life or subsequent lives must be expiated by successive rebirths; and that salvation cannot be attained until the power of "Karma" is vanquished. For instance, in chapter vi Krishna declares to Arjun that "the devotee working with great efforts and cleared of his sins, attains perfection after many births and then reaches the supreme goal." There are other passages, too, in which reference is made to the necessity for re-birth until the soul is purged of evil desires and obtains release from the trammels of nature (*Prakriti*). But of sin as disobedience of the commands of an all-holy God and as a corrupting power in the heart of man that brings about spiritual death, no trace can be found in the *Gitā*. It may be said, indeed, that sin is viewed more as an offence against social or religious custom or a breach of caste rules than as a transgression of a moral law or disobedience of the dictates of conscience. In the first chapter of the *Gitā*, Arjun, speaking of his reluctance to fight against his kinsmen and destroy their families, addresses Krishna thus: "On the extinction of a family, the eternal rites of families are destroyed. Those rites being destroyed, impiety dominates the whole family. In consequence of the domination of impiety, O Krishna, the women of the family become corrupt, and the women becoming corrupt, intermingling of castes results: that intermingling necessarily leads the family and the destroyers of the family to hell; for when the ceremonies of (offering) the balls of food and water (to them) fail, their ancestors fall down (to hell)." In chapter ii, Krishna tells Arjun that if he will not fight the righteous battle (*i.e.* against the Kauravas), he will have

abandoned his own duty and fame and will thus incur *sin*. Again, in chapter iii, Arjun asks Krishna by whom man is impelled, even though unwilling, to commit sin, and Krishna replies: "It is desire, born from the quality of passion. Know that that is the foe in this world. . . . The senses, the mind, and the understanding are said to be its seat. . . . Therefore, first restrain your senses, then cast off this sinful thing which destroys knowledge and experience." (I would here suggest, for further study, a comparison between Krishna's reply to Arjun's question and the seventh chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans.)

We have a yet more curious view of sin in chapter iv. Krishna is explaining to Arjun the importance of knowledge, and he makes this statement: "Even if you are the most sinful of all sinful men, you will cross over all trespasses by means of the boat of knowledge alone. As a fire well kindled reduces fuel to ashes, so the fire of knowledge reduces all actions to ashes. For there is in this world no means of sanctification like knowledge." Knowledge of whom, or knowledge of what, we are not told; but it probably means nothing more definite than the knowledge of self and how to attain final emancipation from the bonds of nature (*Prakriti*).

Lastly, there are two passages that seem to suggest that sin does not necessarily import moral obliquity. At the beginning of chapter x Krishna declares: "Of (all) mortals, he who knows me to be unborn, without beginning, the great lord of the world, being free from delusion, is released from all sins." And in chapter xviii he says: "Once more, listen to my excellent words—most mysterious of all. Strongly I like you, therefore I will declare what is for your welfare. On me (place) your mind, become my devotee, sacrifice to me, reverence me, and you will certainly come to me. I declare to you truly, you are dear to me. Forsaking all duties (*i.e.* of caste or order), come to me as (your) sole refuge. I will release you from all sins." In neither of these passages is there any indication that sin is viewed as wrong-doing against God or against man, or that it is hateful to God as involving disobedience or defiance of His holy will.

The subject of sin must be considered in another aspect. If all the suffering in the world is the result of sin in one form or another—and there are very few, I suppose, that will venture to deny this—the great need of the human race is to find a remedy for

sin, to find a power that shall enable men to resist and overcome the forces of evil which are ceaselessly striving to frustrate the wise and beneficent purposes of God. The Gitā recognizes this need, but man is left to himself to find the means whereby evil may be overcome. He must seek in himself the power to resist and repel the motions of sin : he must rely on his own efforts for final and complete deliverance. The means suggested, as we have seen, are spiritual culture and the acquisition of true knowledge, that is, knowledge of the " self," or the practice of " karma yoga " (asceticism), which means not the renouncement of action, but the renouncement of selfish desires accompanied by the performance of proper action. The Gitā also seems to suggest another means, namely, whole-hearted devotion to Brahman as manifested in Krishna himself, which, through contemplation and attainment of the knowledge of the Great Spirit, will lead to salvation and final absorption in the Supreme Spirit. These doctrines are esoterism in an extreme form, and even if there were an element of truth in them, they would hold out no hope of salvation for the majority of mankind.

How different is the estimate of sin that we find in the Bible, and how greatly the remedy there provided for sin surpasses all the thoughts of man ! In the Bible sin, as disobedience of God's will, is set forth as the curse of the human race, and we have unfolded before us the gradual fulfilment of God's great purpose to redeem fallen man by the gift of His Son to be a sacrifice for sin and the bestowal of His Holy Spirit upon all those who, by faith, accept that sacrifice for themselves. I need not dwell upon this theme. It is blessedly familiar to us all. Upon the salvation provided by God through His Son Christ Jesus are founded all the hopes both for this life and the next of all those who accept the Bible as the Word of God.

5. *Life after death—the future existence.*

I propose to say very little on this subject. I fear I have already exceeded my limits. In the Gitā, as we have seen, salvation means deliverance from the power of " Karma " and the necessity for rebirth and the final emancipation from all that would hinder the soul from being absorbed in the Supreme Spirit. Of Heaven as the place where all those who have been redeemed by God will dwell with Him in a sinless state and of eternal life as the life they will enjoy in the glory of His Presence,

the *Gitā* has no conception, and I leave you to contrast in your own minds what I have described above as the Hindus' idea of final salvation and what has been revealed in the Bible of the life after death.

I feel I have dealt all too inadequately with these great subjects. But, as I have already indicated, the *Gitā* contains a large body of confused and often contradictory opinions, and it is not easy to make a clear and succinct statement of the beliefs of the author in regard to the subjects I have been considering ; and if you detect any omissions or shortcomings, I hope you will excuse them on the ground that to reduce the discussion of such comprehensive subjects within the compass of a short paper is a task of no little difficulty.

In conclusion, may I remind you that I do not pretend to have made an exhaustive examination of the *Bhagavadgītā* ? You will find in it, especially in chapters xiii, xv, and xviii, thoughts of much beauty and wisdom, to which I have made no reference ; but I have not considered it from the standpoint of its literary excellence or as constituting a great advance on the philosophical conceptions of earlier schools. It has been my object to show how far, in comparison with the Bible, it may be regarded as comprehending and satisfying the spiritual and moral needs of mankind.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (Mrs. Walter Maunder) said : I am sure that all will agree that this paper is an important one, both from its clear description of the Content of the *Bhagavadgītā* and from its clear discrimination of its doctrines and those taught in the Bible.

I have myself been among those who think that the *Bhagavadgītā* is one of the many interpolations in the *Mahābhārata*, but it differs from the others in the coherency of its arguments ; there is a definite purpose and a logical reasoning throughout it which marks it as separate from all the other irrelevancies. Arjun's questions are so direct and sensible that Krishna cannot evade them.

I think, however, that Krishna's arguments were not, at least at first, wholly leading up to the training of Arguer in the way of the *Sāṅkhya* and the *Yoga* philosophies. Already the old blind king,

the father of the Kauravas, had been exclaiming "Alas, cruel are the duties of the Kshatriya order as laid down by the *Rishis*," and when Arjun expressed himself to the same effect Krishna (before urging upon him "the protection of deestion"), commanded him: "Casting thy eyes on the duties of thy order, it behoveth thee not to waver for there is nothing else that is better for a Kshatriya than a battle fought fairly . . . if thou dost not fight such a just battle thou shalt then incur sin by abandoning the duties of thy order and thy fame." In fact, the followers of Kapila and Patanjali could not so apply themselves to their devotions as to obtain emancipation from rebirth unless the warrior caste kept them free from their enemies.

In the "Refutation of all the Heresies," supposed to be written by St. Hippolytus, the Bishop of Portus, early in the third century A.D., a description is given of the heresy of Noetus, which seems to me to bear a very close resemblance to the declaration in Chapter IV of the *Bhagavadgitā*, which Krishna gives to Arjun. St. Hippolytus definitely traces this heresy taught by Noetus (who was his contemporary) to the tenets of Heraclitus the Obscure, a philosopher who lived about 500 B.C. Close as the resemblance is, I do not see how one could have been derived from the other at any period. Though the Yavanas (or Greeks) are mentioned occasionally in the *Mahābhārata*, it is certainly not in such terms as would justify one in supposing that the Hindus ever derived their philosophy from an ancient Greek sage.

The *Mahābhārata* took a long time in the making, and it is later perhaps by two or three centuries than the *Ramayana*. Rama probably lived in the fourth or fifth century B.C., and the Pandavas and Kauravas not earlier than the second or third. There is not much in the *Bhagavadgitā* itself through which we can date its writing, but I do not at present see any reason why we should give it as late a date as the first or second century A.D.

The Rev. Principal H. S. CURR said: I should be interested to learn as to the result of the battle, to which reference is made in describing the historical setting of the poem in question, especially in view of the fact that Krishna took sides with one of the armies in person, and, at the same time, sent his own troops, composed

of veterans, to serve with the enemy. Was the presence of Krishna in the one army of more value than the aid of his soldiers to the other? My point will become more plain if I recall an anecdote connected with the first Duke of Marlborough. At the close of a great battle, in which the English army had been successful, Marlborough rode past a party of French prisoners. One of these was a man of gigantic stature, before whom he paused and remarked that if the French king had a thousand such men the issue of the day might have been very different. The witty reply was to the effect that the tables would have been turned if the French armies had one man like Marlborough in their midst. I should like then to inquire if Krishna's presence was like that of Napoleon, worth a brigade of foot.

I noted with much interest that Krishna became the charioteer of one of the warring princes. Such humility is moving. It is a reminder that the best thought in Indian philosophy recognizes meekness and lowliness of heart as the hall-marks of ethical and spiritual excellence in the manner, if one may venture to say so in all reverence, of Him Who was found in the fashion of a slave.

The doctrine of this poem, to the effect that salvation can be obtained by knowledge, interested me very much, recalling the dictum of Socrates that virtue is knowledge. Oriental and Occidental moralists thus seem to agree.

The general impression which this ancient composition conveys is one of deep need for which no satisfaction has been found. That is defined and described in a way which seems to be almost a *preparatio evangelica*. The problems which have been fully and finally solved in Christ Jesus, are stated in such a way that they seem to clamour for the answers supplied by the New Testament. These ancient philosophers and poets seem to have discovered and diagnosed the difficulties which are met and dissolved for ever in Him Who is made unto all believers wisdom and righteousness. In these days far too much is made of all that is good in ethnic religions. To my thinking what merits they possess are largely in their formulation of the needs which Christ alone can satisfy. Of themselves they are utterly powerless to deal with them. The lecturer has illustrated and emphasized that point again and again in his admirable treatment of a big subject.

One is also struck with the similarity between Eastern and Western statements of the deepest needs and desires of the soul of man. Differences there are, but deeper than the differences are the resemblances. East and West meet in the presence of Him Who made them both, and redeemed them both with His own precious blood, and that for His own glory.

The Rev. JOHN STEWART, Ph.D. wrote : Mr. Delevingne does not express any very definite opinion as to the date of the *Gitā*, although he seems to favour an early rather than a late date. He makes no reference to "Bentley's Ancient Hindu Astronomy," published in Calcutta more than a hundred years ago. In that book Bentley, I think conclusively, shows that the Krishna legend could not have been invented prior at least to A.D. 600, as proved by the horoscope of Krishna which Bentley gives and from which it appears that Krishna was born on the 7th August, A.D. 600. If that were so it would indicate that the *Gitā*, which is concerned largely with the sayings and doings of Krishna, could not have been written earlier than the date mentioned although it might have been much later, and as Christianity was very widespread in India long ere that there can be very little doubt as to the source of the finest of the sentiments given expression to in the *Gitā*. Besides, it has still to be proved that Sanskrit itself whether in the form in which it is found in the Asoka rock and pillar inscriptions, the Rig Veda, or the Mahābhārata, existed prior to A.D. The balance of evidence seems against it, and there is certainly, so far as is known, not a single reference to either Buddhism or Hinduism in any classical writing prior to A.D.

All this would seem to indicate a much more recent date for the *Gitā* than is often claimed for it. It would be interesting if the writer of this paper could follow it up by looking into that aspect of the whole question.

LECTURER'S REPLY.

There has not been much in the discussion that calls for a reply. As regards the date of the *Bhagavadgitā*, I have not examined this question at length, for it was rather outside the purpose of the paper. I am quite unable, however, to agree with the view expressed by the Rev. John Stewart in his written communication. The evidence

afforded by a supposed horoscope of Krishna would be very unreliable, and whatever value it might have would be far outweighed by other considerations of greater import. The question as to the data of the Bhagavadgītā has been fully discussed by the late Kashinath Trimbak Telang in the instructive and illuminating introduction to his translation of the poem, and I would commend his arguments for consideration to any who are interested in the question. I agree with our Chairman in thinking that it would be unsafe to assign a late date to the Bhagavadgītā merely on the ground that here and there in it are to be found conceptions that appear to bear some resemblance to certain doctrines or principles of the Christian faith. There is, in my opinion, very little ground for holding that the poem was composed subsequently to the commencement of the Christian era.

Mr. Curr has raised one or two points to which I should briefly refer. He has asked first, what was the result of the battle in which Arjun took part. The Bhagavadgītā has little to do with this, but I may say that the struggle between the Kauravas and Pandavas ended in the complete defeat of the former and the restoration of the Pandavas to their share in the kingdom. Their success, however, was short-lived, for subsequently, through the machinations of the Kauravas, they were once more driven from the kingdom.

As regards Krishna's offer to act as charioteer to Arjun in the battle, I agree with Mr. Curr that the willingness of the god Krishna to take the humble place of charioteer to the man Arjun in order that he might instruct him in spiritual culture is an admirable conception on the part of the author of the Bhagavadgītā.

Mr. Curr has also commented on the evidence afforded by the Bhagavadgītā of man's deep spiritual need and has pointed out that this need makes all men alike of whatever age or race. It is upon this common ground that East and West meet, however otherwise divided, and in Christ Jesus alone in Whom are fully revealed the love and righteousness and wisdom of God, can man's universal need be satisfied. It is said that the Hindus regard Krishna as the tenth "avatar," or manifestation in human form, of the Deity, and that they are looking for one more, the last and crowning revelation of God to man. May the day soon come when India shall see in Jesus Christ the One for Whom she is looking.