



KARMA

Works and Wisdom

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Contents

The Three Kinds of Karma.....	5
Karma in the Upanishads.....	15
Karma in the Bhagavad Gita.....	23
Krishna's Teaching on Karma.....	31
Karma in the Later Vedanta.....	41
Karma and Salvation by Works.....	47
Karma in Modern Theosophy.....	53

The Three Kinds of Karma

“The truth, so often obscured in later times, in various ways, that the getting rid of evil and the acquisition of good can be gained only by personal effort; that there is not, and cannot be, any contrivance through which either individual or common good can be attained, save one’s own personal effort.”—Count Leo Tolstoy, *on “Karma.”*

When the word *Karma* is used by writers on Indian philosophy and religion it is generally supposed that only one quite definite thought is implied, and that this has been uniform and clear throughout the whole period of India’s development—from the dim Vedic times, thousands of years ago, to the present day. But the truth is that this term has a lengthy and varied history, and its latest meaning is the fruit of a long development, which may be divided into three clearly distinguished periods.

When the word first became prominent—at the close of the Vedic epoch, about five thousand years ago—it had a quite definite and rigid meaning: a signification, however, which bears hardly any relation to the idea it was later used to convey. Its earliest meaning was “the ritual law”—the complete ceremonial which grew out of the Vedic religion, a great artificial system of life which laid hold of every man born under it (even before he saw the light of day) and did not relax, in the belief of its followers, even when the flames of the funeral fires had died out and nothing was left of the visible man but a handful of ashes to be scattered on the waters of the sacred rivers. At present we need not

concern ourselves with the details of this ritual law; it is enough that, growing up as precedent and tradition out of the superstitions not less than the true and healthy instincts of Vedic times, it wove itself into a vast, all-embracing system, touching and regulating every act of life, determining for each man beforehand what might and what might not lawfully be done, and becoming for each man an absolute predestination which made any spontaneity of life and will almost impossible. Even if, weary of this formal life and worship, a man elected to have done with it all—to give up every ambition and hope and become an aimless wanderer or hide himself in the forest far from the homes of men—the way of his renunciation was by injunction already defined for him, the year in which it should be made, and even the thoughts with which his mind should be busied after his renunciation was complete.

This ritual law, as already stated, was called Karma; the life of obedience to it was the way of Karma, and the books which contained its ordinances were the sections of Karma. Believing in its divine origin and inspiration, its followers held that it embraced all the possibilities of human life; that every development of life was already foreseen and provided for; that righteousness consisted solely in this—to find out what the traditional law enjoined, and to follow it with perfect obedience. The ritual law being regarded as an expression of the whole of life, the way of Karma came to mean right action through the whole of life—a right direction and application of all the forces of life.

The cult of the ritual law drew its greatest strength from the Brahman caste. The Brahmans—at first priests, believed to have influence with the gods; and practical magicians, believed to be able to use this influence through certain ceremonial acts to practical ends—were dependent for their wealth on the elaboration of ceremonies, and for their power on the hold which they could gain over the imagination of the princes who called on them to perform these ceremonies for particular purposes: the gaining of wealth, victory over enemies, freedom from illness, extension of possessions, etc. This idea of the efficacy of ceremony grew, from the belief that the Brahman's influence with one deity or another could be purchased for some special end, to the wider belief that the whole of life could best be lived by an obedience to the ceremonies prescribed by the

priest; so that the Brahman priest-craft gradually claimed to lay hold on the whole of life, of prince and people alike, and succeeded in imposing the belief that the only right and satisfactory life was obedience to Brahmanical statute.

We need not for a moment believe that this action of Brahmanical priest-craft was necessarily malign, or a matter altogether of selfish calculation and intrigue. On the contrary, we shall be untrue to human nature if we do not perceive that in every stage of their development the Brahmans honestly believed in themselves, as all priesthoods do; believed that they had the influence with and over the gods which they claimed to have—that they could confer the benefits which they asserted would follow the due performance of ceremony; and sincerely thought that the ritual law really formed the highest and truest ideal of life, the most perfect standard of righteousness and truth. But in the same polity of ancient India, side by side with the growing Brahmanical hierarchy, was another force, strongly antagonistic and making for a quite different ideal of life and conduct. This force was the expression of the genius of the warrior race from which the rulers of ancient India were drawn, a race profoundly different in inspiration and character from that which gave India its priesthood; for, rightly understood, the difference in caste between Kshatriya and Brahman (prince and priest) was a difference in blood as well as in occupation.

As the instinct of the Brahmans led them to find the standard of life in outward observances, ceremonials, and traditions; so the instinct of the Kshatriyas led them to seek for the meaning of life in inward things—in the heart and will, in intuition, in the light of the Self. “Follow the law,” said the Brahman, “and you will gain the rewards of the law.” “Follow the life of the Self, as it expresses itself in your heart and will,” said the Kshatriya, “and you will become possessed of the power and being of the Self.” As inward and outward things are in absolute contrast, so also were the ideals of Kshatriya and Brahman; and this contrast is not merely a subject for antiquarian research, but rather a vivid and striking picture of a conflict running through the whole of human life and arising anew for each individual. Is the will to submit to the order which seems to be imposed on it from without, or is it to impose itself on outward things as their sovereign and lord?

This absolute contrast in ideals between the two races is admirably illustrated in the use of the word *Karma*. To the Brahman priest, as we have seen, it meant the ceremonies of the ritual law, scrupulously performed in order to gain rightness in life—the reward of obedience to the law. This meaning of the term inspires the whole of the sacrificial Vedas, and the vast theological literature which grew around and out of them; so that these books are technically known as the Karma books, and the way of life they enjoin as the Karma way. But the Kshatriyas, the rulers, the men of will and power, attach a totally different meaning to the word. As they found their life-impulse not in outward things, but in their own hearts and wills—in the inherent life and power of their own selves—so they use the term to signify, not conformity with the outward ritual law, but the springs of action and impulses of their own wills, purposes, intentions, and energies, which, in their ideal, made up the reality of their lives. This idea of Karma, as the action of a man's own will, first emerges in the Upanishads—the books of wisdom which contain the inspirations and intuitions of the warrior race, as the sacrificial Vedas contain the ideals of the priestly Brahmins.

Bound up in a remarkable way with these two contrasted meanings of Karma, are the beliefs as to death and the life hereafter which were held by the two dominant races, the great rival cultures of ancient India. The Brahmins, in the beginning, in the period to which the hymns of the Rig Veda belong, were not yet a caste, but rather a group of household priests, performing ceremonies for their masters the princes, almost solely with the purpose of gaining temporal benefits. In this earliest epoch we hear very little of any life after death, of any hopes beyond those of material life—gold and chariots and horses, elephants and slaves and robes. But in a later era we find the belief that the same ceremonies and rites which brought well-being and success in this life were efficacious also in an existence after death; that the favour of the gods could be secured for that life also, and that the feasts of paradise were the rewards which that favour conferred. Not only the rites performed by a man himself, but those performed for him after death by his descendants, were held to have this efficacy; and a man's happiness in paradise—his partaking of celestial feasts—was dependent on the proper performance of the offices for the dead by his

sons and his sons sons, from generation to generation.

So deeply rooted was this belief in India that even at the present day it exercises a profound influence on Indian civil law, and the due performance of the offices for the dead is an essential condition for the inheritance of property and the outward sign and witness of the legal competence of the heir. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that the whole object of inheriting property, in the theory of Indian law, is that the heir may have the means to perform the death-rites for his father and earlier ancestors; and the enormous importance of adoption of heirs in India is due to the necessity of providing a qualified performer of the offices for the dead, on which the enjoyment of the feasts of paradise depends.

Now, in all this Brahmanical religion of rites, for the gaining of well-being in this life and the next, there is not even a shadow of the teaching of rebirth, or reincarnation. The hymns of the Rig Veda know nothing of it, nor has it any place in the early sacrificial books. This truth becomes abundantly clear when, in the very oldest teaching of rebirth, in the greatest two Upanishads, we find it expressly stated that Brahmans, "learned in all the Vedas," knew nothing of this teaching; while it was a part of the traditional knowledge of the Kshatriya alone. This clear and definite statement is only the pendant to a chain of proof, which even without it would be complete. The Kshatriya's adherence to the doctrine of rebirth is as much a logical and moral necessity as the Brahmans ignorance of the same teaching; for the Brahman's eyes were fastened on outward things—sacrifices, ceremonies, and rites—and, with his whole mind and imagination filled with the due performance of the offices for the dead, it was inevitable that he should lose sight of the real destiny of the soul in the Great Beyond. To him, Karma and the way of Karma meant the due performance of an elaborate ritual; and, with his mind thus preoccupied, he could not possibly grasp the truth that the real Karma, the real "work," depended on the inherent energy of moral force, and not on any rites whatever.

This true apprehension of Karma, as we have seen, was the possession of the Kshatriya; and it is peculiarly in the teaching as to life after death that its real force appears. It is in connection with the

doctrines of existence hereafter and rebirth in this world (in the greater Upanishads) that the higher understanding of Karma is first plainly expressed. It is said, in the Upanishads, that a man is born again, “according to Karma, according to what he has thought and willed;” and the question is discussed: “By doing what, by what Karma, does a man follow the path of rebirth; and by doing what is he freed from rebirth, reaching liberation?” Yet again, in the oldest Upanishads—pre-eminently the Scriptures of the Kshatriyas or Rajput warriors—we are told that “by pure Karma a man comes to a pure rebirth, and by impure Karma to an impure rebirth;” so that, in the very earliest expression we have of the secret Kshatriya teaching, we find the word *Karma* used in a high sense, implying the power of moral forces and inextricably bound up with the teaching of reincarnation.

It would be useful to take all the passages in the Upanishads in which this word is found and translate them at length, in order to bring out its full meaning; but this would carry us too far afield—away from our general view of the development of the idea of Karma—along two contrasted and contradictory lines. The early Brahmanical teaching, as we have seen, was a system of ritual, the rewards of which were “the feasts of this world and paradise.” The early Kshatriya teaching was an intuition of the potency of moral and spiritual form as the determining powers in life, and a belief in rebirth as the natural outcome of the reality and continuance of these energies.

A very remarkable page of Indian history, one whose importance cannot possibly be exaggerated, is that which tells how the Brahmans came to learn the secret teaching of the Kshatriyas—sitting at the feet of the Kshatriya teachers and begging for wisdom and enlightenment; and how the latter, moved by their prayers, taught the Brahmans the great doctrines of Karma (as the reality of moral powers), and Rebirth (as the necessary outcome of the persistence of these forces). As a continuation of the same study, we might trace how the Brahmans, once initiated into the mysteries of the Kshatriyas, strove hard to appropriate them and to transform them into the likeness of their own image. We shall see presently how this was done by a great Brahman, late in Indian history, and with what result on the thought, not of India alone, but of the whole world.

For the most part, the union of the ritual of the Brahmins with the theosophy of the Kshatriyas was productive of more evil than good. It resulted in a mixed and incoherent system, one element of which affected the external life and civil law of India, while the other influenced Indian thought and philosophy. More than once, after the Vedic age (with its fusion of the two elements) had closed, we find great spiritual leaders of the Kshatriya race attempting to restore the purity of their primitive ideal, and to shake their spiritual intuition of life free from the bondage of Brahmanical theology and ritual. The partial success of two of these efforts marks the most luminous epochs in the post-Vedic history of India. These two attempts are associated with the famous names of the warrior Krishna and the prince Siddhartha—Gautama Buddha. The significance of these two great spiritual events I shall refer to later, giving such quotations from original documents as will make their character and aims indubitable. At the time of Krishna's effort the Brahmanical priesthood was still sufficiently open to new influences to accept and absorb Krishna's work; while in Buddha's day Brahmanical crystallization had gone too far, and reconciliation was impossible. Hence Krishna passes for a light of Brahmanism, while Buddha is stigmatized as a heretic.

In Krishna's day we see the idea of Karma in a stage of transition, from which it finally emerges with a new meaning, one which remained substantially the same through Buddha's epoch and down to the time of Sankara, the last great light of Indian wisdom. This third meaning of *Karma* was a natural result of the fusion of the Brahmanical and Kshatriya ideals, each of which had already a fully developed conception thereof; so the new signification naturally drew elements of thought from each of its predecessors. The Brahmanical interpretation, as we have seen, was the fulfilment of the ritual law to the end of well-being in this life and the life hereafter. In its essential character, this conception was based on the belief that the ritual law really expressed the law of nature—the law of things as they actually are; of outward phenomena, subject to the succession of cause and effect. The follower of the ritual law fully believed himself to be rendering obedience to things as they are, to the actual condition of things; and upon this obedience he founded his hope of well-being for this world and the next. This belief, therefore, though admitting

another world and powers called divine, was essentially materialistic and selfish; an endeavour to make the best of both worlds; to eat the feasts of this life and paradise. And this endeavour, with the forces and powers involved therein, was called the “great work,” or Karma.

The Kshatriya seers and sages, with their intuition of inward realities, were from the very beginning in complete opposition to this worship of the actual, this selfish and material profiting by things as they are. They saw that moral forces were the true realities; that the Self, the soul, the inward power of life, is truly real, while the outer world is not; that the habitual self of the external world is not the real Self; that the well-being of the former is not the well-being of the latter. At the outset they called these moral forces *Karma*; and, clearly perceiving that a man’s reality and progress depend on these moral forces, they insisted that his well-being depended on the purity of his moral force—on his pure Karma, which would lead him into the perfect life of the real Self, a life complete, self-existent, and eternal. Karma meant, therefore, all the moral forces of a man’s soul, as contrasted with the physical forces of outward things; and this is the meaning which the word distinctively bears in the Upanishads.

When the coalition, however, between these two conceptions came about, with the close of the Vedic epoch, it was inevitable that a change should come over the word *Karma*—that a third conception thereof should be developed. This conception contained elements of the other two. It was clearly recognized, in the first place, that the Brahman’s Karma, the ritual law, and the attempt to make the best of both worlds by obedience thereto, was only a particular expression of the moral forces of the lower, habitual self; that an obedience to these forces might, it is true, confer the benefits aimed at—the feasts of this world and paradise; but that such victory, being one for the lower self, was rather a loss than a true gain. It was further seen that, as moral forces are real and work themselves out in perfect continuity, this victory of the lower self must carry with it its own penalty; it must tend to the strengthening of the lower self, and thus defeat the ends of the higher. This became more clear when the Kshatriya intuition of the real Self, with its infinite life, was brought face to face with the Brahmanical ideal; it was seen that this whole system of making the best of both worlds was foreign to the nature of the higher Self, which,

being in itself perfect, has nothing to gain from either world, but is essentially the heart and foundation of both, their only reality. Thus the Brahmanical way of Karma, in its old sense, stood condemned.

By this process of thought and understanding, the idea of Karma was gradually transformed into its third meaning. It still meant the moral forces, but only those of the lower self, which sought their satisfaction in the old selfish and materialistic way of the ritual law. Accordingly, the Kshatriya ideal gave to the new sense of Karma its application to moral forces *instead* of ritual acts; while the Brahmanical ideal restricted and limited it to the moral forces bound up with these acts—those of the lower, habitual self. This is substantially the meaning of Karma, as used in the system attributed to Krishna, in the Bhagavad Gita, and other episodes of the Mahabharata, essentially as it appears in the teaching of Buddha, and almost exactly as used by the great Brahman, Sankara, the final harmonizer of the Brahmanical and Kshatriya ideals. It is probably because, to most modern Indian students, the whole horizon seems filled by these three teachers—Krishna, Buddha, and Sankara—that this latest use of the word *Karma* has become the most popular one, while the two older meanings are overlooked or forgotten.

Karma in the Upanishads

The most important passage on the question of Karma, from an historic as well as a philosophic point of view, is a narrative which appears in two independent versions of the greater Upanishads. The chief personages in this dramatic story, which bears all the marks of authentic history, are Pravahana the Rajput, King of the Panchalas, and the Brahman Aruni (with his son Shvetaketu). These two Brahmans, we are told in the Chhandogya Upanishad, were learned in all the Vedas, the hymns of the Rig Veda, the sacred sentences of the Yajur Veda, and the chants of the Sama Veda. Thus the father is reported as saying to his son:

“Shvetaketu, go dwell as a Brahman student, for none of our family was ever unlearned, a mere hanger-on of Brahmanhood.’ Then Shvetaketu, going when he was twelve years old, returned when he was twenty-four, after studying all the Vedas, conceited, vain of his learning, and proud.”

A little further on, the father examines his son, and, to illustrate the fact that the physical memory depends on food, bids him eat nothing for fifteen days, and then asks him to repeat verses of the Vedas: “Verses of the Rig Veda, sentences of the Yajur Veda, chants of the Sama Veda.” At first Shvetaketu was unable to remember any of them; then after eating: “Whatever he asked him, he repeated them all.” These preliminary details are very important, as showing that Shvetaketu and his father were typical members of the Brahman body, instructed in the sacred hymns and traditional lore, and fully initiated

in the knowledge and rites of the Brahmins. We may now follow Shvetaketu to the court of the Rajput Pravahana, King of the Panchalas:

“Pravahana addressed him: ‘Youth, has thy father instructed thee?’

‘Yes sire!’ replied the young Brahman.

Then the King asked him: ‘Knowest thou whither go those who die out of this world?’

‘No!’ he replied.

‘Knowest thou how they return again?’

‘No!’ he replied.

‘Knowest thou the turning apart of the two ways, the way of the gods and the way of the fathers?’

‘No!’ he replied.

‘Knowest thou why that world is not overfilled?’

‘No!’ he replied.

‘Knowest thou how, at the fifth offering, the waters take human voice?’

‘No!’ he replied.

‘Then how saidst thou that thou hast received the teaching? for how is he taught who knows not these things?’”

The boy refused the King’s offer to teach him, and, returning to his father, complained that the Rajput had asked him five questions, not one of which he knew, and bitterly reproached his father for keeping him in ignorance, thus exposing him to humiliation in the presence of the King’s court. But his father, with delightful ingenuousness, confesses that he knows no more than his son, and frankly proposes that they set out together, and learn wisdom at the Rajput’s feet. This Shvetaketu, “conceited, vain of his learning, and proud,” flatly refuses to do; and the old man sets out alone and prays the Rajput to instruct him. The King answers in these words:

“Never before thee did this teaching reach the Brahmins, but among all peoples it was the hereditary instruction of the warrior Kshatriyas, the Rajputs alone.”

The teaching in question embraces the whole doctrine of Reincarnation, Karma, and Liberation—the complete esoteric philosophy of India. For the King's questions show, and his further instruction to the Brahman abundantly proves, that he was a master in this wisdom: the path of the fathers is the path of reincarnating souls, who go hence to the other world, the world of the reward of works:

“And having dwelt there until their accumulation of works is exhausted, they return again by the same way [from the higher to the lower ethereal region; thence to a form of vapour which gradually becomes a form of cloud, which condenses and brings them to the gates of physical birth.] And for those whose works were fair, then is the prospect that they shall come to a fair birth, as a priest, or warrior, or man of wealth; while those whose works were foul come to a foul birth—animal, or swinish, or servile.”

The path of the gods, on the other hand, is the path of just souls made perfect, who reach liberation and become one with the Eternal. We are specifically told, therefore, that the teaching of reincarnation, through and according to works (Karma), and the teaching of liberation were utterly unknown to the Brahmans learned in all the Vedas, the hymns of the Rig Veda, the sentences of the Yajur Veda, and the chants of the Sama Veda, and duly initiated in the sacred rites, while these same doctrines were fully known to the Rajputs and handed down by them as an esoteric philosophy; and, lastly, that this teaching, hitherto unknown to the Brahmans, was imparted to one of them by the Rajput King Pravahana, who laid stress on the fact that never before did this teaching reach the Brahmans, but was everywhere the teaching of the Kshatriya alone.

In the version of the story from which I have quoted, the specific idea of Karma is only touched upon; but it is more clearly brought out in the other—the Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad—where the questions are given in a slightly different order. The most important of them reads as follows:

“Knowest thou the gaining of the path, the way of the gods, and the way of the fathers, or by doing what (by what works) they gain the path of the gods and the path of the fathers?”

Herein it is quite clear that the idea of doing, of works, of Karma, in the esoteric doctrine of the Upanishads includes all mental and moral energies—those that lead to liberation as well as those leading to reincarnation; in other words, the moral tendencies of the higher, divine nature that lead upward as well as those of the lower nature that lead downward. The former, the upward forces, are here mentioned as wisdom, aspiration, fervent will, and adherence to the real as opposed to the formal in life—a group of powers which appear together again and again in the Upanishads, with exactly the same purpose. Their full explanation is a subject in itself amply worthy of separate treatment; but for our present purpose they may be grouped under the idea of works, or Karma, which maybe best translated as moral energy.

As opposed to this right moral energy, it is remarkable that we find, not so much sensuality and selfishness as we should expect, but “ceremonial sacrifices, gifts, and penances;” in other words, the formal religion of those very Brahmans to whom the doctrine of reincarnation was now being taught for the first time. The reason of this becomes clear when we learn that the objects of this ceremonial religion were: (1) a material success in this world—“gold, chariots, horses, sons, slave-girls, flocks and herds, ornaments and robes,” and (2), as a subordinate object, the attainment of a sensuous paradise, where much the same delights were to be enjoyed a second time, in a more ethereal form. Hence it is plain that the moral energies represented by the traditional teaching of the Rajputs led upward to liberation, while the moral energies represented by the traditional worship of the Brahmans led downward to animalism, and consequent rebirth in a material body. This necessary result of their teaching was unknown to the Brahmans themselves, who, as this narrative makes clear, had never heard of reincarnation, despite their knowledge of the Vedas; and this fact receives a very remarkable corroboration when we discover that, in the Rig Veda, the source of all the hymns, sentences, and chants spoken of in the Upanishads, there is no trace of the teaching of reincarnation, but unlimited evidence of the religion of material success, followed by a sensuous paradise.

One or two more passages may be quoted to show that the idea of Karma, in the esoteric teaching of the Upanishads, embraces the whole range of moral energies, of the higher as well as the lower nature. In

another portion of the Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad, which I translate in full, it is said:

“This Self is the Eternal. It takes the forms of mind, emotion, vitality, sight, and hearing; the forms of earth, water, air, ether, and fire; of desire and freedom from desire, of wrath and freedom from wrath, of law and freedom from law; it takes all forms, in this and the other world.

“According to his deeds, according to his acts—thus he becomes: he whose deeds are worthy becomes worthy; he whose deeds are evil becomes evil; he becomes holy through holy works (*Karma*), and evil through evil works. For they say that the spirit is formed of desire, and, according as his desire is, so is his will; according as his will is, so he accomplishes works (*Karma*); and whatever works he accomplishes, to them he goes.”

From this passage it is clear that the whole nature of man, mental and physical, is regarded as the result of the moral energy of the supreme Self, the divine Spirit; and not only the nature of man, but also the whole outer world, ranged under the five great elemental powers or planes of the manifested universe, is the result and work of the same energy. Further, it is the same moral force of the supreme Self which, working through the individual nature of man, forms and moulds the whole of his works to the purposes of its own development and perfection, for which the outer world and its powers are as necessary as the inner world and its powers. This active moral energy of the Spirit is here spoken of as desire; and it will be noted that this term, like Karma, is here used in a universal sense. It is not restricted, as it was later on, to the evil desire that leads downward. It is rather regarded as the initiative principle of Will; “according as desire is, so is will.”

Exactly the same is true of a passage in the Taittiriya Upanishad:

“The conscious Self accomplishes sacrifice; the conscious Self accomplishes works (*Karma*); he who has understood the conscious Self as the Eternal, thereafter goes astray no more. Putting off evil in the body, he attains all desires.”

Here, again, all the works of the universal Will are included under Karma, just as all the impulses of the same Will are called desires, the most real of which are to be attained after all evil has been put away. The same all-embracing idea of the conscious Self and its energies inspires a passage in the Aitareya Upanishad:

“What is this Self? that by which he beholds form, by which he hears sound, by which he smells odours, by which he expresses what is spoken, by which he is conscious of sweet and bitter.

“This is the heart; this is mind; this is cognition, perception, discernment, observation, wisdom, insight, apprehension, thought, knowledge, motive, memory, intention, will, life, desire, power—all these are names of the conscious Self.”

And again, in the Prashna Upanishad:

“This conscious Self, the spirit, is the seer, toucher, hearer, smeller, taster, thinker, knower, doer” [of works, *i.e.*, *Karma*].

This makes it clear that, in the esoteric doctrine, first taught to the Brahmans by the Rajputs, the idea of Karma had a wide and universal signification, covering all the activities of man’s moral energies—those of the spirit that lead upward as well as those of the body that lead downward. This universal idea of Karma is accompanied by an equally comprehensive idea of desire and will, covering the whole range of activities of the supreme Self, the divine Spirit, which has made man and the universe through its own inherent power.

Unhappily, the Brahman pupils who received this doctrine were already under the sway of a great formal religion based on the Vedas, the objects of which were material success and a sensuous paradise; and even when they received the better wisdom of the Rajputs, they could by no means be persuaded to give up their own system. The result was a compromise on their part in which their teachers never acquiesced. From this arose a bitter struggle between esoteric and exoteric teachings which still echoes throughout the Upanishads. Thus the Mundaka Upanishad, which is of later date than those previously quoted, though still of great antiquity, expresses both the compromise and its indignant repudiation by the holders of the esoteric doctrine.

The compromise appears in the passage which refers to the Two Wisdoms:

“Two wisdoms are to be known—thus says the tradition of those who know the Eternal—the higher and the lower wisdom. The lower wisdom is the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda, the Atharva Veda, and the six sciences subsidiary to these. The higher wisdom is that by which the Eternal is gained.”

By this time, therefore, the Brahmans had accepted the higher wisdom which they had learned from the Rajputs, while retaining their own system of ceremony and sacrifice, to the ends of material success and sensuous delights in paradise—the ceremonial being retained, the old books quite clearly show, for the sake of the rich rewards given to the priests for the performance of sacrificial rites, sometimes lasting for weeks together and requiring the assistance of an army of priests, neophytes, and their helpers. Of the repudiation of the compromise, the same Upanishad speaks thus:

“Inferior rafts are those forms of sacrifice, with the low work (Karma) of the eighteen performers of sacrifice. Those who delight in this as the better way, fools that they are, go again to decay and death.

“Turning about in unwisdom, self-wise, thinking themselves learned, they stagger, lagging in the way, fools, like blind men led by blind.

“Turning about in unwisdom, these fools exult, thinking they have accomplished the work; doing this work (*Karma*) they gain not wisdom; therefore, afflicted they fall, losing paradise.

“Thinking that offerings and purifications are best, these fools, deluded, know not the better way. After reaping the fruit of their deeds in paradise, they enter this world, or some baser world.”

This passage clearly proves that the Brahmans, learned like Shvetaketu in the Vedas, tried to retain the ceremonial system, in possession of which they were “conceited, vain of their learning, and proud,” while adopting also the teaching of the better way, in order to make the best of both worlds. We have seen how this attempt was

regarded by their teachers, the inspirers of the esoteric doctrine of the Upanishads, who, as the records show, were Rajputs, men of the red warrior race who formerly ruled India. This passage also illustrates the fact that the word *Karma* was beginning to have another meaning, the result of the circumstances which arose when the Rajputs took Brahmans, men of the priestly families, as their pupils. *Karma* gradually came to mean the works of the priestly system; and as these works had the attainment of material success and the delights of a sensuous paradise as their avowed aim, it was natural that the term should come to mean all works that made for these things—all acts and energies that had as their object a sensuous gratification, whether in this or another world.

Underlying all this is the clear perception, everywhere present in Indian philosophy, that moral energies, whether good or evil, are real forces, indeed the only real forces in the universe. The universe originally came into existence through the activity of moral forces; and what is true for the universal is also true for the individual—for man. Man has his being in moral energies; moral energies have shaped his exterior form and surroundings, and will shape his form and conditions in the future, in all worlds. And these moral energies are not apart from or outside of him, but are intimately connected with his real Self.

It lies solely with himself to which class of moral energies (to which self) a man shall give effect—whether to the glowing light in the inner chamber of the heart, which leads him away from selfishness and sensuality, away from his individual self to the Eternal (his real Self), or to the baser energies of lust and hate, of sensual and selfish indulgence, which lead him outward and downward, away from his immortal Self, to a sensual form which from its very nature and necessities involves him in hostility toward all other men embodied like himself. As is the desire of his heart, so is his will; according to his will are his works. The result, in the one event, is conscious immortality, above all selfish and sensual desires—conscious sharing in the powers and energies of the Eternal. In the other event the result is rebirth, under sensual and selfish conditions, in this world, or perchance a baser world.

Karma in the Bhagavad Gita

“Many are my past births, and thine also.”

—*Bhagavad Gita*, iv., 5.

There are two important passages in the Bhagavad Gita which throw a strong light on the whole development of the teaching of Karma, even though not directly concerned therewith. They show (1) the two great streams of Indian thought—the ceremonial system of the Brahmans and the metaphysical thought of the Rajputs; (2) the two discordant ideals of life which flow from these two systems; (3) how the word “Karma,” or “work,” came to be used in each of them, in widely different senses; (4) how the two world-concepts came in contact with each other; and (5) how the popular, traditional belief, upheld by the Brahman priesthood, adopted the ideas of reincarnation and Karma from the hereditary secret wisdom of the Rajputs. This is done by these two passages almost unconsciously, allusively, and indirectly; hence they have a high value as undesigned evidence of the truth of the views already put forward concerning the derivation of the teaching of rebirth and Karma—not from the Brahmans at all, but from the Rajputs.

The first of these passages is in Arjuna’s opening speech, in which he laments the fate which has led him and his brothers into warfare with their kinsmen. Arjuna represents the popular, traditional belief—ignorant of the esoteric teaching, especially of the popular belief as to the soul’s destiny after death and the forces which make for its well-being in the future life:

“What joy can there be for us, slaying the sons of Dhritarashtra? Sin verily will follow us if we slay these criminals. Therefore, it is not well if we slay the sons of Dhritarashtra with their kin; how shall we be happy slaying our own people?”

Even if they do not see, their brains clouded with avarice, the crime of destroying their kindred, the sin of enmity toward their friends,

How should we not know to turn away from this crime—we who do see the crime of destroying our own family?

For, when the family is destroyed, the immemorial family law perishes; and, when the law perishes lawlessness overtakes the whole family.

When lawlessness has overtaken them, Krishna, the women of the family turn to evil; when the women turn to evil, a mingling of caste [colour] is generated.

And this mingling is perdition for the slayers of the family and for the family; for their father’s fall, cut off from the offering of cake and water.

By the crimes of those who have slain the family, and caused a mingling of caste [colour], the laws of birth are destroyed, and the long-lasting laws of family.

And for men whose laws of family have perished, there is a protracted dwelling in hell—thus we have heard.” (*Bhagavad Gita*, i, 36-44)

The last four words mark the traditional belief handed down from father to son. Before touching on this belief as it represents the future of the soul, we may refer to a point of great importance. We have elsewhere tried to show that the system of Four Castes in Ancient India arose naturally from the fact that four races, primarily distinguished by colour, lived together within the limits of post-Vedic India; and that, from the mutual adjustment and accommodation of these four races, a condition of fairly stable equilibrium was reached, which was the Four Caste system already mentioned. Two natural principles guided this adjustment—the instinct of race purity and the distribution of social function according to race genius. The working of these two principles can be very plainly seen today in America; and

the ignominy attaching to mixed descent fully explains the bitterness of Arjuna's protest against social strife, which, breaking down the barriers of prescriptive right and settled form, would open the door to a mingling of races and the resultant bitterness and passion.

But there is another motive for Arjuna's protest. It was a dogma of the traditional religion upheld by the Brahmans, that the welfare of the soul after death depended on the due performance of certain rites by the children—the eldest son or his substitute. These rites were paid to the father and his direct ancestors to the ninth generation in the ascending line. Cakes of rice were offered every year for the father, grandfather and great-grandfather; fragments of cakes for the three next ancestors in the ascending line, and water for the three more remote. It was believed that a psychic or spiritual energy was disengaged by the offering and the accompanying rites; this energy raised the souls of the "fathers" (the male ancestors) to the abode of the gods, and kept them there; and that a cessation of this energy, i.e., a failure to offer the cakes and water, would doom the "fathers," robbed of their spiritual support, to fall into the pit of hell.

In a future article we may quote from the same great cycle of poems (which contains Krishna's teachings) a very graphic picture of the fate of the "fathers" thus "cut off from the offering of cake and water." This is substantially the belief of the old Vedic hymns, the material of Brahmanical religion; and the same belief is held by the Brahman priesthood today, even to such an extent that the right to inherit, in Hindu law, is regarded as proved when it has been shown that the heir has offered the cake and water to the souls of his father and ancestors: it being presumed that the family priests, the Brahmans, take care that the performance of these rites shall fall into the proper hands.

This, then, is the essence of the traditional Brahmanical belief: The destiny of the soul after death and its well-being in Paradise depend on the due performance of offerings by the survivors, whose piety in this respect is greatly strengthened by the faith that the same dutiful care will be given by their descendants to their own celestial well-being. Failing in the performance of these rites, the souls fall back into the pit. It need hardly be pointed out that this belief of the Brahmans has nothing whatever to do with the doctrine of rebirth, or the teaching of

Karma, or the continuity of life through the conservation of moral energies. Indeed, the traditional Brahmanical belief is in flat opposition to the principles of rebirth and Karma, and quite irreconcilable therewith. In the words of Krishna himself:

“Thou grieveest for those who need no grief, and speakest words of wisdom! The wise grieve neither for the dead nor the living.

For never was I not, nor thou, nor these princes; nor shall we ever cease hereafter.

As in this body the lord of the body meets youth, manhood, age, so he gains another body; the wise is not deluded as to this.

As a man, putting aside worn-out garments, takes other new garments, so the lord of the body, putting away worn-out bodies, enters other new bodies.

Him weapons cleave not, nor fire burns; him waters wet not, nor dry winds parch.

This cannot be cut, nor burned, nor wet, nor parched; this is the eternal, all-present, immovable resting-place, the everlasting.”
(*Bhagavad Gita*, II:11-13, 22-24)

It is evident that the traditional Brahmanical belief here meets and is overshadowed by another teaching immeasurably higher and more profound—that of the higher Self, real and eternal, beginningless and endless, which becomes manifest in a chain of outward bodies, formed and governed by the conservation of moral energies proceeding originally from the higher Self, “on which the bodily lives are strung, like pearls on a string.” We shall again quote Krishna’s own words as to the origin and perpetuation of this profounder doctrine:

“This undying teaching I declared to the solar lord; the solar lord declared it to Manu; Manu taught it to Ikshvaku.

Thus the Rajanya sages knew it, handed down from teacher to teacher; but in the passage of ages the teaching was lost to the world.

This is the same teaching of union which I declare to thee today, this most excellent esoteric teaching, for thou art my beloved companion.”

Arjuna comments on this dark saying thus:

“Later is thy birth: earlier the birth of the solar lord; how, then, am I to understand this—that thou hast declared it in the beginning?”

This question is wonderfully like one that was put to another teacher of divine things. It is difficult to resist the conviction that his answer (“Before Abraham was, I am”) implies exactly the same esoteric doctrine that Krishna expresses in these words:

“Many are my past births, Arjuna, and thine also. I know them all; but thou knowest them not.” (*Bhagavad Gita*, iv, 1-5)

Here, in the clearest and most unmistakable way, we have a statement of the position set forth in these articles. The twin doctrines of rebirth and Karma belong to the Rajanya or Rajput sages, being handed down among them from teacher to pupil in immemorial succession. The solar lord is the progenitor of the race of the solar Rajputs, the personified genius of the Children of the Sun. Manu also, according to the universal tradition of ancient India, was a Kshatriya or Rajanya, the earthly progenitor of the Rajput race, as the solar lord was their divine progenitor. Then, again, Ikshvaku was the first king of the solar line, to whom, in later India, Prince Siddhartha, of Kapilavastu, traced back his descent—the heir of the royal race, who was to become known to all mankind as Gautama the Buddha, “the Awakened,” bringing yet again the two great doctrines of reincarnation and Karma, which “went not formerly to any Brahman, but were among all peoples the teachings of the Kshatriya,” the Rajput alone. We have a distinct presentment of the teaching of repeated births; further, we have the definite assertion of the possibility of remembering past births, and of the possession of this power by Krishna himself. Buddha made exactly the same claim, and even laid down a method of inwardness and spiritual enlightening by which this power could be obtained.

Krishna’s teaching on Karma, and on the continuity of moral forces, is contained in four main passages in the Bhagavad Gita, which are of such extent and value that we have thought best to translate them separately and in full. The heart of the matter is this: The personal self and the higher Self are opposed to each other in moral tendency. The acts of the personal self, under the domination of the

personal idea (selfishness, egotism, etc.), make for limitation, degeneration, and evil. The higher Self makes for its own proper life, as an eternal and divine Being. The two tendencies “war against each other,” the one making for bondage, or slavery, and the other making for freedom and eternal life. What we have to do is to get rid of the personal idea, which thwarts the higher Self; then the powers of the latter will find their own expression in a perfect and divine life. As the powers of the higher Self temper and overcome the personal idea, with its downward tendencies, so the progress of life rises to loftier and better things; in other words, the future rebirths will be higher and better, until the earthly tendencies which build up “the body of death” are completely worn out and make way for a “celestial body not subject to the law of death.”

We have divided Krishna’s teaching under four headings. It must be kept in mind that “renunciation” means what we have called “getting rid of the personal idea.” This renunciation was materialized by the teachers of the Sankhya doctrine into an injunction to abstain from all action whatsoever, which led to a reaction among the teachers of the Yoga school, who pointed out that certain actions make for freedom—those performed in obedience to the powers of the higher Self after the personal idea is destroyed. The Bhagavad Gita is to some degree concerned in reconciling the Sankhyas and Yogas, by showing that the path of renunciation, or “the way of wisdom,” and the path of actions (free from the personal idea), or “the way of works,” are really one and the same. This is done by separating the true from the false in these two doctrines, as held by their followers, and showing that the truth in both of them is one. Hence we have the contrast between “wisdom and works.” Union everywhere means union with the higher Self, when the personal idea is put aside.

The second passage, to which we have given the title, “The Works of the Law,” shows how the Brahmanical teachers who handed down Krishna’s doctrine tried to reconcile it with their own popular belief by pretending that the acts performed in union with the higher Self were the very ritual and ceremonial acts of their priestly system, which the sages of the Upanishads so unsparingly condemned. To achieve this result, we find them interpreting “sacrifice,” which is properly the destruction of the personal idea, as the slaughter of bulls and goats

enjoined by the Vedic system and practiced in India even at the present day. In much the same way we can trace the development through materialization of the doctrine of the “atonement.”

To this desire to save their popular system we owe the insertion of the legend about the Lord of Beings instituting sacrifice, which we have enclosed in brackets to emphasize the fact that it has no proper place in the text. It is immediately followed by the teaching of union with the higher Self; yet, only a few verses further on, the counsel of priest-craft, the preservation of popular superstition, and much more of the same kind appears, which has no proper relation to Krishna’s real esoteric doctrine. It is the presence of passages like this which leads us to speak of the Bhagavad Gita as the record of a compromise—one which must be attributed to the Brahman recipients of the doctrine, rather than to Krishna himself.

Yet much of the teaching ascribed to Krishna is only fully intelligible in the light of the Sankhya philosophy. This is especially true of the division of works, knowledge, knowing, etc., into three types, belonging respectively to goodness, force, and darkness, which is found in the third of these four extracts; and the sharp separation between the Self and nature, in the same teaching, also belongs to the Sankhyas. Of the teaching as to Caste, in the last section, we need say little; it is a part of the Brahmanical compromise.

Krishna's Teaching on Karma

(Translations by Johnston from the original Sanskrit)

I. Works and Wisdom

Thy right is only to the work, never to its fruit. Let not the fruit of the work be thy motive; yet desire not to abstain from work.

Perform works standing in union, putting desire away; be equal in success or failure, for equal-mindedness is union. Work is far lower than union in wisdom; seek refuge in wisdom, for pitiful are those whose motive is the fruit.

He who has reached union in wisdom gives up even here all things done ill or well; strive, therefore, after union. Union is well-being in works.

For the wise who have found union in wisdom, giving up the fruit born of works, set quite free from the bond of birth, go to the goal where no sorrow dwells. (*Bhagavad Gita*, II:47-51)

II. The Works of the Law

[*Arjuna speaks:*]

If wisdom is esteemed by thee higher than work, why then dost thou engage me in a terrible work?

It is as though thou deludest my thought with confused speech; tell me, then, clearly the one thing whereby I may gain the better way.

[*Krishna speaks:*]

In this world, a twofold rule was of old laid down by me: by

union through wisdom for the Sankhyas, by union through works for the Yogins.

Not by not undertaking works does a man reach freedom from works; nor by renouncing them does he gain adeptship. For no one ever remains even for a moment without performing works, involuntarily, through the potencies born of nature.

He who, though restraining the works of the senses, yet broods on objects of sense—such a man is called a false ascetic; his very self is delusion.

But he who, compelling the senses to restraint by the mind, without desire in the senses, enters upon union through works—he, verily, is superior.

Do thou perform work thus restrained, for work is better than abstinence from work; and even the progress of thy body may not succeed without work.

This world is under the bondage of work, except work that is done for sacrifice; therefore perform work, free from desire.

[The Lord of beings, of old sending forth beings with sacrifice, spoke thus: Be ye fruitful through this; may ye milk from this whatever you desire.

Nourish ye the gods by this, and may the gods nourish you; thus mutually nourished, ye shall gain the better way. For the gods, nourished by sacrifice, will give you the feasts that you desire; he who feasts on what they give without giving to them—the same, verily, is a robber.

They who eat the leavings of the sacrifice are freed from all their sins. They eat sin who, sinful, cook for themselves alone.

From food, beings grow; from rain is the birth of food; from sacrifice comes rain, and sacrifice is born of works.

Know that works are born from the Evolver, and that the Evolver is born from the Incorruptible; therefore, the all-present Eternal is ever present in the sacrifice.

He who does not roll on the wheel set rolling here, sinful in life, of sensual delights, lives in vain.]

But he who delights in the Sell, content with the Self, among the sons of men, and altogether satisfied with the Self—for him no duty

remains.

He has no object in doing anything, or in leaving aught undone. Nor among all beings is there any from whom he has aught to seek.

Therefore, do whatever works are to be done, without desire; for the man who performs work, without desire, gains the Supreme.

For Janaka and other sages reached adeptship through work; and yet again, looking to the host of the people, deem it right to perform work.

For whatever the best does, the lesser folk also do; whatever example he sets, that the world follows.

For me nothing remains to do, in the three worlds—nothing ungained to gain; yet I take part in work.

For if I ceased to take part in work persistently, as men everywhere follow after my way.

These worlds would fall into ruins, were I not to perform work; and I should be a worker of confusion, and should slay these beings.

As the unwise perform works with the desire for them, so the wise should perform them without desire, working for the host of the people.

Let him not cause a division of thought among the unwise who have desire in their works; let the wise man who has gained union engage them in all works, himself performing them.

Works are everywhere done by the potencies of nature; he is perfectly deluded by the personal idea who thinks, "I am the performer of works!"

He who knows the reality as to the division of potencies and works is free from desire, knowing that the potencies move in the potencies.

They who are deluded by the potencies of nature are engaged by desire in the works of the potencies; he who knows all will not disturb the backward ones who know not all.

Renouncing all works in me, through the thought of the higher Self, without longing or sense of possession engage in work, without feverish hope.

They who, among the sons of men, ever follow this mind of mine, in faith and without reviling, are set free through works.

But they who, reviling, follow not this mind of mine, know that they are destroyed, thoughtless and deluded as to all wisdom.

Even he who possesses wisdom strives according to his own nature. All creatures follow nature; what can restraint avail?

In the sensual objects of the senses dwell lust and hate; let a man not come under their sway, for they lie in wait for him on his path.

Better his own duty, without power, than the duty of another well performed. Death in his own duty is better; the duty of another brings fear. (*Bhagavad Gita*, III:1-35)

III. The Way of Wisdom

Whoever knows my divine birth and work in reality, leaving the body, he goes not to rebirth, but to me.

Rid of rage and fear and wrath, full of me, seeking refuge in me, many purified by the fervour of wisdom have come to my being.

According as they approach me, so, verily, do I love them; men follow after my path in every way.

Desiring the success of their works, men worship the gods here; for quickly is success born of works in the world of men.

The system of Four Castes was formed by me according to difference of power and work. Know me also as the doer of this, though no doer and eternal.

“Works stain me not, nor do I long for the fruit of works;” he who knows me thus is not bound by works.

With this knowledge, works were performed by those of old who sought liberation; perform thou, therefore, the work performed before by those of old who longed to be free.

What is work, and what is abstinence from work? Even sages have been deluded in this. That work I shall declare to thee by knowledge of which thou shalt be freed from evil.

Insight is to be gained in works, in avoidance of works, and in abstinence from works; the way of works is obscure.

He who sees abstinence from work in work, and work in abstinence from work—he indeed is wise among men; he has gained union and performed all works.

He whose undertakings are all free from desire and personal will—him the wise call a sage, whose works have been burned up by the fire

of wisdom.

Giving up desire for the fruit of works, ever contented, seeking nothing—he performs no work, even though completely involved in work.

Free from longing, with imagination perfectly controlled, with every grasping desire given up, performing works only outwardly, with the body, he incurs no sin.

Satisfied with whatever he receives, risen above alternations of mood, not envious, equal in success and failure, even when performing works, he is not bound.

Of him whose desire is gone, who is free, whose thought is set in wisdom, who acts only for sacrifice—his works are dissolved away altogether.

The Eternal is the offering, the Eternal is the libation, the Eternal is the fire, the Eternal is the sacrifice. By him also the Eternal is to be approached, who performs works intent upon the Eternal.

Some who seek for union offer sacrifice to the gods; others sacrifice by an offering in the fire of the Eternal. Some offer hearing and the other senses in the fires of self-control; others offer sound and other sense-objects in the fires of the senses.

Yet others offer all works of the senses and works of vitality, in the fire of union with the Self, through control, which is lighted by wisdom.

There are sacrificers of wealth, sacrificers by penance, sacrificers through search for union, sacrificers through study and knowledge, ascetics faithful to their vows.

Others offer the downward breath in the forward breath, the forward breath in true downward breath; checking the goings of downward breath and forward breath, proficients in the art of breath-restraint.

Others, abstaining from food, sacrifice the life-breaths in the life-breaths. All these are knowers of sacrifice, whose darkness is worn away by sacrifice.

The eaters of the deathless leavings of the sacrifice go to the Eternal. Not even this world belongs to those who sacrifice not: how can they inherit the other?

Thus many modes of sacrifice are expanded in the mouth of the Evolver; know them all as born of works, and, knowing this, thou shalt be free.

The sacrifice of knowledge is better than the sacrifice of wealth; each and every work is comprehended in wisdom. Find wisdom through obedience, questioning, and service; the wise who know the real will teach thee wisdom.

Gaining wisdom, thou shalt not again enter delusion; through wisdom thou shalt behold all beings, without residue, in the Self, and so in me.

Even if of all sinners thou art the most sinful, thou shalt cross over evil on the raft of perfect knowledge.

As the fire that is kindled burns the wood to ashes, so the fire of wisdom burns to ashes all works.

Nor is any purifier seen here equal to wisdom; he who has gained perfect union himself will find this in the Self in due time.

The faithful gains wisdom, intent on it, with senses restrained; gaining wisdom, after not a long time he enters into perfect peace.

He who is unwise, unfaithful, ever doubting, perishes; neither this world nor the other, nor happiness, belongs to him who doubts.

Works bind not him who has renounced works through wisdom; his doubts are cut by wisdom, full of the Self. Therefore, cutting the doubt born of unwisdom with the sword of knowledge of the Self, enter into union and rise up. (*Bhagavad Gita*, iv)

[*Arjuna speaks:*]

Thou praisest renunciation of works, also union, Krishna; tell me clearly which of these two is best.

[*Krishna speaks:*]

Renunciation and union through works are both bringers of the supreme good; yet, of these two, union through works is better than renunciation of works.

He is to be known as the perfect master of renunciation who neither hates nor desires, for he who is free from alternations of mood is perfectly freed from bondage.

[Children, not the learned, speak of Sankhya and Yoga as different; he who stands firm in one gains the fruit of both.

The goal that is gained by the Sankhyas is reached also by the Yogas; he who looks on Sankhya and Yoga as one—he indeed sees.]

But renunciation is hard to gain without union; the sage who is perfected in union after not a long time gains the Eternal.

He who is perfected in union, whose self is pure, who has conquered self and the senses, whose Self is blended with the Self of all beings, even performing works, is not stained.

He who has reached union, who knows the real, thinks it is not I who performs any work, whether seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, walking, sleeping, breathing.

Speaking, putting away, taking, opening and shutting his eyes: he feels only that the powers are pursuing their objects.

He who, laying all works on the Eternal, performs works, putting desire away, is not stained by sin, as the lotus-leaf by water.

They who seek union perform works, with body, mind, thought, and senses kept pure, putting desire away, for the purity of Self.

He who has gained union, giving up the fruit of works, wins perfect peace where there is no desire; he who has not gained union is bound because of lust, through desire for the fruit.

The lord of the body, renouncing all works in his mind, dwells perfect in self-rule, in the nine-doored dwelling, neither performing works nor causing them to be performed.

The Lord forms neither the actorship nor the works of the world, nor the union of works and fruit; but the Self-existent works on. (Bhagavad Gita, v, 1-14)

The renunciation of works enjoined is wrong; this abandonment through delusion belongs to darkness.

He who abandons work through fear of bodily weariness, saying, "This is painful"—he, performing renunciation full of desire, gains not the fruit of renunciation.

Whatever work enjoined is done, with the thought, "This should be done," putting desire and fruit aside—this is renunciation full of goodness.

He who has truly renounced hates not a bitter work nor desires a sweet one; he is a sage perfected in goodness, his doubts all cut.

For he who wears a body cannot put away works without residue, but he who has given up the fruit of works has accomplished renunciation.

The fruit of actions is of three kinds—desired, undesired, and mixed—for those who have not renounced, on leaving this world; but not for those who have renounced.

Learn from me these five causes of the accomplishment of all works, as they are declared in the Sankhya teaching:

The field of work, the worker, the working in various ways, the various and separate endeavours, and, fifthly, universal law.

Whatever work a man undertakes, by body, speech, and mind, whether just or not, these five are the causes of it. Since this is so, whoever looks on the pure Self as the worker, through fault of thought, sees not truly, and his belief is false.

He who is free from the personal idea, whose thought is not implicated, even though he slay all these worlds, slays not, nor is bound.

The division into knowing, known, and knower is the threefold mover of works. The division into working, work, and worker is the threefold complex of work.

Hear, now, how the knowing, the work, and the worker are classed in the enumeration of the three potencies, according to the division of the three potencies.

The knowledge by which one incorruptible Being is perceived in all beings, undivided in things divided—know that this is the knowledge belonging to goodness.

But the knowledge which, through the sense of separateness, sees various beings of separate essence in all beings—know that this is the knowledge belonging to force.

But the knowledge which is wholly taken up with one object, unreasonable, false, limited—know that to be the knowledge belonging to darkness.

The work that is performed with perfect control, free from desire—without lust or hate, without desire for its fruit—know that to be the

work belonging to goodness.

But the work that is performed with desire and lust, and under the dominion of the personal idea, with abundant effort—know that to be the work belonging to force.

And the work that is performed without regard to consequences, loss, injury, humanity, through sheer delusion—know that to be the work belonging to darkness.

And he who is free from desire, free from the personal idea, full of firmness and endurance, unchanged by success or failure—know him to be a worker ruled by goodness.

He who is lustful, longing for the fruit of his work, greedy, hurtful, impure, given to exulting and grieving—know him to be a worker ruled by force.

But he who has no union, material, stubborn, deceitful, slothful, idle, desponding, procrastinating—know him to be a worker ruled by darkness. (*Bhagavad Gita*, XVIII:7-28)

IV. Works and Caste

The works of Brahman, warrior, merchant, and serf, were assigned by the potencies engendered by the Self-being.

Peace, control, fervour, purity, endurance, uprightness, wisdom, knowledge, affirmation—this is the work of the Brahman, assigned by the Self-being.

Heroism, radiance, firmness, skill, steadfastness in battle, liberality, masterfulness—this is the work of the warrior, assigned by the Self-being.

Agriculture and commerce are the duties of the merchant, and service is the duty of serfs, assigned by the Self-being.

A man who is devoted to his own work attains perfect success; learn now how he attains success by devotion to his work.

Worshipping Him from whom all these beings came, and by whom this universe was spread forth, and by doing his own work, a son of man finds success.

Better is one's own duty without power than the duty of another well performed; performing the work that is enjoined by the Self-

being, he incurs no sin.

Let him not give up his congenital work, even though it be faulty; there is no undertaking without fault, as there is no flame without smoke.

He whose thought is without desire, ever self-conquered, free from longing, reaches perfectly consummated freedom from works through renunciation. (*Bhagavad Gita*, XVIII:41-48)

Karma in the Later Vedanta

To the sages whose teaching is recorded in the Upanishads, Karma meant the whole sum of moral energies—as well the spiritual and divine forces which make for freedom and real life as the emotional and passionate longings which make for bondage and continued subjection to earthly life. When the Brahmans, feeling the futility of their scheme of being, came to sit at the feet of the Rajput sages, they brought with them this ritual conception of Karma, which was at once confronted with the moral and spiritual conception of the kingly seers, their teachers and masters in wisdom. The royal sages showed once for all that real life has to do with inward forces and powers, not with outward acts; and they are unsparing in their condemnation of “the way of sacrifices and gifts,” declaring finally that it offers no hope of real life and freedom—of spiritual reality, faith in which is hidden in the heart of every man.

But the belief of the Brahmans represented a vast priestly system, which penetrated the whole life of the populace, and took so large a hold on that life that even today all questions, not only of religion but even of property and inheritance, are decided according to the old ritual idea of Karma. Such a system could not easily be extirpated or superseded, since formalism, especially in the sphere of religion, has a tenacious vitality of its own, twining itself round a hundred sentimental affections and memories, and taking hold of human life just at those moments of great joy or grief when impressions are deepest and most lasting. Only a high degree of spiritual enlightenment, and vivid contact with spiritual reality, can lift the

mind above this vast growth of formalism which has woven itself as the garment of spiritual things, and by its material, visible presence has come to be regarded as the reality, not the vesture and symbol.

Hence it was unlikely that the Brahmans, even when coming into contact with the esoteric schools of the Rajputs, should be able to divest themselves of their sacerdotal culture, to stand up simply as men in the presence of the Infinite. And this is evident from the story of King Pravahana, son of Jivala, in which is recorded the first communication of the doctrines of reincarnation and Karma to the Brahmans; for while the old Brahman Uddalaka asks nothing better than to learn wisdom from the Rajput king, his son Shvetaketu, "conceited, vain, and proud," as his father calls him, though convicted of ignorance, yet refuses to learn, and meanly turns his back on the teacher, unwilling even to accompany his father when the old man sets out to seek wisdom.

There must have been many Shvetaketus in ancient India, and we are not surprised when we find Krishna, many generations (perhaps many centuries) later, initiating or at least accepting a doctrine of compromise which practically divided the religion of India into two parts: an esoteric doctrine derived from the old schools of the Rajputs, and an exoteric system continuing the ritual of the Brahmans. Krishna, himself a Kshatriya, clearly declaring the futility of the Brahmanical "sacrifices and gifts," yet counsels the retention of these things, in order "not to shake the faith of the multitude." He, however, lays down one quite definite rule:

"All moral and spiritual energies which rise above the personal idea and are referred to the higher Self and the Eternal, make for reality and freedom; while all thoughts and acts referred to the personality, to the isolated, separate self, make for bondage and ignorance, whether these acts are called religious or not."

This rule Krishna repeats again and again, now speaking abstractly of the higher Self and now concretely, as being himself representative of the higher Self and the Eternal, in order to meet the comprehension of every type of mind, the philosophic as well as the devotional.

But the rule is clear: whatever is done under the dominion of the personal idea makes for bondage and continued earthly, illusory

existence; whatever energies are above the personal idea, free from reference to the isolated, separate self, flowing directly from the higher Self, make for reality and freedom. Gradually the custom arose of applying the name of Karma exclusively to the former; so that, in the later Vedanta, Karma means almost wholly those emotions, desires, longings, hopes, fears, intentions, decisions, and actions which are referred to the personal idea—to the self conceived as separate and isolated, the centre of selfishness; or, rather, the sum of moral energies underlying these and accumulating under the law of the conservation of energy.

Now, the whole aim and purpose of the Vedanta are the removal of the personal idea and the substitution of the real man, the higher Self, who is an undivided part of the Eternal and whose energies are infinite and immortal, in perfect harmony with the All. The problem, therefore, arises: When the centre of selfishness is gone, what becomes of the accumulation of energies which were gathered round it. This problem, with its solution, we shall state in the words of a tract attributed to the great teacher Sankara-Acharya, which bears the name of “The Awakening to Reality,” and which we hope later to translate at length,* with an analysis of the native commentaries and such annotation as may seem necessary. The teacher says:

“And thus, through the words of the Vedanta and the instruction of a true master, those among all beings in whom have arisen the full instruction and knowledge of oneness with the Eternal, are free even in life.

“Who, then, is free even in life? Just as there was a firm conviction that ‘I am the body; I am a human being; I am a priest; I am a serf;’ so he who has the firm conviction that ‘I am not a priest, or a serf, nor a man, but in my own nature pure Being, Consciousness, Bliss; in my own nature shining Light, the Inner Spirit and Ruler of all, the Spirit of wisdom,’ knowing this truth by direct knowledge, face to face, is free even in life. By this direct knowledge that I am the Eternal, he is set free

* This effort was begun by Johnston in 1913, but was left unfinished. A complete translation of the “The Awakening to Reality” (Tattva Bodha) was completed by him, but without extensive commentary. [ED.]

from all the bondage of Karma.

“The three kinds of Karma may be classified as future Karma, accumulated Karma, and Karma entered upon.

“After wisdom and illumination have been reached, whatever Karma is done, whether good or bad, by the bodily personality of the sage—this is called future Karma. Whatever Karma has been generated, as the seed of myriads of births, previously amassed and retaining unexhausted, is to be known as accumulated Karma. Whatever Karma is the bringer of happiness and sorrow after entering this body, here in this world is Karma entered upon. It is exhausted by enjoyment and suffering.”

The idea of the conservation of moral energies is herein clearly developed. From myriads of past births all kinds of moral tendencies and forces are stored up, the storehouse being the causal body, the immortal vesture of the higher Self. This accumulation of energies makes the sum of gain which the higher Self has won from unnumbered embodied lives, as well as the sum of its debts—perfections yet unacquired, deficiencies of power and knowledge, the results of tentative advances of one or another path of life which led to failure, or obligations to other selves: imperfections in harmony, the whole spiritual possessions and obligations of that individual self.

From this total, the higher Self sets apart a certain group of ends to be gained and debts to be paid, for each individual life—each bodily personality or incarnation. This group of energies is the “Karma entered upon” for that particular life. For the personality, these energies wear the aspect of pains and pleasures; for the higher Self, they bear the aspect of ends to be gained, of imperfect harmonies to be restored. The self-attribution of the personal self, which turns the divine forces to its own ends of pain or pleasure, and thinks the universe was created for it alone, is the greatest disharmony of all, the cause of endless suffering and bondage. It is a sickness that can only be cured by illumination, led up to by unvarying experience of the futility of personal life, with its selfishness and sensuality. Then the man rises above personal ends; the centre of selfishness is dissolved; he is born again.

For him there is no longer any happiness or sorrow, pain or pleasure—no longer any personal end to be gained, or personal victory to be won; there are only divine ends and universal goals—energies which are immortal and impersonal, following wholly the purposes of the Eternal. The knot of the heart is untied; the tendencies and energies bound to that centre of selfishness have reached perfect harmony and balance; they are cancelled for that personality, which is no longer a personality but an undivided part of the Eternal; they go their way in divine channels, working only to universal ends. So the teacher says:

“Accumulated Karma comes to an end through the knowledge—the very self of firm conviction—that ‘I am the Eternal.’ Future Karma also comes to an end, for future Karma adheres not to him who has reached wisdom, like water on a lotus-leaf.”

To him who has reached illumination, who has become the Eternal, accumulated Karma has ceased to have any meaning or individual relation, otherwise than as the will and power of the Eternal, which he now knows himself to be. Neither has Karma entered upon any meaning for him, as a determinant of this or future births; for, if he is born again, it will be under a higher law, by direct divine will, not through the seeds of downward, earth-seeking desires. Thus the sage becomes free from Karma. Only one question remains. It is answered thus:

“Now they who fitly recognize, love, and honour the sage—to them goes the future good Karma of the sage. But they who blame and hate the sage and seek to injure him—to them goes all the future bad Karma; whatever is done unseemly or faulty goes to them.”

One illustration of this inheritance from the sages, free even in life, is found in every work of genius and perfect art; for genius is simply this: the pure, divine energy of the higher Self, working directly, untrammelled by the personality. And all the highest works of genius, whether in art or religion, have a splendid impersonal quality, which makes them available for all mankind, not for an age but for all time. But “poetry is the power of imparting essence to him who is capable of

receiving essence," not to others; hence it is those who "fitly recognize, love, and honour" genius who share its inheritance; and if this be true of the works of genius already stilled and embodied in forms, much more is it true of those present works and powers which are even now flowing from the living spirits of the sages, free even in life, or risen above life. Only those souls that are in harmony with them can inherit their power. "There is no teaching," as Emerson says, "until the pupil is in the mind of the master." It is true, not only of the bards but of the sages, that—

“They have left their souls on earth;
They have souls in heaven, too—
Double-lived in regions new.”

Karma and Salvation by Works

Just as the Greek word “Pneuma,” the Spirit, is the exact etymological equivalent of the Sanskrit “Atma,” the Self, both being originally the Divine Breath, and as the Greek “Kurios,” the Master, or Lord, finds a complete parallel in the use of the Sanskrit “Ish” or “Ishvara,” the Lord, or Master, so in the question of Karma, or Works, there is a very remarkable parallelism between the growth of the Indian and Christian conceptions. But, whereas in India these ideas were throughout subjected to a clear philosophic understanding, we find them in the early Church overgrown with theological misconceptions almost from the outset; so that we may say they had hardly appeared when they were obscured.

We saw the priestly development of the idea of Karma, as the fulfilment of “the works of the law,” arising at the end of the Vedic age and continuing through the post-Buddhistic “Karma Mimansa,” or Investigation of the Works of the law, to the India of today, where it has taken the final form of the fulfilment of caste duties and caste observances; so that a Hindu of one caste, when asked to perform any act not strictly belonging to his hereditary scope of activity, will invariably reply: “It is not my work, not my Karma.”

We have exactly the same use of the word “Erga,” or works, in both Old and New Testaments. And the whole cycle of works, as depicted in the Hebrew Books of the Law, from the birth-rites, rites of sanctification, purification, sacrifice, marriage, and the rest, offer a hundred analogies to the same works of the law as developed by the Brahmans; so that, if they were translated in the same style and tone,

we should have the greatest difficulty in deciding off-hand whether we were reading a passage of Leviticus or Manu's Code. We may illustrate this Levitical use of "works."

"Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, . . . and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou, therefore, which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?" (Romans 2:17-21)

—and so on, the whole passage leading up to what is called the doctrine of "justification by faith."

This sermon to the men of the law is strongly reminiscent of a like lecture by Buddha to the Brahmans, in the *Tevijja Sutta*; and not less strongly does it carry our minds back to the fierce denunciations of the "infirm rafts of sacrifice and pious gifts" in the *Mundaka Upanishad*. The idea in each case was precisely the same: the obtaining of success in life through obedience to a series of technical commandments, the germ of which was, doubtless, a series of simple moral precepts, though in the outcome these were entirely smothered under a vast growth of formalism and ceremonial. In the earliest age of India, as we have had occasion to note, there was remarkably little thought of any life beyond the grave, the benefits of which, in their turn, were to fall to the pious Brahmanical worshipper. This is equally true of the Levitical system, in which it is doubtful whether there is any clear belief in the soul's immortality.

In the later stages of Brahmanism, however, the life after death came to fill a larger place in the sacrificer's mind, till due attention to it became of such extent as to furnish the basis of the law of inheritance. In the same way the final form of the Levitical system, as held and expounded by the Pharisees, undoubtedly embraced the idea of the soul's immortality, and even of its pre-existence; while it is quite possible that what is called the "resurrection of the body" was really a form of reincarnation. The doctrine of transmigration was certainly among the teachings of the *Kabbala*, the antiquity of which, however,

is not yet demonstrated. We may note that the Kabbala held that the same soul which had informed the body of Adam had appeared again in the person of David, and should appear again in the Messiah; and may we take Paul's expression, "the last Adam," referring also to the Messiah, to be an allusion to the idea of the Kabbala? If so, this would fix the age of the Kabbala, at least as regards the tenet of transmigration, or reincarnation, as at least as old as the Epistle to the Romans. Hence, we are probably justified in saying that the pre-Christian Pharisees held to some form of reincarnation, along with their ceremonial law of rites and forms, just as the later Brahmans did and do; while in the earliest stage of both Levitical and Brahmanical belief, this teaching was altogether absent, any clear foresight of life beyond the grave being extremely difficult to discover in the early epochs of both systems, which seem, in their inception, to have been nothing more than a series of rules for securing a successful earthly life.

To this earliest form of "salvation by works," extended only as a later development to trans-sepulchral salvation, followed an evangel of "salvation by faith," that is, a teaching of a far profounder conception of life, in which the main place was held by right spiritual and moral energies—a right attitude of the soul, in comparison with which the acts of the body, including formal and ceremonial acts, held only a second place. A comparison of the elements of that spiritual attitude in both teachings, the Upanishads and the Gospels, is extremely tempting; but it would be an injustice to the subject to introduce it as a mere digression in another study. It is enough to say that, if there is a profound though generally overlooked relation between the Gospels and the Upanishads, there is a quite clear and remarkable consonance between a later stage of these two evangels, embodied in the teachers Sankara and Paul. Just as Paul holds absolutely to a spiritual ideal, which is seriously injured by the theological jargon of "justification by faith," with its pendants of "predestination" and "imputed righteousness," so Sankara adheres wholly to a spiritual ideal generally translated "knowledge," but more truly rendered "wisdom," and best of all, perhaps, "illumination." As Paul, the fervid orator—who is making a speech even when he writes, and who thus, very likely, fell into the habit of dictation—cries out: "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; . . . but that no man is justified by the

law . . . is evident;" (Galatians 3:10-11) so Sankara echoes, in his dry and almost humorous way: "The works of the law cannot remove unwisdom, since the two are not logical opposites; only wisdom can remove unwisdom;" or, to translate his thought more truly, "only illumination can remove inborn darkness;" or, in Paul's words: "By grace are ye saved through faith."

Then comes, in each case, a very natural reaction, based on a total misconception. Paul means by the word translated "faith" very much what Sankara means by "wisdom"—an illumination, the soul becoming conscious of its own spiritual being. But that is a conception quite unintelligible to those whose own lives have given them no experience of illumination—who have never felt the spiritual being of the soul, above and behind their habitual lives; so that, in the one case, they will misinterpret the "knowledge," "wisdom," or "illumination" of Sankara as the knowing or understanding of some particular teaching, while, in the other, they will take "faith," or the word thus translated, to mean a belief in something, or the intellectual acceptance of some doctrine. In India there were always sources of knowledge to correct this profound misapprehension, whereas it is to be feared that the Christian doctrine has never got rid of it, but underlies it to an extreme degree; so that to say that "the Christian faith" and "the creed of Christians" are two wholly different things, as wide apart as the poles, will seem nothing but a senseless paradox to those who regard themselves as the upholders of both.

The natural fruit of this misapprehension was another: it was argued that the "knowing" and "believing"—of which, in the true doctrine, there was never any question—were incomplete, and only applied to half the nature. So that we have discussions like this, on a level a whole plane lower than Paul's teaching:

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?" (James 2:14)

It is quite clear that we have here a wholly different conception of "works." We are no longer dealing with "the works of the law"—of rites and ceremonies such as those indoctrinated by Leviticus and practised by the Pharisees. We have a new idea—works understood in a moral sense; that is, moral motions embodied in acts; an approach,

in some degree, though only partially, to the new meaning of Karma in the Upanishads. Salvation by works, taken at its highest level, now means the gaining of a right and healthy condition of soul, with a special eye to trans-sepulchral bliss, through good and charitable acts.

We have an exact parallel to this section version of salvation by works in the “Karma Way” of the Yoga philosophy, the object of which was to add a practical side to the too theoretical philosophy of the Sankhyas. In the Karma way, which is something quite different from the old way of Karma of Vedic times, the ideal is the gaining of a proper attitude of the soul, and, ultimately, illumination (or liberation) through moral practices of mind and body. These take rather the direction of self-purification than that of practical benevolence, such as is upheld in the moral of the Epistle of James. Nor is this fact one for which the thought of India should be specially blamed as uncharitable or lacking in practical good-will. The truth is that the social life of India, with its joint property and undivided families and communities, left very little room for those extremes of riches and poverty which are the fruit of our accentuated individualism; hence, in India, there was no large exhibition of that bitter poverty which is the dark lining of our life today.

The simple village life of India, with its spare diet and extremely limited expense in the matter of clothing, had none of those heights and depths which give colouring to our charitable enterprises. Then, again, competition (with its attendant suffering) and failure of employment were hardly possible in the conservative life of caste, which made it impossible for labourers to invade the province of workers in a different field. Caste worked in a different way—by setting up such barriers between the different ranks and employments as would make what we would call charity rather an interference, which the recipient would hesitate to receive. Hence, “good works” would naturally take the alternative direction of self-purification, with a view to the attainment of spiritual powers. Such a system of self-purification is the Karma way of the Yoga philosophy; and, as we have suggested, it is pitched altogether in a lower key than the spiritual teaching of the Upanishads, which seek, not psychical gifts, but the infinite Soul itself: not good works, but the heart of All Good, the Supreme Eternal.

This final meaning of Karma we have hardly touched, in speaking of the Indian idea and its development, because the Yoga philosophy really belongs to the line of the Sankhya, not the Vedanta; therefore, it does not properly fall into the series of the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Brahma Sutras—the triad forming the subject of Sankara's system, which alone is what is generally meant when one speaks of the philosophy of India. We must here content ourselves with merely outlining the parallelism between the two systems of salvation by works, in India and in the Old and New Testaments—the first ideal of salvation through the works of the law, and the second of salvation through good works, whether of self-purification or benevolence. While we cannot enter into detail, either in describing the works of the law (whether Levitical or Brahmanical) or the more attractive works of righteousness, yet the works of the law seem to us without doubt founded on pure materialism and opportunism, and the works of righteousness seem to take their rise from a misapprehension based on a low spiritual ideal and lack of illumination.

The fancy of “faith without works,” against which the zealous ascetic inveighs, is the child of a delusion. True “faith” is at once intuition and will, or, more truly, the drawing near to that august and nameless Spirit which manifests will and intuition inseparably joined together. Those who, even in a slight degree, have gained knowledge of the approach to that nameless Being—the Self supreme—will forever check the irreverence of dictating to the Divine the mode of its manifestations by drawing up any code of righteous deeds. They know that, when that luminous power begins to gleam and glow within a man, he will not be found wanting in either purity or gentle charity, and they will not be guilty of the futility of trying to feign that presence by the form and semblance of these acts. When the real Self begins its work, that work will be something new and above all our powers of surmise and prediction—a fresh revelation for every enlightened soul.

Karma in Modern Theosophy

It must be admitted that the present wide knowledge of the idea of Karma is almost wholly due to the success of the Theosophical movement. The vast and self-forgetful energy of a few Theosophical leaders is the chief cause that makes it possible to discuss the teaching of Karma, in its historic aspect, in the pages of a magazine appealing to the general world of thinkers rather than to specialists in Oriental and linguistic studies, who alone would have cared to follow such a discussion a few years ago—before the Theosophical movement had done its work. It is of the highest interest, therefore, to examine the ideas of Karma which have been put forward by the best teachers of modern Theosophy, and to compare these views with the results already gained from the study of a long line of Sanskrit scriptures, extending over many ages.

We may best begin with the teachings of Madame H. P. Blavatsky herself—a woman whom friends and enemies alike must admit to have been one of the most forceful souls of the age; to be near her was to feel a presence like one of the great forces of nature, so strong and affirmative was her individuality. It may be said even now that she divides the world into her followers and her foes—the latter as bitter as the former are enthusiastic, and both paying equal tribute to her power. Here is one definition which she has given of “Karma:”

“Physically, action; metaphysically, the law of retribution, the law of cause and effect, or ethical causation; Nemesis only in one sense, that of bad Karma. It is the eleventh ‘Nidana’ in the concatenation of causes and effects in orthodox Buddhism, yet

it is the power that controls all things, the resultant of moral action, the metaphysical 'Samskara' or the moral effect of an act committed for the attainment of something which gratifies a personal desire. There is the Karma of merit, and the Karma of demerit. Karma neither punishes nor rewards; it is simply the one universal law, which guides unerringly, and, so to say, blindly, all other laws productive of certain effects along the grooves of their respective causations. When Buddhism teaches that 'Karma is that moral kernel (of any being) which alone survives death and continues in transmigration,' or reincarnation, it simply means that there remains nought after each personality but the causes produced by it—causes which are undying, which cannot be eliminated from the universe until replaced by their legitimate effects, and wiped out by them, so to speak; and such causes, unless compensated during the life of the person who produced them with adequate effects, will follow the reincarnated ego and reach it in its subsequent reincarnation until a harmony between effects and causes is fully re-established. No personality—a mere bundle of material atoms and of instinctual and mental characteristics—can, of course, continue, as such, in the world of pure Spirit. Only that which is immortal in its very nature and divine in its essence, namely, the ego, can exist forever. And it is that ego which chooses the personality it will inform, after each Devachan, and which receives through these personalities the effects of the Karmic causes produced. It is, therefore, the ego—that self which is the 'moral kernel' referred to—and embodied Karma, 'which alone survive death.'”

Our first remark on this definition is that it represents a very profound and far-reaching conception. Secondly, it does not precisely represent the idea of Karma as we have found it at any stage of its development in the Sanskrit books; in other words, that its exponent in this definition was not borrowing directly from any of these books, but was presenting a conception, very just and striking in itself, which must be derived from some other source. In some degree the conception of Karma as Universal Law finds a counterpart in certain

schools of northern Buddhism—a region which we have designedly refrained from entering, as all our knowledge regarding it is at present passing through a period of transition and reconstruction. Until the present work of exploring the Tibetan text and comparing technical words with their Sanskrit synonyms has reached a more advanced stage, it will be impossible to say whether Madame Blavatsky's conception of Karma fully agrees with that of any school beyond the Himalayas of which the writings are accessible to us. We can only state positively now that the word "Devachan," which appears in the definition quoted, is a perfectly correct phonetic rendering of a Tibetan word which is the accepted name, or rather epithet, of the paradise of rest between two births in the chain of incarnations; that is, the Tibetan equivalent of the "lunar paradise" which the soul, to be ultimately reborn, reached, along the "way of the fathers," in the early Upanishad teaching. Devachan means "the blissful," "the delightful," and is the equivalent of the paradise described by Sukhavati in the Sanskrit Buddhist work, "Sukhavati Vyuha," with a luxuriance of realism only equalled in pictures of the New Jerusalem. We shall be doing only justice to the authors of both descriptions if we at once admit that they are both conscious users of symbols, the meaning of which it is our part in each case to discover.

Besides these Buddhist notes in Madame Blavatsky's definition, inclining distinctly to the northern, Trans-Himalayan schools, there is much that reminds us of the teaching of Krishna in the words: "the moral effect of an act committed for the attainment of something which gratifies a personal desire." As we observed, there are two elements in this idea: the thought of the old secret schools of the Rajputs, which always applied Karma to moral effects and moral forces, and the ideals of the Brahmans as influenced by these schools, which imported the notion of gratification for the personality. Then "Karma of merit and Karma of demerit" finds quite a clear echo in the Bhagavad Gita, and in what we have translated from Sankara as to the future Karma of those who are "free even in life."

Finally, the conceptions of the immortal Self and of Karma as Universal Law—not limited to selfish desires, but applying also to the pure moral forces of the Sons of Liberation—carry us straight to the Upanishads; and, in general, it is to their teaching that Madame

Blavatsky's definition most closely conforms—a teaching which, as we have had occasion to show, claims to be that of the secret schools of the Rajputs. But it is not less clear that Madame Blavatsky did not draw the substance of her definition direct from the Upanishads; and the occurrence of certain Tibetan elements in it reminds us that many of the first Buddhist teachers among the Tibetans were Rajputs, driven from India by Brahmanical hostility. They were, therefore, of the same race and moral heredity as the teachers of the Upanishads, as indeed also was Buddha himself; hence we should see our way clear to understanding that these Rajanya teachers, Buddha's pupils, members of his own race, carried northward to Tibet certain elements of his teaching which coincided very closely with the doctrines of the Upanishads—these elements being less lucidly preserved in the southern church of Ceylon, among disciples of a different race, therefore of a different moral heredity; so that a presentation by Buddha of the doctrine of the oldest Rajput schools, carried to Tibet by his Rajput pupils and handed down by oral teaching, would probably contain most of the elements of Madame Blavatsky's conception. Whether, among the still untranslated manuscripts and books of the Tibetans, we shall find an exact written counterpart of that conception, the research of the next year or two will doubtless show. My own expectation is that such a counterpart will be found.

The same tendency toward the Upanishads and their broad conception of Karma is found in a second definition from the same source:

“We consider it as the ultimate Law of the Universe—the source, origin, and fount of all other laws which exist throughout Nature. Karma is the unerring law which adjusts effect to cause, on the physical, mental, and spiritual planes of being. As no cause remains without its due effect, from greatest to least, from a cosmic disturbance down to the movement of your hand, and as ‘like produces like,’ Karma is that unseen and unknown law which adjusts wisely, intelligently, and equitably each effect to its cause, tracing the latter back to its producer. Though itself unknowable, its action is perceivable. This wide and universal conception—wider than anything we

have found outside of the Upanishads—is followed by a more defined outline of the idea of Karma as applied to the individual, and as working through reincarnation: as being, in fact, the force that guides the outward environment and the personal scope of each birth, according to the fruit of all past births—just as the part of a road we are next to traverse depends entirely on where we have already got to; that is, on our entire past progress since setting out. If we have just reached the edge of the forest, we must go through the forest before going further; if we have already crossed the plain, we must next set ourselves to climb the mountains.”

This idea of Karma as the Universal Law and Will of the Self, “shaping all things wisely through endless years,” and “though one, disposing the desires of many,” is entirely that of the Upanishads, as also is the metaphor of “the Path.” We may note, parenthetically, that the writer or writers of the Acts of the Apostles almost invariably speak of the new gospel as the Path, or the Way (See Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4, and 24:14.)—a return to the same venerable and profound imagery. It is distinctly to the credit of the Revisers that they have brought this out much more clearly than in the Authorized Version.

From Madame Blavatsky’s own writings we may turn to a very remarkable Theosophical treatise called “Light on the Path,” a work so perfect in form and profound in thought that it deserves a place among the mystic masterpieces of the world. The third part of this admirable treatise, which comprises only thirty small pages, is devoted entirely to Karma. The keynote of its thought is struck in these words:

“Consider with me that the individual existence is a rope which stretches from the infinite to the infinite, and has no end and no beginning; neither is it capable of being broken. . . . Eventually the long strands, the living threads which in their unbroken continuity form the individual, pass out of the shadow into the shine. Then the threads are no longer colourless, but golden. Once more they lie together level. Once more harmony is established between them; and from that harmony within the greater harmony is perceived.”

The two ideas here presented—the “thread-self, which joins

together many lives as a string joins many pearls into one jewel,” and the understanding of the supreme Self through the individual self—find their perfect counterpart in the Vedanta; though the vivid and original presentation of the thought, as we have quoted it, argues a new and individual insight, a soul that has caught the light which lit the teachings of the Upanishads. A second aspect of the subject opens with the words:

“It is said that a little attention to occultism produces great Karmic results. . . . The first step in occultism brings the student to the tree of knowledge. He must pluck and eat; he must choose. . . . And to move definitely and knowingly even but one step on either path produces great Karmic results.”

It is clear that the path of occultism is here the “small old path stretching far away, the path the seers tread” of the most beautiful and greatest Upanishad. This is the path of liberation, the way of the gods, from which there is no return. To go further in this direction would lead us too far into a consideration of the Way of Liberation, a subject that could only be fitly treated in a volume. I shall quote another thought, this time reminiscent of Krishna and Sankara, though also quite original in treatment:

“He who would escape from the bondage of Karma must raise his individuality out of the shadow into the shine. . . . He simply lifts himself out of the region in which Karma operates. . . . The operations of the actual laws of Karma are not to be studied until the disciple has reached the point at which they no longer affect himself. . . . Therefore, you who desire to understand the laws of Karma attempt first to free yourselves from these laws; and this can only be done by fixing your attention on that which is unaffected by those laws.”

But it is a sin against literary propriety to quote from this profound and admirable treatise in partial and dislocated fashion. The whole work makes its effect as does any whole work of art; and no piecing together of scattered members is quite free from the reproach of barbarity. It is quite clear, however, that we are here dealing with a much more limited use of the word Karma—a use almost identical with that of the Bhagavad Gita and the later Vedantins who follow it.