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SWAMI VEDACHALAM'S ADDRESS
on
ANCIENT AND MODERN TAMIL POETS.

Rendered into English by

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THE TAMILS' ANTIQUE PAST

It is essential, in the interests of the education and culture of the Tamils, to get a clear idea of the relative conditions of Tamil poets, ancient and modern. Conditions have vastly differed and it is the clear duty not only of Tamil scholars but of all interested in Tamil to appreciate the distinctive characteristics of ancient and modern poets.

2. Indeed, to be solely guided by instincts and attend only to the immediate and animal wants is largely the nature of the brute creation that is not gifted with Reason. It is the special privilege of Man to reason and think over the past in relation to the present, and wisely plan a future, consistent with tradition and tested experience. It is this faculty to reason and to plan out things that enables a captain to steer his ship safely to harbour through perilous seas. Lack of foresight and inadequate appreciation of the various forces that govern life will surely lead men to be mere ramblers with no definite object in this great world.

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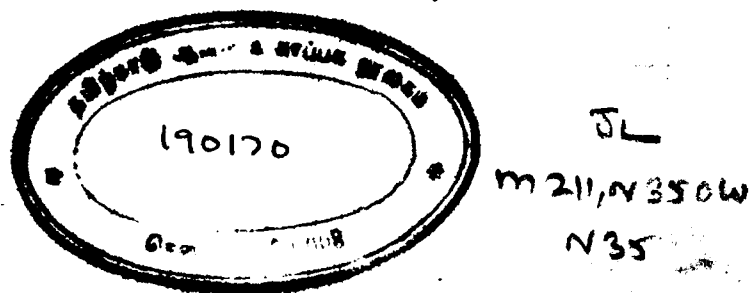
3. The great difference noticeable in the state of civilisation and progress attained by the various peoples in this world may be generally attributed to the extent to which each group has shown the capacity to utilise the past for the benefit of the present, and to improve the present by a judicious extension of the experience acquired by the present. This is a fact which history testifies by distinguishing the rulers from the ruled of the present day. Those who have benefitted by the examples offered by the past, and improved upon the present, broadening and ascending as it were from precedent to precedent, are easily the rulers of those that have either ignored the past or been too insolent to realise its import correctly.

4. But there is this difficulty to face for any race of men that seeks adequately to assess and appreciate its past. In the nature of things, men competent to undertake such a research could only be a few. Even among these few, it is not always all that could utilise to the best advantage the best they were able to receive from their heritage. Again, some among these may realise after a diligent inquiry that nothing noteworthy could be obtained from their heritage, as others in the same field may be handicapped by a lack of suitable aids to unravel their probably indifferent past. Of these four groups, the first, who found a worthy past and made the best use of it are the English. And a handful of Tamils, scattered here and there, have also delved into their splendid past and made some use of them. The third are the Aryans who, having discovered that their ancients had revelled mostly in blood sacrifices and

blind nature worship, have become convinced that an adoption of such a course will lead them only to doubtful prosperity, earthly or spiritual. To the last class belong the miscellaneous Telugus, Malayalees, and Canarees who do not have any ancient literature of their own meriting research but who possess only the translations of the epics in Sanscrit. The glory of owning such matchless works as 'Thirukkural,' 'Silappathikaram,' 'Thiruvachakam' etc. belongs only to the Tamils. Therefore, the safe, precious, and inspiring examples, to be followed for building up a solid and substantial future are available only to the English and the Tamils. As a people making a profitable use of their great heritage and occupying the foremost place in modern civilisation, the English stand unique. It is therefore needless to speak about them here. On the other hand, the Tamils in spite of their equally splendid heritage remain almost illiterate and grope in the dark. The object of this paper therefore is to shed the light of knowledge on their way, and enable them to proceed safely in it towards a bright and happy future.

6. That the Tamils were highly civilised in the past is not only deducible from their ancient literature but is demonstrated also by the researches of Oriental Scholars. Dr. Caldwell writes: * "The primitive Dravidians do not appear to have been by any means a barbarous and degraded people. Whatever may have been the condition of the forest tribes, it cannot be doubted that the Dravidians,

* A. Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages, 3rd ed., p. 113.



properly so called, had acquired at least the elements of civilisation, prior to the arrival amongst them of the Brahmans" After noting how, as pointed out by Caldwell, Tamil words like "Thogai" 'Akil' etc. have found their way into the Hebrew Bible, Max Muller observed: * "If this etymology be right, it would be an important confirmation of the antiquity of the Tamulic languages spoken in India before the advent of the Aryan tribes." Again, Prof. Rapson the renowned Sanskrit Scholar, while narrating the spread of the Aryans over the Tamil land notes: † "This extension is everywhere marked by the spread of Sanscrit and its dialects. It received a check in Southern India, where the older Dravidian civilization and languages remain predominant even to the present day." "In any case, Dravidian civilization was predominant in India before the coming of the Aryans. Many of the Dravidian peoples now speak Aryan or other languages not originally their own" "and there can be no doubt that they have very greatly influenced Aryan civilization and Aryan religion in the north." Mr. Slater, sometimes Professor of Economics in the Madras University, brings further testimony to the highly civilised economic condition of the ancient Tamil Society, and proceeds to prove this through evidence afforded by the Rig Veda itself: ‡ "That the Aryans themselves were then essentially nomadic pastoralists, though possibly not altogether unacquainted with agriculture, is

* The Science of Language, vol. 1, p. 190.

† Ancient India, pp. 9, 29.

‡ The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture, 1924, pp. 53, 54.

undisputed; the Dravidians were probably in a much more advanced stage of civilisation. It is only necessary to reproduce some of Mr. Oldham's quotations from the Rig Veda, that being the most ancient, and therefore the source on which we can best rely as indicating conditions at the actual time of the invasion rather than later. We have:

"Indra shattered, for Divodasa, the hundred castles of Sambara"

"Indra, wielder of the thunderbolt, warring on behalf of Purukutsa, thou didst overthrow the seven cities; thou didst cut off, for Sudas, the wealth of Anhas"

"Benevolent to man, thou hast broken the cities of Pipru; and protected Rijisvan in his battles with the Dasyus"

"Thou didst boldly sweep away the wealth of Sushna; thou didst shatter his castles"

Castles, cities and wealth—these are sufficiently significant. "In addition," says Mr. Oldham, "Sanskrit writings ascribe to the Dravidian Asuras luxury, the use of magic, superior architectural skill, and ability to restore the dead to Life."

7. So much for the testimony of Western Scholars who have made a comparative study of Tamilian and Aryan civilisation. Some Indian Scholars, while rightly acknowledging the high state of Tamilian civilisation have naively argued that it is a bye-product of the Aryan. Mr. Abin-
as Chandra Das in his Rig Vedic India says: * "The Sumerians, therefore, must have been the product of the

* Rigvedic India, 1927, p. 215.

and trade, and that the Aryans were the pioneers and leaders of the flourishing maritime trade of the Tamil land.

9. This comes out of sheer ignorance of the Tamil language, and a pardonable partiality towards the Aryan civilisation. The 'Panis' do not form part of any sect among the Aryans. On the other hand, they are said to be the bitterest enemies of the Angirasas. The Rig Veda teems with allusions to the perpetual enmity that existed between these people and the Aryan Angirasas and with the latter's innumerable prayers and sacrifices offered for the purpose of exterminating their hated rivals.* There is again a significant allusion how Indra pierced the Panis with his sharp arrows (Rig Veda, Part VI, 33, 2). Therefore, that Panis could not have formed part of any sect of the Aryans will be clear to any impartial student of ancient Aryan Vedic literature.

10. To what class then do these people belong? Some notable facts are given of the Panis in the researches of Mr. A. B. Das and other European scholars whom he has quoted. That the Panis were prosperous traders who carried on their commerce through land and sea to the Western world, that such of them as went and settled in different centres in the west were called the Phoenicians, that they were also called by the Aryans 'The sons of Kusa-dvipa or the Indo-oceanic continent since they had been the original inhabitants of that continent, and that the severed heads of statues which were discovered at Telloh have clean-shaven crown thus revealing a remark-

* See the Rig Veda, I, 83, 4; II, 24, 6; VI, 51, 14.

THE CONCEPTION OF GOD AS RUDRA

CHAPTER I

RUDRA IN THE RIG-VEDA

As a pronounced theist, I purpose to speak from the theistic point of view of the conception of God as Rudra, formed in the minds of the ancient civilized Hindus in India. I take the Being represented by the term 'Rudra' to be identical in character with that indicated by 'Siva.' Millions of people from cape Comorin to the Himalayas pay their homage every day to this deity and there are all over India—especially in the south, many huge, magnificent and beautifully constructed temples dedicated to him. Next in importance comes the worship of Vishnu who too claims many equally large temples though they are not so numerous as those of Siva. Leaving aside several minor deities worshipped either as household gods and goddesses within or as village gods and goddesses without, the Hindu religion may, to all intents and purposes, be divided between the followers of Siva and those of Vishnu. If you take the word 'Hinduism' to mean a theistic religion, i. e., a religion which believes in the existence of an all-powerful and all-wise Being not unknowable and inaccessible to man but gracious and personal living through and through in sympathetic relation

to all that have life, then you cannot include in it any religion except these two creeds; others: Buddhism, Jainism and Mayavada being atheistic though ethical and metaphysical in character.

Now, let me turn to the oldest literary records both in Sanscrit and in Tamil in order to determine the intrinsic nature and function of Rudra from the descriptions given of him in them. For a fulness of account Sanscrit works stand pre-eminent, as almost all the Tamil works pertaining to religion and philosophy were irretrievably lost in the Lemurian floods that swallowed up the original home of the Tamils. Yet enough of Tamil remains, a few literary poems and an entire work of rare excellence called the 'Tholkappiam' which go back to a period when the Rig-Vedic hymns on Rudra were most probably just beginning to be composed and which, by presenting to us a clear picture of his person, enable us to know the earliest conception formed of God as Rudra.

In the Rig-Veda, Rudra is spoken of as the terrible fire;¹ He is appealed to as the lord of hymns, the lord of Sacrifices, and as one who keeps healing medicines; He is brilliant as the sun, refulgent as bright gold, He is the best of all gods and most bountiful;² He is excellently wise, most bountiful and strong;³ He who is strong and He the

¹ "Rudraya drisikam," i, 27, 10. ² "Gatha-patim medha-patim Rudram jalasha-bheshajam" "Yah ankrah iva Suryo hiranyam iva rochate | Sres:ho devanam asuh" i, 38, 1, 5. ³ "Kad Rudraya pra chetase milhus-tamaya tavyase | vochema Santanam hride" i, 3, 1.

lord of heroes, has braided hair and is invoked to bring prosperity to the two-footed and four-footed creatures that all might be well-fed and healthy; He with the braided hair is called the boar of the sky and described as having a dazzling form glowing red, He is the father of the Maruts, He is immortal but bestows on all the food of mortals;¹ in glory he is the most eminent of all beings, the mightiest of the mighty;² He is the greatest physician of physicians;³ He is gracious and easily invoked;⁴ Divine power can never depart from him who is the supreme lord of this world;⁵ There is nothing mightier than him;⁶ He fulfils the aims and objects of rites and sacrifices;⁷ He is the father of Maruts and his consort Prisni is their mother;⁸ He their young and energetic father and his consort Prisni their mother bring fortunate days to the Maruts;⁹ in more than one place He is identified with Agni and is praised to have burnt the three castles;¹⁰ His consort is called not only by the names Prisni, and Aditi but also by the name Soma, and He is, therefore, frequently addressed by the name Soma-Rudra (vi. 74, 1, 2, 3 and 4). This Divine mother is in many

¹ "Imah Rudraya tavase kapardine kshayad-viraya prabharamahe matih | Yatha sam asad dripade chatushpade vasvam pushtam grame asminnanaturam" "Divo varaham arusham kapardinam tvesham rupam" "Pitre Marutam | rasva cha no amrita marta bhojanam" i, 11, 1, 5, 6. ² "Breshtho jatagya Rudra sriya" si tavattamas tavasam vajra baho" ii, 33, 8. ³ "Iva bhishajam srinomi" ii, 33, 4. ⁴ "Bidudarah suhavo" ibid, 5. ⁵ "Isanad asya bhuranasya bhurer na vai u yoshad Rudrad asuryam" ibid, 9. ⁶ "navai ojiyo Rudra tvaad asti" ibid, 10. ⁷ "Rudram yajnanam Sadhadishtim apasam" iii, 2, 5. ⁸ "Prisnim vohanta mataram | adha pitaram ishminata Rudram" v, 52, 16. ⁹ "Yava pita svapah Rudrah esham sudagha Prisnih sadina Marudbhyah" v, 60, 5. ¹⁰ "Ya ugrah iva Sarya-ha

places called Aditi. And Rudra too is called by several names such as Bhaga, Pushan, Brahmanaspati and Siva; He is said to have a strong bow and swift arrows; He is the self-dependent and wise God and the conqueror whom none can conquer; through his power He perceives all beings on the earth, through His high imperial sway He bends His looks upon the beings in heaven;¹ He the long-haired Being sustains fire, water and the two worlds; He is all sky to look upon; He is this light; He the Muni associated in the beneficent work of every God, is said to fly through the air looking upon all forms;² He is also stated to have drunk poison along with Rudra.³

These notable references to Rudra I picked up only from the Rig-Veda in the order in which they occur from its first book to its last. But, for the sake of our argument, all the scattered epithets applied to him in the above references may be classified under three categories, one relating to his self, the other to his form and the third to his functions. He is said to possess excellent wisdom and boundless knowledge, unlimited grace and bountifulness, al-

tigma-sringo na vanasagah | Agne puro rurojitha" vi. 16, 39. "Pratar Bhagam Pushanam Brahmanaspatim pratah somam uta Rudram buvann" vii. 41, 1; "Yebhish Siva svavan erayavabhir" x. 92, 9.

¹ "Imah Rudraya sthira-dhan vane girah kshipreshave devaya svadhavne | ashalhaya sahamanaya vedhase tigmayudhaya bharata srinotu nah | sa hi kshayena kshamayasya janmanah samrajyena divyasya chetati" vii. 46, 1, 2.

² "Kesi agnim kesi visham kesi bibarti rodasi | kesi visvam svar drise kesi idam jyotir uchyate | antarikshena patati visva rupa vachakasat—Munir devasya devasya saukrityaya sakha hitah" x. 136, 1, 4.

³ "Kesi vishasya patrena yad Rudrenapibat saha" x. 136, 7.

mightiness, fierceness eternal youth, immortality and self-dependence.

His form is constituted of pure and resplendent light the colour of which is either red or golden; He has braided hair and long, loose locks; He holds in his hands a strong bow and swift arrows; He remains in an inseparable union with a female principle which is variously called Prisni, Aditi and Soma. The word 'Soma' means 'with Uma'; hence 'Soma Rudra' means 'Rudra who dwells with Uma.'

Being the wisest, the mightiest and the best of all gods, He with Prisni creates the universe, sustains all—the two-footed and four-footed creatures, by bestowing on them food, prosperity and healing medicines, and at length destroys them all. He hears the songs and prayers of his devotees and is easy of access to them. He it is that presides as the chief deity over all kinds of sacrifices and fulfils most bountifully the aims and objects of the sacrificer. At one time he drank poison to save gods from mortality while he himself remained ever immortal without being in the least affected by that dreadful poison. At another time, He burnt up the three castles of three demons that had been giving immense trouble to gods. He is also said to perform austerities and is on that account called a Muni, the modern Dakshinamurti.

Thus we get a clear, definite and perfect picture of Rudra from the delineations given in some whole hymns

¹ Muir's Sanskrit Texts, vol iv. p. 357.

of the Rig-Veda, as well as in many stray passages found interwoven with other hymns addressed to various other deities. These attributes and functions of Rudra, except for a few personal traits, are the same as those generally attributed to the Supreme Being by the common consent of man. So far as my knowledge of the Rig-Veda is concerned, I venture to say that such a grand conception of the one Almighty God cannot be found entertained of any other god in the Rig-Vedic pantheon. Even Indra the pre-eminent deity in the Rig-Veda—pre-eminent because of the greater number of hymns (250 out of 1028) addressed to him, does not seem to have been raised to the position of an Almighty God of the universe. In one place some of the gods are spoken of as mightier than others (i27, 13), while in another all are equally great (viii 30, 1). In hymn 18 of the fourth book, not only all the gods but Rudra are distinctly stated to have been born but Indra too is mentioned to have been brought forth like others. And it is curious that this hymn fails not to note that the very same Indra slew his father and that Vamadeva, the author of the hymn, cooked a dog's intestines and ate them. Nor are the gods immortal whose number amounts to three thousand and three hundred and thirty nine (iii, 9, 9), for in the words of Prof. A. Macdonell, "Immortality is said to have been bestowed upon them by individual deities, such as Agni and Savitri, or to have been acquired by drinking Soma."¹ And on the crimes

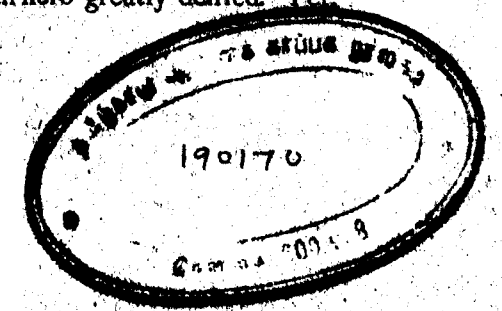
¹ *Sanskrit Literature*, p. 71.

committed by gods it is not pleasant to dwell and so I dismiss them with an observation made by Dr. Barth: "In a developed and concrete form it becomes embarrassing whether when it offers a conception of the gods which looks mean, gross, or even loathesome or when it simply represents them in an aspect too human, too epic, and in a sense too familiar for the religious consciousness, now grown more exacting."¹

But Lord Rudra, the father of Maruts and of many other Rudras is nowhere said to be one amongst the gods, nor is he taken to have been born and brought up and become immortal by drinking Soma; on the other hand he is declared to be eternally young and immortal and he stood so even when he drank the deadly poison. In the whole range of the Vedic literature I do not find a single passage that ascribes to Lord Rudra either birth or death, either any imperfection of mind or any mean action that characterizes man and the so-called gods. When we consider all the sublime qualities attributed to his self, we perceive in Rudra the complete conception of the Supreme Being.

But as we approach the descriptions given of his form as having red or gold complexion, his head braided hair or long loose locks, his hands as holding a strong bow and arrows, himself as coupled with a female principle, and of his feats of poison-drinking and castle-burning, we seem to encounter in him a mere human hero greatly deified. Yet

¹ *The Religions of India*, p. 27.



so far as his essential nature is concerned, it is clear there is nothing in it which militates against the conception of an Almighty god of the universe. What is thus inwardly great and divine cannot express itself outwardly as a low human. It is not, therefore, reasonable to bring any human interpretation to bear upon the descriptions pertaining to his form and functions. For, in judging of the actions and appearances of a person or thing, do we not find a careful consideration of the intrinsic nature of that person or thing is brought into full play? Why? Because we like not to be deceived by mere appearances. For instance, a copper-piece, when it is thoroughly polished or coated with gold, glitters like gold; and so long as you do not require it, or do not feel yourself sufficiently curious to know whether it is real gold or not, you may treat it rather indifferently; but when you want it for your use, you cannot rest satisfied unless and until you have made a thorough study of it. So, here too, in studying the form and functions of Lord Rudra, we must be guided not by his mere appearances but by the light we get from his essential nature. Since, as shown above, all the Rig-Vedic passages and hymns relating to Rudra proclaim his inward nature to be supremely divine, it behoves us to interpret the nature of his form and functions also in keeping with his divine essence and not otherwise. For, how can a being that is divine through and through, that is perfect and imperishable in every way, that is all grace, bliss and intelligence, be said to assume

SAIVA SIDDHANTA AS A PHILOSOPHY OF PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

"Philosophy" says Professor William James in his monumental work on religion,* "lives in words, but truth and fact well up into our lives in ways that exceed verbal formulation." In these words what he means to insist on, is that a philosophy, bearing no vital and intimate relation to the stern realities of life, is like an empty and dead body that has lost the pre-eminent principle of consciousness which makes it both valuable and useful. From the earliest times, here in India as in Greece and other western countries, there have been, and still are, in existence, various systems of philosophy and various kinds of religion, a great many of which is mostly built upon mere imaginations, assumptions and fancies. But Saiva Siddhanta, unique amongst them all, is grounded solely upon sound practicalities of life. Even on rare occasions when it reaches the very outskirts of practical reason to jump into unexplored regions of pure reason, it does not venture to disappear completely from our sight without leaving behind at least a clue for us to discover how it went there and what it was that enticed it away from its native home. Numerous problems which it solves are solved in the cru-

* *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, page, 456.

cible of stringent practical tests. Nothing in it is taken for granted, nor anything is asserted arrogantly, nor any attempt made to shut the mouth of an earnest and inquiring student. Every problem and every knotty point in the history of thought is taken up in a calm, serious and dignified mood, is duly considered in all its aspects and is then solved by the application of strict logical methods derived from the keen observations of daily occurrences in life. As has been effectively said by Prof. William James that "To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, we need then only consider what sensations, immediate or remote we are conceivably to expect from it, and what conduct we must prepare in case the object should be true. Our conception of these practical consequences is for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all."* Saiva Siddhanta, again in his words, "could never get away from concrete life or work in a conceptual vacuum."† It is my humble desire to impress on your mind the importance of this position of Saiva Siddhanta—this practical point of view from which it proceeds to argue the three categories of life, namely mind and matter and Supreme Self or in the language of this philosophy Pasu, Pásam and Pathi.

But at the present time as in the past, in complete opposition to this practical stand-point of Saiva Siddhanta there are prevalent everywhere many fanciful theories of

* *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp., 444, 445.

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p., 456.

which one holds that all knowledge derived through sense perception from the practical affairs of life, being the knowledge of individual things passing every moment out of existence, cannot be admitted to have permanent value, but must be given up as untrue and illusive, and only that knowledge acquired through direct intuitive perception of a thing abstract and ever-existing should be accepted as true and valuable. However attractive and convincing this may seem to some light-minded people, it cannot satisfy the cravings of the serious-minded. In abstractions man can never live long. He has a substantial body made of flesh and blood; and many and varied are his needs. To meet his daily wants, he seeks not after abstract but concrete things, by working hard and unremittingly both night and day. When his hunger is acute, his thirst is unbearable, you cannot persuade him to imagine that he is taking sweet and wholesome food and drinking cool, fresh and clear water. He will simply treat with scorn any such suggestion and will go his way in search of a spot where he can really get his food and drink. Similar are his other requirements which can be gratified only by concrete things.

Some may object to this by saying that in a future state of existence when man can live free from the contact and contamination of this gross earthly matter, not only will life in an abstract world be possible but it must also constitute the only true goal to attain which man, while he is on this earth, must strive hard to cultivate the habit of forgetting this world and its transitory objects and must

from a moving body? Can you think of a virtuous act out of its relation to a bounteous man? Can you picture to your mind the glowing colours of blue, crimson, yellow, green and purple except as they are painted in the sky on a bright winter evening, or as found in some beautiful fruits and flowers? These facts brought to bear upon the abstract theory, in comparison with the practical or pragmatic view of Saiva Siddhanta, will clearly show that to form a correct estimate of an abstract idea, it must be related to the object which gave rise to it. This truth was long ago seen and enforced in clear and unmistakable terms by one of the profoundest thinkers of the last century, I mean, John Stuart Mill to whose genius the British philosophy owes its breadth and modern development. He says: "It is one of the most unquestionable of all logical maxims, that the meaning of the abstract must be sought for in the concrete, and not conversely."*

St. Meikandan, the first systematic expounder of Saiva Siddhanta in Tamil, held, six hundred and fifty years ago, that "But for life in the concrete, which serves like lamp-light to illumine the understanding of the soul, the self can know nothing nor can it discriminate one thing from the other; for just as a piece of wood hides fire within itself, so the evil principle which is darkness itself envelops the soul from eternity."† To explain the matter so tersely put by St. Meikandan in a single stanza of his great work, the Sivajnanabodham in Tamil, would require

* *An Examination of Sir W. Hamilton's Philosophy*, page, 45. † *Sivajnanabodham*, 4th Sutra, 2nd Adhikarana.

several hours which we cannot spare now. I shall, therefore, touch on it briefly.

By concrete life the Saint means the life that is going on in intimate union with this organic body and all its organs, this earth and all its objects. Independently of this form of life, he holds, the Self cannot evolve, nor can it attain to a knowledge of itself and its environment, nor can it escape from the trammels of evil, sin and ignorance. To understand clearly this abstract teaching of our Saint, we must again have recourse to a concrete example. Let us compare a new born child with a magnet. For, as has been told by Prof. James Sully, that "Unless we could observe in children and the lower animals the simpler forms of our mental processes, we should be unable to trace back the complexities of adult consciousness to their constituent elements, and even with this help, we can only carry such analytical simplification of psychical phenomena to a certain degree of completeness."* Now the child has a supple body made of living matter and completely fitted up with all complex organs; but the magnet is not made so; it has neither living matter nor any growing organs. Still there is a little similarity between the child and the magnet. When hungry, the child sucks the breast of her mother; and the magnet also draws towards itself little pieces of iron, although you cannot attribute to it any motive for its action, as in the case of the child. So much for their similarity. Now, comes a difference which is most vital and significant of results.

* *Outlines of Psychology*, page 8.



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