

# Prabuddha Bharata

OR

AWAKENED INDIA

VOL. LV

JANUARY—DECEMBER, 1950



By Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, and Yoga, by one or more or  
all of these the vision of the Paramatman is obtained.

Publication Office  
MAYAVATI, ALMORA, HIMALAYAS

Editorial Office  
4, WELLINGTON LANE, CALCUTTA 13

Annual Subscription : Inland, Rupees Five ; Burma, Rupees Six  
Foreign, Fourteen Shillings ; U.S., Four Dollars  
Single Copy : Annas Eight

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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

VOL. LV

JANUARY 1950

No. 1



“उत्तिष्ठ जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।”

“Arise ! Awake ! And stop not till the Goal is reached.”

## CONVERSATIONS OF SWAMI SIVANANDA

BELUR MATH : 21 DECEMBER 1930

Tomorrow is the Holy Mother's birthday, when a few young men will be initiated into *brahmacharya*. In this connection Mahapurushji said : 'Study of the scripture is very good. Study of *shāstra* etc. is also part of one's spiritual practices. For *brahmachārins* it is necessary in the beginning to read the *Gita* thoroughly. Is there another book like the *Gita* ? It is superb ! All the spiritual attitudes are given there—*jñāna*, *karma*, *bhakti*, and *yoga*. What I like above everything else in it is that the Lord Himself assures His devotee saying, "O son of Kunti, know for certain that My devotee never perishes". What an assurance ! He is very fond of His devotees. He who has taken refuge in His feet with all his heart and soul has no reason to be worried. He protects him in every way. But such is the spell of *mahāmāyā*, the Divine Mother, that man fails to understand this grace of His. However learned or intelligent one may be, it is not possible to escape from the clutches of this *māyā* without a glance of His grace. An individual can understand His grace, if only

He mercifully removes the covering of *māyā* a little.

'This Self cannot be gained by Vedic study, nor by intellect, nor by much hearing of *shāstra*. It is gained by him whom the Self chooses ; to him the Self reveals Its nature.

'Alexander, Napoleon, and Kaiser were great heroes and powerful men in the scale of the world. But they were mere bubbles in the stream of creation flowing without a beginning. Their might is of no avail to cut the net of *mahāmāyā*. And so long that is not done, all is in vain—human life is a failure. For this, God's grace is needed. And God Himself has spoken of the secret for gaining divine grace :

' "Give your mind to Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me and bow down to Me. You will come to Me alone, I promise truly to you, since you are dear to Me."

' "Giving up all observances take refuge in Me alone.

I shall liberate you from all sins, do not grieve."

To a devotee who prayed for initiation he said : 'There is nothing secret about my initiation. I know that if one takes the name of Sri Ramakrishna, the *yugāvatār*, one is assured of Liberation. He will certainly save one who takes refuge in him. This is the religion of the Age. The Master said that coins of the times of the *bādshahs* have no currency in the present day. The name of Sri Ramakrishna is the *mantra* of this Age. What else is initiation ? The Master himself is the initiation. I do not know about *tāntrika dīksha* or the ritualistic *dīksha* given by priests. Go on repeating his name and pray to him much : "O Lord, have mercy on me". He is sure to listen to a sincere prayer. The Master himself has said, "He who was Rama and He who was Krishna has come (pointing to his body) in this form". These are the words of the *yugāvatār*. We also say it. In this Age, if one takes the name of the Master, he will be saved. If you can hold on to this blind faith, then come; we shall teach laying bare our heart. If not, go and carry on disputations and arguments; you will come when it is time. This is no bigotry but the perceived truth. We know that the Master himself is the eternal *parabrahman*. You should have this faith. You are learned, intelligent and have abundant energy. You have read much; read more. And along with it try to steady your mind, wake up love of God in your heart, increase your yearning and call on Him as much as you can. You will find that everything will be achieved in time. Prepare the mind. He used to say, "When the flower blossoms, bees are drawn to it automatically". So we say, try first to bring to blossom the lotus of the heart; the grace of the *guru* will come automatically in that case. He is the Inner Guide—He is in your heart itself as your inner Self. He will let you know everything as soon as it is time.

'It is good to have worldly ambition. But you have been doing that sort of thing so long. Now try to gain Self-knowledge. This is the highest desire of life—the desire to

know God. Be up and doing ! Direct all the powers of the mind with great vigour for the attainment of real life.'

As the devotee showed great eagerness, Mahapurushji agreed to initiate him.

BELUR MATH : 21 MAY 1932

It was afternoon. Expressing great despair because he was not able to steady the mind through spiritual practices, a devotee said to Mahapurushji : 'Maharaj ! I am struggling, but the mind does not become steady. Please tell me kindly what is to be done. Shall I fail to achieve anything at all ?'

Mahapurushji replied in a firm tone : 'Child, you have still a month and a half left of your leave. Why not do exactly as I have told you. If you despair so much so quickly, how will it do ? You should have faith and patience. You must be continually striving. Will it do to lament and sigh because you are not having any success after a little effort ? Child, I do not know of any artificial means or clever trick for controlling the mind or gaining the bliss of God. What I know and what I have learnt from the Master I have told you. And I say this also that nothing can be gained in a trice on this path. One has to be regularly and continuously striving in the same way and with faith day after day, month after month, and year after year. The mind which has so long been scattered among all manner of objects has to be slowly collected and merged in the feet of the Lord. Call on the Master and be up and doing. Gradually the mind will become steady and you will find joy. You believe in a Power, don't you ? For you the personal aspect of God is more suitable. You will be able more easily to concentrate your mind on it.

'In the beginning I used to go to the Brahmo Samaj. Afterwards when I came to the Master, he asked me one day : "Do you believe in *Shakti* ?" I said, "I like God without form; but I also feel that a Power permeates everything everywhere." He then went to the Kali temple. I followed him.



Even while going towards the temple he fell into a trance, and on coming before the Mother he prostrated himself with great reverence. I fell into a dilemma, and felt a little hesitation at first to bow down before the image of Kali. But immediately the thought came to me that Brahman is all-pervading; in that case It must be in this image too, so there is no objection to bowing down. As soon as this came to the mind I also prostrated myself. Afterwards the more I began to frequent the Master the more my faith in God with form deepened. It is my extreme good fortune that I came in contact with the Master and received his grace.'

BELUR MATH : 30 MAY 1932

In connection with the topic that scientific advance in the West had made the daily life of man there very comfortable in many ways and that the Westerners were much happier than the Indians, Mahapurushji said: 'Such happiness is of short duration. What's there in it! Because they have never felt the joy of God they are intoxicated with these fleeting pleasures. Child, whatever one may say, there is no joy in lust and gold. No matter where you may live, in heaven or anywhere else; no matter whether you are learned or anything else—there is, I repeat, no joy in lust and gold. The Lord has said so. The *Chhândogya Upanishad* also says: "That which is Great is Bliss, there is no joy in that which is small. The Great alone is Bliss, the Great alone should be enquired into." True happiness resides in that Infinite Reality. That has to be known. Science has not been able to disclose it. Science deals with matter, with the things of this world. The desire for enjoyment increases ever more through enjoyment. Where is satisfaction there?

Where is peace there? The seed of discord is inherent in the sense-enjoyment itself.

' "Never is the desire quenched by the enjoyment of desired objects. Rather it increases ever more like fire fed with butter." '

As regards achieving peace in life he said: 'There is no peace in non-Self. Real peace lies in Self-knowledge. And one has to search for that peace inside. Peace lies inside, not outside. Knowledge, devotion, love of God—are all inside. Do spiritual practices, call on God. He will give peace inside.'

At night on the subject of initiation he said: 'Initiation is of many kinds. Is there a hard and fast rule that all should be given a *mantra* for *japa*? All do not have the same nature, and attainments and capacity also differ. Of course ordinary *gurus* do not understand these differences. Some incline to God with form, some to God without form. There are further many variations of taste even in the matter of personal or impersonal aspects of God. Some like meditation, they will practise it. Some like *japa*, they will do *japa*. The aspirants require to be instructed by first knowing the particular line and inclination of each of them. Otherwise if all are forced into the same mould, spiritual development is sure to be delayed.'...

In connection with the moving about of *sadhus* and devotees, he said: 'Look, it is not good for devotees to move about much. That is injurious to the acquisition of love of God. For this reason it is necessary to settle down at a spot after a little wandering and practise spiritual disciplines. That deepens love and devotion to God. Much wandering about dries up the spiritual feeling. But the state of the *parivrājaka*, the wandering monk, is different. Then you have to hold on to a particular vow.'

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'Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life; think of it; dream of it; live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success, and this is the way great spiritual giants are produced.'

—Swami Vivekananda



# INDIA, OUR MOTHERLAND

BY THE EDITOR

*Satyameva jayate nānritam, satyena panthā vitato devayānah.*

'Truth alone succeeds, not untruth; through Truth lies the path to Liberation.'

(*Mundaka Upanishad* 3. 1. 6)

'The longest night seems to be passing away, the sorest trouble seems to be coming to an end at last, the seeming corpse appears to be awaking and a voice is coming to us,—away back where history and even tradition fails to peep into the gloom of the past, coming down from there, reflected as it were, from peak to peak of the infinite Himalaya of knowledge, and of love, and of work, India, this motherland of ours,—a voice is coming unto us, gentle, firm, and yet unmistakable in its utterances, and is gaining volume as days pass by, and behold, the sleeper is awakening! Like a breeze from the Himalayas, it is bringing life into the almost dead bones and muscles, the lethargy is passing away, and only the blind cannot see, or the perverted will not see, that she is awakening, this motherland of ours, from her deep long sleep. None can resist her any more; never is she going to sleep any more; no outward powers can hold her back any more for the infinite giant is rising to her feet.' In these immortal and prophetic words did the patriot-saint of modern India, Swami Vivekananda, visualize the greatness and glory of our motherland. India, which is entering this year on a new era of her history, stands unique among the countries of the world. The New Year which generally ushers in new hopes and new aspirations in every land, will undoubtedly be a memorable one in the annals of Indian history. For, this month, on the twenty-sixth to be exact, India will proclaim herself a sovereign, democratic Republic. Our sacred motherland, the land of religion and spirituality, the eternal home of peace and harmony, the cradle of history's major civilization is renascent today. The whole country will soon celebrate the new 'Independence Day' and

proudly rejoice at the momentous event of the enactment of the New Constitution. On this great occasion,—so great that we who are so near to it can hardly appreciate, but future historians will record it in letters of gold—the *Prabuddha Bharata* or 'Awakened India' offers warm greetings to all those lovers of India who have contributed to this 'New Awakening'. Hail, Independent India!

An event of this magnitude is certainly an occasion for great rejoicing. But it is also an occasion for thoughtful reflection and profitable retrospection, for becoming aware of our new and heavy responsibilities. Immense sacrifices have been made by innumerable patriots of all classes and creeds and we have advanced a long way in our successful march to freedom. India today stands on a par with any other independent country of the world, with her head held high, with dignity and strength. Our thoughts are naturally turned to the future which is full of hope and augurs well. It is a little over two years since India attained dominion status amounting to independence. In the long perspective of history this is but a very brief period. Yet, much has been achieved, and today the country is well on its way to greater and more unfettered progress as a sovereign republic. It is common knowledge, that, two years ago, the exuberant rejoicings on our newly-won freedom could not mitigate the inevitable but irreconcilable anguish resulting from the partition of the motherland. The country had to face a period of transition, full of unexpected crucial problems, unprecedented in any other country under similar circumstances. Our great national leaders at the head of the adminis-



tration, with indomitable courage, withstood a challenge to their wisdom and resources such as few leaders of countries have had to face. All available energy and attention, as also resources, were naturally absorbed in meeting the urgent situation. Even today the Government and the people alike have to tackle the important problems of food scarcity, refugee rehabilitation, and maintenance of law and order in the face of disruptive elements. Now that political subjection to a foreign power has disappeared, the common people are eagerly looking up to the Government for the solution of a variety of problems such as better living standard, higher remuneration, cheaper cost of commodities, better facilities for education and medical relief, and elimination of the causes of insufficiency in food and cloth. Moreover the Government has a number of development plans to be translated into achievement. Then there is the international sphere with which the State's foreign relations are closely linked. All these apart, the State is ultimately responsible for the social, ethical, and spiritual welfare of the nation as a whole. Thus the citizens and the Government of the new-born republic are shouldered with great responsibilities for the future.

The Preamble to the New Constitution of the Republic of India lays due emphasis on securing, to each and every inhabitant of the country, 'justice, social, economic, and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship; equality of status and of opportunity.' It is also mentioned that the purpose of the Constitution is to promote fraternity among all the people 'assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation'. New India, true to her national genius and tradition, has set before her, at the beginning of her Constitution, lofty Vedantic ideals. This is of great significance because individuals are affected by the ideas and ideals for which the State as a whole stands. India, the *Punya Bhūmi*, has, in the past, shown the way to perfection in gentleness, generosity, purity, introspection, and spirituality. It has been,

and even now is, the fountainhead of spiritual waters which serve to quench the fire of hatred, mutual distrust, and aggrandizement among nations. It has always stood as a bulwark of peace and has lit the lamp of liberty in the hearts of millions in other lands. Students of the history of races are aware that the debt the world owes to our motherland is immense. Many Indians who visit foreign countries are surprised to find that the world has a greater estimate of India than what they have of their motherland. The warm reception accorded to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru during his recent visit to the United States and Canada, India's election to the United Nations Security Council and other events only confirm the conviction that India is destined to play an important role in international affairs. Notwithstanding the widespread poverty, illiteracy, and economic distress at home, India has survived and will survive the severe tests it is put to. The words of the Prime Minister are highly inspiring: 'Because I have faith in India, I believe that India will not only survive these tests, but will make good; because, I think, that in spite of our weakness, there is fundamental vitality which has enabled it to carry on all these millennia of years and which will function much more effectively and vividly, having got the opportunity now. I have that faith.' And he has repeatedly appealed to the people of the country to couple this faith in the destiny of our motherland with work—hard and sincere work, with a will to achieve the fruits of freedom.

For thousands of years, earlier than even the earliest recorded history of the world, India has existed peacefully, always maintaining the true spirit of religion as the backbone of her national life. It is the birthplace of spiritual giants who have given to the world the ideal of a universal religion, the Advaita Vedanta, the boldest and broadest enunciation of the realization of Truth. India is the land of renunciation where service to man is looked upon as worship of God, and where alone, from the most ancient to the most modern times,



the highest ideal of life is open to every man and woman, irrespective of caste, creed, or nationality. She has never ceased to produce saints and mystics who have acted as dynamos of spirituality wherefrom the people in the towns and the villages alike have derived a steady current of spiritual values. And some of them who were philosophers as well, have elucidated in the profoundest manner human intellect could rarely do, the spiritual philosophy of the ancient *rishis* which has promoted and sustained human solidarity and brotherhood throughout the ages. India did not choose the path of aggressive conquest or enslavement of any other country or nation. Never has an act been done or a word spoken without 'a blessing behind it and peace before it'. Pandit Nehru drew the pointed attention of the American people to this fact in his historic Address to the United States Congress: 'India is old in thought and experience and has travelled through trackless centuries in the adventure of life. Throughout her long history she has stood for peace, and every prayer that an Indian raises ends with an invocation to peace.' In the course of his Address to the Canadian Parliament, Pandit Nehru has once again stressed this aspect of our national endeavour: 'India desires no leadership or dominion or authority over any other country. But we are compelled by circumstances to play our part in Asia and in the world, because we are convinced that unless the basic problems of Asia are solved there can be no world peace.'

India is a very ancient country with a great past. Democracy is not new to India. In Vedic times even the kings were elected by the people. The system of voting through secret ballot was in vogue. The king was fully responsible to the ministers and the people. There were *sabhās* and *samitis* similar to the lower and upper houses of legislature, and the *panchāyat* system was common in every village unit. The king was called upon to rule the country strictly according to *Dharma*, ensuring to the citizens social and economic

betterment side by side with ethical and spiritual welfare. Every man was at perfect liberty to follow his own religious persuasion, and there was tremendous spiritual power in religious thought. Today many of our countrymen, young and old, have failed to find inspiration and guidance through religion. The fault lies not with religion but with us. Not unoften people take to religion in a light-hearted manner, as a fashionable dogma or ritual, or ignore it altogether, their shallow faith shaken by a few irreligious acts they witness. It is a matter of common experience to find every form of liberty abused by some individuals or groups. Peace is abused by preparations for war, civil liberty is abused by antisocial elements, science is abused by destructive inventions, and freedom to possess weapons is abused by unrighteous use of them. But because of these abuses we do not give up altogether peace, liberty, or science. On the other hand we make individual and collective efforts to preserve them for human welfare by punishing the wrongdoers and minimising chances of further abuse. In the process of time, owing to various causes, our *Sanātana Dharma* has not been properly understood and practised by the people. This has given free scope for the growth of exacting priestcraft and rank communalism. Unworthy accretions of superstition and fanaticism have hidden the shining truth of religion. It is needless to mention that the way out of this impasse does not lie in discarding religion or in directing our national aspirations away from religion. The essential truths of the *shrutis*, demonstrated in the lives and teachings of the saints and seers, have to be studied, practised, and realized. To the illiterate masses who are generally exploited by communalists the meaning of true religion has to be imparted through the right kind of trained preachers. Also they should be encouraged to observe national festivals and revive their past institutions which served as clubs or societies for the spread of healthy religious ideas.

A dominating factor in human unification



is the motherland. The bond that knits together sons of the same soil—one country, one people,—springs out of one common past tradition. The fact that we are all descendants of the ancient *rishis* and that we are the inheritors of the same hoary culture engenders a commonness in our needs and aspirations, in our hopes and fears, in our objects of love and achievement. Every nation that has progressed in civilization has drawn inspiration from its great past, by keeping before every one down to the masses, the wealth of their ancestral heritage. For, out of the past is built the future. But we are often told that looking into the past only degenerates and leads nowhere. We are reminded of the words of a great English statesman who has played a prominent part in the political life of his country: 'Those who want to see farthest into the future of a nation must look farthest into its past'. We are also told that India's recent past is made up of failures, suffering, and servitude. In this connection, another statesman has said that it is a false study of history that emphasizes a nation's three hundred years' failure and overlooks her three thousand years' achievements. That India was at one time great and prosperous, with a rich civilization, there is no doubt. Later on tyrannical alien influences contributed to her degradation. The country's age-old social institutions deteriorated. Coercive attempts were made to further weaken the country through religious persecution, disintegration of national culture, and proselytism, but with little success. When it came to religion and spirituality, India was inflexible. She raised defensive walls of social rigidity to zealously preserve the essential values of life.

Surface critics occasionally indulge in much puerile talk about India. According to them, our religion and philosophy are world-negating and impractical; there is a seething variety of religions, languages, and customs, making national solidarity impossible; and, Indians are a backward people in the modern

sense of the term, having developed no trade, commerce, or industry worth the name. No detailed examination of such criticism need be undertaken at present. India's independent status will serve to throw open the floodgates and let her infinite power find self-expression in various channels. The more intimately other nations come to understand India's soul the greater will be their appreciation of her people and institutions. But it is unfortunate that some Indians should exhibit more ignorance regarding their own scriptures and national ideals than foreigners many of whom look upon India as the last great hope of humanity. It is more so when educated Indians, occupying important positions, give expression to it in foreign countries. It may be foreigners appreciate better our country's greatness to which familiarity has made us nonchalant. That our religion and philosophy are neither world-negating nor reserved for study in old age in the forests, but are very practical, in day-to-day life is clear from the scriptures and the *purāṇas*. Monarchs in ancient India, ruling big kingdoms, and busy with administrative affairs, were deep philosophers who had realized the truths of the scriptures and acted as successful teachers to others. The *Bhagavad Gita*, imparted on the battlefield, teaches the highest philosophy, without detriment to intense activity. The diversity of social and religious life is there on the surface, but underlying it is a uniformity of eternal values. Infinite variety, a desideratum of healthy social and religious life, rests on a common thread of spirituality. India was not a land of many religions nor was Hinduism a sectarian religion. The different sects that grew up out of a psychological necessity of man were only so many paths to reach the same Ultimate Truth. *Ekam sadviprā bahudhā vadanti*—'That which exists is One; sages call It by various names—says the *Rig Veda*. The more number of sects the greater the opportunities for people to grow spiritual and reach the One Truth—Existence-Knowledge-



Bliss. In the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find the perfect realization of the truth of his teaching, 'As many faiths, so many paths'.

An ancient Sanskrit saying tells us: *Jananī Janmabhūmischa svargādapi garīyasī*—one's mother as well as the motherland are rated greater than even heaven. Not many have been able to understand India's problems so thoroughly and love her so intensely as did Swami Vivekananda. Sister Nivedita, writing of her Master, says, 'The queen of his adoration was his Motherland'. His great heart was sensitive to all that concerned India, her faults and suffering as well as her greatness. Those who are conversant with the speeches and writings of the Swami know that 'the thought of India was to him like the air he breathed'. In the course of his inspiring letters written from America to his young disciples in this country, the Swami has exhorted the youths of India to devote themselves heart and soul to the noble task of her regeneration. More than half a century ago Swami Vivekananda unfolded, in his Indian lectures, his plan of work for the resuscitation of the motherland. His intimate knowledge of the deplorable condition of the teeming millions of the country enabled him to make a realistic approach to the entire problem. He called upon the patriots and reformers to give up tinkering with minor social and religious questions and concentrate their energies on the immediate task of helping the general people to procure food, clothing, and other material wants. When their anxiety for these wants is removed, then they are to be given education of the right sort. In order to rouse his countrymen into intense activity, he spoke with great fervour, saying: 'For the next fifty years this alone shall be our key-note—this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for that time from our minds.' 'Therefore I say, first rouse the inherent power of the Atman within you, then by rousing the faith of the common people in that power, as much as you

can, teach them first of all to make provision for food, and then teach them religion.' 'You talk of patriotism, but has the thought of your motherland taken so much hold of you, that you have lost your sleep and you carry the burden of the misery of your people throughout your waking moments? That is real patriotism.' Every politician is not a patriot; a true patriot does not take to politics as a pastime or unwillingly under duress. Mahatma Gandhi has repeatedly warned his countrymen against amateurish patriotism. He has said that real *Swaraj* in which the poorest can participate can come only through 'proud, defiant, self-respecting, sensitive, selfless, and self-sacrificing patriots who would count no cost too great'.

Today, in the hour of her final triumph, when India is attaining *Purna Swaraj*, the entire nation, while paying homage to the hallowed personality of Mahatma Gandhi, shall not fail to recall the inspiring message of his teachings and the great ideals that he personified. His gentle but firm words of advice remind us that 'thought and action should never be divorced from moral principle, and the true path of man is truth and peace'. India has always stood for Truth Absolute which is greater than the person who preaches it. The person lives in the Truth even more vividly than in flesh and blood. Gandhiji's constructive unifying approach to the various problems of the country was fundamentally spiritual and of the very essence of the soul of India. It was his cherished desire that the downtrodden masses of India should be happy and contented under *Ram Raj* which, according to him, meant the establishment of the 'kingdom of righteousness' on earth. It is clear that what is meant is economic prosperity and social solidarity based on ethics and spirituality.

This brings us to an important question. The term 'secular state' is often misunderstood because the word 'secular' has various meanings, and unless the special implications



in the particular context in which it is used are made abundantly clear, it is bound to give rise to misgivings. In the absence of such clarification, we are left to think that the word 'secular' may be understood to mean 'non-ecclesiastical or non-theocratic'. We do not for a moment think it has any reference to its other implication viz. 'that which is opposed to the religious or the spiritual'. We cannot subscribe to the view that a 'secular state' is indifferent or antagonistic to essential spiritual values, merely concerning itself with materialistic aims. We are glad Pandit Nehru has made an important observation in his Address to the U. S. Congress. He said: 'Material progress cannot go far or last long unless it has its foundations in moral principles and high ideals.' Political emancipation and the achievement of the material means of satisfying human wants at the cost of those higher ideals will degrade man into a selfish opportunist, and lead the nation away from the path of righteousness. No state can ignore the ethical and spiritual welfare of its people. For man is rooted in divinity and his spiritual hunger cannot be satisfied by a soulless humanistic ethics, however lofty. 'True religion and true morality,' says Mahatma Gandhi, 'are inseparably bound up with each other. Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil.' If a change of heart has to take place in every one—rich and poor, official and non-official, the producer and the consumer,—it can come only through a broad conception of Vedantic morality.

The growing spirit of secularism (in every sense the term implies), much in evidence in other countries, is finding a fertile soil in our national life. Our sense of values are changing for the worse day by day. Fascinated by the achievements of science and the advancement of economics and industry, we are likely to throw off, in a frivolous manner, our firm allegiance to those great truths and ideals of religion and spirituality that have been the lifeblood of our

national culture and civilization. The calamitous consequences of such disavowal are obvious. It is well known that the great nationalist upsurge in India was the outward expression of her soul-force to meet the challenge of alien brute-force which threatened to undermine everything that she held precious and sacred for self-fulfilment. If democracy means government of the people, by the people, for the people, a secular State need not necessarily remain supremely unconcerned with the spiritual welfare of its people. If the State, which is the collective expression of its people, keeps itself aloof from the deeper problems that concern directly the fundamental inner being of the individual, it will be impossible to cure the nation of its spiritual malady which is at the root of the antisocial and antinational tendencies. Nations like individuals, when faced with crises in their history are saved by the power of strength derived from national ideals they have assiduously cherished and followed. If religion, revitalized and readjusted to our present needs, has to play its part in shaping our national life and endeavour, it will not do to regard it as merely a personal or private concern of the individual. The multitude look up to their leaders for inspiration and guidance, and follow them with implicit faith. As such a great responsibility lies on the leaders of New India. The history of the world shows that the more far-sighted the leaders and the greater their reliance on moral and spiritual values rather than on mere economic or physical power, the more successful have they been in leading their followers to the desired goal. An ideal State is very much alive to its responsibility in building up the foundations of personality of the individual. 'Man-making' and 'character-building' are not to be left to the individual as his personal or private affair. The State, being a powerful human institution, should create for every worthy citizen the requisite social, economic, and political conditions indispensable for his perception and creative pursuit of the essen-



tial values in life, viz. *satyam*, *shivam*, *sundaram* (Truth, Goodness, and Beauty). The State should ensure absolute freedom of worship to its subjects, and protect them from persecutions, internal or external.

Having achieved her political freedom, India is on her way to achieve economic self-sufficiency through agricultural as well as industrial development. Every effort has to be made to banish from our motherland the evils of poverty, ignorance, untouchability, and communal fanaticism. Untouchability is fast disappearing, even from its strongholds. It can be eradicated not merely by laws of the legislature but by an active and determined effort of the majority of the people. Communalism and religious fanaticism should be countered not by abolishing healthy religious ideas from educational and public institutions but by striving to engender religious harmony through the propagation of the essential verities common to every religion. The foremost task is spread of education and finding ways and means of food production and distribution throughout the country. The masses, mainly agriculturists and labourers, are the backbone of the nation. But most of them are poor and illiterate. They are to be educated, and their pathetic living standard should be elevated. The motherland will rise higher in the scale of progress the more we succeed in minimizing the palpable difference between the standards of the upper and the lower classes. The caste system in its original form proved an excellent institution in the ancient days. But today it has irretrievably disintegrated, and the reason for this is not far to seek. A curious logic of traditional inheritance of privileges by the higher castes to the exclusion of the lower led to a struggle between the privileged and the non-privileged castes, finally breaking down the structure of this ancient system.

We have attained freedom from foreign yoke and are today an independent nation. But we have yet to liberate ourselves from sloth, selfishness amounting to antinational

self-interest, greed for excessive personal gain, and lust for power and leadership. These are no small obstacles in the way of India's future reconstruction. These obstacles together with some inevitable economic difficulties are at the root of much of the prevalent corruption and unrest which apparently threaten to jeopardise the peace and prosperity of the nation. Political rivalries and fissiparous tendencies are doing not a little harm to the cause of national regeneration. Even the delimitation of administrative provinces, though innocuous, has assumed a narrow aspect, challenging national unity. The remedy to all these afflictions lies in the hands of the people. Indians should become aware of the responsibilities that rest on them as citizens of an independent republic. Our motto should be: 'service before self' and 'love of the motherland above love of personal gain'. Everyone of us should proudly proclaim: 'I am an Indian; every Indian is my brother. The soil of India is my highest heaven; the good of India is my good.'

Our country's hope lies in her own children. And they need to draw no extraneous inspiration from any State or organization beyond her borders. If they are enchanted by the glamour of the West, and mistaking it for true light, try to imitate a foreign culture or tradition, that will indeed be a sad day for India. India's storehouse of knowledge and experience in every branch of human endeavour for the pursuit of happiness is rich and infinite. It can offer inspiration not only to her own people but also to other nations of the world. But superficial revolutionary processes sometimes appear to offer a kind of solution for the inequities in social and economic spheres. But a mere humanistic or utilitarian ideology with the high-sounding monotone 'the greatest pleasure for the greatest number', cannot and does not offer a real and convincing basis for man to sacrifice his pleasure in the service of his fellowmen. It is distressing to find that some of our best youth, ignorant of the

precious ideas and ideals rooted in the soil of the motherland are rushing in despair to seek self-fulfilment through adulation of alien patterns. Perfect equality in inherent intelligence or power is absurd. What people are struggling for is equality of opportunities and rights for material happiness. As for spiritual illumination, the *Upanishads* assure equal rights to everyone. The majesty of the *Atman*, the heritage of all beings, is manifesting itself in our hitherto downtrodden masses who are regaining their legitimate rights and privileges. They are rejoicing at the birth of New India and eagerly look forward to prosperity and plenty in the *Bharat* of their dreams. It is certain they will submit neither to exploitation by capitalists and imperialists nor to regimentation behind an 'iron curtain'.

The ideal is always far ahead and infinitely greater than what we perceive with our limited senses to be the real or practical. Progress consists in elevating ourselves from lower to higher Truth and trying to reach the ideal by advancing towards perfection as much as possible. Independent India has declared through her emblem her determination to adhere to Truth at all cost. For ultimately Truth alone will prevail. We have to stoutly resist easy temptations to lower or compromise Truth for justifying our imperfections. It calls for ceaseless striving and constant vigilance on the part of the people.

They should be disciplined, and have faith in themselves, in their leaders, and in the future of the motherland. They should close up their ranks, subordinating the individuality complex to national solidarity and welfare. Self-reliance and self-confidence make men invincible. It is they that vitalize and sustain the nation.

The whole world is looking up to India with hope and confidence. It is our essentially spiritual approach to international problems that will bind India closer to other nations rather than a display of material power or alignment into blocs. India cannot choose to remain in isolation. She will have to exert her great influence in order to eliminate all hazards to world peace. And today India's importance is not inconsiderable. We strongly urge the sons and daughters of our motherland, especially the younger generation who will be the valiant citizens of the future, to resolve to make India prosperous, strong, and resplendent, radiating the light of Truth, love, and peace throughout the world. Let them stabilize their character on the bedrock of inherent divinity, and treasure in their heart the eternal wisdom of the Seers of Truth which exhorts them to 'Help and not fight, to assimilation and not destruction, to harmony and peace, not dissension'. 'Awake, Arise, and stop not till the goal is reached'. *Vande Mataram*.

## VEDANTA AND WORLD PEACE

BY SWAMI MADHAVANANDA

The necessity of peaceful conditions for the general well-being of people is a thing that scarcely needs any elaboration. Throughout the world we hear groans of misery and unrest as an aftermath of the last Great War. Though four years have gone by, we do not see any prospect of an early settlement of

peace among the belligerent nations. On the contrary, vast territories are still being ravaged by some form of warfare, and despite the earnest desire of the common man for peace, rumblings of a third world war are assailing our ears. No wonder that thoughtful people of all countries are searching for means to



avert this catastrophe, for it has been fairly brought home to them that even victory in a war of colossal proportions may prove almost as costly as defeat. Particularly the consequences of the next war, if any, are being rightly judged as likely to shatter the whole structure of civilization. One shudders to think of what will be left of it if the two or three powerful nations of the world do not strive to avert such a cataclysm.

It is easy to see that mutual distrust and fear are at the root of the terrible preparations that are going on in the two hostile camps, for purposes of offence and defence against the enemy. Money is flowing out like water, much to the detriment of the constructive activities that every country sadly requires. And no one knows where this bid for arms is going to end. In a meeting, when everyone starts to shout to make himself heard, it is a general uproar that is the result, whereas all could perfectly hear one another if they spoke less loudly. There is also a great danger in the accumulation of vast resources for inflicting injury. One is forced to use these resources by a secret incentive, as it were. This has happened in the last two great wars, and it may happen again. Hence the paramount need of coming to a mutual understanding among the nations so that an appalling loss of life and property and the consequent agony may be saved.

If one turns to the pages of history, it is difficult to see how nations could do otherwise than what they are doing. For self-interest has so far played an all-important part in the affairs of the world, and nations, like individuals, can only judge others by their own standards and attitudes. Though in the last hundred years or so there has been a phenomenal advance of science, it has almost exclusively been in the direction of adding to our creature comforts, but has badly neglected a proportionate culture of the heart. Money and the material power it brings rather than virtue,—prosperity rather than happiness—has been mostly emphasized. The time-honoured

attributes of self-discipline, humility, honesty, and disinterested service have been sadly at a discount. The net result of all this has been that culturally we are still at the level of beasts; only our power for causing destruction has increased a hundred thousand times. The League of Nations failed because it could not live up to the required standard. It is sincerely hoped that the United Nations Organization will not repeat the mistakes of its predecessor but will maintain a uniformly lofty attitude of disinterested help.

Although nationalism is natural, and helpful also to some extent, yet, in the larger interests of humanity there should be a limit to it and it should, on occasions, yield place to internationalism. Nowadays science has so linked the world that no nation can thrive and attain its highest goal by cutting itself off from the rest of the world. For the welfare of all concerned, sooner or later, there is bound to be a World-State in which the potentialities of each nation will receive full scope, but its deficiencies made good by the contributions of the other nations. The Commonwealth of Nations is but the precursor to it. It is only mutual distrust that prevents particular powerful nations from actively working for such a federation. But, if the right approach be made, there is no doubt that the present misgivings will slowly disappear and bring about this desideratum. An honest attempt to understand each other is obviously the first step to this. The leaders of each country should try to grasp the fundamental unity of outlook of the common man and woman in all countries, and, when they have done this, they will find it easy to win over their countrymen to any course of action deemed appropriate for a world unity. Clearly enough this unity cannot be sought merely on the material plane. It is the fundamental spiritual unity of all mankind that must be realized and the economic and political superstructure of the World-State should be raised on that.

Fortunately, India from time immemorial



has developed an attitude towards life that can conveniently be applied to the solution of the world problems. It is Vedanta, the essence of the philosophical teachings of the *Vedas*, which are the oldest religious literature of the world. It is first taught in the *Upanishads*, then popularly presented in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is a part of the *Mahabharata*, and lastly systematized in the *Brahma Sutras*, a remarkable book of aphorisms by Badarayana, which has been ably commented upon by Sankaracharya and others. Vedanta teaches the unity of all existence including mankind, and the essential divinity of man. Thousands of years before the advent of modern civilization, these teachings were preached and practised in India. Buddhism arose as only a reform movement within the bigger fold, and Christianity may be considered to be an offshoot of Vedanta. According to Vedanta, humanity is an organic whole, just like a tree; the well-being of the whole is inextricably bound up with that of its parts—the individual human beings—and injury done to any of its parts affects the whole. It also holds that man is a reflection of God Himself—not just an evolution of the beast, which may apply only to his body. To put it briefly, Vedanta says that the soul is the essential part of man, and that it is a spark of Brahman (the Supreme Principle), nay, fundamentally one with It. The differences that we see between one man and another are all due to the degree of manifestation of the immanent principle. Like the sun hidden under a cloud, the inner Divinity is only veiled by a person's ignorance, and it is quite within his power to remove this ignorance and realize his eternal identity with Brahman. The goal of human life is the realization of this identity. Birth and death are only of his body; he passes on from life to life, gathering new experiences, till at last the ultimate illumination is attained, when he becomes really free. The law of causation operates in the spiritual field also, making man reach higher or lower levels according to his good or

bad work. Thus he is responsible for his present condition, he is the architect of his own fate.

That the above tenets are not mere assumptions is proved time and again by the experiences of saintly persons. Such realizations come to a fortunate man or woman as soon as the conditions are ripe for them. The experiences of great mystics in Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, in different ages and climes, are a glowing testimony to the truths of the Vedantic doctrines. Even in recent times Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) demonstrated by his unique realizations at Dakshineswar, near Calcutta, that the Vedantic truths were verifiable. He corroborated the Vedic truth, 'Existence is One, sages call it variously',—a truth reiterated by Sri Krishna in the *Gita*—by stating that every faith was a path to God. The glorious lives of the saints are a living testimony to the truths they preach. To make a long story short, it is not only possible to apply the Vedantic truths to the solution of the present problems throughout the world, but also imperative to do so. The sooner this is fully understood, and sincere efforts are made to give effect to them, the better for the world. It would be folly to ridicule them in the name of science. These ancient truths are just as authentic as any scientific truths, if not more so. For it is by virtue of such realizations that those whom we call World-Prophets have swayed the hearts of millions and millions of people down the ages. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. India, in particular, has specialized in the production of gigantic spiritual characters, just as the West has done in the production of scientists. It should be remembered that science, being based on observation and induction, has its limitations; and it is only because the highest and deepest realities of existence transcend the bounds of sense-experience and reason that science, even at its most advanced stage, will prove inadequate to grapple with them. That is why problems relating to God,



the soul, and the after-life do not lend themselves to scientific tests. All the same, if the mind is pure and receptive enough the realizations of great mystics will not be found wholly jarring to it.

For bringing about world peace, we can take a long-term and a short-term view. Both can go on simultaneously, and emphasis may be laid on the one or the other according to the circumstances. Under the short-term view, sincere and strenuous efforts should be made to promote understanding at the highest level among the different nations, particularly the big powers. It will not be an easy task for it is extremely difficult to shed for any nation its past prejudices and fears, even if it wants to. Still free and frank discussions about the stark realities facing all cannot but have a salutary moderating influence. Under the force of circumstances many unforeseen things happen, pet ideas are discarded, and the prospect of a general annihilation that another war is sure to cause ought to be a sufficient incentive even to the most recalcitrant power to come to an understanding with other powers for mutual benefit. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has struck the right note in his recent utterances in America, and it is hoped that similar visits of celebrities with a personality and liberal outlook to different countries will be forthcoming. Patience, perseverance, and, above all, honesty of purpose are great factors in bringing success. If the pros and cons of mutual understanding *versus* war are truly brought home no nation will be inclined to take the risk of preferring the war-path. Of course, where good sense persistently fails to show itself, and until such time as it appears, the other parties concerned must go on with their preparations of effective security. This is an evil no doubt, but a necessary evil; for like the hiss of a snake that has secretly pledged itself not to bite, it will ward off thoughtless acts of provocation from any possible aggressor. Gradually, as the beneficent effects of mutual trust and co-operation become apparent, the present armament race

will slacken, and the enormous expenditures on this score may then be diverted to constructive works.

On a long-term view of establishing world peace, a programme of educating the public mind on the right lines should be the chief item. Care should be taken to lay adequate stress on questions affecting the entire humanity, so that nationalism may not grow rampant at the expense of internationalism. It is here that Vedantic thoughts can be of most use, for Vedanta is not just a religion but it is the synthesis of all religions. No mention of its name need be made while disseminating its teachings, although Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, all derive their best teachings directly or indirectly from this source. Only Vedanta gives the why and the wherefore of the universal precepts it inculcates. For instance, it explains why utilitarianism should be followed: because all are one. It may help the modern mind to know this side of the question. What is of importance is to understand that humanity is organically one, of which nations are but parts, and that the well-being of each is intertwined with that of the rest. This sense of underlying unity should be drilled into the minds of every man, woman, and child in every country, from schools and colleges, from the press and platform, through the radio and literature. It will take time, but in the long run such universal ideas are bound to produce in every country a large number of clean, earnest, noble souls who will be as much world citizens as citizens of particular states.

Above all, we must all strive, each in his or her own way, to act up to those ideas. The home should be their first practising ground, then the school or office, field or factory. If sincere attempts be made to practise them from childhood, they may not prove as difficult as they may seem at first sight. For at present we have to fight against many wrong notions, which have been thoughtlessly put into us by our defective education. And everybody knows that it is much more difficult to unlearn



a thing than to learn it at firsthand. Early habits tend to last through life. There was a time when Indian children were placed in hermitages under the loving care of noble sages—who were married men—from whom they learnt a disciplined way of life as well as various arts and sciences. Such hermitages no longer exist. In Western countries also, boys and girls were, and to some extent still are, put in monasteries or convents to acquire education. As far as possible, suitable substitutes for the above institutions should be found so that the young generation in every country may receive proper training not only in secular fields but also in building up their character which is more important. Love instead of hatred, brotherliness instead of jealousy, co-operation instead of self-centredness, manliness instead of cowardice, should be their watchword. They should be taught even from their childhood that there is an infinite potentiality for greatness in them, that they are children of immortal Bliss, that they can attain perfection in this very life if only they will sincerely struggle, that they can be happier by putting forth their qualities of head and heart than by amassing wealth, and that real strength and nobility consist in the ability to sacrifice for others than in minding selfish interests. Parents and guardians can best impress these ideas on the young folk by trying to live up to them with their whole heart, for example is always better than precept. Even if they fail in their object, they will have the satisfaction of having done what was proper.

Vedanta does not countenance weakness in any form. It recognizes the body as the first instrument of spiritual as well as material progress, and as such exhorts us to keep it in a healthy state. But it sets a greater value on the mind, particularly on its moral and spiritual qualities. A mere athlete, according to it, is at best like a prize-animal; it is the saint who is the true fulfilment of man. But till one attains sainthood—and it is no easy matter—one must defend

one's freedom to live, to know, and to be happy. According to Vedanta, man progresses through an attitude of less and less resistance to one of complete non-resistance. It distinguishes between a situation in which a man faced with aggression is not sure of victory, and one in which he is absolutely sure. In the former case, if he yields, it may be expediency, but it is not considered a virtue. But in the latter case, if he refrains from punishing the offender, he is a hero. So individuals and nations should acquire strength, so that mischief-makers may not take an advantage over them; but they should use this strength only for a righteous cause and never for exploitation.

In India, originally four classes were recognized in society according to their aptitudes and functions, viz., the priest, the warrior, the agriculturist-trader, and the labourer. Of these, the priest, as being the custodian of knowledge and culture and the lawgiver was given the highest place. Next came the warrior, who formed the kingly and fighting class and whose function it was to protect the country and society from internal and external enemies. The third was the agriculturist-trader, who produced or procured the necessities and comforts of life and distributed them, and incidentally increased the wealth of the country, while those who had no such special aptitudes formed the last, the labouring class. The hereditary caste was of later origin. Perhaps it was a convenient way of conserving the skill of particular guilds and keeping out indiscriminate competition. By degrees sub-castes appeared and multiplied. But in all this there was, at least at the beginning, an idea of equitable sharing of the good things of life by all the classes, as it happens in a large joint family. With the lapse of millenniums, owing to foreign invasions and various other causes, among which were human selfishness and greed, there came a great inequality of privileges, and all sorts of evils followed. Hereditary caste is going out in India but classes will



remain, here as also elsewhere. For differentiation is a necessary condition of life, and no matter what we may do to abolish classes from society, they are sure to come back in some other form. It is not class, however, but the inequality of privileges, that is really at fault, and Vedanta stresses the removal of the latter as the way to bring about stable and cordial relations among all sections of society.

Vedanta advocates equal opportunities for all. Or rather, it is for helping the weak more than the strong, so that all may ultimately reach the goal. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and no country can prosper if large sections of its people are left in a backward condition. Hence the efforts of all worthwhile people throughout the world should be directed towards the amelioration of such conditions wherever they may exist. The lower a man is in the scale of evolution, the more will he feel his well-being in the body. Accordingly the supply of his material wants is the first necessity. And since humanity is one and indivisible, countries that can afford should come to the aid of those that are in misery, and this should be done from the purest of motives—from a sense of the kinship of all mankind.

According to Indian philosophy, the world is the product of a lost equilibrium—the sameness of Brahman—and all the upheavals that we see in it are due to the urge to regain this lost equilibrium. So struggles are natural and are not in themselves bad. They are but symptoms of life which is the opposite of inertia. Only they have to be directed in proper channels. A person imbued with the idea of the unity of all existence cannot but feel for his suffering brethren even in distant lands. In this spontaneous desire to help he will feel an expansion of his self. His heart will tell him that he is doing the right thing, although he may have to make personal sacrifices, materially speaking. After all, it is the heart that opens the door to inspiration. The intellect is all right as far as it

goes, but there are domains which are beyond the reach of reason, and virtues like faith, hope, and love, which we associate with the heart, have their free play there. If the leaders of thought in different countries move in the direction prompted by their heart, there will be less chance for trouble-makers to make capital out of the glaring inconsistencies that are in the world.

Prophets like Buddha and Christ have repeatedly exhorted us to expand our personality so as to include others beyond our particular families. We think we are wiser and want to regard this earthly life as the be-all and end-all of existence. But when we come to the end of our term, too often we have to quit the world with vain regrets and remorse. Like adolescent children, we consider it manly to pooh-pooh ideas of God and the hereafter, of brotherhood and love, whereas the spiritual giants of all ages and countries have made no secret of their faith in them. Let us be bold enough to face the truth. If religion has often bred fanaticisms and superstitions, science has no less done so. Only a person who has tried sincerely and patiently his utmost to verify the eternal truths of religion and found them wanting can say that they are all concoctions of interested persons. But most often we only betray our ignorance when, even before giving those truths a trial, we declare them as fictitious. But it is now incumbent on us to re-examine our attitudes towards life and co-ordinate both reason and sentiment. Unless we realize even intellectually, that nations as human beings stand or fall together, and sincerely unite to usher in a better state of things in the world, there is, as everyone can see, inevitable disaster ahead of us. Our very scientific discoveries will, like Frankenstein's monster, kill us before we are aware of what is happening.

Swami Vivekananda, following in the footsteps of his great Master Sri Ramakrishna, has preached the gospel of practical Vedanta as the one thing necessary for the present age.



Although a true patriot, he was, in every sense of the term, a universal man. His vision of a regenerated world was based upon his realizations of the highest truth. His greatness lay in this that he scorned the life of a recluse, and literally burnt himself out in his attempt to propagate the dynamic truths of Vedanta both in the West and in India. He saw in every man and woman the embodiment of the Lord, and desired all to achieve their highest in the least possible time. He knew that each person carried within himself the resultant of his infinite past, and wanted all to develop according to their particular tendencies and capacities. He was no believer in sin; he preached the gospel of strength. According to him, man travels not from error to truth but from lower truth to higher truth. If man has come to his present plight as a result of his past actions, he can also raise himself to the highest status through personal exertions. He was not afraid of mentioning God and religion. Rather he had realized their wonderful potency for uplifting man, and so advised us to resort to them under all circumstances. Of course his God was both personal and impersonal and the religion he preached was all-inclusive and dynamic; there was nothing narrow or enervating in it. Seeing the same God manifest in all beings, he

preached 'Help and not fight, assimilation and not destruction, harmony and peace and not dissension'. He did not simply preach Vedanta; like all true knowers of it, he was Vedanta personified. In his writings and utterances one finds the quintessence of the religious literature of all countries. His one desire was to help people to help themselves. He exhorted them to practise what they professed. The qualifications he set for patriots and reformers were that they should not only have a thorough grasp of the remedy for the situation they wanted to rectify, but also a burning sympathy for those they wished to help, as well as infinite patience and determination. He prophesied that India would not only be great but would also eclipse her former glories. Once more she was to be the torch-bearer to the ailing nations of the world. And he longed to see all sons and daughters of Mother India as worthy representatives of her ancient culture, so that they might themselves attain both prosperity and liberation and help others to do the same. India is already politically free. It is now up to her children to rise above all pettiness, and acquit themselves in a way that the world may have in their dedicated lives an object lesson to copy.

## FIFTY YEARS OF ADVAITA ASHRAMA, MAYAVATI ( 1899—1949 )

The Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, established in the year 1899 under the inspiration and guidance of Swami Vivekananda, and well known to the readers of its numerous publications, foremost of which is the *Prabuddha Bharata*, has completed fifty years of its glorious existence. Situated on an elevated knoll, 6,800 feet above sea-level, in a secluded and thickly wooded part of the interior of the

Himalayas (Almora District of the United Provinces), the Ashrama commands an exquisite view of the Himalayan ranges of perpetual snow lying directly to the north. On this happy occasion of the 'Golden Jubilee' of the Advaita Ashrama, it is meet to cast a backward glance at its semi-centennial striving and achievement in the field of the spiritual regeneration of humanity. It is an occa-



sion to recall the memorable events relating to the origin and growth of the Ashrama, and to gratefully remember its illustrious founders and their worthy successors whose strenuous efforts have made the Ashrama what it is today.

It was a cherished desire of Swami Vivekananda to found a monastery amidst the profound grandeur and beauty of the Himalayas to serve as an ideal retreat for the realization and dissemination of the eternal Truth—the Oneness of all beings, free from all compromises, and also for the training of young monastic workers, especially Westerners, spiritually and intellectually, so that they may be fit to spread the message of Vedanta ‘elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind’. The immortal credit of founding such a monastery, thus fulfilling the Swami’s great desire, belongs to a devoted English couple, Mr J. H. Sevier and Mrs Charlotte Elizabeth Sevier, both ardent disciples of the Swami. They had met Swami Vivekananda on his second visit to England in the spring of 1896, having heard of him from a mutual friend. Both of them had been earnest seekers of Truth, but were disappointed with the prevalent forms of creeds and dogmas. However, coming into personal contact with the Swami and listening to his masterly exposition of Advaita Vedanta which appealed to them most, they became intimately drawn towards him. Both of them were convinced that they had discovered in the Swami the ideal person and the expression of the highest Truth which they had long been seeking. The very first time they met the Swami in private conversation, the latter addressed Mrs Sevier as ‘Mother’ and asked her, ‘Would you not like to come to India? I will give you of my best realizations.’ Since then they not only accepted the Swami as their *guru* but also looked upon him as their son, for they were considerably older than he. The Swami too, in his turn, established a sweet relationship with Mr and Mrs Sevier,

freely confided to them his many plans and problems, and considered them two of the fairest flowers of his work in England.

Mr and Mrs Sevier had made up their mind to follow Swami Vivekananda to India and to enthusiastically help him in the plan of his future work there. They were prepared to renounce their possessions and dedicate themselves to the furtherance of the Swami’s mission, and to the practical realization of those of his teachings which they had made their own. The Swami too, from the beginning, chose them as his future helpers and felt he could always count on them in any emergency. He regarded Mrs Sevier as a ‘jewel of a lady, so good, so kind’, and said the Seviere did not hate the Indians and did not come to patronize them. When the Swami expressed his desire to leave for India to work out his plans, Mr. and Mrs Sevier quickly settled their domestic affairs, disposed of their belongings, and, like faithful disciples, held themselves in readiness to do whatever the Swami wished.

Swami Vivekananda had an intense love of the mountains and was greatly exhilarated at the sight of charming snow peaks. To him the mighty Himalayas, the Father of mountains, was an embodiment of renunciation and a supreme object of veneration. He very much desired to found a monastery in the Himalayas, those mute giants with endless holy associations down the ages, ‘where thought will be clearer in sight of the snows and nerves more settled than in the heat of the plains’. In the summer of 1896, the Swami accompanied by Mr and Mrs Sevier, undertook a tour of the Continent. Eager to wander on the mountain paths and cross the glaciers of the Alps, the Swami made a long sojourn in the innermost recesses of the Swiss mountains. At this time he wrote, ‘The mountains and snow have a beautifully quieting influence on me’. The Alps and its hill-folk reminded the Swami of his own beloved Himalayas. It was sometime in August 1896, while wandering in the Alps,



'the Himalayas of Europe', that Mr and Mrs Sevier heard, for the first time, of the Swami's longing to establish a monastery in the heart of the Himalayas. He said: 'O, I long for such a monastery where I can retire from the labours of my life and pass the rest of my days in meditation. It will be a centre for work and meditation, where my Indian and Western disciples can live together and then I shall train as workers, the former to go out as preachers of Vedanta to the West, and the latter will devote their lives to the good of India.' Hearing this, the Seviers intuitively felt it as a prophetic command from their beloved *guru* and readily consented to fulfil the Swami's great desire, saying, 'How nice it would be, Swamiji, if this could be done. We must have such a monastery.' The Swami's intention, though a passing remark, sank deep into the hearts of these two disciples who, through their practical help and whole-souled co-operation finally carried out the intention.

Though Swami Vivekananda had planted the seed of the inspiration which the Seviers devoutly nursed into the Advaita Ashrama of his choice, the Swami himself took keen interest in working out the details concerning his Himalayan Centre. In his letter to Lala Badri Sah of Almora, from Switzerland, as early as 5th August 1896, the Swami wrote, 'I want to start a Math in Almora or near Almora rather. ... Do you know of any suitable place near Almora where I can build my monastery with garden etc.? I would rather like to have a hill all to myself.' Writing to the same from London on 21st November 1896, the Swami said: 'Mr and Mrs Sevier are going to settle in Almora. They are my disciples you know, and they are going to build the Math for me in the Himalayas. It was for that reason I asked you to look for some suitable site. We want a whole hill, with a view of the snow range all to ourselves.' Writing to Alasinga Perumal of Madras at about the same time (20 November) from London, the Swami said: 'Mr Sevier and his

wife are going to start a place near Almora in the Himalayas which I intend to make my Himalayan Centre, as well as a place for Western disciples to live as Brahmacharins and Sannyasins.' In a letter to the Hale sisters (London, 28 November 1896) the Swami wrote that he was going to start a centre in the Himalayas and that Mr and Mrs Sevier were going to India with him to work and spend their own money on it, and added, 'The Himalayan one will be an entire hill about 7,000 feet high—cool in summer and cold in winter. Capt. and Mrs Sevier will live there, and it will be the centre for European workers, as I do not want to kill them by forcing on them the Indian mode of living and the fiery plains.'

In December 1896 Swami Vivekananda left London for India. Mr and Mrs Sevier accompanied the Swami and arrived in Colombo in January 1897. As is well known, Swami Vivekananda travelled from Colombo to Almora, receiving enthusiastic ovation at many important towns and delivering his famous Indian lectures. The Seviers accompanied the Swami in most of these trips, though they occasionally separated from him for short periods. As the summer heat of the plains was unbearable, they lived mostly in some hill-station or other, and the Swami himself went up and stayed with them whenever he got an opportunity in the course of his travels. During this period the Swami stayed at Almora for about two months and a half. On the Swami's arrival in Almora sometime in May 1897, an Address of Welcome in Hindi was presented to him by the local citizens. Therein, referring to the Swami's plan of founding the Advaita Ashrama in the Himalayas, it was mentioned: 'We have heard with great pleasure that you intend establishing a Math (monastery) here, and we sincerely pray that your efforts in this direction may be crowned with success. The great Shankaracharya also, after his spiritual conquest established a Math at Badarikashrama in the Himalayas for the protection



of the ancient religion. Similarly, if your desire is also fulfilled, India will be greatly benefited. By the establishment of the Math, we Kumaonees, will derive special spiritual advantages, and we shall not see the ancient religion gradually disappearing from our midst.' In his reply to the Address, Swami Vivekananda observed: 'Friends, you have been very kind to allude to an idea of mine, which is to start a centre in the Himalayas, and perhaps I have sufficiently explained why it should be so. why above all others, this is the spot which I want to select as one of the great centres to teach this universal religion. These mountains are associated with the best memories of our race; if these Himalayas are taken away from the history of religious India, there will be very little left behind. Here, therefore, must be one of those centres, not merely of activity, but more of calmness, of meditation, and of peace, and I hope some day to realize it.'

As the months passed by and the year 1897 was drawing to a close, the Swami continued his successful tour of important places in North Western and Central India including short visits to Jammu and Kashmir. Though during this period Mr and Mrs Sevier moved from place to place, sometimes travelling with the Swami and sometimes staying in hill-stations, their search for a suitable spot for the proposed Himalayan centre continued with unabated fervour. In this connection the Swami wrote to Swami Brahmananda on 10th October 1897 from Murree (near Rawalpindi) saying: 'Captain Sevier says he is very anxious for a site. He wishes to have a spot near Mussoorie or in some other central place, as soon as possible. . . . The thing is that we do not want a place which is too cold, at the same time it must not be too hot. . . . there must be a supply of water at the place throughout the year, for drinking purposes and for everyday use.' The Swami too was interested to purchase a tract of land in the hills whereon to establish an institution for the training of *brahmachārins*. After completing his ex-

tensive preaching tour, Swami Vivekananda returned to Calcutta about the middle of January 1898. Mr and Mrs Sevier ended their travels in Northern India in April 1898 and took up residence at Almora, awaiting the Swami's arrival there.

It was about this time (March 1898) that Swami Swarupananda, an efficient and qualified disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who was destined later to be one of the founders and the first President of the Advaita Ashrama, came under the Swami's guidance. Consumed with a burning desire for renunciation and unselfish service to humanity, Swami Swarupananda was deeply impressed by the powerful personality and sublime ideas of Swami Vivekananda. While on a casual visit to the Math, after a long conversation with the Swami, he decided then and there to renounce the world and join the Ramakrishna Order of monks. Hearing this Swami Vivekananda exclaimed with joy, 'We have made an acquisition today!' And much later the Swami observed, 'To get an efficient worker like Swarupananda is of greater gain than receiving thousands of gold coins'. Swami Vivekananda had great confidence in Swami Swarupananda. As later events have amply proved, the former charged his disciple with weighty responsibilities and the latter substantiated his *guru's* confidence in him by ably discharging those responsibilities. When Swami Vivekananda went to Almora again in May 1898, he took Swami Swarupananda with him, and they stayed with Mr and Mrs Sevier who had been residing there. Towards the end of that month the Swami himself left Almora on a short visit to a place further away in connection with a possible purchase of an estate for his Himalayan monastery. This, however, did not materialize. The Seviars were no doubt disappointed as they were exceedingly eager to start some work on the lines already suggested to them by the Swami. And before long, by a strange coincidence, an opportunity presented itself before them. While in Almora Swami Viveka-



nanda came to know from his disciples at Madras that the monthly magazine *Prabuddha Bharata*, started by them under his inspiration and guidance, had just ceased publication on the sudden death of its Editor. The Swami had a special affection for the *Prabuddha Bharata*, and before he left Almora for Kashmir about the middle of June 1898, he asked Swami Swarupananda and Mr and Mrs Sevier to revive the defunct magazine and make all arrangements for printing and publishing the same from Almora.

Swami Vivekananda was glad to find that a nucleus of his Himalayan centre was thus formed at Almora. Mr and Mrs Sevier together with Swami Swarupananda devoted themselves heart and soul to the great task entrusted to them by their *guru*. But the Seviers soon felt that the town of Almora could not satisfactorily serve the purpose of the secluded monastery they wanted to establish. Leaving the matter in the hands of his disciples at Almora, the Swami returned to Calcutta from Kashmir in October 1898. Mr and Mrs Sevier earnestly carried on their search for a select spot in the Kumaon hills. After a diligent search in the company of Swami Swarupananda they came upon the beautiful estate of Mayavati. Finding at last a retreat after their heart, their choice at once fell upon it. The whole property was purchased and arrangements were made to shift the office of the *Prabuddha Bharata* with Press and staff, from Almora to Mayavati. Thus was founded the Advaita Ashrama, at Mayavati, on the 19th March 1899, the birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. The joy of Mr and Mrs Sevier knew no bounds. At last their master's cherished desire had been fulfilled. They had the satisfaction of seeing the Himalayan monastery firmly established.

Swami Vivekananda was very happy at this noteworthy event and gave his heartfelt blessings to the Advaita Ashrama. In his letter addressed to the joint founders of the Ashrama the Swami clearly set forth the ideal

and principles to which the Advaita Ashrama should adhere, in the following lines which he intended to be embodied in its prospectus:

'In Whom is the Universe, Who is in the Universe, Who is the Universe; in Whom is the Soul, Who is in the Soul, Who is the Soul of man; knowing Him—and therefore the Universe—as our Self, alone extinguishes all fear, brings an end to misery and leads to Infinite Freedom. Wherever there has been expansion in love or progress in well-being, of individuals or numbers, it has been through the perception, realisation and the practicalisation of the Eternal Truth—*The Oneness of All Beings*. "Dependence is misery. Independence is happiness." The Advaita is the only system which gives unto man complete possession of himself, takes off all dependence and its associated superstitions, thus making us brave to suffer, brave to do, and in the long run attain to Absolute Freedom.

'Hitherto it has not been possible to preach this Noble Truth entirely free from the settings of dualistic weakness; this alone, we are convinced, explains why it has not been more operative and useful to mankind at large.

'To give this *One Truth* a freer and fuller scope in elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind, we start this Advaita Ashrama on the Himalayan heights, the land of its first expiration.

'Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught and practised nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; and though in entire sympathy with all other systems, this Ashrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone.'

Devotion and determination had encouraged the Seviers and Swami Swarupananda to brave all initial difficulties and push on with zeal in order to set the Ashrama in efficient working order. Swami Swarupananda, a monk of remarkable brilliance, had much uphill work to do as he was the head (First President) of the Advaita Ashrama and also the Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*. Mr and Mrs Sevier



though advanced in age, cheerfully bore the hardships and did their best to successfully conduct the work of the Ashrama. In those early days Mayavati was encircled by deep forests infested with wild animals and had no good roads connecting the near-by towns or villages. Water had to be fetched from a good distance, and the two standing buildings were dilapidated badly, needing renovation. Looking back at what it was in the beginning, the Ashrama's growth has not been inconsiderable during the past half a century. From this distance of time one can hardly imagine the various disadvantages and privations that the pioneers, a small number of monks under the leadership of Swami Swarupananda, had to encounter. Swami Vivekananda was not unaware of the progress of the work of the Mayavati Ashrama, and before he left on his second visit to the West in June 1899 arranged to send four of his disciples to assist Swami Swarupananda. One of them was Swami Virajananda, at present President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

Mr and Mrs Sevier had settled down virtually as *sanyasins*, leading a life of plain living and high thinking. By their noble qualities of head and heart both of them had endeared themselves to all. The Ashrama members as well as the people from neighbouring villages used to call Mr Sevier as 'Pitaji' and Mrs Sevier as 'Mother', looking upon her as *devi* (goddess). The activity of the Advaita Ashrama consisted mainly in conducting the magazine *Prabuddha Bharata* whose scope and influence was enormously enhanced by its scholarly Editor, Swami Swarupananda. The Seviers received the affectionate attention and unstinted co-operation of all the monks in the monastery. It was a great loss to the Ashrama when Mr Sevier passed away at Mayavati on 28th October 1900. At that time Swami Vivekananda was touring in Europe where he had arrived after re-visiting England and America. There the Swami had intuitively perceived the end of this faithful and beloved disciple of his. On arrival in

Egypt, the Swami cut short his tour and unexpectedly returned to India in early December 1900. Reaching Calcutta he had confirmation of his premonition as regards the death of Mr Sevier.

Swami Vivekananda was eager to pay a visit to the Mayavati Ashrama as early as possible. He was deeply moved at the death of Mr Sevier which he called martyrdom of a heroic type in the cause of the Hindus. Moreover the Swami was anxious to meet Mrs Sevier and console her. Just before leaving Calcutta for Mayavati, the Swami wrote to Miss MacLeod: 'Dear Mr Sevier passed away before I could arrive. He was cremated on the banks of the river that flows by his Ashrama *a la* Hindu, covered with garlands, the Brahmins carrying the body and boys chanting the Vedas. The cause has already two martyrs.<sup>1</sup> ... Dear Mrs Sevier is calm. I am going up tomorrow to pay her a visit. Lord bless her, dear brave soul! I am calm and strong. Occasion never found me low yet; Mother will not make me now depressed.' On one of the last days of the year 1900 the Swami started for Mayavati.

A hallowed event of great significance in the life of the Advaita Ashrama was Swami Vivekananda's visit to Mayavati. He reached there on the 3rd January 1901 and stayed for fifteen days. That winter happened to be unusually severe and most of the days during the Swami's stay, Mayavati was snow-bound. To the members of the Advaita Ashrama, especially to its founders Mrs Sevier and Swami Swarupananda, these happy days in the company of Swami Vivekananda were of blessed memory. The Swami gave detailed instructions to Swami Swarupananda on the ideas and work that he wished to be carried out by the Ashrama, and had long conversations with Mrs Sevier, free as a child with its mother. His inspiring talks to the group of monks that would gather round him every day emitted the divine fervour that animated

<sup>1</sup> The other was Mr J. J. Goodwin



his heart and were never to be forgotten. As the Swami's birth anniversary fell on the 13th January the members of the Mayavati Ashrama had the proud privilege of celebrating his birthday with the Swami himself in their midst. In his letter to Mr E. T. Sturdy, dated 15th January 1901, written 'At Mayavati, Himalayas,' the Swami said, 'Capt. Sevier passed away about three months ago. They have made a fine place here in the mountains and Mrs Sevier means to keep it up. I am on a visit to her. ...'

The Swami was very much pleased with the site and charming snowview scenery of Dharamghar, the highest hill within the Mayavati boundaries, and expressed a desire to have a hermitage erected on that site so that he could meditate there in undisturbed solitude. The lake-side walk of Mayavati had a special charm for the Swami, and with child-like simplicity he told Mrs Sevier and others, 'In the latter part of my life I shall give up all public work and would like to pass my days in writing books and whistling merry tunes by this lake, like a free child!' The Swami had cherished a great desire to retire to a solitary but charming retreat, somewhere in the Himalayas after completing his work. Addressing the citizens of Almora, he had expressed his worshipful admiration for the Himalayas and said, 'This is the land which, since my very childhood, I have been dreaming of passing my life in, and ... it is the hope of my life to end my days somewhere in this Father of mountains where *rishis* lived, where philosophy was born. ... I sincerely pray and hope and almost believe that my last days will be spent here, of all places on earth.' Swami Vivekananda left Mayavati for Calcutta on 18th January 1901. On his way down to the plains, the first halt was at Champawat, about 4½ miles from Mayavati. In the course of his talk that night, at the Champawat Dak Bungalow, the Swami was extraordinarily inspired with fervour concerning Sri Ramakrishna and repeatedly exclaimed, 'And above all, above all, I am *loyal*! I am

loyal to the core of my heart!'

When Swami Vivekananda passed away on 4th July 1902, the members of the Advaita Ashrama were deprived of the ever inspiring guidance they were receiving from the galvanizer. They had hoped that under their *guru's* personal care and direction they would endeavour to make the Himalayan Ashrama into the ideal institution its originator wanted it to be. Mrs Sevier, who had returned after a visit to England in 1901, was deeply grief stricken. In 1903 Mrs Sevier executed a trust deed for the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, laying down the legal formalities necessary for the administration of the Ashrama and the constitution of its management, as far as possible in accordance with the plans and ideas of Swami Vivekananda. The Advaita Ashrama sustained a great loss when its Founder-President Swami Swarupananda passed away in 1906. Mrs Sevier had patiently to bear another tremendous shock. Thus the Mayavati Ashrama, hardly seven years old, had lost three of its founders in quick succession.

Swami Virajananda, the present President of the Order, became the second President of the Advaita Ashrama in 1906. Mrs Sevier, who paid another visit to England in 1908, continued to live at Mayavati and was looked after with devoted care and affection by Swami Virajananda. Though the Press at Mayavati continued to print the magazine *Prabuddha Bharata* and some smaller publications of the Ashrama, arrangements were made about this time for improved printing of some bigger books in Calcutta. Swami Prajnananda succeeded Swami Virajananda in 1914 as the third President of the Advaita Ashrama. Mrs Sevier finally left for England in March 1916, from where she kept herself in close touch with the Advaita Ashrama so dear to her. In April 1918 Swami Prajnananda passed away, and Swami Madhavananda became the fourth President of the Advaita Ashrama. During his period a beginning was made to establish a Branch centre in Calcutta to house and



better conduct the publication department of the Ashrama. Finally, in 1924, the Press at Mayavati was discontinued and the entire publication work was conducted from the Advaita Ashrama (Publication Department), Calcutta. Swami Vireswarananda succeeded Swami Madhavananda in 1927 as the fifth President of the Mayavati Ashrama. Many new and original publications were brought out by the Ashrama, and its publication centre at Calcutta assumed greater importance. But the passing away of old Mother Sevier in London, on the 20th October 1930, was a great loss to the Advaita Ashrama, and all those who were acquainted with her felt truly orphaned. She was not only the prominent foundress but also the very soul of the Ashrama. When Swami Vireswarananda relinquished office in 1937 Swami Pavitrananda was elected the sixth President of the Advaita Ashrama. The number of books published by the Ashrama reached a considerable figure and the publication department at Calcutta, which had grown into a big institution, was put on a secure basis in a permanent building of its own. At Mayavati the Charitable Hospital was shifted to its newly constructed building affording more accommodation and greater facilities for patients. Towards the end of June 1948 Swami Pavitrananda was succeeded by Swami Yogeshwarananda, the present President of the Ashrama.

The Advaita Ashrama is a unique and representative Math centre belonging to the Ramakrishna Order, yet distinct from the other institutions of the Order. There is no *external* worship of images, pictures, or symbols of God. No religious *ceremony* or *ritual* is performed except the *vinaya homa* (the ceremony for the vow of renunciation of the world). The Ashrama is an ideal retreat for spiritual aspirants who giving up all private concerns desire to devote themselves exclusively to meditation and study. This centre, situated amidst the Himalayan salubrious climate and scenic beauty provides opportunities to its inmates for the practice of

self-improvement by following a daily routine of meditation, *japa*, private as well as class study, and other occupations of a manual or intellectual nature in furtherance of the objects of the Ashrama. The Ashrama believes that such a regulated and disciplined life, led in an atmosphere of peace and holiness, serves to help the aspirants to develop a well balanced character and an introspective habit, and enables them to march steadily on the path of spirituality for the realization of the Highest Truth. Having abiding faith in the elevating power of every religion truly practised, the Advaita Ashrama allows its members full liberty to choose and follow their own ways of *upasana* inasmuch as all spiritual approaches finally lead to the *one ultimate Truth*—the *sat-chit-ananda* of Advaita Vedanta—which forms the basic principle of its thought and action.

This Ashrama is managed by a Body of Trustees, with a President who is elected every three years. It keeps in constant touch with enlightened persons and institutions the world over that are in sympathy with its aims and objects. This Himalayan centre has been a cosmopolitan meeting place where have lived together, in spiritual fraternity, monastic members as well as distinguished guests and visitors, both Indian and Western. Mention may be made of some of them : Swami Sivananda who later became the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission ; Swami Turiyananda who had started the Shanti Ashrama in America and who stayed in Mayavati for many months editing the first manuscripts of the volumes of the 'Life' and 'Works' of Swami Vivekananda ; Swami Saradananda who was the first General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission ; all the three Swamis were the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and brother-monks of Swami Vivekananda ; the patriots Sri Ananda Mohan Bose and Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das ; Sister Nivedita and Sister Christine ; Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose ; Prof. Eliot Clark of Virginia University ; and the



celebrated artist Sri Nandalal Bose of Santiniketan. 'Mayavati is a happy link between the East and the West, between the past and the present, between contemplation and action.

The activities of the Advaita Ashrama are broadly twofold : Preaching and Philanthropic Work.

The Ashrama has taken active part in spreading the doctrines of Vedanta and the universal message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in India and abroad. It has sent out those of its members who are trained as preachers either to undertake lecture tours and hold religious classes or discourses in India, or to conduct Vedanta work in foreign countries. Many ex-members of the Ashrama have distinguished themselves in various capacities, occupying important positions in the Order or conducting the work of the Order as heads of branch centres in India and outside, especially in the United States. The Ashrama has published quite a volume of religious literature, both in English and in Sanskrit, which has been of inestimable value to seekers of Truth all the world over. Among its important publications, *Prabuddha Bharata*, now in its fifty-fifth year, is the oldest English monthly journal in India and occupies a unique place in Indian journalism. Some of the English books are : *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in seven volumes, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, *Life of Swami Vivekananda* in two volumes by His Eastern and Western Disciples, *Life of Ramakrishna* and *Life of Vivekananda and The Universal Gospel*—both by M. Romain Rolland, *Spiritual Talks* by the First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, *The Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna*, *Common Sense About Yoga*, *Paramartha Prasanga* by Swami Virajananda, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and *Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda* by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Some of the Sanskrit books (with English translations) are : A complete translation of *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* with Sankarā-

charya's commentary, *Brahma Sutras*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Bhasha Pariccheda with Siddhanta-muktavali*, *Ashtavakra Samhita*, *Vivekachudamani*, and *Altar Flowers* (Sanskrit hymns).

The Advaita Ashrama has not ignored the practical side of religion. It has kept in touch with life and society through philanthropic work carried on in the Mayavati Charitable Hospital. In the latter part of 1899, a few month after the Ashrama was founded, Swami Swarupananda went to Kishengarh in Rajputana to organize relief in the famine-stricken areas of that State. The Ashrama took active part in helping to start the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama at Kankhal (Hardwar) in 1901, and in the Dharmasala Earthquake Relief Work in 1905. For a short time the Swamis of the Ashrama conducted a small school for boys from the surrounding villages. When the Ashrama was founded Mrs Sevier kept a small chest of some common medicines which she would prescribe also for the servants of the Ashrama and their poor relatives at home. As the demand for medical aid increased, Mrs Sevier helped to start the Mayavati Charitable Dispensary in November 1903, with a big almirah of medicines. The dispensary became more popular and many patients from far-off villages came for treatment. This necessitated the construction of a small building for the Dispensary with six beds for indoor patients in 1914. To meet the ever increasing demand, further improvement and extension were effected in the years 1937 and 1938 when a new big building was built for the Mayavati Charitable Hospital, provided with a large stock of medicines, up-to-date surgical equipments, and a clinical laboratory. The qualified medical staff endeavours to maintain a high standard of efficiency and render service in a spirit of worship to all irrespective of caste or creed.

Thus runs the life-story, in brief, of this 'Himalayan powerhouse of culture'—Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati—since its inception five decades ago. The Ashrama has constantly



striven to maintain intact its unique ideal and principles set forth by Swami Vivekananda himself. True to the design of its great architect this Ashrama has stood uncompromisingly for 'Advaita and Advaita alone', while actively engaged in stimulating the self-consciousness of the nation to the sense of its glorious cultural and spiritual inheritance. The Advaita Ashrama looks back with satisfaction upon its past achievements and looks forward with confidence to be better able to serve the cause of Truth Eternal and thereby contribute to the progress and well-being of individuals in particular and the mass of mankind in general. The future plan of the Ashrama is to train a larger number of preachers, provided sufficient funds and suitable persons are forthcoming—preachers who will carry the universal message of Vedanta throughout the world and who, by their own example and character, will show the way to meet successfully the conflicting forces of the modern world.

Most people with their devoted leanings towards dualistic forms of worship and rituals may yet find the *raison d'être* of an Advaita Ashrama dedicated to the principles and practice of Advaita, pure and simple—the Oneness of all beings. Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, gave an assuring reply to a

member of the Advaita Ashrama, saying, 'Sri Gurudeva (meaning Sri Ramakrishna) was all Advaita and preached Advaita. Why, therefore, should you not follow the Advaita? All his disciples are Advaitins.' And the following observations of Swami Vivekananda on the subject, in the course of a lecture delivered in America in April 1900, make the point satisfactorily intelligible:

'Everyone says that the highest, the pure truth, cannot be realized all at once by all, that men have to be led to it gradually through worship, prayer, and other kinds of prevalent religious practices. ... In India I work both ways.

'In Calcutta, I have all these images and temples—in the name of God and the Vedas, of the Bible, and Christ and Buddha. Let it be tried. But on the heights of the Himalayas I have a place where I am determined nothing shall enter except pure truth. ... The purpose is to train seekers of truth and to bring up children without fear and without superstition. ... They shall learn from the start to stand upon their own feet. They shall learn from their childhood that God is the Spirit and should be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Everyone must be looked upon as Spirit. That is the ideal.'

## REMINISCENCES OF MAYAVATI ASHRAMA

BY SWAMI PAVITRANANDA

As a student I went once to Belur Math. There was a Swami of the Order who acted as my guide. As I was going upstairs to see the room of Swami Vivekananda in the main building of the monastery, on the wall above the staircase was a magnificent picture of the Mayavati Ashrama. It arrested my attention, and I stopped to see the picture more carefully. At this the Swami, my com-

panion, remarked, 'What are you looking at so intently? Well, there will come a time when you will go there and live as one of the members of the Ashrama.' The very thought that I might one day go to Mayavati and stay there, filled me with a thrill.

While we were students, we would speak and hear of Mayavati with awe and reverence. Mayavati was the Himalayan Ashrama



founded by Swami Vivekananda. It was in the abode of Shiva. Monks lived there to develop their spiritual life in that great solitude. All these ideas were associated with the Ashrama at Mayavati to our young, imaginative minds. And the *Prabuddha Bharata*, though at that time it was published on none too good paper and its printing was not very admirable—with how much eagerness would we read it! Every word that was printed in it had a special message, and the magazine belonged to a class by itself—far above the level of any other periodical in the country! Such were our ideas—may be, the result of our exuberant imagination.

Afterwards it was the will of the Lord that I should actually join the monastic Order and one day find myself at Mayavati. In the beginning of my monastic life, when I was at Belur Math, I had a severe illness and Swami Shivananda, the then President of the Order, once told me, 'Don't worry, I will send you to some good place'. Afterwards he actually did, and I had the supreme privilege and opportunity to work as a member of the Mayavati Ashrama for about twenty-four years. Advisedly I say—it was a 'supreme privilege', for what a great dream Swami Vivekananda cherished with respect to Mayavati! It was to be a place where his Eastern and Western disciples were to meet and perform spiritual practices in order to realize their Oneness with the Ultimate Reality. It was to be a centre from where to emanate and spread spiritual thoughts to act as the healing balm to the afflicted humanity.

'Wherever there has been expansion in love or progress in well-being, of individuals or numbers, it has been through the perception, realization, and the practicalization of the Eternal Truth—the *Oneness of All Beings*. ... Hitherto it has not been possible to preach this Noble Truth entirely free from the settings of dualistic weakness; this alone, we are convinced, explains why it has not been

more operative and useful to mankind at large.

'To give this One Truth a freer and fuller scope in elevating the lives of individuals and leavening the mass of mankind, we start this Advaita Ashrama on the Himalayan heights, the land of its first expiration.'

—Thus wrote Swami Vivekananda in March 1899, when the Ashrama was first started, with regard to its aims and objects. And to be chosen as workers—pigmies like us—in order to carry out that mighty scheme!—was not that a supreme privilege? How many times have we not thought, as we looked at the Ashrama, 'What a great idea of Swami Vivekananda this Ashrama represents! What a great hope the Swami cherished with regard to this institution!' And as one thought of this, one felt almost overwhelmed with the responsibility, and prayed that one might become a fit instrument—however unworthy by oneself one might be—for the fulfilment of the dream of the Swami.

The Ashrama was started by Captain and Mrs Sevier, the two English disciples of Swami Vivekananda, with Swami Swarupananda as its first President. Captain and Mrs Sevier met Swami Vivekananda first in London where he was lecturing. They were fed up with the Church-religion and were athirst for something more inspiring. As they listened to the Swami's lecture, the Captain said to his wife, 'What he says seems to ring true'. Mrs Sevier also agreed with the opinion of her husband. And it took them no time to give up their all and follow the Master. Within an incredibly short time they sold whatever they had and came to India to work for the cause of the Swami. Swami Vivekananda also was very much impressed with the devotion of the Sevier couple. He addressed Mrs Sevier as 'Mother' at the very first time he met her, and after that he was both a son and a Teacher to her. Imagine their strength and courage! In the nineties of the last century, when the Britishers were in the



heyday of their power in India, when Englishmen thought it beneath their dignity to mix with Indians, this English couple flung away their so-called prestige and dignity, openly faced the contempt of their friends, relations, and society and came to India as devoted followers of a heathen, and settled down in the far away region of the Himalayas at Mayavati. At that time Mayavati was much more inaccessible than today, and the amenities of life were much fewer. But nothing daunted, these two English disciples settled there—at a place where there was no society, no friends, no medical help, where the bare necessities of life were very hard to obtain. When Captain Sevier died at Mayavati, the medical help came from a distance of thirty miles, and the man who administered it was not a qualified doctor either—he was only a compounder. At that time Swami Vivekananda was in Egypt, travelling with a party of Western disciples. There he had some premonition of a coming calamity, and all of a sudden he gave up the plan of further travel and started for India by the first available boat. But when he arrived at Belur Math, he got the sad news of the passing away of Captain Sevier.

In a letter dated Belur Math, 11 December 1900, he writes to an American disciple: 'I arrived the night before last. Alas! My hurrying was of no use. Poor Captain Sevier passed away a few days ago—thus two great Englishmen gave up their lives for us—us the Hindus. This is martyrdom—if anything is. Mrs. Sevier I have written to just now, to know her decision.'

Mrs Sevier's decision was to continue her stay in that lonely place. Bold heart indeed! If Mayavati has done any service to India and the world or will do any further service in future, the credit goes mainly to Mrs Sevier. People do not know how much they are indebted to that courageous English lady. Once a friend of Mrs. Sevier asked her how she could manage to stay at Mayavati—that remote, almost inaccessible, lonely place. Did

she not feel monotony? 'No', replied the devoted disciple. 'When I feel time heavy on me, I remember the Swami.' So she remained at Mayavati, passing her days in the constant remembrance of her *guru*.

Swami Vivekananda paid a visit to Mayavati in the first week of January, 1901, and stayed there for about a fortnight. He was extremely pleased with the atmosphere and environment of the Ashrama at Mayavati. He also expressed a desire that he would build a hermitage at Dharamgarh, the highest hill within the Mayavati boundaries, so that he could meditate in solitude undisturbed. Another favourite spot of the Swami was the walk by the side of the 'lake'. He said, 'In the later part of my life, I shall give up all public work and pass my days in writing books and whistling merry tunes by this lake, free as a child.' Alas, he was not to live long. He passed away the next year.

Other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna took particular interest in the activities of the Mayavati Ashrama. Many of them visited the Ashrama. Swami Turiyananda along with Swami Swarupananda edited some of the writings of Swami Vivekananda. Swami Brahmananda, in sending any worker to Mayavati, would half-jocosely remark that the worker was given a prize post, that is, he would get many rare facilities for the development of his spiritual life by being a member of the Mayavati Ashrama. While sending a worker to that place, Swami Brahmananda said that to live in such an environment was in itself very conducive to spiritual progress and one who would take some particular care about spiritual practices would improve marvellously. Many of the workers were veterans. They gave complete satisfaction to the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who were then guiding the affairs of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Some of these disciples of the Master, though staying at Belur Math or some such place, would keep detailed information about Mayavati affairs. I remember that once, while I came on a visit from Maya-



vati to Belur Math, I committed to memory many particulars of the Ashrama, its trees, the number of cattle in the cow-shed, and so on. For I knew that Swami Shivananda, the then President of the Order, would ask me many such detailed questions, and I did not like to betray my ignorance and play a fool. Even in his very old age I saw him reading the *Prabuddha Bharata*. Once he remarked that the types of the journal were too close for his eyes. Because that remark was in my memory, when opportunities came we made some change in the printing arrangement.

I went to Mayavati in April 1925. In the first night at Mayavati I had a very strange experience. My sleep was broken in the middle of the night—I don't know why—and I found the silence of the place quite oppressive. Such a great silence I had never experienced all my life. In the plains also there is silence at night, but still now and then you hear some sound—distant or near—say, the barking of a dog, the cooing of some bird or so,—but here the silence was, as it were, breathless. I confess I was seized with some unknown fear, and to allay that I sat in meditation. The next day's experience also was no better. In the morning, after breakfast, as I sat in a relaxing mood on the bench in the verandah outside, I felt as though I was a prisoner in that place and as I looked at the surrounding hills, I felt as if they were the prison walls. How could I stay in such a place?—was my inner reaction. Fortunately I did not disclose my feeling to anyone. But as days passed by and I began to enter into the spirit of the place, I liked it more and more, and no monotony seized me. At all seasons Mayavati had its charm for me. Its gorgeous view of the snow-range in the autumn and winter, the roaring sound of waterfalls in the rains (the mention of the troublesome leeches invading you in your very room will be out of place here), the blazing profusion of rhododendron flowers in early spring and the stately deodars kissing the sky, the rustling noise of the pine trees, ferns of different shades

and colour looking at you as you go along on your evening walks—all give zest to your life at Mayavati. How many times had I (accompanied by somebody for safety) not gone out for a walk in the woods before dawn, just to enjoy the silence under the starlit sky; how many times had we not gone to Dharamgarh very early in the morning, defying cold, just to have a nicer view of the snow-range; how many days had we not gone out for a walk in the jungles of thick forests, just to enjoy doing something unusual! Sometimes it would be a nice change to go for a long walk all alone—in a philosophical mood—but for an unconscious fear that you might meet some wild animals. There have been cases when some of our Swamis saw tigers or bears during their walks. Though such cases had not been too many—their number was sufficient to scare the newcomers or the more timid amongst us. There are some set stories about the Swamis seeing tigers and panthers or wild bears. They would be now and then told at night, after our meals, when we met together, and it would be worth looking at the faces of those who had 'wild-animal phobia' turning pale. Afterwards the firm assurance from some senior monks that though there have been many occasions when tigers and bears were seen, there has not been a single case that a tiger or a bear actually attacked anybody in or near about the Ashrama compound—would put courage to the fear-stricken heart. There came a visitor Swami to Mayavati. He was very much afraid of tigers. Some (more mischievous) amongst us played a great trick with him. One night a person simulated himself as a tiger with a big tiger skin rolled round his body, and the Swami was shown it in all gravity and seriousness that should be the effect of a tiger coming near the Ashrama building. He was greatly alarmed, and for one or two days the important subject of talk in the Ashrama was that tiger incident. Afterwards the real fact was disclosed to him. But he would not believe it! He thought that the later version was concocted only to



drive away his fear, as if he was a mere child! Henceforward that Swami got the appellation of 'Tiger-Swami' and on the occasion of the following Vijaya festivity he was presented with a toy-tiger. These are only the lighter sides of Mayavati life which make the stay over there all the more enjoyable and the performance of allotted works and duties all the more serious and earnest.

At Mayavati one can clearly see how Nature can supply spiritual sustenance to a man's soul. Living at this place for some time one does not feel surprised that the British poet Wordsworth would get into a trance, while in communion with Nature and that his corporeal breath would stop. Here sometimes to walk alone is to get the experience of deep meditation, and behind the silence of the woods one can feel a great Presence. At the Ashrama there is no shrine or any provision for ritualistic worship. It is indeed in the fitness of the surroundings. To have a temple built of bricks and mortar in a place where cosmic worship is going on in the shrine of Nature would have been a great tragedy. With a little inwardness one can easily feel that the whole surrounding represents a great, sublime worship of the *Virāt*. For personal devotions and worship one has simply to fall in line with that.

Once a Polish professor came to Mayavati. As we were showing her the vast snow-range in the north, some of us said, 'If you look at that, you feel, as it were, a Living Presence'. 'You too say "as it were"?' she remarked in a surprised tone. She meant that it is actually a Living Presence, and not 'as it were a Living Presence'.

The name and reputation of Mayavati have drawn many visitors and guests to the Ashrama from its very beginning. Ananda Mohan Bose, the great Brahmo reformer, Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, the famous scientist, Chittaranjan Das, the great fighter for the cause of India's political freedom—came and stayed here for a period. Of the visitors who had come here in recent years, Nandalal Bose,

the famous artist of Visvabharati, impressed us most. He stayed at Mayavati only for a very short time. By nature he is a man of few words. At Mayavati he was found all the more taciturn and contemplative. We expected that he would be drawing many pictures at Mayavati. But to our great surprise he did not draw a single one. When we expressed our astonishment to him, he said, 'I do not feel like making any sketch here. I am trying to absorb the spirit of the environment. That is a great thing. And it may be, when I shall go back to my work, the influence of my stay here will be reflected in my works.' In such words we found in him more of a philosopher than an artist. Perhaps he was right. For has it not been said that the highest art is the highest worship? Sri Ramakrishna himself was a great artist. The songs he would sing were divinely melodious. Though living constantly in the supernatural plane, he was an extreme lover of order and neatness.

One can do very much concentrated work at Mayavati. Perhaps this is true of all hill stations. But Mayavati has not got the usual distractions of hill stations. The Ashrama, situated in the midst of forests, with no human habitation nearby, has got a very uplifting influence on one's mind. Even those who had been to many hill stations in India or abroad say that Mayavati has got an atmosphere of sublimity which is rare at any other place. Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, the famous scientist, who had been to Mayavati four or five times, used to say, 'When I am at Mayavati, ideas rush into my mind, but when I am in Calcutta, everything seems to dry up.'

It was a delight to see some of the members doing very hard work. Their steadfastness, their devotion to duty, their love for Swamiji, in whose name they would work—were a source of inspiration to others. It was a privilege to work and associate oneself with such souls. It was because of such earnest hands that the Mayavati work had so much



thrived. Otherwise hands were never too many at Mayavati. As a matter of fact, in comparison with the work that was to be done, hands had often been short.

In addition to regular classes, at times great stimulus had been given to our intellectual life. For some years, there would be what we used to call Sunday 'Lecture Class', when one of us would give a talk on some particular philosophical subject and some others afterwards would discuss the points raised by the previous speaker. In those discussions sometimes there would be found great originality of thought or boldness of outlook—for no authority, no tradition, no personality would be considered too sacrosanct. One particularly remembers the period of about one year when Swami Yatiswarananda—latterly Head of the Vedanta Centre at Philadelphia, U.S.A.—was with us for a change to recuperate his health. He was our permanent 'president' in those lecture classes. Even though the subjects were trifling to him, with how much preparation would he come to our class! His thoroughness and labour would give us the stimulus to be very earnest and assiduous in our own works.

Sometimes those classes would take an interesting turn also. One summer Swami Suddhananda, (afterwards Secretary 1927—1934 and then President May to October 1938 of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission), was amongst us. He proposed that he would hear our discussion on the following subject: Whether the political independence of India was absolutely necessary for the protection of Indian Religion and Culture; if so, what could be the means of attaining India's freedom in the present circumstances of the British rule. He suggested that in the discussion each one of us must have to speak and there would be no exception. At Mayavati we were in God's own land. There were no alien people, there could be no police or C.I.D. So for three or four days—in morning and evening sittings—we discussed this momentous subject. It was very interesting, and instructive too,

to see how some of us—monks, who had renounced the world!—reacted on this topic.

In this connection one remembers the great enthusiasm which some of us exhibited when the 'Independence Resolution' was first moved in the Indian National Congress. We were all joy and enthusiasm. And out of our overflowing fervour we celebrated the occasion by a feast! Mind you, all this was done in a lighter and relaxing mood, as a sort of diversion!—For we are pledged to do only religious, cultural, and philanthropic works. At that time the then President of the Ashrama was away on a tour—and we, some youngsters, organized this function.

But however non-political we were, some educated young men—specially some of them being Bengalis—living in a Himalayan seclusion, did not fail to rouse suspicion of the police and the C.I.D. We did not know how and what secret information they would keep regarding us, but now and then they would openly come to us for information regarding the names of the members, the arrival of new visitors, and so on. During the last war, such things were regular and sometimes troublesome too. In this connection we remember an interesting incident. It was after the fall of Burma. There was a rumour that some strange people (Japanese?) had come to the Kumaon Hills. One day a top-ranking official—Burmese by nationality—came to our Ashrama, and frankly declared himself to belong to the C.I.D., asked for some information. As we had nothing to hide, the business ended very quickly. It was tea-time, and we offered him tea. The man was visibly moved and blurted forth: 'We C.I.D. people are considered as pests. We are hated by all people. Nobody ever shows us any compassion or courtesy. I am really surprised at your human consideration.' We replied, 'You may be a C.I.D. man, but you are a human being first'.

Many top-ranking British officials would visit Mayavati—perhaps out of disinterested curiosity or to gather information about us.



Sometimes they were frank and from their talks we could know their outlook. During the last war, a party of Europeans visited the Ashrama—one of them was a Colonel. We asked him, 'When Mahatma Gandhi was fasting in jail, how did you, military people, look at the thing?' Taking us into confidence but forgetting that we were Indians, he said, 'Many of these political leaders are dishonest'. We replied: 'How can you make such a sweeping remark? There are good and bad people everywhere. Can you say that in England there are only good people and no bad ones?' He took this retort in a very good spirit and without the slightest resentment.

These are but the external sides of Mayavati life. The inner aspect of the Ashrama life was very strong, active, and dynamic. The fact that Swamiji held so high hopes about the Ashrama, the thought that the stalwarts of the Ramakrishna Order, we mean the chief disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, keenly watched the progress of the institution, spurred all the members to action and created in them an enthusiasm to better their lives. Every institution has got its own tradition and culture, which are its assets and its strength. Mayavati also has built up its own tradition. The stories of how our predecessors had worked and lived would go down from one batch of members to another. Swami Swarupananda was the first President of the Ashrama. He was such a great personality that he commanded love and respect from one and all. Mrs. Sevier and Sister Nivedita would respect him almost as their teacher, though he was only a *gurubhai* (brother-disciple) to them. One who worked in the *Prabuddha Bharata* Press at his time narrates, with almost tears in his eyes, how he was the recipient of extreme love and affection from Swami Swarupananda. He was given much to meditation. Seeking a much more quiet place than even the Mayavati Ashrama, he lived for a period in a tent at a little distance from the monastery. But, it is said, there was

found a tiger prowling near the tent one day, so it was desirable not to live in an unprotected place. Afterwards he built a meditation cabin, which still exists as a reminder to the younger members to pursue their contemplative life vigorously. Unfortunately the Swami passed away in 1906 at a very young age. It was such a tragic event that one wondered whether the Ashrama could continue. After him Swami Virajananda was elected President. Despite his love for meditative life, he worked day and night unsparingly in order to stabilize the Ashrama. As a matter of fact, it was his hard work and unparalleled industry that gave a sure standing to the Ashrama. He brought out the Complete Works (then in five volumes) and the biography of Swami Vivekananda. After him Swami Prajnananda was the President. In his pre-monastic days he was the right-hand man of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh in organizing the revolutionary movement in Bengal.

Along with Sri Aurobindo he was tried in the famous Alipore Bomb Case and was released. By his keen intellect, sober judgment, rare wisdom, above all calm and never-to-be-ruffled temperament, he was a tower of strength as well as the source of inspiration to all who were his colleagues or looked to him for guidance. Even Swami Saradananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, remarked with poignant grief at his premature death, "... as if my right hand had been chopped off". There were other Swamis who had left great reputations behind because of their exemplary life and character and who loomed large before the imagination of the younger members.

In a place like Mayavati, work and meditation can be very perfectly balanced. Though some of the members have to work pretty hard, none has the cause of any complaint that he has not sufficient opportunity for meditation. But still now and then there would come waves of enthusiasm to devote more time and energy to meditation. This



would happen when some Swamis, released from normal duties or coming as guests from some other centre, devoted their time exclusively to meditation. Their examples would supply stimulus to the other ones longing for that kind of life. In the same way there had come impetus for intellectual life also. When any of its members or any visitor Swami had exceptional intellectual aptitude, talks and discussions centring round him would create an atmosphere of intellectual outlook, of fresh thinking, and wider reading.

In the process of time Mayavati has developed side-activities also. A dispensary, not in the original plan of the Ashrama, was started in 1903, which has afterwards developed into a full-fledged hospital, ministering to the suffering people of a very vast area. Patients come even from a distance of 70 to 80 miles, covering the journey in a week's time or so. Even in the outdoor dispensary patients come from a distance of 15 to 20 miles. The Publication Department, when it became too unwieldy, was shifted to Calcutta, where better facilities for printing and distribution were available. Now the Ashrama has four kinds of activities—(1) Publication of religious literature, (2) The monthly journal *Prabuddha Bharata*, (3) Hospital and (4) Sending out preachers.

If one looks at the present growth of the Ashrama from a very humble and insignificant beginning fifty years back, one feels, not unjustifiably, glad and proud. The books sent out from the Ashrama have reached thousands of homes in India and different parts of the world and have helped to develop the spiritual life of the readers, giving them strength in the hour of distress, solace in the time of suffering, or changing their entire outlook on life. These books have carried the message of India to the outside world, have fostered love for their ancient religion in the Indians and have steadied the minds of those wavering in their faith in the spiritual heritage of the Motherland. The service that the journal *Prabuddha Bharata* has rendered for more than half a century is not inconsider-

able. It would be the cause of pride to any management, though the least hankering after any recognition of services rendered is a negation of spirituality. The Ashrama has also sent out many preachers. Some of the ex-members of the Ashrama did and have been doing works in two hemispheres which have shed lustre of glory on India.

Here the question arises, whether we have been able to fulfil the dreams of the great Swami with regard to the Ashrama. Of course, partially we have. But that, to what extent? At a certain time I used to ask some senior monks of our Order, who worked at the helm of affairs, what the vital points were, that should be emphasized in Mayavati activities, so that the Ashrama might rightly represent the ideas of Swami Vivekananda. How are we to guide its activities? How were we to conduct ourselves? Different Swamis gave different opinions. But one given by Swami Suddhananda, one of the most favourite disciples of Swami Vivekananda, stands out prominent in my memory. He said, 'If you can realize Truth and thereby directly or indirectly help others to realize Truth, you will be fulfilling the real object of the Master'. That was true, but too abstract and absolute! Swami Suddhananda was such a sweet and loving soul that we could be very free in discussions with him. So I began to argue: 'Why, what do you think of the vast volume of literature the Ashrama has spread, the preachers it has sent out, the suffering patients its hospital has served, and so on?' Incidentally I referred to the similar good works of other centres of our Order. The Swami warmed up, and got a bit excited too, and said: 'No, these things are very secondary in the plan of Swami Vivekananda. The first thing is, you must realize Truth, you must have a direct perception of Truth. That is the most essential thing. If you can succeed in that, you have really fulfilled the expectations of Swamiji.'

These words still ring in my ears. And as I think of the great expansion of the work



of the Mayavati Ashrama, I inwardly rejoice but at the same time I say to myself : 'Yes, these are good, very good indeed. But more is wanted. The Ashrama is to give succour to the spiritually thirsty. Swamiji wanted that this Ashrama should be the meeting ground of the Eastern and Western

devotees. Their hunger and hankering can be truly satisfied if one can give them first-hand information about the Highest Truth. Thereby only real good can be done to them, by that only one can give them right guidance.'

But that is not an easy task.

## ADVAITA ASHRAMA, MAYAVATI: EARLY YEARS

BY A PILGRIM

There are certain place-names which have a haunting sound. Once heard, they can never be forgotten. *Mayavati*, in the Kumaon Himalayas, is one of them. Whoever chose this name must have had a musical ear, like Swami Vivekananda, under whose inspiration the place came to be selected for an *Advaita Ashrama*. Besides the name, the natural beauty of Mayavati would have appealed greatly to Vivekananda's Master, the saint of Dakshineswar. The first mystic experience which Sri Ramakrishna had, was, when, as a little boy, he beheld a flight of birds across a cloud in a resplendent morning sky. Though he never actually saw the Himalayas, one can imagine to what divine ecstasy he would have been moved by the glow of the rising sun on the cold Himalayan peaks; or the rustle of the breeze through the laughing pines and the stately, old deodars; or the moon-beams playing among the branches of the ancient, gnarled oaks, looking, with their mossy hangings, like so many bearded ghosts of the *rishis*!

As in most events inspired by great personalities, there is an element of drama in the manner in which the Ashrama at Mayavati came to be founded. In the spring of 1896 Swami Vivekananda, then only 33 and in the fullness of his astounding powers, was lecturing in London on *Jnana Yoga*. In his select English audience were a middle-aged couple—

Capt. J. H. and Mrs. Sevier—and their great friend, also middle-aged, Miss Josephine MacLeod. The thoughts uttered by the Swami in those lectures were so profound in their depth and so penetrating in their insight, that Capt. Sevier, a taciturn, Victorian gentleman, must have doubted if it was possible for one so young to conceive them in all sincerity. He therefore asked Miss MacLeod, on coming out from one of those lectures: 'You know this young man? Is he what he seems?' And when she said, 'Yes', he made, without further hesitation, the surprising reply: 'In that case, one must follow him, and with him, find God'. And so without any more ado, the Sevierts sold away their possessions in England, and accompanied the young Swami to India after spending some months with him on the Continent. While they were in Switzerland, the Alps awoke Vivekananda's deep love of the Himalayas and his cherished dream of starting an Advaita Ashrama in their solitary domain. He shared this dream with the Sevierts who enthusiastically resolved to devote themselves to its fulfilment. They accordingly sailed with the Swami to Colombo where they landed in January 1897, and were his admiring but self-effacing companions during the famous lecture-tour which ended at Almora in the spring of 1898.

It was at Almora that Vivekananda told



the Seviers of his desire to revive the monthly journal which he had so aptly named *Prabuddha Bharata* (Awakened India). This magazine had been started under his inspiration at Madras in 1896, but had just

'Thompson's House', where they were then living with the Swami. Swami Swarupananda, one of the most gifted disciples of Vivekananda, became the first monastic editor of the resurrected Journal, and Capt. Sevier took upon himself the humble but exacting duties of its manager.

But the shy Captain and his imaginative wife did not feel quite at home in the official atmosphere of a military Cantonment like Almora. They accordingly continued their search for a quiet spot, suitable for an Ashrama, where one could not only meditate, but also find inspiration for making the *Prabuddha Bharata* a true 'Awakener of India'. Their devoted quest finally ended at the beginning of 1899 in the selection of a secluded old tea estate, 50 miles from Almora, belonging to General MacGregor, a retired veteran of the Indian Army.

One can imagine the thrill with which both the Seviers and young Swarupananda must have first gazed upon this beautiful estate, comprising nearly a hundred acres of dense Himalayan forest, and commanding, from a height of nearly 7,000 feet, a magnificent view of the Nanda Devi range. What must have added to their thrill, and gladdened the heart, particularly of Mrs Sevier, with her love of trees and flowers, were the glorious old deodars surrounding the estate, and the flaming, red rhododendrons which must have been in bloom on that spring morning, fifty years ago.

These inspiring surroundings must have surely helped the valiant band of young monks under Swarupananda (who became the first President of the Ashrama), and that brave English couple who were no longer young, to face cheerfully the tremendous odds they had to surmount before they could establish an Ashrama and get a Press going in a place which was then more than 60 miles from the nearest railway station.

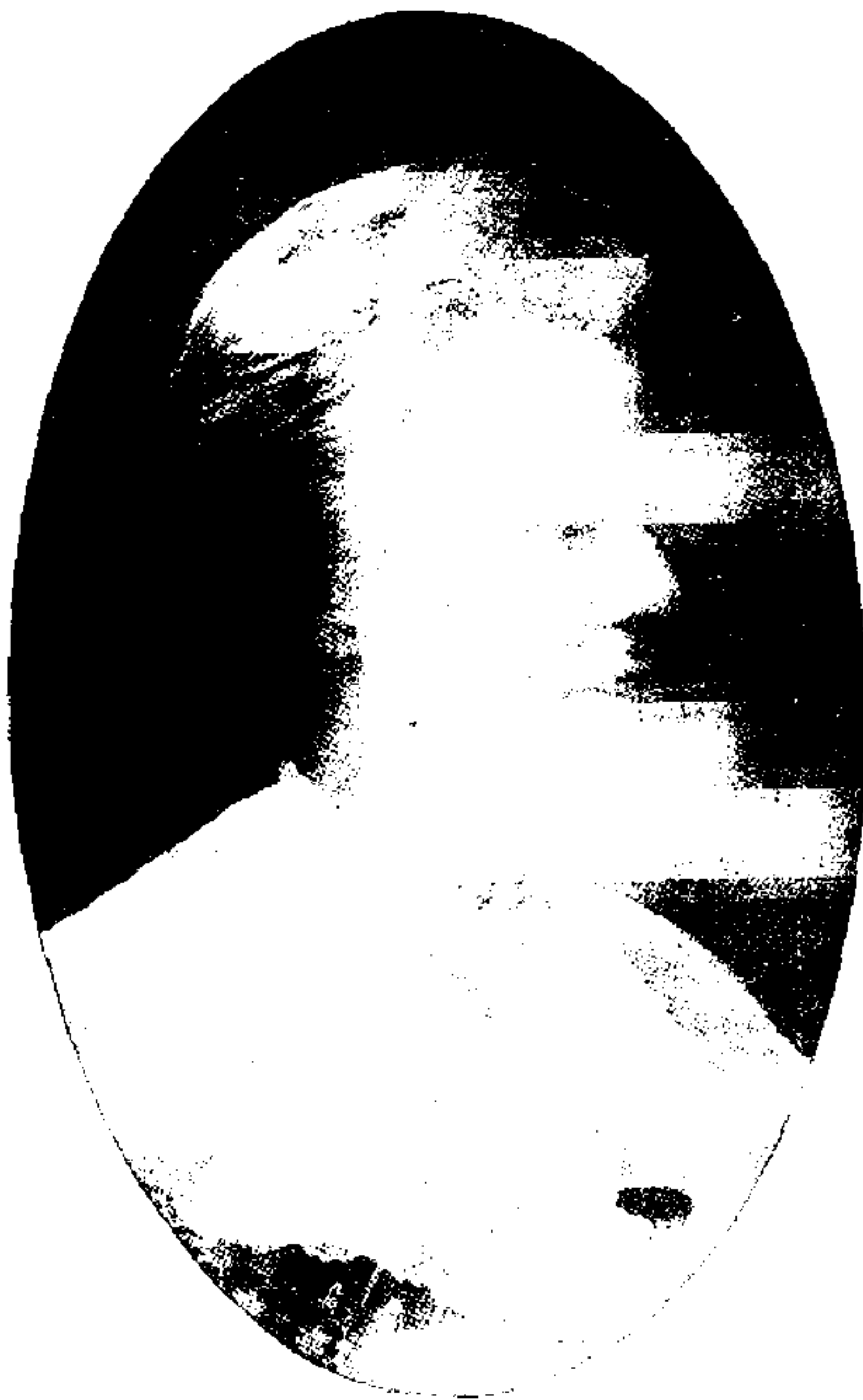
That there was, from the beginning, a kind of secret communion between the spirit of Nature and 'Mother' Charlotte Sevier (Swami Vivekananda spontaneously addressed



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

ceased publication on the death of its brilliant first editor Rajam Iyer. Again the Seviers eagerly responded to their young *guru's* wish and arranged for the setting up of a Hand-Press in a rented bungalow at Almora, called





MRS C. E. SEVIER



CAPTAIN J. H. SEVIER

her as 'Mother' the first time he met her) is shown by the fact that, in her very first summer at Mayavati in 1899, she wrote a remarkable article for the *Prabuddha Bharata* called *A Breath from the Himalayas* under her favourite pseudonym 'Advaitin'. This piece of writing is so beautiful and revealing that portions of it are reproduced here in order that the reader may be able, in imagination at least, to conjure up a vision of the author and of the surroundings which could inspire such thoughts.

This is how it begins :

'In that enchanting part of the world, the Himalayas, one lovely day in early

summer, I was sitting in my garden which was brightened by flowers of every hue. It was a perfect galaxy of beauty. No echoes from the outside world reached this lovely place where all was calm and fair, and I with scarce a thought but of the great joy of living, let my mind wander into lightly woven dreamings. The lofty mountains, the eternal snows, so near to the heavens and so far from the earth, gleamed like opalescent temples in the sky. Solemn and solitary, the whole landscape was touched with the magic of distance and the soft charm of sunlight. The atmosphere throbbed and vibrated with perfect colour



SWAMI SWARUPANANDA  
FIRST PRESIDENT (1899-1906)



and divine essences, while the hum of the honey bees that hovered about the roses made the air languorous and drowsy.

'Long, long ago, many delightful legends were told of certain godly men who lived in the recesses of these mountains, dwelling on high thoughts, possessing all the secrets of nature, and never growing old and weary.

'Surely my mind must have been pondering on these things, for, what with the soul-soothing effect of the gentle air wafted from the snowy summits and the delicious perfumes floating around me, I seemed to become one with the spirit of Nature, and was spellbound when I caught the sound of the subtle voices of the flowers drifting towards me in warm and fragrant breaths.

'The subject of their conversation was Sun Worship, and which of their community worshipped in the truest manner.'

And then follows an exquisite, imaginary conversation between the flowers, each flaunting its own virtues.

When all the flowers have done speaking, there comes the turn of a grand, old deodar to do the final summing-up :

'In the centre of the garden an ancient deodar, in a green old age, reared his stately head. His noble contour stood out clear against the blue vault of heaven. His wide-spreading branches stretched lovingly and protectingly over the garden ; their beautiful lines reached outward and upward, stooping to earth and upraised to the Sun, and thus, in sheltering guardianship and splendid aspiration, were a connecting link between earth and heaven. He honoured the Sun in the truest sense, by simply keeping his head elevated sunward and contemplating the shining countenance of his divinity, until he perceived the beauty of the inward Soul penetrating all things, and discerned that where He shone all was vitality and brightness. He now sighed profoundly and stirred his branches in warning notes, much to the perturbation of the argumentative flowers growing at his feet, for they not only deeply

reverenced the vast wisdom and nobility of the sage who towered above them in his patriarchal strength, but attributed to him a power which enabled him to live for ever.

'With impressive gestures he now addressed them :

"My foolish children, why these hasty expressions of self-kindled dogmatisms ? You have been running wild over this discussion. Profane not this peaceful scene by disagreement, for no apple of discord must ripen here ! Harken to me ! We all derive our life, talents, and virtues from the Sun, He causing the variety in expression and manifestation. Among the manifold aspects of the true and beautiful, He recognizes those qualities in whatever guise they may be found. There is Unity in diversity. How would the Master like it if but one kind of flower grew in His garden ? The beauteous diversities of leaf and flower illustrate your charms. He admires the daintiness of this, the loveliness of that. The ideal of beauty is simplicity and tranquillity. Thus, in our several ways we may rest satisfied in contributing to His pleasure. Learn that the love of the Sun is the best motive, the glory of the Sun the highest aim, the grace of the Sun an inexhaustible strength, and the presence of the Sun the supreme joy here. All our tendencies have their apogee in a worship which compasses all times and which the Master gathers into the deep founts of love in a heavenly union, a joyous fellowship."

'As the venerable tree ceased speaking, a light zephyr sprang up, murmuring caressingly of unity and loving kindness, thus soothing the crestfallen flowers, at the same instant playing on the heart-strings of the deodar who lovingly responded by diffusing in musical cadences the bliss of peace and concord.'

This English Advaitin who, in her day-dream among the flowers and deodars, 'had comprehended the secrets of Nature and communed with the Spirit of Life', was, strange to say, the presiding angel of an Ashrama of



Hindu monks for seventeen years! Her memory is still cherished by those Swamis who knew her as a loving and generous 'mother', and by some of the old villagers, still living near Mayavati, who had such reverence for her that they did not hesitate to call her 'Devi'! Was this not, after all, one of the miracles wrought by the all-embracing catholicity of Vivekananda's Master, the unlettered priest of Dakshineswar? When Mrs. Sevier was once asked how, as an Advaitin, she looked upon Sri Ramakrishna, she answered without a moment's hesitation, 'Of all the perfect men that have appeared on earth, I consider him the greatest.'

Like most mothers, Mrs. Sevier too had her full share of suffering. But like a true Advaitin, she always bore her Cross in silence and in a spirit of calm resignation. Within two years of their settling down at Mayavati, death snatched away her beloved husband. Capt. Sevier passed away on 28th October 1900 when Swami Vivekananda was in the West on his second visit. This blow was particularly hard for Mrs. Sevier to bear, because of the impossibility of summoning prompt and efficient medical aid to an isolated spot like Mayavati, in those early days. It is an irony of fate that the Ashrama's Charitable Hospital which Mrs. Sevier helped to start in 1903 did not then exist to bring relief to her own husband in his hour of mortal need! His body was cremated and the ashes thrown to the winds in accordance with the Captain's own wishes. The spot where the cremation took place near the stream flowing below the Ashrama bears no monument.

Swami Vivekananda returned to India in December of the same year; and in spite of failing health and the winter season, hastened to Mayavati to console Mrs. Sevier. It was a short but memorable visit, because it was the first and last time that the great Advaitin saw with his own eyes the Himalayan Ashrama of his dreams. It would have been not easy for the Swami in the then condition of his health to accomplish, without a hitch, the

long and arduous road journey from the little railway station of Kathgodam to Mayavati during a Himalayan winter, but for the pluck and resourcefulness of one of the Swami's trusted disciples—Swami Virajananda. Young Virajananda, who was at Mayavati when the news of Swami Vivekananda's coming reached the Ashrama, volunteered to bring up his Master in a *dāndi*, over the difficult mountain-paths. He collected coolies, raced down the 63 miles to Kathgodam in two days, and returned to the Ashrama, with his precious charge, on January 3rd, 1901. There was snow on the way up, but the thoughtful guide was always at hand to see that the *dāndi* reached Mayavati safely and in good time.

Vivekananda's deep love of the forest and the majestic snow-peaks which often made him think of the Great God Shiva, must have made him loath to leave Mayavati in a hurry. But indifferent health compelled him to curtail his stay to only two weeks. How short the two precious weeks must have seemed to the monks of the Ashrama, and especially to Mrs. Sevier during those days of her bereavement! Stories are still told of the Ashramites, young and old, flocking daily round the great Swami in the *Gol Kamra* (the present reading-room of the monastery) to drink in his words of courage and wisdom.

Swami Vivekananda passed away in 1902 when he was only thirty-nine, leaving a great void in the lives of all the inmates of Mayavati to whom his wise counsel and encouragement meant so much in those early days of struggle.

Swami Swarupananda now redoubled his care of the Ashrama's bereaved Mother; but his life too was suddenly cut short in 1906 when he passed away at Naini Tal where he had gone on a short visit. His photograph shows a man of distinguished countenance with deep-set eyes and a sensitive but determined mouth. Swami Vivekananda's penetrating insight had recognized in Swarupananda a worthy disciple at their very first





SWAMI VIRAJANANDA  
PRESIDENT, RAMAKRISHNA MATH & MISSION  
SECOND PRESIDENT OF MAYAVATI ASHRAMA (1906-1913)

meeting ; and, as President of the Mayavati Ashrama, he set up a model for work and meditation which his successors have tried to follow. There is still a small log-cabin in a secluded corner of the Ashrama grounds, known as 'Swarupananda's Dhyān-kutir', where he would often go for a quiet hour or two.

Shyamala Tal (the Vivekananda Ashrama), 30 miles away from Mayavati.

Before retiring in 1914, Swami Virajananda successfully completed what has perhaps been the most ambitious task so far undertaken by the Ashrama at Mayavati,—the printing and publication of

The second President of the Ashrama, and Editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, was the same Virajananda who had escorted Swami Vivekananda to Mayavati in 1901. He was still young ; and, with his athletic figure and clean-shaven face, had a striking appearance. He is now 76 years old, and, presides over the destinies of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, gathering round him an ever-increasing number of disciples from every walk of life, all over India. His photographs taken when he was President of Mayavati more than forty years ago, and now as President of the Order, afford a remarkable study in contrasts. But though age may change a man's appearance beyond recognition, it cannot change the fundamental qualities of his nature. His inborn love of the Himalayas still remains with him as strong as ever, and in spite of failing health, makes him long to return each year to his beloved retreat at





SEATED IN THE VERANDAH OF 'MOTHER'S BUNGALOW'  
*Left to right: SWAMI ATULANANDA, SISTER NIVEDITA, SWAMI VIRAJANANDA,  
 SISTER CHRISTINE, MRS SEVIER AND LADY ABALA BOSE (wife of Sir J. C. Bose)*



'MOTHER'S BUNGALOW'



the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda in five volumes, and a four-volume Life of Swami Vivekananda (by his Eastern and Western disciples). The first editions of these two works are still in the Ashrama library; and it makes one wonder how such excellence of printing and binding could have been achieved with an old-fashioned Hand-Press, in a remote place like Mayavati. But his feeling of surprise gives place to admiration as soon as it is realized that the persons engaged on this task were a devoted band of young monks whose sole desire was to spread far and wide the message of their great Master. Even the paid compositor of that Press—young Mohanlal Sah, a Pahādi from Almora—worked hard at his job. For he too had seen the great Swami Vivekananda during his visit to Mayavati in 1901, and had heard the music of his voice. After that, he felt more and more drawn to the Swamis at Mayavati and to Mother Sevier who was very kind to him. Mohanlal Sah is now over seventy, and is the only Pahādi, still living, who actually worked at Mayavati from the time the Ashrama Press was first installed in 1899 until its discontinuance in 1924. He stays at Lohaghat, nearly 4 miles from Mayavati; but walks to the Ashrama every fortnight on *Ekādasi* day to join in the singing of *Rāma-nāma*.

The successor of Virajananda (familiarily known as Kalikrishna Maharaj), as President-Editor at Mayavati, was Swami Prajnananda who began work in 1914, the fateful year of the first World War. Before joining the Ramakrishna Order, he had been a revolutionary, working for India's freedom during the Bengal Partition days. But as soon as he had taken shelter beneath the protecting wings of Sri Ramakrishna, his whole outlook on life underwent a remarkable change. Thereafter, he fought with new weapons, not only for India's freedom, but also for the greater freedom of the human soul. Now his sole desire was, to use his own words, to be 'a humble worker in the vineyard of Swamiji'.

Prajnananda was a great Vedantist, and his editorials in the *Prabuddha Bharata* of those days are marked by a breadth of scholarship and understanding rarely equalled in the annals of that Journal. But these great intellectual attainments were combined with a generous and loving heart, and his relations with his co-workers and also with the simple villagers living near Mayavati, were always marked by genuine sympathy and kindness. Anyone seeing his photograph at once becomes aware of the scholar's lofty brow and the gentle, smiling eyes of the kindly monk. He had been President only for four years, when death snatched away this great soul, so full of promise, at the early age of thirty-nine.

Meanwhile, circumstances had necessitated Mother Sevier to leave for good her dear Mayavati. On the retirement of Swami Virajananda (who had looked after all her needs since the death of Swarupananda), she went and stayed with him for nearly a year at the Shyamala Tal Ashrama which she had actually helped to start. She finally sailed for England in 1916 at the call of her ailing sister who needed her care and attention. Britain was then fighting for her life as she had to fight once more during the second World War. To Mrs. Sevier, war-time England of those days must have been an unpleasant contrast to peaceful Mayavati. But she cheerfully accepted this change of scene and renewed her spirit from time to time by keeping in close touch with all the activities of her beloved Mayavati. In her letters written from England at that time she used to sign herself 'Old Mother'. Thus she lived on till the grandmotherly age of eighty-three, breathing her last in London on the 20th October 1930. Her body, too, like her husband's, thirty years before, was cremated and the ashes thrown to the winds, in accordance with her wishes. Although she died in foggy, old London, thousands of miles away from Mayavati, 'a breath from the Himalayas'—those magic mountains of her heart—must have surely mingled with her own last breath to



make her look as serene in death as she was in life! In a letter of condolence which one of Mrs. Sevier's nieces in England received after her aunt's passing away, a woman who knew her very well wrote: 'Mrs Sevier never preached religion, she *lived* it'. Can any saint ask for a greater tribute than this? Though twenty years have now passed since Mother Sevier died, her memory still lives on at Mayavati, and her gracious spirit continues to hover round the places she loved so well—the house in which she usually lived, still known as 'Mother's Bungalow'; the garden in which 'a breath from the Himalayas' once came to her; the avenue of deodars under which she often walked, and the Ashrama itself, with 'its bells pealing out their sonorous chimes'. Her love for the dumb animals at Mayavati was no less than her love for the monks. A Swami who had known this wrote after her death:

'The Ashrama cattle would run to her and form a ring around her as soon as they heard her familiar voice, and she would talk to them as if they were human beings. The pony Mangal got also his due. Not even the goats were forgotten. She would keep vegetable peelings for these dumb creatures and distribute them among all. Her special favourite was Glama, a plain-looking Bhotia dog, whose death later on visibly moved her.'

The fourth President at Mayavati, after Swami Prajnananda's death in 1918, was Swami Madhavananda. Like his distinguished predecessor, he also combined in himself the qualities of a meticulous scholar and a true *bhakta*. In appearance, however, he was different from the big-built Prajnananda. He was barely thirty when he became President and his photograph at Mayavati, taken many years ago, shows him of fragile build, with almost a boyish face of delicacy and refinement. Though he is now about sixty and has retired from active work, he still retains his slim figure and mental alertness. He is of

a shy, retiring disposition, and has always avoided the lime-light so successfully that only those who know him intimately have been able to discover his great qualities of head and heart. He put in eight years of silent, useful work at Mayavati and is still affectionately remembered as the self-effacing 'Nirmal Maharaj'. He also found time to make lucid translations of Sanskrit works which have been highly prized by a large circle of discriminating readers.

He was not long in office before his essentially modern outlook made him realize that it was no longer practicable to print and publish, efficiently, a progressive magazine like the *Prabuddha Bharata* in an isolated spot like Mayavati. He, therefore, gradually arranged for the transfer of the printing and publication work to Calcutta, and in 1924 the life of the old-fashioned Mayavati Press which had done such splendid work for twenty-five years at last came to an end. In 1927 the Mission asked Madhavananda to go to America; and although the seclusion of Mayavati must have meant so much to a monk of his type, he obeyed the summons, like a true soldier of Vivekananda. After that, he held with distinction, for many years, the onerous post of General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. On retirement from that post last year, he spent a few months at Mayavati and for all the inmates of the Ashrama it was a real privilege and joy to have among them an ex-President who is still remembered with love and respect.

So runs the story of the Mayavati Ashrama during the first thirty years of its existence. It was the Seviers who founded it, and the first four Presidents lovingly built on that foundation.

But besides these devoted builders and their co-workers, there were, in those early days, several distinguished visitors who, in their own way, contributed to the glory of



the Ashrama. Some of the most important direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, other than Swami Vivekananda, visited Mayavati at one time or another: Turiyananda, the great ascetic, whom Vivekananda had begged to visit America in order to show the West what an austere *sanyāsin* was; Saradananda, the first General Secretary of the Mission, grave in his exterior, but at heart like a loving mother; Sivananda, known as the 'Mahapurush' who was President of the Mission for many years; and Premananda whose transparent purity of soul and overflowing love attracted to him men and women of all communities, including Muslims.

There came also to the Ashrama two remarkable women who were among the earliest Western disciples of Vivekananda—the dynamic Sister Nivedita, taking after her own imperious Master; and the gentle, meditative Sister Christine, more like the childlike Ramakrishna. Nivedita, in her book *The Master As I Saw Him*, and Sister Christine in her 'Memoirs' have left unforgettable pictures of the great Vivekananda which his famous biographer, Romain Rolland, valued highly.

Two great sons of Bengal whom India later claimed as her own, also came to Mayavati in those days—Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, the renowned scientist, considered by his biographer, Patrick Geddes, to be, in his imaginative perception, as great a poet as Tagore; and C. R. Das, the great Deshabandhu, a prince among men. There is a narrow pathway leading to the Ashrama which is still known as 'Bose's Walk'; while the memory of the Deshabandhu lives on in the stories which continue to be told of his generosity to all who came in contact with him during his short visit.

It must not be imagined that even in those early years of struggle, it was 'all work and no play' at Mayavati. No true follower

of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda can be either a narrow ascetic or a kill-joy. A new-comer, visiting a Ramakrishna Ashrama, for the first time, is often struck by the contrast between it and one of the austere and gloomy monasteries of the West. Whenever Sri Ramakrishna was not in *samādhi*, he was full of innocent fun and infectious laughter. His famous *Kathāmrita* (recorded by his lay disciple 'M') abounds in flashes of the most delightful humour; and many a sanctimonious humbug pretended to be shocked at the scene of innocent merrymaking which often went on at Dakshineswar, just as the Pharisees of old—those 'fiends of righteousness'—frowned upon the tolerant smile and unconventional laughter of Jesus. Most of his famous disciples inherited Ramakrishna's keen sense of humour, especially Vivekananda, who, till the end of his life, enjoyed playing almost boyish pranks on his own *gurubhais* as well as disciples. So in Mayavati also, the *sanyāsins* and *brahmachārins* usually joined, after the day's work, or on holidays, in innocent fun and recreation. They played indoor games and light outdoor games and made excursions to places of interest and natural beauty in the neighbourhood. Mayavati is on one of the pilgrim-routes to Mount Kailas whose shining dome of ice is said to conceal the abode of the great God Shiva, the king of all *sanyāsins*. Parties of Swamis from the plains would, therefore, sometimes come to this Ashrama when starting on the pilgrimage or returning from it. There would then be happy scenes of reunion and the whole place would ring with the sound of animated talk and laughter for many a day.

The Swamis at Mayavati grew fruits and vegetables then, as they do now. There was a time when apples grew so plentifully in the Ashrama's orchard that kind Mother Sevier would offer them to passing villagers and even the Ashrama cattle had their share!

The Advaita Ashrama has completed



fifty years of its life last year. Besides Swami Virajananda (President of the Math and Mission) and Mohanlal Sah, Mayavati's oldest surviving link today in India is Swami Atulananda, popularly known as Gurudas Maharaj. The only non-Indian *sanyāsin* of the Order, he is now over eighty and passes most of his days at the Ashramas at Kankhal on the banks of the Ganges, and at Barlowganj in the Mussoorie Hills. As a young man, he went from Holland to America where he met Vivekananda and came under the influence of that other great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Tnriyananda, at the Shanti Ashrama in the interior of California,

which, in many respects, was similar to the Mayavati Ashrama. After coming to India, Gurudas Maharaj lived and worked at Mayavati for some years in Mrs. Sevier's time, and is still affectionately remembered by those who came in contact with his charming personality.

During his brief sojourn on earth, Swami Vivekananda strove ceaselessly to spread the message of Vedanta all over the world. On completing fifty years of its life, the Ashrama at Mayavati may well lay a claim to have played a humble but significant role in the furtherance of that great cause.

## THE WORKS OF TULSIDAS (I)

BY MRS. C. K. HANDOO

Tulsidas is known to be the author of fourteen books, and Beni Madho Das has also specified the years in which they were written. The most noteworthy are the *Gitāvali*, *Kavitāvali*, *Vinaya Patrikā* and the *Rāmcharit Mānas*—the last named being by far the most important, the best known, and the largest of them all. The others are *Dohāvali*, *Rāmājñā-Prasna*, *Rāmlala Nahchu*, *Vairāgya Sandīpani*, *Barve Rāmāyana*, *Pārvati Mangal*, *Jānaki Mangal*, *Krishna-Gitāvali*, *Hanumān Bāhuk* and *Satsāi*.

The *Gitavali*, as its name denotes, consists of songs set to music in *rāgas* and *rāginis*. It deals largely with the babyhood and boyhood of Ram in which the poet depicts the tender side of His character and so the sentiment of sweetness (*mādhurya*) reigns supreme here. It is a loving account of the infant Ram and His baby brothers, true to nature and predominantly human in its appeal.

The *Kavitavali*, like the *Gitavali*, follows

the *Rāmcharit Manas* in the division of the book into seven cantos. Its style is heroic and it contains 'some really fine word-paintings, the sound being literally an echo of the sense'. Though the *Manas* is a narrative poem relating to the deeds of Ram in all its complexity, and the *Kavitavali* and *Gitavali* emphasize one aspect of his character, we would venture to say that without the tenderness of *Gitavali* and heroism of *Kavitavali* even this great epic would have, in some respects, remained incomplete—miscellaneous topics are dealt with towards the end of *Kavitavali*. There is a reference to Prahlad and to the devotion of the *gopis* of Vrindāvan, a description of the Kali Age, Chitrakut, Sita-vat in Valmiki's Ashrama and Prayāg. After describing vividly the havoc caused by plague and with prayers to Hanuman and Annapurna to free the town of Kashi from this fatal epidemic the book ends.

*Vinaya Patrika* is a petition of complaint



to the court of the Lord. The idea of the construction of the work is that as when a petition is presented to Royalty supplications have to be made to the door-keeper and courtiers for leave of access to the king, so in sweet humility Tulsi first addresses his prayers to Ganesh, the Sun God, Siva-Parvati, Ganga-Yamuna, Hanuman, the brothers of Ram, Sita, and last of all to his Master Ram. In this book the majestic (*aishvarya*) side of the Lord's character is kept in view and Tulsi as the suppliant delights in effacing himself so that the glory and greatness of his master might shine in undiminished splendour. He creates a strong impression in the mind of the reader that he is the very dust of the earth and the lowliest of the low. His obvious sincerity and devotional fervour constitute the greatest charm of *Vinaya Patrika*. The unusual approach of this most original book, and the ennobling thoughts of the gifted poet are guaranteed to captivate all hearts and this book cannot be too strongly recommended to all seekers of God irrespective of their individual faith or special path in life.

A passing reference has been made to the *Ramcharit Manas* in the life of Tulsi. Sir George Grierson speaks of this book in the following words: 'In its own country it ... exercises an influence which it would be difficult to describe in exaggerated terms. ... I have never met a person who has read it in the original and who was not impressed by it as the work of a great genius. ... Any extract would be like presenting a glass of water as a specimen of the ocean. Its style varies with the subject. There is the infinite pathos of the passage describing Ram's farewell to his mother, the rugged language describing the horrors of the battle-field, and when occasion requires it, a sententious aphoristic method of dealing with the narrative, which teems with similes drawn not from the tradition of the schools, but from nature herself, and better than Kalidas at his best.'

The *Dohavali* is a collection of 573 verses

dealing with various topics such as some aspects of devotion and other spiritual teachings. It seems as if originally it was not written in book form. Many of its verses are to be found in *Ramcharit Manas*, *Ramajna*, *Vairāgya Sandipani* and *Satsai*. *Ramajna-Prasna* is a small book consisting of seven chapters, each containing about 49 verses. It is, as its name implies, a book of prophecies along with which the life of Ram is also briefly stated. *Ramlala Nahchu* is a booklet in *sohar chhand*. *Nahchu* is a custom prevalent in the United Provinces and Bihar according to which the bridegroom's toe-nails are painted ceremoniously with song and laughter just before he leaves for the bride's home. Its language is akin to the village patois and it contains verses appropriate to the occasion. *Vairagya Sandipani* consists of 62 *chhands* describing the ways of holy men, their greatness, and the glories of renunciation. *Barve Ramayana* consists of seven chapters in *barve chhand*. It seems to be a collection of independent verses written at different times and later arranged according to the method of the *Manas*. *Janaki Mangal* and *Parvati Mangal* contain a description of the wedding of Ram and Sita, and Siva and Parvati respectively, each book consisting of about 200 verses. *Krishna-Gitavali* is in praise of Sri Krishna. It may have been written in Vrindavan. It does not contain all the major events in the life of Krishna but only some of them are related according to the poet's fancy. *Hanuman Bahuk* consisting of 44 verses is sometimes looked upon as a separate book and sometimes as the concluding portion of *Kavitavali*. It contains a description of Tulsi-das's last illness and a prayer to Hanuman for his recovery. *Satsai* consists of 700 verses out of which 150 are borrowed from the *Dohavali*. Its authenticity is disputed by some scholars who hold that it was written by another poet of the same name.

To give an idea of the philosophy and devotion of Tulsidas as well as the distinct characters he creates—with varying human emotions, their conflicts and reactions,—his



description of nature and other topics dealt by him in a masterly fashion, more space will be required than can be spared in a small-sized magazine like the *Prabuddha Bharata*. A scholarly exposition must also be relegated to an equally brilliant mind like Tulsidas himself; but he being essentially a poet of the people we feel that the proper approach to him should be that of the common man for whose benefit he sang his immortal *Ramayana*.

Tulsidas has himself boldly proclaimed the power of his *Rām Kathā* at the very beginning of his book. He says :

*Bhaniti mori Siva kripā vibhātī,  
Sasi samāja mili manahun surātī.  
Jo ehi kathahin saneha sametā,  
Kahihahin sunihahin samujhi sachetā.  
Hoyihahin Rāma charana anurāgī,  
Kalimala rahita sumangala bhāgī.*

'Through the grace of Siva my poem will shine like the star-bespangled lovely moonlit night ;

Those who will read and hear carefully this story, with love and understanding,

They, untouched by the impurities of *Kaliyuga*, will acquire love for the feet of Ram and good fortune will attend on them.'

Tulsidas's explanation for naming the *Ramcharit Manas* is both poetic and devotional. He uses the word *Manas* in two ways, one meaning the mind and the other the lake *Mānsarovar*. The *Manas* is a beautiful lake conceived in the mind of Siva. Tulsidas says :

*Rāmacharitamānasa ehi nāmā,  
Sunata shravana pāyia vishrāmā.  
Mana kari vishaya anala bānā jarayī,  
Hoyi sukhi jaun ehi sara parayī,  
Trividha dosha dukha dārida dāvan,  
Kali kuchāli kuli kalusha nasāvan.  
Rachi Mahesa nija mānasa rākhā,  
Pāyī susamau Sivā sana bhāshā.*

'It is called *Ramcharit Manas*, and even the sound of this name gives rest to the ears ;

The mind which is like an elephant, burning in the forest-fire of sense objects,

becomes happy when it falls into this lake ;

It destroys the three defects, misery, spiritual poverty, the impurities and evil ways of *Kaliyuga* ;

Having conceived it, Siva kept it in his mind and related it to Parvati at an opportune moment.'

Scattered throughout this book and delicately woven in the texture of the story, we find literal translations of verses from the *Gita*, *Upanishads*, *Bhāgavata*, and various other scriptures. Thus the wisdom of the sages was brought to the masses at large in their own familiar everyday language. Considering the opposition that Tulsidas encountered in using the spoken language for his writings, this was no small achievement ; but our deepest obligation to him is that he has given form to the Formless and has brought within the grasp of the limited understanding bestowed on us, that Brahman which the *Vedas* describe as '*neti, neti*'. Just as Bhagiratha brought down the heavenly Ganges to earth through his austerities, so the devotion of Tulsidas has brought God down from the heavens into the practical world of our daily life. Neither are we able to meditate on the *Nirguna Brahman*, nor have we the patience or faith to practise austerities in the cave or the mountain ; but the very idea that God lived like one of us and shared our joys and sorrows brings peace and solace to the human heart. Though we are conscious of the Divinity of Ram at every moment, He is at once so strong, peerless, and brave, and yet so loving and tender, and above all so very human in His dealings with men that we cannot help giving Him our hearts. In whatever frame of mind we may approach the *Ramcharit Manas*, if we but plunge into its cooling waters, we shall find to our great delight that, unknown to us, like the first ray of the rising sun, the *Saguna Brahman* in the form of Ram has entered the hitherto dark and lonely temple of our hearts ; and in our humble opinion this is due not to the grace of Ram, but to the



grace of that lover and servant of Ram who is known to the world as the blessed Tulsi.

We shall devote a few succeeding articles to give illustrations from the works of Tul-

sidas, treating the *Manas* as the main book and his other works as its subsidiaries.

(To be continued)

## VEDANTA AND WESTERN HISTORY

BY GERALD HEARD

A new thing has come into history—that is Western Vedanta. For centuries and perhaps millennia Vedanta influenced and moulded the East, passing from the richness of original Brahmanism to the austerity of Theravadin Buddhism, through the counter-richness of Mahayana and so again to the counter-reformation of Sankara and the Vedanta we know. But, save for some tentative influence—such as the missionary effort of Asoka and the small though steady trickle of Indian ideas through Alexandria—Vedanta did not really strike the West. Christianity, had it not been torn from its original rooting spots by Islam and made to specialize in the Western legalistic form of Catholicism, would no doubt have exchanged many ideas with India. As it was the Christian Church on the coramandel coast—and claiming descent from St. Thomas—did not remain a live link and the Buddhist missionaries who entered the Mediterranean world made no distinctive mark. True, there is a church in Sicily dedicated to St. Barlaam—a garbled form of Buddha's name made famous and saint-worthy because of a garbled but very popular story of his life and renunciation. The width and subtlety of Indian thought, the range of its cosmology, the depth of its psychology never, however, succeeded in enlarging the narrow Hebrew scheme of things, that Apocalypse and Eschatology, that has ever since cramped and hobbled the religion of the West. That the Eastern churches of the Levant would have made some use of this treasury of knowledge there can be little

doubt when we see how many Indian ideas are present in Origen, how clearly he holds reincarnation and with what liberality he wished to draw upon the East for insights, for those illuminations from 'the Christians that were before Christ'. The mistake of the council of Chalcedon—fourth century—in condemning reincarnation—removed from Christianity a view of things which till then had been liberally entertained and with which the cruel finality of everlasting punishment for the mistakes of this one life would not have disgraced the 'religion of love'.

Indeed we may say that the appearance of Vedanta in the West as a living religion—and not as an academic study, is inevitable just because the religious heredity of the West has now outgrown the tight Hebrew pot of cosmology in which it has been growing for two millennia. A faith that taught hell for those who did not get themselves saved in this life was suited enough to put 'the fear of God' into barbarians or into men too busy to do much more than make a dash with their last breath for a death-bed repentance. But for people really interested in the spiritual world, really desirous of growing in spirituality and filled with a real longing to know and love God such doctrines were, far from being any help, a terrible obstacle. Catholicism has become increasingly dogmatic; Protestantism increasingly secular and humanist. Where were men to find a religion that was intense but not cruelly narrow, wide but not vague, loose but not tepid? Vedanta in the broad range



that is given by the Vedanta mission of Southern California is the answer.

And the very breadth of Vedanta combined with its force is bound to embrace and develop much that is now lying latent in our Western thought and spirit. When Christianity went to India it became in form and in much of its spirit Indian. When the Indian reformed Brahmanism that we call Buddhism went into China it took on many of the forms and manners of China—so much so that today when people imagine that warrior spirit Gautama they think of a rather obese Mongolian dozing. So today when Vedanta comes to the West it will, now that it has been acclimated here—to which acclimating it owes so much to Swami Prabhavananda—take on and make a distinctive Western Vedanta. What that will be we cannot say. Few historical studies are more interesting than to see what it is that the spirit of an area and province will pick as its peculiar accent and expression of a universal truth. For example when Tantric Buddhism—a queer enough synthesis in all conscience—entered China by way of Tibet and the Shakta-Shakti Symbol of Union was shown to the Chinese they made no protest as far as can be discovered to this rather startling picture of Spirit and Expression, they simply dropped that symbol making gradually their own iconography. So no doubt gradually the West will pick those Asiatic forms and from them make ones of its own which best express for it by symbol that which all agree is in its Essence inexpressible.

It is easier to speak of the Perennial Philosophy, the Eternal Gospel, the Universal Religion than actually to define them—or it. We can see that certain general principles run through the great religions that have affected mankind for many centuries. But when we come to consider what are the actual essentials and what merely matters of time and place, topical and local, then the issue is far more difficult. Probably there is not a religion that is extant that does not in some way and degree meet the deep demands of its

worshippers, for relief from the false self, for some vision of a vast meaning in which all may find both loss of their separation and fulfilment of their deepest nature. But certainly religions just as much as individual persons grow old and in their decrepitude they may like ourselves produce ugly features and show evidence of disease. The Congress of World Religions when being summoned in London in the thirties had many sessions of its main committee to decide on how this act of union could be best expressed. The secretary very rightfully wished all religions to be invited. There was however a long and inconclusive discussion when a member asked whether all religions would include such tribes as might still wish to practice human sacrifice or even temple prostitution. A great deal of thinking has to be done on Ramakrishna's ecumenical statement—All roads lead to God. It is possible to think of all religions as tending to enlightenment and liberation but only if some of the more decadent and crabbed are considered as those strange and tortuous paths whereby as Blake puts it in his gnomic utterance, 'Were the fool to continue in his folly he would become wise.' You may get to Catalina by sailing straight southwest from Los Angeles. You can also go there via New York, Lisbon, Cairo, Ceylon, Wake Island and hence come upon it from the sea-ward side. As the Sanskrit tradition holds that the gods themselves are mortal—only the imageless Brahman is unchanging—so it would seem is it with all religions, they may need to die and transmigrate and their essential nature take form again in another guise in another epoch.

There is however another consideration that today arises when we think of the Perennial Philosophy and especially of Vedanta as its most ancient expression. There may not be progress in history in the way that the nineteenth century thought of historical progress—a process whereby men became better just by going on 'and', as Tennyson says, 'the thoughts of men are



widened with the circling of the suns'. But undoubtedly there is an element of irreversibility in history—a process is working itself out. History does not repeat itself—only, as in music a theme given earlier may be repeated and developed further on in the composition. There can be no doubt that no age resembling ours has existed before and that in one respect we have an opportunity denied to earlier ages—Today the world is in touch with every part of itself as never before. We know that

in spite of the exclusiveness of certain theologians, religions themselves are strongly inclined, as said above, to borrow from one another. Today there is no doubt we must look forward to and should anticipate a new syncretism of the religions of the world. In a succeeding article some of the possible results of this intercourse and exchange will be considered and the part that Vedanta will play in that process will be suggested.

## A GLIMPSE OF THE REAL INDIA (I)

BY A WESTERN BRAHMACHARI

### I

When, in January 1949, I set sail from New York for Bombay with Swami Nikhilananda, I had already had the benefit of over ten years' association with the Ramakrishna Mission. Even so, to have gone direct to India without an intermediate stop by way of preparation might have required too great an adjustment for an inflexible Western mind like my own. So, at least, I told myself at the time. Therefore I welcomed the plan to break our journey with a short stay in the beautiful countryside about Naples and almost a week in Rome.

Italy, with its centuries of religious and artistic culture, its mild climate, its semi-tropical vegetation, its simple peasants and workers, and its post-war problems of rehabilitation and over-population, provides as good an introduction to India as can be found in Europe. At Pompeii, the ancient city buried by an eruption of Mt Vesuvius in A.D. 79, the distant past is vividly brought to life by excavations revealing stately temples, elaborate houses and gardens, public baths equipped with hot water and steam-rooms, a drainage system with lead pipes, and all the other details of a flourishing city's life—grain-shops,

oil-shops, bakeries, wine-shops, and the like. Even the deep ruts made in the stone paving by chariot wheels are as clear as when they still resounded to the clatter of horses' hoofs two thousand years ago. But this is a dead city, where everything serves to remind one of the sudden end that came to its gaiety and refinement.

Rome, on the contrary, is very much alive. Here every other building stands not only as a reminder of the splendour that has been, but also as an illustration of how the living present can make use of the past to enhance its own meaning and value. Ruins of the ancient pagan Rome are abundant; but at the same time, only slightly less ancient Christian structures are still in use that incorporate huge columns or other imposing fragments of the pre-Christian temples abandoned with the advent of the new faith. The many churches and monasteries, the Roman Forum, the Colosseum, the broad avenues and graceful fountains, the libraries and museums, all have a fascination for the student of history or art or religion. In the Vatican Library is a collection of original manuscripts of the greatest literary value and its interesting mementoes of Church history keep one enthralled for



hours. Impressive from an artistic point of view are the Sistine Chapel, with frescoes by Michelangelo from biblical themes, the nearby suites of rooms decorated with paintings by Perugine and Raphael, and, in the Vatican Museum, the masterpieces of Greek sculpture found buried in and near Rome.

St. Peter's Church, the mother church for all Roman Catholics, had a particular interest for us; for it was here that Swami Saradananda went into a deep spiritual mood while attending high mass. We recalled Sri Ramakrishna's having once said that the Swami, in a previous incarnation, was one of the disciples of Jesus. To us, however, this colossal structure, which could contain within itself an average sized Christian church, bore witness more to the worldly power and prestige of the Roman Church than to the spiritual power that enables it to go on producing saints and holy souls century after century. Hence we were equally interested in visiting some of the smaller churches and cloisters, all of great antiquity, and particularly in attending, with some Roman friends, the festival of St. Agnes, a virgin martyred for her faith at the age of thirteen during the early days of Christianity. The Church of St. Agnes is an ancient one, with catacombs beneath, and in it are said to be preserved St. Agnes' bones. In this festival two white lambs, one crowned with white and the other with red roses, were carried in procession to the altar of the church and blessed by a bishop. The church was crowded with children; for this saint was a child and is a patron of children. But there were many older people too. Swami Nikhilananda said it reminded him of a Hindu festival. We were told that the lambs are afterwards raised by the nuns of a certain convent and that their wool is used for making an ecclesiastical vestment given by the Pope to high church dignitaries.

At Rome was living one of the greatest of modern philosophers, George Santayana. The Swami had a long conversation with him.

Though an avowed naturalist, he seemed very much like a *rishi* out of ancient India. In the shelter of a hospital conducted by English nuns, the *Piccola Compagnia di Maria*, or Little Company of Mary, as they are called, he was living as a semi-invalid, granting interviews to those who took the trouble to look him up. He was much interested to hear from the Swami about Shankaracharya's conception of *māyā*, which had not, he said, been explained so persuasively to him before. He agreed that Western philosophers wanted to know more about the orthodox Indian philosophies just as they were originally presented. This was encouraging to the Swami, who had felt for a long time that if Indian thought could be presented in all its original colours, it would make a deeper impression on Western minds.

The second half of our journey we made by aeroplane. In exactly fortyeight hours, with a half day's stopover in Cairo, we spanned the entire distance between Italy and India.

## II

When Swami Nikhilananda and I arrived at the Bombay Ashrama of the Ramakrishna Mission, we were still wearing the garlands that Swami Sambuddhananda had given us at the aerodrome. The extreme kindness of his coming to meet us at 2 a. m., with several other members of the Ashrama, and patiently seeing us through the customs, was my first experience of Indian hospitality. During our tour through the country for the next three and a half months we were to experience it again and again. Just as the early morning worship was beginning in the shrine, we got into bed.

On arising after a few hours' sleep, we enjoyed a hearty breakfast of puffed rice, fruits, toast, and tea. Only after it was over did I have a real chance to become acquainted with the Ashrama in which we were living. Monks and *brahmachārins*, I found, lived with an equal simplicity that extended to all phases of their living. Electricity they had,



but only for lighting. The beds, consisting of low tables on which the bedding was placed, were the most austere feature from a Western point of view. The bathing and dining arrangements, though simpler than those to which we were accustomed, provided no trouble. To pour water over oneself out of a mug is not at all strange for one used to shower baths, and to sit cross-legged on the floor and eat with one's fingers is only a trial to the uninitiated. Even in America we had learnt that Indian cooking tastes best when eaten Indian fashion.

Here was a country where Wordsworth's line: 'High thinking and plain living are no more' was manifestly untrue. Now I could really feel the force of Swami Vivekananda's statement that in the West men had been experimenting to find out *how much* was needed to make a man happy, whereas in India they had been experimenting to find out *how little* was needed. How to preserve the Spartan simplicity of Indian society and at the same time ease the extreme poverty of the masses is one of the central problems of the age—not for India only, but for the world. For, if civilization is to be preserved, the Indian way of life and all it stands for must also be preserved. But this problem cannot be solved by denying India the basic conveniences of modern industrialized society. If Hinduism cannot meet the challenge of Western materialism any more successfully than Christianity has, no amount of protection can save it.

Quite as important, from this point of view, as the indifference to material comfort still found all over India is another form of simplicity, which became more and more evident as our trip progressed. This was the complete lack of self-seeking I noted in personal relations. If someone did me a good turn, whether as the result of a spontaneous impulse or of a request on my part, no thanks were expected. Formal salutations of greeting or farewell, too, were not indulged in nearly so much as they are in America and Europe.

And in conversation, practically no one talked about what *he* was doing, or had been doing, or was planning to do. It is possible that some of this is pure social convention. It is also possible that, having seen India largely through the Mission and its friends, I judged her habits by what I found in this special environment. But is there any other group more representative of the real India? It was only among a few Westernized friends that we saw marked attention to these irrelevant niceties of behaviour.

The Bombay Ashrama provided an excellent introduction to the work of the Mission all over India. A spirit of devotion pervaded the place. Under Swami Sambuddhananda's guidance were several young *brahmachārins*. They were full of attention to our every need. Because our New York Ashrama is a small one, each member is called on to do a variety of tasks. At Bombay, however, each had his allotted duties: buying vegetables and helping in the kitchen, assisting the *pūjāri* in the shrine, keeping accounts and writing letters, or doing outside work for the Ashrama. Yet always the *brahmachārins* found time to do us extra favours. In addition to these young men who had dedicated their lives completely to God, there were several lay helpers who, before going to their work in the city, served daily as compounders in the charitable dispensary for the poor.

Another feature of the Bombay Ashrama was the Students' Home, located next to the main monastery building. It provided accommodation for twenty or more boys. Plans were well advanced for the erection of a new building. We were happy to visit the Home one evening and enjoy the hospitality of the students.

The shrine at the Ashrama is a beautiful one, with a large open porch in front of it, paved with a sort of mosaic tile. Regular worship is performed by one of the Swamis three times a day. The *ārati* service, held every evening, is attended by a large gathering of people from the neighbourhood. About



fifteen or twenty children regularly joined with the older devotees in singing the *ārati* hymns, and the fervour of their young voices was very affecting. They also showed great enthusiasm for the *prasād* that was distributed at the end of the service.

At Bombay we enjoyed our first large festival—the public celebration of Swami Vivekananda's birthday. An interesting part of the day's activities was the offering to the 'poor Narayanas' of rice pudding and a small amount of money. For the main function, in the late afternoon, a large pandal had been erected and decorated. Excellent music, vocal and instrumental, occupied the first hour of the programme. Fortunately at the New York Ashrama we had learnt to enjoy Indian music as much as Western. Swami Nikhilananda was one of the speakers on this occasion and he spoke on *The Vedanta Movement in the West*. In his lecture he described not only the work of the Ramakrishna Mission centres in America but also the historical background of the American people that made possible their hearty response to Swami Vivekananda's message. The previous evening he had spoken at a similar meeting in Bombay, also held under the auspices of the Mission. It was encouraging to see how favourably the audience reacted, on both occasions, to his ideas about the need of a revival of Indian spirituality. After the reports we had received in America about the educated Indian public's lack of interest in religion, we had expected something quite different.

### III

At the New Delhi station we were greeted by Swami Gangeshananda and several members of the Mission. Once again we received garlands of beautiful flowers—the Indian gesture of welcome so appealing to a stranger from the West. Since it was already late we were driven straight to the Ashrama. As I saw the sign 'Ramakrishna Mission' I felt as if I were coming home. Everything was

provided at the Ashrama to make a Westerner feel comfortable—even to Kellogg's corn flakes for breakfast. I was struck with the modernness and neatness of the buildings and the efficiency with which everything was run. Here, as at Bombay, the affection of the *Brahmachārins* was very touching. One of the greatest delights throughout our trip was my relationship with the younger members of the Order, who accorded me everywhere a genuine and spontaneous welcome.

In the city, however, I was distressed to note a distinctly Western flavour even stronger than that of Bombay. It was evident that trouble lay ahead if India's educated minority should continue to follow alien fashions of living and thinking. But at the same time, I was pleased with the Mission's up-to-date Tuberculosis Clinic, which we inspected a few days after our arrival, and the sturdy-looking small houses erected by the Government as a start in housing refugees from West Punjab. There is a vast difference between putting Western scientific and technological knowledge to practical use, and imitating everything Western just for the sake of imitation.

In the bazar of the old City I first came in intimate contact with typical Indian conditions. Many times Indian friends had warned me, in the West, not to expect too much in India and had compared conditions in their motherland most unfavourably with what they had found in Europe and America. Yet on several occasions I had to look twice before I could understand what my Indian companion was referring to when he said, apologetically, 'This is a very dirty street,' or 'These people have yet to learn the laws of hygiene,' or 'Conditions are very different in your country—aren't they?' Somehow it never occurred to me to judge what I saw by Western standards. There are so many things in India that should remain exactly as they are that it seems absurd to become exercised over those few that probably need reforming. What is vital and right and of enduring value far outweighs what appears to



be diseased and wrong and of passing significance.

In the old city and in the surrounding countryside we visited some famous examples of Moslem architecture. They have a certain charm, to be sure. But the amount of destruction wrought in the past by the Moslems dampened my enthusiasm. In the many mosques that had been allowed to remain, even on the sites of Hindu holy places, after the Moslems had gone out of power was conclusive evidence of the Hindus' remarkable tolerance. Their ability to let bygones be bygones indicated a superior sort of realism hard for a Western mind to grasp. While we were driving past the buildings of the Secretariat, in New Delhi, I expressed my surprise at the sight of several well-known statues. I even asked the *Brahmachārin* with us why they were still there. 'Now that we are free,' he said quietly, 'does it make any difference whether they stay or go?' After a pause, he added, 'They do have a certain historical significance, you know'. This patience, this willingness to forget the faults of others once they are no longer in a position to continue committing them, is something that has gone into the very blood of the nation. I have heard the same remarks on so many occasions that I cannot believe they simply reflected individual opinions.

One morning a number of us went to see the fine new Gandhi Memorial at Rajghat. At the spot where the Mahatma was cremated we offered a few flowers.

From New Delhi I went on a never-to-be-forgotten side-trip to Vrindavan and the holy places connected with Sri Krishna's early life. Though I was wearing coat and trousers—with the incongruous addition of a chaddar over my coat—I was allowed to enter the shrines at Giri Govardhan and almost all of those inside the town of Vrindavan as well. There was an almost tangible atmosphere of peace wherever we went in Vrindavan—whether in the narrow but well-paved streets, through which we dashed in a tonga from

temple to temple, or in the shrines themselves, with their beautiful images of Sri Radha and Sri Krishna, or in the sacred Nidhuvana, or at the houses where Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother had once stayed, or on the sandy bank of the Jumna. Perhaps most noticeable of all was the atmosphere of the shrine at the Ashrama itself, which I visited shortly after we arrived. There was something in its decoration that reminded me of some of the smaller churches in Italy. But the yellow marigolds arranged before the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna, and the associations which the other pictures in the room evoked, had a power to still the mind that is not often encountered outside India.

Before we returned to New Delhi, the next day, I was shown through the wards and the operating theatre of the Sevashrama. It was easy to understand why the Ramakrishna Mission is so much respected here. The service that had been and is being done for the poor—especially in the eye clinic—deserves high praise.

#### IV

A long cherished desire of mine had been to meet Swami Atulananda the American monk whose writings had first introduced me to the Indian monastic ideal. It was a profound satisfaction to fulfil this desire at the Kankhal Ashrama and thus put the seal on a friendship maintained for almost twenty years through correspondence. The six-hour bus trip from New Delhi I made alone. During my stay with the Swami I was able to share, through his advice and his reminiscences, some of the inspiration that he, like all the older members of the Ramakrishna Mission, had derived from association with the direct disciples of the Master.

It was Swami Atulananda's custom, while staying at the Kankhal Ashrama to walk over to the office building every morning and afternoon and join in conversation with some of the Swamis and the resident physician. I was glad to have this opportunity to meet a



number of members of the Ashrama. On the second evening a gathering was arranged in the lecture hall, at which I was forced to sing the several Bengali songs I had learnt in America, many years before, from Swami Jnaneswarananda. I think it was such a surprise to everyone that an American could sing Bengali songs at all that they mercifully overlooked the obvious flaws in the performance.

Though my visit to the Sevashrama was much too brief, here again I had a distinct impression of the devoted service being rendered to monks and householders alike. The physician in charge, I was happy to learn, gave his services absolutely free.

I was fortunate, too, to be taken to the Brahmakunda at Hardwar and to Hrishikesh and the famous Lakshman Jhoola. Our trip on this occasion was a most interesting but rather difficult one, since at one place, where a bridge had been washed out, it seemed doubtful whether the motor could negotiate the rough passage over the stony bed of a dried-up river. At Lakshman Jhoola, beyond the bridge and the Siva temples, we walked for a good distance up the road leading to Badrinarayan and sat for some minutes in silence beside the swift-running waters of the Ganges, still muddied by recent torrential rains. The beauty of the river, as it issued from the foot-hills of the Himalayas, reminded me of the mountain streams in America; but the associations that its name evokes have, of course, no parallel there. On our way to and from the bridge we were kept on the alert by persistent monkeys that were plaguing unwary pilgrims for food. Only by showing them our empty hands could we persuade them to look elsewhere. Perhaps the most attractive spot we saw on this particular excursion was the Ramakrishna Kutir at Hrishikesh, where we found a kindly old Swami living in complete seclusion in one of the six simple huts within the enclosure. Here again was real peace. It became a sort of punishment to be shown so

many inspiring places, only to be dragged away by an inexorable time schedule.

On the return journey, I stopped for half a day at Lucknow and visited the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama at Aminabad. Together with a *Brahmachārin* from Kankhal, who joined me there, I proceeded to Allahabad, enjoying as usual the sight of fields and villages from the train window. At Allahabad we spent a few happy days at the Ashrama blessed by the memory of Swami Vijnanananda. Swami Nikhilananda gave two talks before the students of Allahabad University, where we were again impressed by the respectful hearing his audience gave him. When we bathed at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna, I was delighted by the innumerable gaily coloured flags—presumably representing different denominations of Hinduism—flying at the top of tall flag-staffs planted in the sand. Some of them carried ancient devices whose original meaning was lost in antiquity, and others carried most modern ones, such as locomotives and automobiles. This, I thought, was typical of India—to give as much honour to the modern as to the ancient, but to preserve the ancient as carefully as what was new. Though the time of the annual *mela* was past, we saw here many of the ash-covered *sādhus* for whom India is renowned. Most of them were quietly going about their own business; but there were a few *gerua*-clad beggars who did no honour to their garb.

Here in Allahabad—as previously at Bombay and New Delhi—we had a taste of the hospitality of real friends and devotees of the Mission. I can never forget the few hours we spent in the home of one family, who entertained us with a feast of carefully prepared Bengali dishes and in everyway treated us as if we were their nearest of kin. Hospitality is to be found in all parts of the globe; for love and kindness are not limited to any one particular country or race. But Hindu hospitality has a flavour that is hard to match elsewhere. There is as much in the *way* things



are done as there is in *what* things are done.

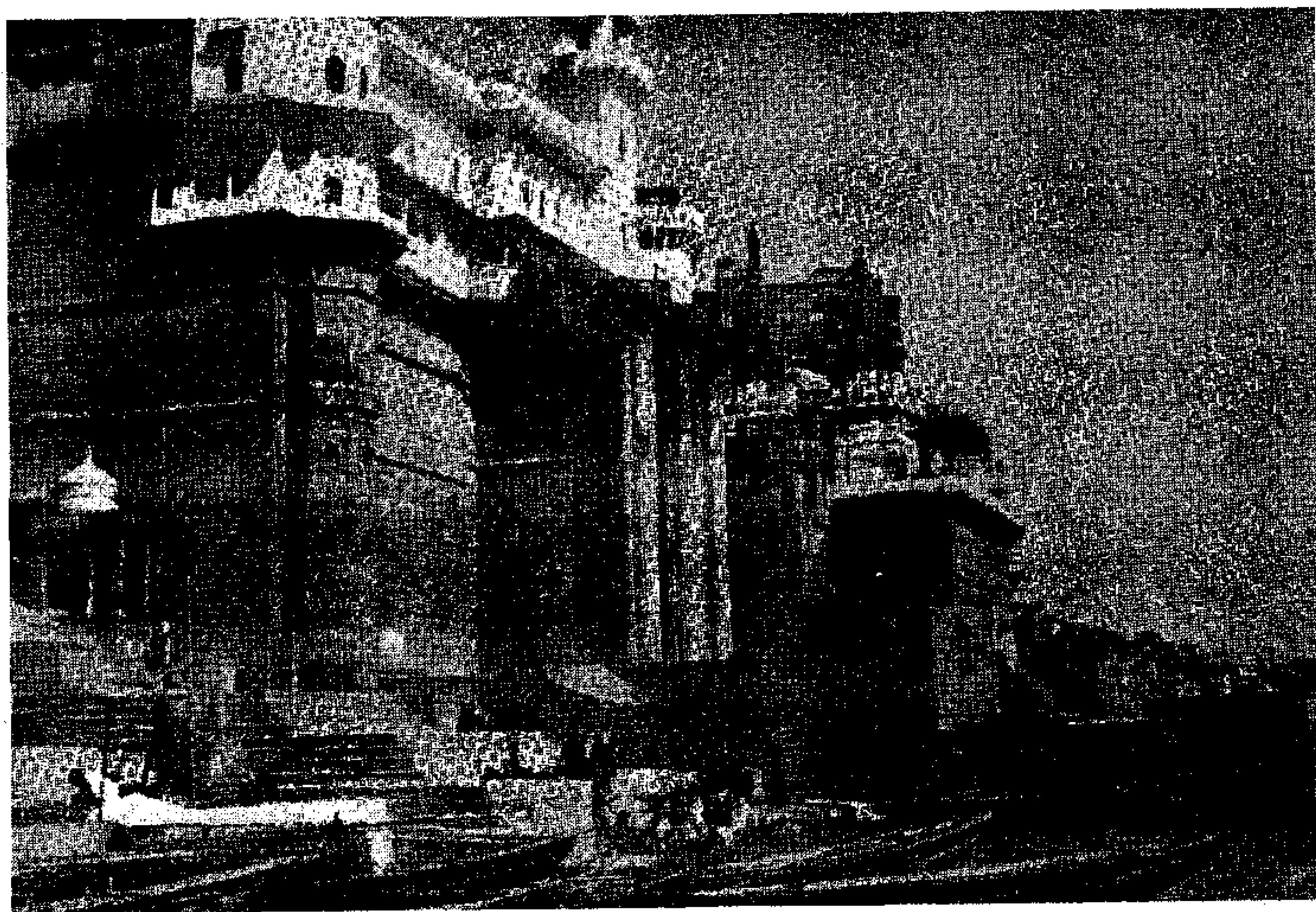
## V

At Banaras we stayed at the Home of Service, on Ramakrishna Road, a place inseparably associated with the memory of Swami Shivananda. Swami Turiyananda, and many another of the Master's closest disciples. One of the marvels of all Mission Sevashramas is that they have somehow grown big without acquiring the atmosphere of a hospital. Here beds of seasonal flowers made the place informal and gay. At the Sevashrama we

mixed with a large number of *sanyāsins* and *brahmachārins*, and I began to have a sense of the magnitude of the Order to which we belonged. Several of the older Swamis here were exceptionally thoughtful and kind. The presence of the gentle Swami Santananda, who was at that time lying ill in one of the smaller hospital buildings, was like a benediction. It was my good fortune to visit him a number of times and one day to sing for him.

The atmosphere of Banaras, everyone will tell you, is peculiarly conducive to meditation. This was especially noticeable when, with Swami Atmaprakashananda and a few others, we took a long walk to the outskirts of the city one afternoon at dusk. On our way we entered several shrines of Siva, and after we had come to the open country we came upon Kailas Math, an orthodox monastery of the *Puri* Order of monks, situated on a slight

elevation. A monk was meditating in the grove of trees near the monastery, his face toward the sunset. We entered the enclosure and were at once impressed by the peacefulness of the place. A large image of Shankaracharya, with several smaller figures of disciples,



GHATS ALONG THE GANGES, BANARAS

stood in the shrine on one side of the courtyard. The living quarters of the monks, who spent their time largely in meditation, reminded me of those of our own Mission monasteries.

Our visits to the *ghats* along the Ganges, with their arresting vistas and great variety of activities, to the temples of Viswanath and Mother Annapurna, and to the bazars along the famous Viswanath Lane were full of interest for me. Several times we took boat rides on the sacred river, during one of which we visited the houseboat of a saintly monk, said to be over a hundred years old, waiting there for his death. Once we went on a trip by motor to the Durgabari and to the Mahavir temple, where Tulsidas attained illumination. But most moving of all was the long and beautiful Monday evening *ārati* at the temple of Viswanath, which we watched from a nearby balcony. Each of these experiences allowed a further glimpse



into the real India, the India of the Sanatana Dharma.

While we were at Banaras we made a short excursion, in the company of Swami Omkarananda, the abbot of the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, and several other Swamis, to Sarnath, the site of an extensive ancient Buddhist monastery and of a great *Stupa* said to have been built over the spot where Buddha preached his first sermon. The well-kept museum near by housed a particularly fine collection of sculptures and architectural fragments taken from the excavations at the

The atmosphere of Sarnath, however, like that of the Red Fort and the Kutub Minar at Delhi, and of the Taj Mahal at Agra—which we had briefly visited on our return from Vrindavan—was one without life. Peace there was, to be sure. But it was a nostalgic peace. What I much preferred to all these reminders of a past glory was the living sense of a religious tradition and aspiration, unbroken through thousands of years, to be found in the Hindu holy places. All over India, in every one of its ancient and many of its modern shrines, was manifest for who-

ever sought for it an identical peace of God. It is this fact that gives India that peculiar fascination which sensitive travellers have always felt, even when they have not analysed its cause, no matter how short their stay in the country. This sense of peace, which I found not only in the Himalayas and Vrindavan and Banaras, but also later at Dakshineswar and Kamarpukur and finally at Madras, was what convinced me that India's unity already exists and does not need to be created.

## VI

The climax of our visit to India, that for which everything else was only a preparation, came with our arrival at Belur Math. Early one morning in February we were met at the railway station by Swami Madhavananda, who was then the General Secretary of the Mission, and a number of other monks, and in a few minutes we were on our way to the monastery. The charm-

monastery. One of the most impressive of these was the lion capital of the polished sandstone pillar of Asoka, now used on the seal of India. Another was the wonderful Buddha of Sarnath, which radiates a refinement and calm possessed by few pieces of sculpture.

ing location of the Mission headquarters on the bank of the Ganges has been described many times and I was familiar with the arrangement of the buildings. The Ganges dominates the whole scene. All day long there is activity along and on the river. At the *ghat* in front of the



TEMPLE OF VISWANATH, BANARAS



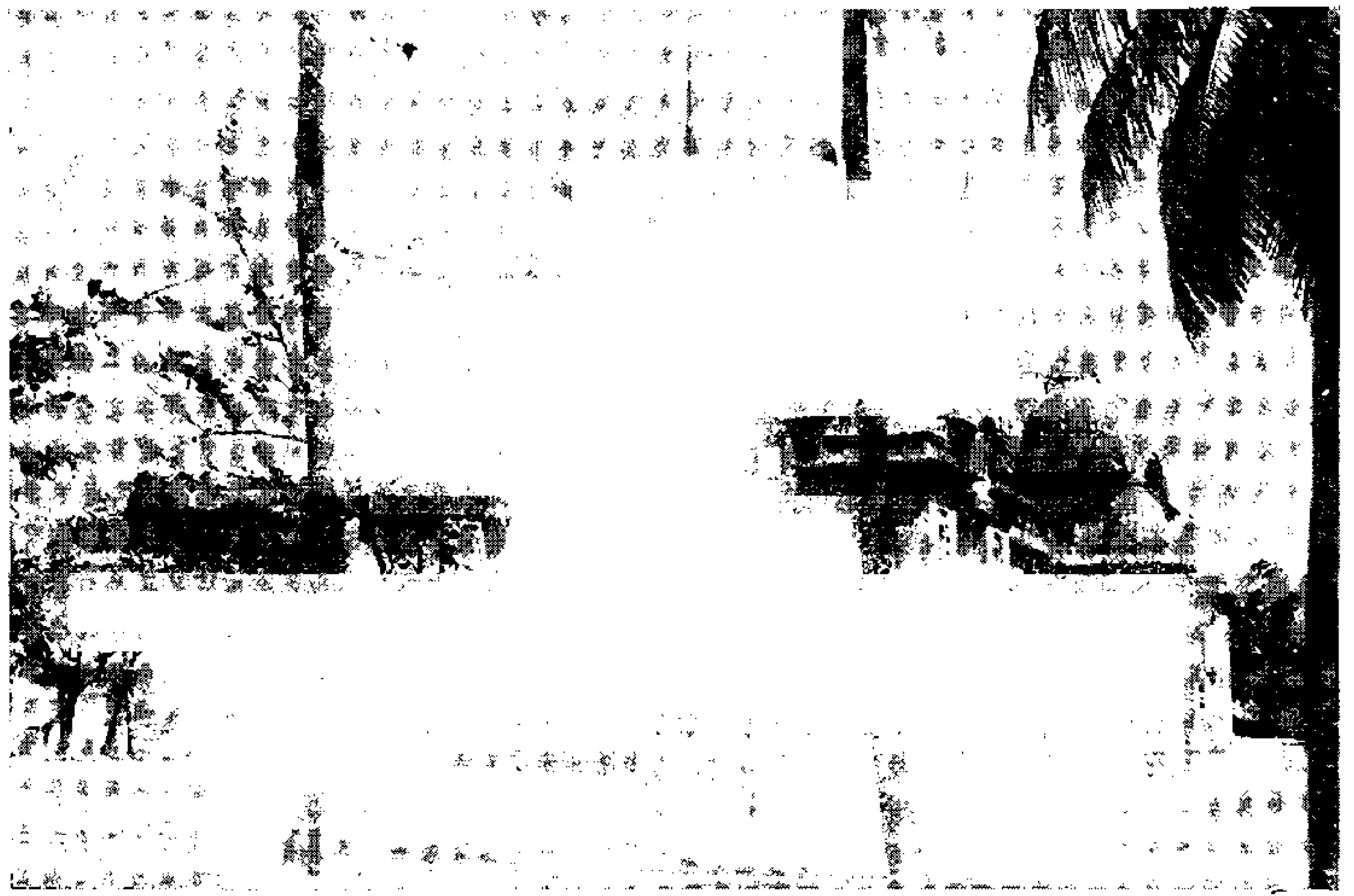
Holy Mother's temple there is almost always a group of bathers. Boats of every description, from ancient galleys to modern power launches, ply up and down the muddy current. And in the distance, as a reminder of that unparalleled life on which the whole structure of the Mission is founded, can be seen the spires of the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar a few miles to the north.

The most appealing time of day at Belur is certainly the hour of the *ārati*. The atmosphere of the place at dusk, when the river takes on a sort of iridescence and the shrines and living quarters of the monks are bathed in a timeless trance, has never been adequately conveyed in words. In the great temple, before the luminous image of the Master,

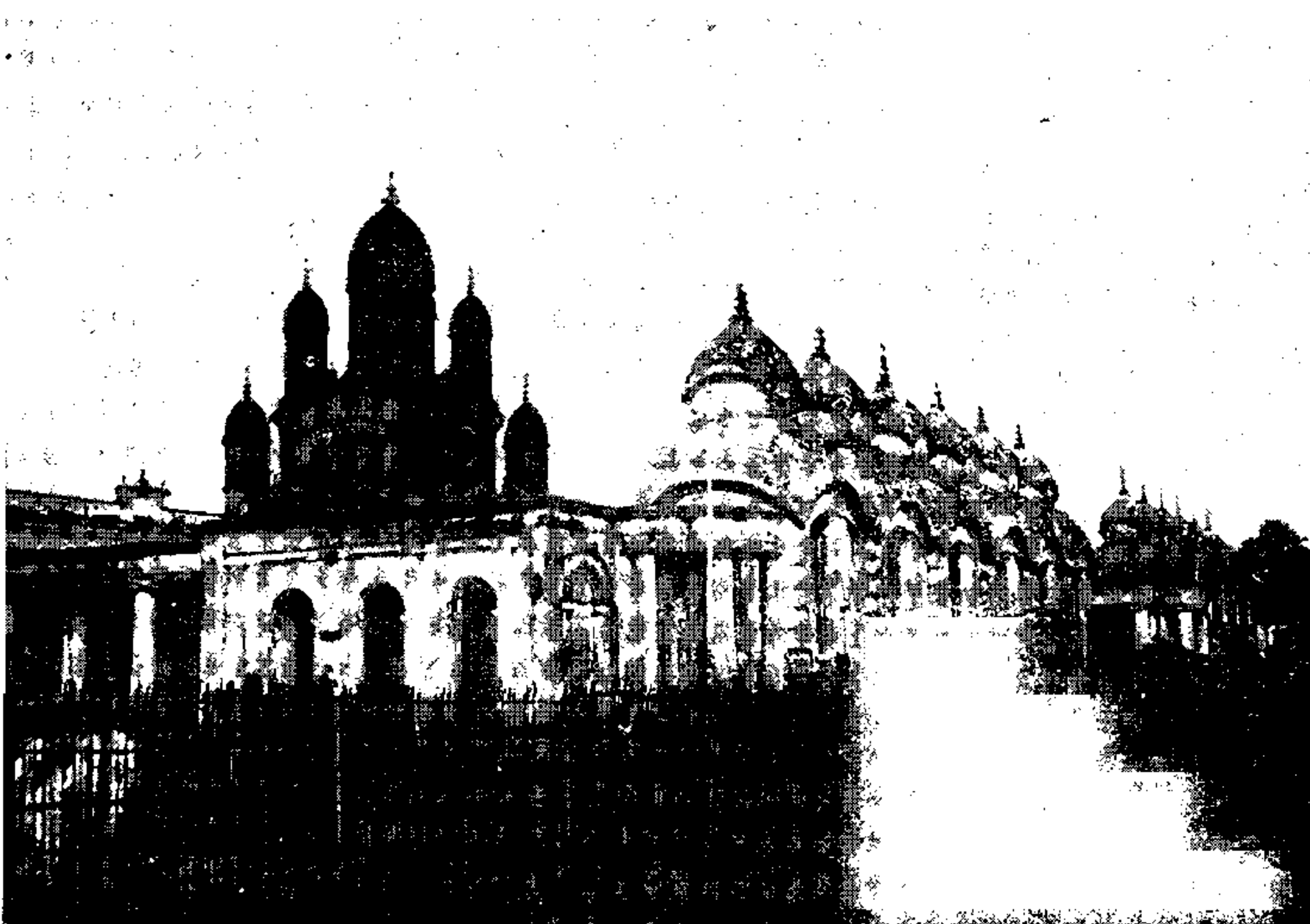
devotees join with monks in singing the *ārati* hymns. While the priest rings the bell and waves lights in the shrine, the majestic stanzas of *Khandana bhava bandhana* may be heard, with their accompaniment of gong and cymbals, even from the boats on the Ganges. Sung at dusk in every monastery where there

are enough monks to form a chorus, the *ārati* hymns join the Order throughout India with the bonds of devotion to a common ideal.

The new temple at Belur—now more than ten years old—is easily the most striking building at the headquarters. To Western eyes it appears a happy combination of Orient and Occident and is thus a fitting symbol of the spirit of the Mission. The spa-



SRI RAMAKRISHNA TEMPLE, BELUR



KALI TEMPLE, DAKSHINESWAR  
SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S ROOM IN FOREGROUND



cious prayer hall is reminiscent of some of the churches in Europe, while the shrine—except for the great hollow dome above it—is more typically Indian. The temples of the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda are also particularly successful in design from a Western point of view. One of the most appealing aspects of Belur Math is the sight of devotees bowing reverently before the several shrines all through the day.



HOLY MOTHER'S TEMPLE, BELUR

The original Math building is, in its own way, a shrine as well. Here is the room used by Swami Vivekananda, the room in which he gave up the body on the Fourth of July, 1902. The entire place is saturated with memories of the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Here, too, lives the venerable Swami Virajananda whenever he pays a visit to the headquarters. The presence of the President of the Order makes of the building a special place of pilgrimage for innumerable devotees of the Mission. Unfailingly interesting is the *darshan* held twice daily, when men, women, and children come to pay him their homage.

Across the courtyard from the Math

building, and up a flight of stairs, is the shrine where Sri Ramakrishna was worshipped before the erection of the new temple. This, too, is full of holy associations; for here Swami Vivekananda had his last meditation and here many of the disciples of the Master spent long hours in communion with God. Beyond this building, and directly north of the temple, is another of great interest, the new monks' quarters, which was dedicated on the day of *Dol Purnima* while we were at the Math. Simple in design both without and within, it is at the same time extremely modern in construction and provides the monks with precisely the accommodations they need. It is the largest dormitory at the Math, housing fifty persons.

What seems destined to develop into one of the most significant departments of the Mission's activities at Belur is the residential college, or Vidyamandira. Housed in buildings of a modern and attractive design and located on land adjacent to that of the monastery proper, it promises to fulfil one of Swami Vivekananda's cherished dreams—that of converting Belur Math into a finished university where Western science and Indian spirituality would be taught side by side. We were gratified to learn that most of the students are drawn from families unable to pay tuition for their sons' education. Also near the monastery is the Industrial School. There are several departments for practical training, including tailoring, carpentry, and weaving, and a more advanced technical section, where boys are taught the fundamentals of electrical and mechanical engineering. The school thus forms the nucleus of an institution that should set an example for all Bengal. The work of these young men is already providing a source of income for the school, even as it trains them for practical work in days to come.

Our stay at Belur Math lasted about three months. Here life went on uneventfully, its quiet current broken now and then by a religious festival or a *yātnā* or a feast given to



the monks by some generous devotee. Swami Nikhilananda and I took our breakfasts and suppers at the old Guest House where we were living, and our midday meals always with the monks in the dining hall. Many of the Swamis at Belur went out of their way to talk to me, explaining different aspects of the Hindu religion and culture, describing various features of life at the Math, or showing me objects of interest. One Swami took it upon himself to point out new and rare blossoms whenever they appeared somewhere on the grounds. Frequent visits to Swami Sankarananda and Swami Vishuddhananda provided an ample share of that holy company which Sri Ramakrishna has said is so necessary for the struggling soul. Needless to say, my daily visit to the venerable and kindly President of the Order, whenever I was staying at the Math, proved a real source of inspiration.

Nor should I fail to mention the *brahmachārins* and younger *sanyāsins* at Belur Math. Without their affectionate solicitude my life there would not have been half so happy as it was. I am especially grateful to the young *brahmachārin* deputed to look after our wants. During the early part of our visit, when I knew next to nothing of the details of life at Belur, he took me under his wing. It was he who led me, on the *Sivarātri* day, to the Kalyaneswar temple, and it was he who showed me the articles once used by Sri Ramakrishna, which are preserved in a room high up in the dome of the Master's temple. Whenever I forgot myself and thanked him for his kindness, he would say, 'It isn't I who am doing these things for you; it is all done through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna'.

Only once during our stay at Belur Math did Swami Nikhilananda leave the monastery for an extended period. This was when he flew to New Delhi to preside at the public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, at which Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru spoke to about ten thousand people. The Swami also gave an address at this time before the Hindu Mahasabha, the University, and the Indian

Council of World Affairs and had talks with various political leaders.

On several occasions we took short motor trips, with several of the Swamis, to visit places intimately connected with the Master's life. Our first visit to Dakshineswar occurred about a week after our arrival, just at the time of Mother Kali's *ārati*. Since it was late and fast growing dark, it was impossible for us to see most of the landmarks of the temple garden clearly. But the *ārati* itself was beautiful, and the sight of the image, half hidden by garlands of various hues, filled the heart with joy. Curiously enough, this first visit took place at precisely the time of day and year as that of M., who has so vividly described his experience in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Here, as at Belur Math, nothing seemed strange. The room where the Master spent so many years of his life, and where so many significant events took place, the twelve Siva temples, evocative of so many memories, the *Chāndni*, the *Nātmandir*, where scholars were forced to accept the Bhairavi Brahmani's assertion that Sri Ramakrishna was an Incarnation of God, and the shrine of Mother Kali—all seemed just as I had pictured them so many times in imagination. On later visits I was able to enjoy the quiet of the *Panchavati* and of Sri Ramakrishna's room to better advantage. And one memorable day I spent at Dakshineswar alone, visiting the shrines of Kali and Radhakanta and Siva, sitting in the Master's room, and wandering over the premises to my heart's content. On the semi-circular porch outside the Master's room, and on the enclosed verandah on its north side, I sat awhile reading his own words from the *Gospel* in the very places where they were spoken. Having bought a green cocoanut at a nearby stall, I ate lunch under the huge banyan of the *Panchavati* and rested there. After the shrines were opened again, I reluctantly left the temple garden, reaching Belur by river boat in time for the *ārati*.



It is not enough to visit such a holy place once or twice; one must return many times if its spirit is to penetrate deeply into one's consciousness. I am grateful that it was possible for me to visit Dakshineswar five times during our stay. Many friends have complained that the place is run down, that picknickers on weekends spoil its sanctity, that the priests are not all what they should be. But in spite of everything, here too I was aware of that same indefinable peace we

found in all the other holy places.

One day, in the company of a number of Swamis, we visited Kamarhati, the scene of Gopal Ma's thirty years' *sādhana*, and Panihati, where is held a yearly festival that was often attended by Sri Ramakrishna. The charm of both these spots, in sight of the peaceful Ganges, is unforgettable. Nor shall I forget the quietness in the room at Cossipore where the Master passed away.

(To be continued)

## NOTES AND COMMENTS

### TO OUR READERS

At the beginning of yet another New Year for the *Prabuddha Bharata*, the fifty-fifth of its career, we offer our cordial greetings to our readers and sympathizers, and look forward, with fresh hope and strength, to serve better the cause of truth and peace, and thereby promote the well-being of humanity. . . .

The *frontispiece* is a picture of the main monastery of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas. The Ashrama, founded in the year 1899, under the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda, is an important centre of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. . . .

The present issue opens with the *Conversations of Swami Sivananda* which continue to be as inspiring and instructive as ever. Mahapurush Maharaj elucidates the deep significance of spiritual initiation, and prescribes mental control through self-effort as a means to the attainment of blissful peace in life. . . .

This year will stand out strikingly prominent in the history of our country, as the epoch-making event marking the inauguration of the Republic of India takes place this month. Naturally our thoughts are turned to *India, Our Motherland*, her great past and her glorious future. The *Prabuddha Bharata*

once again earnestly urges the men and women of India to be legitimately proud of the greatness of their motherland, and to cherish as well as to proclaim the message of spirituality, religious harmony, and world peace. . . .

Hardly have the smoke and din of the second world war subsided when rumbling of another world conflagration are being heard in both the hemispheres. The rapidly changing political and military situation in China, the minor but potentially explosive turmoils in many parts of the world, and the open talk of 'East-West cold war' are symptoms of a deep-rooted spiritual malady. There is no doubt that if a mutually agreed formula for peace is not evolved, the consequences of atomic warfare will be disastrous to the victors and the vanquished alike as well as to neutrals. India has a message of hope for the world threatened with the doom of civilization. In *Vedanta and World Peace*, Swami Madhavananda, till recently General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission and, for a time, President of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati shows two ways—a long-term one and a short-term one—of practical application of Vedantic morality and spiritual unity to the solution of present-day problems and the creation of stable world understanding. . . .



This special number is, in a limited sense, meant to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas, wherein is situated the editorial office of the *Prabuddha Bharata*. On the occasion of the completion of *Fifty Years of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati*, we are glad to present to our readers three illuminating articles by different persons closely associated with the Mayavati Ashrama, appropriately recalling the aims and objects with which the Advaita Ashrama was originally founded and the nature of its activities during the period of the last half a century. The first article is a brief retrospect, neatly summing up the salient features of the semicentennial life-history of this Himalayan Ashrama. ...

Swami Pavitrananda was a member of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, for about twenty-four years, the longest period of intimate association with Mayavati for any monastic member of the Order. In the course of these years he was connected with the Ashrama in various capacities, especially as Manager of its Publication Department at Calcutta, then as Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, and finally as President of the Ashrama for over ten years. As such his *Reminiscences of Mayavati Ashrama* give us an authentic and intimate picture of the Advaita Ashrama, including some lively personal touches. At present Swami Pavitrananda is Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission. ...

A vivid and picturesque account of the *Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati*, largely covering the *Early Years*, is contributed by 'A Pilgrim' who prefers to remain anonymous. The 'Pilgrim', who is a poet and a great lover of beauty in Nature, undertook his first pilgrimage to Mayavati ten years ago, and was much charmed with the place and its inspiring surroundings. Ever since, he has maintained a close acquaintance with the Mayavati Ashrama and its inmates who affectionately regard him as one of themselves. The article is illustrated. ...

*The Works of Tulsidas* (I) is the first of

a series of excellent articles on the literary works of this great poet-saint of Northern India, celebrated for his monumental work *Rāmcharit Mānas*. Mrs C. K. Handoo, one of our old and valued contributors, makes a brilliant study of Tulsidas's poetical works distinguished alike for beauty and sweetness of versification and devotional fervour of a high order. The present article is mainly introductory to the series which will be continued in the succeeding months. ...

Our readers will be pleasantly surprised to find a remarkable and most interesting portrayal of *A Glimpse of the Real India* (I) by 'A Western Brahmachari'. It is remarkable for the extraordinarily familiar and unbiased sensitiveness with which the 'real India' is studied and understood by a Westerner—a feature we rarely meet with. It is interesting for the graphic descriptions of the writer's many personal experiences relating to participation in Hindu religious festivals, visits to temples and monasteries, and meetings with enlightened persons of various callings. ...

### SWATANTRA BHARAT AND THE CRISIS IN OUR CULTURE

Indian culture is very ancient, and has stood out great and undying through the ages, successfully enduring the vicissitudes of our national life. But today, it has had to face a challenge which is shaking its time-honoured institutions to their foundation, and weakening the structure of our social and moral life. Newfangled ideas and ideals in the socio-economic as well as in political and other fields have travelled far to the different parts of the world, stirring up people to seek revolutionary changes and pursue the path of violence and untruth, discarding peaceful and orderly evolution. India can meet this challenge successfully by adapting herself to the new situation while maintaining her pristine strength unimpaired. Shri K. M. Munshi, referring to this culture crisis that India is facing today, in the course of his Convocation Address to the Banaras Hindu



University, made a fervent appeal to the youth of independent India to revive the fundamental life-values positively representative of our national culture and tradition. He said :

‘... New and explosive ideas are all over the world, and it would be suicidal to ignore them. The old life is threatened by the new freedom which each man claims; by the emergence of the woman as an independent member of society; by the possible welter into which a democracy based on adult franchise may throw us; and by the totalitarianism which threatens all free life with soulless regimentation. All these factors have been casting the world and India into a different mould. ...

‘We have neglected education in the moral and social values. It is time that we study them in our academies and give them a purposive shape. Now in the light of the fundamental values which have made Indian culture great and undying, we must recapture pristine strength for the weakening fabric of our social life. ...

‘India is a land of faith; we are a God-minded race; and so long as our universities stand away from this fundamental they will

never produce the human power with which to meet our culture crisis.

‘Our universities therefore must recapture the spirit of our eternal culture, not by short-sighted revivalism but by a living reintegration. In our land, the central idea of *Rita*, the Law Universal of the Moral Order, was first discovered and defined. With it as the inspiring motive power, not only did we acquire earthly goods and undying moral power but also the eternal secret by which a human being can shed his limitations and become divine. Those have been India’s achievements in the fields of the Spirit. We owe our present freedom and strength to them—at any rate through the wonderful phenomenon founded on those secrets represented by the series of great men who have found self-fulfilment in living up to it. We are looked upon as the hope of the future and command the respect of the world not because of our military strength which is little, nor our populous country which is a handicap, but because Ramakrishna, Dayananda, Vivekananda, Malaviya, and Gandhiji have brought to the modern world a fresh vindication of our ancient truths.’

## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

**THE PROBLEM OF SANSKRIT TEACHING.**  
BY PROF. G. S. HUPARIKAR, M.A., B.T. Published by  
*The Bharat Bookstall, Kolhapur.* Pp. 738. Price  
Rs. 12/8.

This is a standard work on a subject which must be dear not only to the Indian educationalist, but also to every one who desires to know the cultural achievements of India. For those who favour or advocate a large-scale adoption of the Sanskrit language in many spheres of new Indian life, this volume can well be called indispensable.

The author has done pioneering work in that he adduces a vast, well-arranged material for scientific comparison between Eastern and Western psychologies, linguistics, and pedagogics. He has taken great pains

to elaborate practical suggestions as to how the task of Sanskrit teaching could be accomplished on a sound and profitable basis.

The two divergent points of view of the adherents to the ancient Indian and to the Western methods are judiciously reconciled by Professor Huparikar. His refutation of all types of opponents to Sanskrit learning seems exhaustive and perfect. His solid knowledge of modern psychology gives authority to his contentions which are in great part derived from his scholarly investigations.

The book contains a Sanskrit section (entirely in Devanagari) and an English section. A *questionnaire* on the teaching of Sanskrit and the topics connected with it opens the former section (which is complete with-



in the first ninety two pages of the book). Next, one learns much about the present deplorable condition of Sanskrit study, the means to improve it, and the role of the teacher in a prospective Sanskrit curriculum. A critical comparison of Eastern and Western methods of linguistic study ensues, pointing out what should be retained or rejected from both. In what the author terms the 'eclectic method', he has hit on a new synthesis indeed, serving as an improved means of teaching this classical language.

Coming to the actual method of teaching pupils, the learned author analyses the aims and objects of the teacher and the taught, and stresses that the best approach towards efficient instruction in Sanskrit prose and poetry, is the psychological one.

The Sanskrit section is concluded by a description of, and proposals for the application of the eight *Shāstric* principles for the study of a language, viz. grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), comparison (*upamāna*), dictionary (*koṣha*), statement of a trustworthy person (*āptavākya*), usage of elders (*Vyavahāra*), supplementary statement (*vākyaśeṣa*), commentary (*vivṛiti*), and contiguity of words (*siddhapadaśānnidhā*).

The English section (which occupies a very large part of the book) commences with an eloquent vindication of Sanskrit as a compulsory subject in the university curriculum. Then follows a fullscale and very complete treatise on *Hindu Methodology* which is the kernal of the author's work. The old and much contended against *pāthashālā* method cannot be discarded as useless. Experimental psychology of today endorses the value of learning by rote.

The professor has discovered an interesting parallelism between the five Herbartian steps of teaching and the five formal grades advised in the *shāstric* tradition.

Hindu psychology, as pertaining to the sphere of linguistic study, is lucidly dealt with and evaluated.

The methods of instruction must be various and skilful combination is desirable; thus, the psychological, logical, grammatical *mīmāṃsā*, comparative, synthetical, historical, and literary methods are thoroughly examined. Much valuable light is thrown by the learned Professor on such vital questions as 'thought and language', and the unit of language, as well as the classical researches on expression (*abhidhā*), purport (*tātparya*), implication (*lakṣhanā*), and suggestion (*vyanjanā*) by way of objective comparison with the findings of Western philosophy and science.

The aesthetic side is elucidated, based on the statements of Bhaṭṭanāyaka, Abhinavagupta, and others on the one side, and Coleridge and Shelley on the other.

Throughout the volume, emphasis is laid on the importance of reading and recitation; apart from it, a separate chapter is devoted to its application to Sanskrit literature.

The last part of the book embodies his practical suggestions for teaching Sanskrit and a standardized

syllabus of Sanskrit study for a course of approximately five years. The author's practical experience in teaching Sanskrit for many years lends great support to his valuable suggestions which will prove useful to teachers, students, and general readers.

The main thing the author intends to bring home to the intelligent reader, summed up in his own words, is that 'a happy combination of the Western or extensive methods of study and the Eastern or intensive methods is a desideratum.'

We congratulate the author for his remarkable achievement, and gladly recommend the book to Sanskrit scholars, both orthodox and modern, as well as to the English-reading public, interested in the rejuvenation and popularization of Sanskrit learning.

**VAISALI-ABHINANDANA-GRANTHA.** Published by Vaisālī Sangha, Vaisālī, Bihar, with a foreword by Dr Rajendra Prasad.

It is a collection of thirtysix articles, in Hindi and English, on Vaisali and all that it stood for. In endeavouring to convey through its pages a people's homage to the memory of an ancient city this 'Grantha' strikes a new line in the series of Commemoration Volumes.

Vaisali, now represented by the extensive ruins in the village of Basarh (Muzaffarpur District, Bihar) occupies an important place in the political as well as cultural history of India. The antiquity of Vaisali (Visālā) dates back to the days of the *Rāmāyana*, when it was ruled by King Sumati, a scion of the illustrious Ikshvāku family. The early Jaina and Buddhist texts reveal Vaisali at the height of her glory. It was then the capital of the republican state of the Lichchhavis and the headquarters of the Vajjian Confederacy. Historical research has yet to determine the circumstances which transformed the Vaisalian kingship into a republican state. The republic, however, soon afterwards fell a prey to the Magadhan imperialism, but Vaisali again rose to prominence in the fourth century A.D. when it played an important part in the consolidation of the Gupta empire. An unusually large number of seals locally unearthed reveal its prosperity during the Gupta period. We can trace its decline in the pages of Hsien Tsang and now all that remains of the once prosperous city lies buried under the mounds of Basarh. Vaisali also played an important role in the history of Indian religions as the birth-place of Mahavira and the scene of much of his activity. It was also hallowed by the dust of the feet of the Buddha who delivered some of his most important discourses in its parks and monasteries. Above all, the democratic institutions of Vaisali are of timely interest to us.

All these facts have been lucidly brought out in the articles contributed to the 'Grantha' by eminent Indologists, most of whom are unquestioned authorities on the subject. In such a symposium one would naturally expect



repetitions and even certain discrepancies as various writers have based their statements on different traditions, but the attribution of a particular type of coins to two different kings in the course of the same article (page 81, lines 5 and 13) could have been avoided.

The memory of Vaisali needs to be cherished as an

inspiration and the publication of this volume fulfills a great desideratum. The addition of a map of the locality and the photos of important antiquities recovered on the site has further enhanced the value of the book.

R. K. DIKSHIT

## NEWS AND REPORTS

### THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION NIVEDITA GIRLS' SCHOOL

#### AN APPEAL

Swami Vivekananda defined education as the manifestation of the perfection already in men and women. Inspired by that Ideal of her great teacher, Sister Nivedita of hallowed memory devoted herself heart and soul to the cause of women's education. For this life's mission of hers, she sacrificed her leisure, physical comfort and worldly welfare. With wonderful steadfastness to duty she clung to her school which she started in a hut in a congested area of the city. But this transparent sincerity bore fruit and inspired others who placed the work on a more permanent basis. After her passing away in 1911, the Ramakrishna Mission took up the management of this school. Since its inception about fifty years ago the institution has been educating girls *free of all cost* and helping poor women through adult and higher education and vocational training, thus enabling them to earn their livelihood. Many a poor family has in this way been rescued from starvation. There is also a home which accommodates some girls and teachers who have dedicated their lives to the cause of women's education. Many of the old students are now resident teachers who have taken up the work as a labour of love.

The school was run as a free institution till 1946. It has now a roll-strength of about 800 girls, of whom about 500 get free education. From 1947 the rest have to pay fees though at a much lower rate than elsewhere. The spirit of the institution which was inspired by the ancient Gurukulas where the teachers provided everything for the students, is rather damped by such an unnatural situation forced on it by economic pressure. The primary section and the vocational sections, however, are entirely free, and it is only in the higher high school classes that fee is levied. But even in the free sections the institution cannot do as much as it would like to for want of funds. Again many educated young

women who inspired by the life of the Sister Nivedita want to lead the life of a Brahmacharini and dedicate their lives to the cause of education among women cannot be accommodated in Sarada-Mandir, the residential section of the institution for want of space and money. At present there are only eight such teachers but more such teachers are needed for running the institution more efficiently. Besides, the trainees in the vocational section do not get all the monetary aid that their circumstances demand. As it is, the high school section incurs an annual deficit of Rs. 4,000/- and if the whole work is to be re-organised on the lines indicated, at least Rs. 6,000/- more per annum is needed.

The institution has got other pressing needs, too. The present building requires thorough repair at an estimated cost of Rs. 20,000/-. Moreover, there is a growing demand for the accommodation of girls from the districts. The present hostel is too small for the purpose. The school section is somehow cramped in the existing rooms. An extension is an urgent necessity but to get more land and build a house on it will cost us more than a lac of rupees.

The institution is not only very useful in its own way, but has got a noble ideal of its own. Besides, it is a memorial to Sister Nivedita who laid down her life for India and the womanhood of India. It behoves this generation to preserve this memorial institution and its ideal and help it to expand. We hope our appeal for funds for this institution will meet with encouraging response from the public.

Donations will be thankfully received by the undersigned or by the Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 5 Nivedita Lane, Baghbazar, Calcutta-3.

P.O. Belur Math  
(Howrah).

Swami Vireswarananda  
General Secretary  
Ramakrishna Mission

### SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S BIRTHDAY

The Birthday Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda falls on the 10th January 1950





ADVAITA ASHRAMA, MAYAVATI  
( Started by Swami Vivekananda in the year 1899 )