

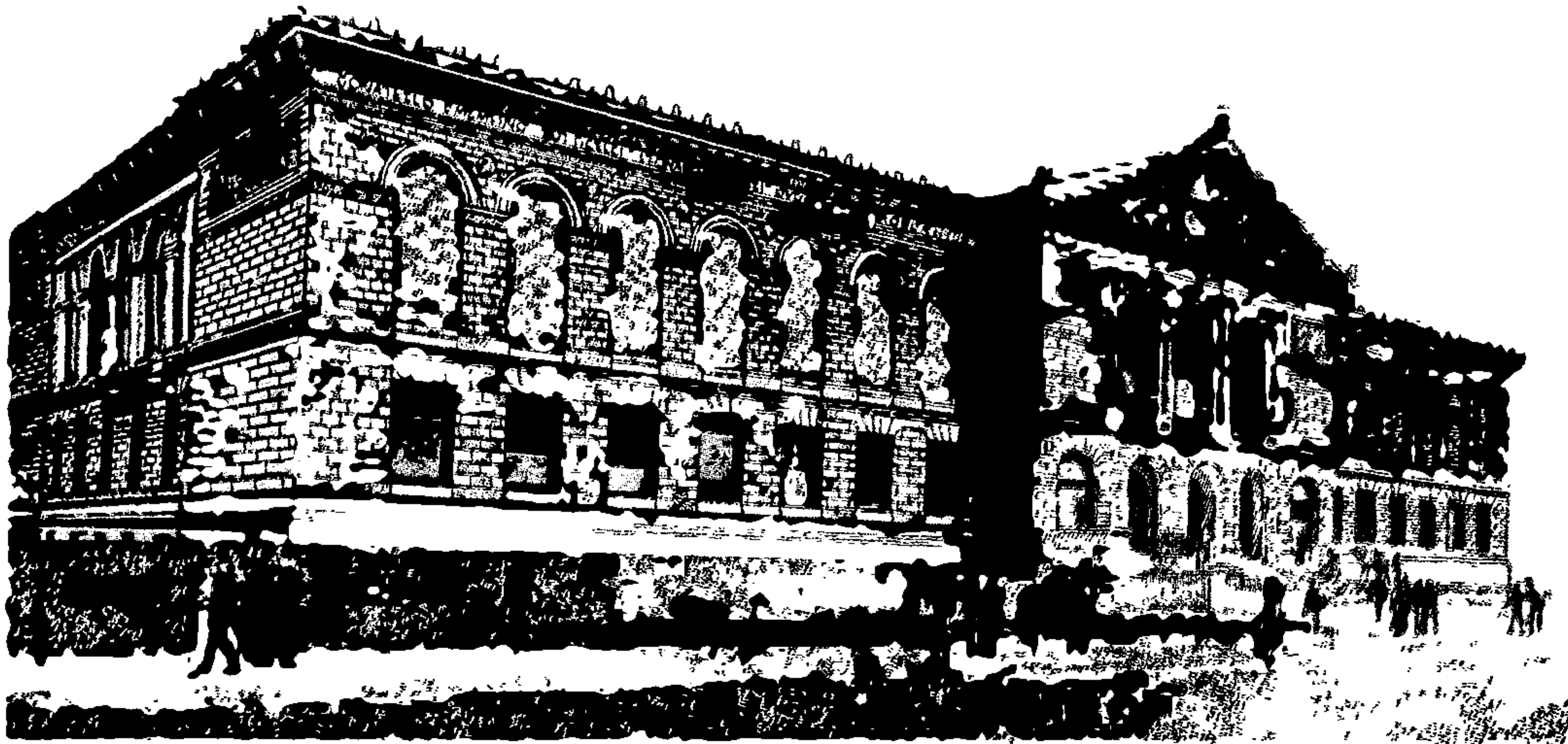
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Prabuddha Bharata

or Awakened India



*"Upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance:
'Help and not Fight,' 'Assimilation and not Destruction,'
'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.'"*

*Closing Address by Swami Vivekananda,
Chicago Parliament of Religions, September 1893*



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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TO OUR READERS

This issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* is a Special Issue brought out on the occasion of the Centenary of Swami Vivekananda's Participation at the Parliament of Religions. Many eminent writers in the East and the West have contributed valuable articles on various themes centering Swamiji's visit to the West, his experiences there, the message he gave to the people of the West at the Parliament and after, and his training of his western disciples. We are grateful to them all.

Prabuddha Bharata staff have always endeavoured to improve the quality, printing and paper of this Journal started by Swamiji in 1896. We hope the general public, especially the lovers of this great country and her precious culture, and devotees of Swamiji, will come forward in large numbers to help us by enrolling as life members/ year-to-year subscribers, by offering donations, and by contributing articles which will help to fulfil Swami Vivekananda's vision of Awakened India.

We earnestly believe that the universal and harmonising message of Vedanta delivered by Swamiji will bring integration at all levels in the strife-torn world we presently live in.

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED.

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No. 9

Divine Wisdom

A Hymn to Vivekananda

अनित्यदृश्येषु विविच्य नित्यं
तस्मिन् समाधत्त इह स्म लीलया।
विवेकवैराग्यविशुद्धचित्तं
योऽसौ विवेकी तमहं नमामि ॥

To him who sifting out the Eternal from the transitory phenomena of this world, made it his sport to concentrate thereon his mind, purified by discrimination and renunciation to that discriminating soul I salute.

ऋतं च विज्ञानमधिश्रयद्य-
न्निरन्तरं चादिमध्यान्तहीनम्।
सुखं सुरूपं प्रकरोति यस्य
आनन्दमूर्तिं तमहं नमामि ॥

To him whose graceful form, truth, and knowledge made their abode, and which imparts a joy incessant, without beginning or end to that embodiment of bliss I salute.

सूर्यो यथान्धं हि तमो निहन्ति
विष्णुर्यथा दुष्टजनांश्छिनत्ति।
तथैव यस्याखिलनेत्रलोभं
रूपं त्रितापं विमुखीकरोति ॥

Verily as the sun dispels the intense darkness, as Lord Visnu destroys the wicked ones in exactly the same manner, whose handsome appearance, the cynosure of all eyes, drives away the threefold misery of life.

तं देशिकेन्द्रं परमं पवित्रं
' विश्वस्य पालं मधुरं यतीन्द्रम्।
हिताय नृणां नरमूर्तिमन्तं
विवेक आनन्दमहं नमामि ॥

To that Teacher of teachers, supremely pure, the guardian of the world, the sweet one, the prince of Yogins, who took up the human form for the good of mankind to that Vivekananda, I prostrate myself.

नमः श्रीयतिराजाय विवेकानन्दसूरये।
सच्चित्सुखस्वरूपाय स्वामिने तापहारिणे ॥

Salutation to that king of renouncers and controller of passions, the sage, Vivekananda who is Sacchidānanda, (Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute) Itself, the spiritual preceptor, the remover of distress!

Swami Ramakrishnananda

Vivekananda—An Ocean Without Bounds

Embodying the loftiest thoughts, filled with the noblest ideas, many of Vivekananda's speeches in the West rank among masterpieces of the world's religious literature. Clarity and forthrightness are the striking characteristics of these extraordinary utterances of his. To many, Swami Vivekananda's extempore addresses delivered at the Parliament of Religions are sublime poetry. The tremendous soul-force of a great sage is manifest in them and sets afire every receptive heart with inspiration. Neither time can dim, nor space dampen the brilliance and irresistibility of Swamiji's words. They are like sparks of eternal wisdom and they unerringly work their way into the human psyche, so that none escapes their uplifting and transforming power. Every word carries the imprint of that indomitable spirit which appeared in human form for the welfare of the human race. Vivekananda was born to fulfil the mission of God on earth. God spoke through him. In one of his letters (July 9, 1897), he acknowledged this fact, writing: "...the power behind me is not Vivekananda, but He, the Lord, and He knows best."¹ Swamiji's whole being was saturated with God and it was totally a God-centred life. Therefore the divine atmosphere lingered about him and his pure character radiated holiness. He was so pure that it was impossible for people to think of any impure thoughts in his presence. Both consciously and unconsciously, by his silence and flaming utterances he transmitted spirituality. So elevating are his speeches and writings! Yet they reveal only a partial glimpse of the transcendental personality of the man,

Vivekananda. "Behind all his books," said Sister Nivedita, "all his utterances, stands the man himself, different from each, and only partially expressed through the whole mass."

The climactic event in the World's Columbian Exposition, as many thought, was the World's Religious Congress, which lasted for seventeen days, from September 11th, 1893 to September 27th. It was not until the afternoon session of the first day that, urged by the French Protestant pastor who was seated next to him, Swamiji stood up and addressed the eager and expectant audience and the world at large. With this address his prophetic mission began. The mighty waves of spirituality and new consciousness released on that day and in subsequent years of his dynamic life are still rolling and will go on releasing their pent up energy for many more centuries, purifying hearts and awakening minds from slumber to realize the Infinite Consciousness. It was to effect this awakening of humanity that he delivered his wondrous message in a thundering voice. Even gods and angels must have rejoiced and danced with ecstasy seeing this Enlightened One tearing asunder the veils of Maya and redeeming the souls. Before Swamiji addressed the huge gathering at Chicago, many orators spoke effectively and the crowd was wildly demonstrative and appreciative of some of them. They expressed their appreciation in outbursts of applause and with loud cheers. But Vivekananda's first few words were drowned in a deafening applause that lasted for several minutes.

1. The Life of Swami Vivekananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981) Vol.2, page 270.

Why did these words of his electrify listeners? Was it due to his peculiar colour-

ful dress or his personality, his luminous expressive eyes and gestures, or his rich musical voice? Even thousands were unaware why they felt joy and broke into the long tremendous ovation; they could not understand their own spontaneous reaction to those few simple words of greeting from the lips of the unknown monk. His was not a familiar face, nor was his name famous. He was a stranger in the land and people hardly knew anything about him. Many great speakers were present who had already made their marks in the world as scholars, orators and religious leaders. A very few in the Hall might have felt the great spiritual power in Swami Vivekananda's few words, and the rest were unconsciously lifted, as it were, to a higher plane of consciousness. For the Swami was a roaring fire of spirituality, and he actually transmitted it by his mere presence. People instinctively perceived it. Later, moved by the same subconscious perception, the crowds whenever they saw him used to rush forward to touch the hem of his robe and feel the thrill of purity passing through their hearts. Swamiji knew it and he was conscious of the invincible power working in and through him. Only people in America had never known such a thing before. They could experience something in his presence, but they could not name it.

"Never before had the people of America," writes Marie Louise Burke, "seen one in whom spiritual truths had been fully realized. Though Swamiji's towering spiritual eminence was not consciously recognized by the hundreds, who, he later reminisced, 'jostled with one another in the streets of Chicago to have a sight of this Vivekananda,' who flocked to hear him speak, who waited interminable hours for even a word, and who applauded him when he simply crossed the platform, the people through

some inner knowledge seemed unerringly to recognize him for what he was and, from start to finish, instinctively to sense that his very presence conferred a blessing. 'Darshana' was unheard of in America, but here at the Parliament was a spontaneous and unconscious manifestation of the attraction of the human soul to the spiritually great."²

Many acknowledged about his lectures that when he began to speak memory, time, place, people all melted away. In the words of Miss MacLeod, who heard him for the first time,

"He said something...instantly to me that was truth, and the second sentence he spoke was truth, and the third sentence was truth. I listened to him for seven years and whatever he uttered was to me truth."³

Swamiji himself said, "Do you think I only lecture? I know I give them something solid, and they know they receive something solid."⁴

Renunciation was the keynote in Swamiji's life. Neither the standing ovations of people, nor the wealth and luxury of the world did touch that great soul. Vivekananda was least interested in his personal glory, nor did he care to popularize any sect of his own. He was a world teacher and was called upon by the Lord to accomplish His will. He never spoke about himself and was unconscious of his greatness. His unworldly simplicity

2. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983) Vol.1, page 101.

3. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964) page 263.

4. *Spiritual Talks*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983) page 193.

and childlike innocence were incapable of seeing any evil in man. He always saw goodness in others, he always recognized the innate divinity in all beings. With supreme humility and equanimity he met everyone. To him the other person and his welfare were more important. Many, taking advantage of his guilelessness, deceived or betrayed him. But in spite of humiliations and sufferings caused by unscrupulous persons, Swamiji's unflagging faith in man never wavered, his unbounded love for his fellowmen never faltered. He was the personification of unselfishness and *tyāga*. Jealousy, hatred, or sense of superiority never touched that sublime character. From the words of Sister Nivedita one gets a glimpse of the greatness of Vivekananda:

"When travelling in America, he had at first in certain southern towns been taken for a negro, and refused admission to the hotels, he had never said that he was not of African blood, but had as quietly and gratefully availed himself of the society of the coloured race, when that was offered, as of that of the local magnates who hastened round him later, in mortified apology for what they deemed the insult put upon him. 'What! rise at the expense of another!' he was heard to say to himself, long after, when someone referred with astonishment to this silence about his race, 'Rise at the expense of another! I didn't come to earth for that!'"⁵

His compassion knew no discrimination between rich and poor, learned and illiterate, yet one could see that it overflowed towards the oppressed, poor and less privileged. It gave him great pleasure to associate and live with such neglected

people, whether in India or abroad.

"He was scornful," writes Sister Nivedita, "in his repudiation of the pseudo-ethnology of privileged races. 'If I am grateful to my white-skinned Aryan ancestor,' he said, 'I am far more so to my yellow-skinned Mongolian ancestor, and most so of all, to the black-skinned Negritoid!'"⁶

He had the habit of seeing every people from their strongest aspect, and highlighting their positive side. Expressing his faith in his fellow beings, he wrote in a letter (27th October, 1894): "I believe in God and I believe in man. I believe in going even to hell to save others." Where could we find such a lover of humanity, save in Buddha and Christ! Publicity, adulation of crowds, public lecturing, he detested, and wished always to remain an unknown carefree sannyasin. Mrs. S.K. Blodget, an old lady, in whose home at Los Angeles he stayed for many days, wrote:

"He would come home from a lecture where he was compelled to break away from his audience, so eagerly would they gather around him—come rushing into the kitchen like a boy released from school, with, 'Now we will cook!' The prophet and sage would disappear, to reveal the child side or simplicity of character."⁷

Vivekananda with a simple touch, or a wish, or by his presence could destroy the veil of Maya from anybody's heart and lift that person to superconscious state. Where others gave directions, he would show the thing itself. Telling of the Power he often felt descending upon him when he lectured, he would say, "When I stand on the

5. Sister Nivedita, *The Complete Works*, (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita's Girls' School, 1967) Vol.1, page 153.

6. *Ibid.*, page 153.

7. *Reminiscences*, page 373.

platform, a Power comes over me as though by one word I could carry the whole audience of thousands across Maya and make them break the prison-walls of 'I' and 'mine'. "⁸ Recognizing the greatness of his young chief-apostle, Sri Ramakrishna endearingly spoke of him as "my Suka," indicating the great sage, Sukadeva, and said that he was a born *Brahmajñāni*. Though Vivekananda was an illumined soul by birth, yet he underwent severest tapasya for several years to accumulate immense spiritual power for the benefit of the world. To all outward appearances he toiled and suffered like an ordinary mortal, but was not of this world. It is difficult to comprehend the unlimitedness of Swamiji.

During his stay in 1890 at the Baranagore Math, Swamiji felt the great call and the lofty mission that awaited him. But its exact contours and the form were not clear; when the Lord would command him to embark upon it was uncertain. To carry out that gigantic task he needed preparation in solitude. Buddha, Christ and Sri Ramakrishna, also unknown to the world, prepared themselves silently to shoulder the burden of sufferings of the human race. Before leaving the Math in the middle of July 1890, Swamiji told his brother disciples, "I shall not return until I acquire such realization that my very touch will transform a man." On the eve of his departure from Varanasi the same year, he said to Pramada Babu in the presence of many others: "I am now leaving Kashi, and shall not return until I have burst on society like a bombshell; and it will follow me like a dog."⁹ In his later life we find many an instance how he, by a mere touch of the hand, or even by his presence, could transmit tremendous cosmic energy.

An atheist, a professor of Madras, one day while Swamiji was in an exalted state, came close to him, touched his feet and was instantly transformed. He later renounced the world to lead the life of a recluse and died a saintly death. Swamiji once stayed with the three Mead sisters in South Pasadena, California. One of the sisters, Carrie Wycoff (Lalita), had a unique experience. One day she was following Swamiji down the narrow stairway from the upper story. She started to lose her balance, and put her hand on Swamiji's shoulder to steady herself. The moment she touched him, suddenly a higher consciousness opened up and she scarcely knew how she got down the stairs. From then on Vivekananda was God to her.¹⁰ In California a lady shook hands with Swamiji after his lecture. She experienced such purity in her hand that she was unable to wash it for a few days. After listening to his thrilling lecture in California on Sri Krishna, a young lady, and heiress to an immense fortune, renounced everything and retired to a solitary island and lost herself in meditation on the Lord.¹¹ In Swamiji's presence at Belur Math one day, Manmathanath Ganguly, a disciple, lost relative consciousness and had a taste of undivided consciousness.¹² Christina Albers of San Francisco related her experience about Swamiji's lecture, "I was drawn into a sea of being, of feelings of a higher existence, from which it seemed almost like pain to emerge when the lecture was finished."¹³

Tom Allan and his wife Edith (Ajoy and Viraja) lived in San Francisco. Early in March 1900 Swamiji gave a series of lectures in that city. Tom alone went to hear

8. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, (1918), Vol. 4, page 150.

9. *Ibid.*, (1979) Part I, page 248.

10. *Prabuddha Bharata*, January '93, page 47.

11. *Reminiscences*, page 329.

12. *Ibid.*, page 363.

13. *Ibid.*, page 393.

one of the lectures as his wife was ill. Deeply impressed by the stirring speech, he rushed home excited and said to his wife, "I have met a man who is not a man; he is a god!"¹⁴ Though she was mentally and physically ill. Edith also went to hear a lecture. Swamiji asked her to see him privately the next morning. The next morning she waited for him anxiously in a sitting-room. "In a little while the Swami came into the room, dressed in his long overcoat and little round hat, chanting softly. . . . Presently he said, 'Well, Madame!' I could not speak but began to weep and kept on weeping as though the flood-gates had been opened. . . . Thus ended my first interview with the Blessed Vivekananda, and as I went from his presence, my problems were solved and my questions were answered, though he had not asked me anything."¹⁵ Madame E. Calve had the same experience in the presence of Swamiji. She wrote, "He seemed to have emptied my brain of all its feverish complexities and placed there instead his clear and calming thoughts."¹⁶ Many experienced by his touch all their thoughts and desires evaporate and an indescribable bliss and stillness coming over their hearts.

Vivekananda was both human and divine—human in appearance, but divine in reality. He was unlimited Consciousness in human form. The very nearness to that blazing fire of spirituality called Vivekananda conferred blessings on all beings. To all his disciples, friends and admirers he remained indefinable and incomprehensible. Today we face the same enigma. A disciple said how little they understood Swamiji: they had no knowledge what he really was. Sister Christine puts it beautifully, "...But with

Swami Vivekananda there could be no comparison. He was in a class by himself. . . . He was not of this world. He was a radiant being who had descended from another, a higher sphere for a definite purpose."¹⁷ Haripada Mitra at Belgaum who witnessed the vast knowledge of Swamiji wondered, "Is he man or god?" Mrs. Blodget who heard Swamiji at the Parliament said, "If there was God on earth that is the man." Those who came in intimate contact with him carried the impression that "he was sent from higher regions to fulfil a great mission, and that mission fulfilled, he returned to his seat among the gods, whence he had come."¹⁸ There is not the least trace of hyperbole when the Mead sisters of Pasadena said of Swamiji when he came to stay with them: "It was as if Christ had come in our midst."

When Vivekananda was in a prophetic mood he threw out some indications as to who he was. He said to Swami Turiyananda, "The Parliament of Religions is being organized for this (pointing to himself). My mind tells me so. You will see it verified at no distant date."¹⁹ At the palace of the Raja of Ramnad when someone ridiculed the assertion that it was not possible for a human being to see Brahman—the Unknown, at once Swamiji exclaimed, "I have seen the Unknown!"²⁰ To a Vaiṣṇava pandit of Madras who wanted to know whether Swamiji was Advaitin or Dvaitin, he said "This incarnation of mine is to help put an end to useless and mischievous quarrels and puzzles which only distract the mind, and make men weary of life. . . ."²¹ Once he said,

17. *Ibid.*, page 159.

18. *Ibid.*, page 394.

19. *Spiritual Talks*, page 246.

20. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, (1979), Part I, page 366.

21. *Ibid.*, Part 2, page 204.

14. *Ibid.*, page 387.

15. *Ibid.*, page 399.

16. *Ibid.*, page 265.

"What I am is written on my brow." In that same exalted mood he declared, "I have a message to the West as Buddha had a message to the East."

Vivekananda was a wonderful confluence of all the contrasting doctrines—uncompromising Advaita, yet love and surrender to the Personal God; the stillness of meditation, yet a whirlwind of activity; the love of the Universal, yet the love of the Particular; spiritual and material, religion and science, past and present—in fact, the best of both the East and the West. Yet he was much more. Well did a pandit of Varanasi say about Vivekananda, "The divine Shakti plays in him and very little of it is manifested. It is impossible to judge his

greatness and power—he seems to be an ocean without bounds."²²

For the deification of man, to unite mankind into one global family, to alleviate the sufferings of the oppressed and weak, to help others on the road to the Supreme Goal, Vivekananda descended from the higher regions. The Sage from the silent East chose purposely the dynamic field of America in the West to deliver his message. It is difficult for us to know the divine play of the Universal Mother. Only another Vivekananda could have known it

²² *Reminiscences*, page 424.

Centenary of Vivekananda's Visit To The West *

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Revered Maharaj is a Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. His name is well known in India and abroad for his stirring speeches and illuminating books.

You have all heard that this is the beginning of a year-long celebration to make our people know about Swami Vivekananda and his great man-making, nation-building message. Very few people know yet, but every day more and more people are knowing about Vivekananda and his message, and during this one year there will be many meetings all over India wherein his ideas will be presented. It is high time that the nation wakes up to this Great Awakener of our nation. We were sleeping for centuries, perfectly satisfied with our pettiness, hardheartedness, inhuman treatment of human beings, mutual quarrels and suffer-

ing through foreign invasions.

It was Swamiji who first awakened our nation, and he used these very words—"The sleeping leviathan is slowly awakening." That was the theme of his first lecture on Indian soil after returning from four years in America and England—that was at Ramnad, near Rameshwaram. A tremendous reception was given to him and the Prince of Ramnad was pulling the chariot along with the youths. Swamiji was prompted by their enthusiasm to give a great speech. The opening paragraph is worthy of being recited in schools and colleges—that was 25th January, 1897. He said:

* Based on the speech given by Swami Ranganathananda at the Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad on September 11, 1992.

"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. . . . India, this motherland of ours is awakening from her long deep 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.

What a statement! What tremendous ideas! At that time the nation was practically asleep. There was no political consciousness, no serious desire for freedom. Most people were happy to get a thirty-rupees clerkship under the British. At that time he could see that this period was going to be a period of tremendous awakening, with impact upon the whole of India, every section of her people, and on the world outside. That is what the prophet could see and say. They can see far ahead. We see only a few feet ahead, but men like Vivekananda, and his own teacher, Sri Ramakrishna, could see far ahead—that in this age, this country of ours, which has stood and withstood so many centuries of foreign invasions and oppressions—it has some infinite strength within it. It is going to come out, manifest, and create a new glorious chapter of our long history. When you read Vivekananda literature you will get all these impressions, all this understanding of our nation. It is unfortunate that many of our people do not know what the nation's innate strength is. How we can manipulate the forces acting on the nation today to make it progress in the right direction. If our people had studied Vivekananda as seriously as they did before independence, things would have been different. None of these desperate situations would have arisen, or the sense of defeatism, the sense of despair, and not knowing which way to go. No direction—that is where we are today. This would not have happened if after independence our people, who filled

administrative positions from top to bottom in government and were in many other types of service institutions in India, if they had studied this literature. India would not have remained a developing nation; it would have become a fully developed nation by now—and with none of these moral problems facing us today. Because, before independence thousands of patriots were inspired by Vivekananda literature and they loved this nation and the common people and wanted to make India free. Even Mahatma Gandhi said in Belur Math, when he visited the Headquarters of the Mission and was requested to say a few words: "I have studied Vivekananda literature very carefully, after reading his books the love that I had for my country became a thousand-fold."

For Gandhiji to say this! He himself was a great lover of India. We in India today need to develop a little love for the nation, a little love for the people. Most of these moral problems, ethical problems, dearth of values, will disappear—with a little love for the people, love for the nation and the spirit of service that follows that love. This is the inspiration that is provided in the "*Complete Works*" of Swami Vivekananda, now in eight volumes. In these books you have the message of human development and fulfillment, not only for our nation but for people in all parts of the world. Men like Monsieur Romain Rolland wrote in the 1920s about Vivekananda and Ramakrishna and their contribution to Europe and America. M. Rolland wrote the most beautiful, critical, appreciative biographies of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. He could appreciate the immense dimensions of these two great personalities. He introduces both in *The Life of Ramakrishna* (1970 ed., page 8) in these words:

"I have chosen two men, who have won my regard because with incomparable

charm and power they have realized this splendid symphony of the Universal Soul. They are...Ramakrishna and Vivekananda."

And he ends the *Preface* in these books by saying that Swamiji wanted to unite East and West. He had united them within himself, but externally he wanted to bring harmony between the East and the West, and so he had started digging a tunnel between the East and the West, and he appealed to his Western friends to start digging a tunnel from the West to the East, so that they could meet together in the middle,—this is the language he has used. What tremendous dimension of thought and aspiration, you can see in this type of venture,—not just for a community; not even just for a nation, but for all of humanity he came to give this message of human development and fulfilment. It is no wonder that the West is very much inspired when people there come in touch with Vivekananda literature. Romain Rolland, in his *Life of Vivekananda*, describes him as a harmony of all human energy. Every type of energy found a perfect blending in the person and thought of Vivekananda. As decades roll on, we begin to discover these great dimensions of his personality. In the beginning, one may not be able to see more than a few glimpses of that greatness, but he unfolds his personality steadily, decade after decade, as generally do all great men. When they were alive very few people could recognize them. But as years roll on, people realize "what a tremendous person was here...a few years ago and what a wonderful teaching! And we were influenced thereby." The Buddha's teaching was in Sarnath 2500 years ago to five people, but that Buddha later on became the idol of love and reverence to millions and millions of people in Asia. It was a slow development of understanding. The same thing is happening today in the case of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami

Vivekananda and Sarada Devi. People are understanding slowly. Books are coming out. Plenty of literature is being spread; in other languages also. So a time will come when they will be known in various parts of the world. From a small country, Uruguay in South America, some people came to Calcutta, with much devotion. "We want to get books of Ramakrishna, books of Vivekananda, and photographs." They said, "We don't get these things in our country." This kind of thing is happening every day. And from this year—September 1993—will start the centenary of Swamiji's bursting on the Parliament of Religions like a bombshell.

What Swamiji did in the Parliament of Religions was nothing less than to burst 'thought-bombshells'. We need plenty of such 'bombs' today. Our terrorists are bursting bombs and killing people and destroying property. Vivekananda also will burst 'bombs' in the minds of people all over India, and all over the world, but to *create* and *renew* humanity, to make people grow and become fulfilled. That is the type of 'bomb' that are Swami Vivekananda's thoughts

In the Sept. 1992 issue of *Prabuddha Bharata*, published from the Himalayas, Mayavati, there is an article by Professor Hal W. French (he is a Professor at the University of South Carolina in America), on the Parliament of Religions and the tremendous part played by Vivekananda in that Parliament. It is worth studying. Like it, many such articles are coming out. In America itself, professors and students are being drawn to the wonderful personality of Swamiji, his scientific mind, his intense humanism, his complete absence of narrowness and intolerance. But he embodies what India represents—a spirit of harmony. This he represented in the West—that India—that *Amar Bharat*, eternal India. These things are going on now also.

In India we need these much more than they in the West. We have to reshape the life of 850 million people, about 200 million of them living very subhuman lives. It's a huge problem. But no problem can stand before the *will*, the pure will and determination of a human being. Swamiji gave that inspiration:

"Don't think you are weak; don't think you have not the strength. Infinite strength is in you. Great things will be done through you. Have faith in yourself." And then he added: "The old religion said, 'He or she is an atheist who does not believe in God.' The new Vedanta tells you, 'he or she is an atheist who does not believe in oneself.' Have faith in yourself, then faith in God; then that faith will work."

Till now we never had faith in ourselves, we felt a sense of helplessness, weakness. "I can't do, I can't do," was the constant attitude we had for centuries. He brought the message of Vedanta—*Ātma-śraddhā*,—that infinite power is hidden in every human being. In that teaching you find a new focus of worship—the human being himself or herself. God is hidden in every human being. He is not somewhere in the sky far up in space—not at all! He is here in you, next-door to you; in every one He is present. This is the Vedantic teaching. The same Atman is present in every human being. When this teaching becomes the sheet anchor of our national life, of our interhuman relationships, a tremendous revolution will take place in this country—a social, cultural revolution. All these problems will be completely eliminated, by developing that intense strength of manliness.

So he coined two words to describe his message: *Man-making* and *Nation-building*. Through *man-making* alone you can build

the nation. By mere technical development you can't build the nation. The human being must be built up. The power hidden within must be made to come out. And the capacity to love and to serve must come in the heart of a human being, if you are to achieve real integration as a nation. So Swamiji summed up India's message to her own children in one sentence: "Renunciation and Service are the twin ideals of India. Intensify her in these channels; the rest will take care of itself. *Tyāga* and *Sevā*: you can never do *seva* without a bit of *tyāga*. If you want to show a person where some house is, you are to go a little out of the way to show him that house. That is *tyāga* renunciation. We left that normal way, that easy way, straight way, and round about we went. So in any aspect of *sevā*, there *tyāga* is present. So these two are the national ideals; let us strengthen India in these directions. These are Swamiji's great words—a message for our people.

There is so much to speak on Swamiji, but this is just the first occasion for this Centenary Programme, and so you will have many occasions to deal with various aspects of Swamiji's personality and message. I only wish that more and more people read these books of his. How many substandard books we read; third-rate books we read! But books which can give you a new dimension of human greatness, these are set aside—that is a great misfortune. I have seen administrators, who once they have read Vivekananda's books, have changed their whole approach. They become more concerned with the people, more concerned with the spirit of service. This is what we can get from Vivekananda literature. And so today we pay our tribute to Swamiji for the wonderful awakening given to us, an awakening which must reach the humblest person in India. The tribal living in the jungles must also feel the touch of Vivekananda's awakening; and I,

for one, firmly believe we shall do it in this modern period. We are writing a new glorious chapter of our ever-glorious long history, in the modern period. In that work we have the guidance from Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.

I hope we shall move faster and faster as days go by. We all know our society is sick just now—a sick society. What is the remedy available here? We need not go to China, or Russia, or America, or England as we used to do till now. Now, turn to your

own country. Turn to the great persons who appeared in the modern period—not necessarily to the ancient period. In the modern period these giants appeared. Let us study at their feet and then set to work to transform the human situation in India. This is the message I would like to convey to you on this occasion, as we commence the celebration of the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's presence in Chicago.

Swamiji and The Parliament of Religions

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA

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It is said that ideas are the most mysterious things in a mysterious world. They appear in human consciousness in a strange manner, without giving any prior indication of their emergence. They are really independent of time and space and therefore not subject to human calculations or control. They are extremely powerful forces and are equally contagious. Great minds are moulded by these ideas. These living and life-giving ideas are found to flourish, according to their innate nature, in a suitable environment drawing nourishment from the sub-soil of the cultures, and wither away in hostile mental climates. Swamiji says: "These universal thought waves seem to recur every five hundred years, when invariably the great wave typifies and swallows up the others. It is this which constitutes a prophet. He focuses in his own mind the thought of the age in which he is living and gives it back to mankind in concrete form. Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, and Luther may be instanced as the great waves that

stood up above their fellows (with a probable lapse of five hundred years between them). Always the wave that is backed by the greatest purity and the noblest character is what breaks upon the world as a movement of social reform."¹ Great men and women being possessed by these inconceivable "living-ideas" do appear in time and place like thickly set constellations.

In Periclean Athens, in the Italian Renaissance, in Elizabethan England and in the Indian Renaissance of the 19th century, we find how these living ideas got themselves embodied and brought forth bumper crops in different aspects of human life. Zeitgeist or Time-Spirit creates these ideas, nurtures them and ultimately takes them away. Involved universal intelligence unfolds itself; evolution presupposes involution. "This universal intelligence is

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VI, page 134.

what we call God."² The sixth century B.C. was a golden age in human history. Lao-tse, Confucius, Buddha, Mahavira, Zarathushtra and Pythagoras were living at that time. This has been called by Karl Jaspers the "axial period" in human history. This marked the emergence of rational thinking and understanding out of the mythical imagination of ancient periods. "Luther—a creature of the Time. Time called him forth, the time did everything, he nothing."

Great ideas appear in life silently. H.G. Wells says: "The beginnings of such things are never conspicuous. Great movements of the racial soul come at first like a thief in the night", and then suddenly are discovered to be powerful and world-wide. Religious emotion—stripped of corruptions and freed from its last priestly entanglements—may presently blow through life again like a great wind, bursting the doors and flinging open the shutters of individual life and making many things possible and easy that in these days of exhaustion seem almost difficult to desire."

Albert Camus is of the opinion that they come into the world gently as doves. Under the compelling, receptive emotions generated by new ideas, Columbus and Vasco da Gama undertook the hazardous adventures in uncharted ocean, having no idea of the tremendous impact of such voyages. Gandhiji was forcibly pushed out of the railway compartment at 9 p.m. in 1893 at Maritzburg (South Africa). That singular incident was a turning point of his life and the apostle of non-violence emerged in history in due time. When Swamiji spoke only five words, "Sisters and brothers of America," at the Parliament of Religions, history was created at that supreme moment of spontaneous frater-

nity. The unknown monk "absolutely took the Parliament by storm." These five words were nothing, but the power behind them mattered everything. "It was the power of the sovereign quality of his being, transmuted by illumination, that passing through those sound waves quickened every soul like a flash of lightning. And they all responded instantaneously. They did not know what he was going to speak. But they surely felt that, at last, here was one who truly was the brother of everybody." This was a literal fulfillment of Sri Ramakrishna's prophecy: "Naren shall shake the world to its foundations."³ This is corroborated by Marie Louise Burke: "His entrance onto the scene of the West was dramatic and impressive. Through hindsight it almost seems to have been planned by a master planner in response to the profound need of the age."⁴

There is one most important point to be noted here. Unlike others mentioned earlier, Swamiji had a strong conviction of his role in the Parliament and its tremendous impact in the regeneration of the entire humanity.

When George Fox (1624-1691), starting a career as a cobbler's apprentice, received "a voice of God" at the age of twenty, history was created. "Perhaps, the most remarkable incident in modern history," writes Carlyle, "is not—the Battle of Austerlitz, Waterloo, Peterloo, or any other battle; but an incident passed carelessly over by most historians, and treated with some degree of ridicule by others; namely, George Fox's making himself a suit of leather. This man was one of those to whom, under purer or ruder form, the Divine Idea of the Universe is pleased to

2. *Ibid.*, Vol II, page 209

3. *Prabuddha Bharata*, May 1963, page 259.

4. M.L. Burke, *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1979, page 95.

manifest itself, and who are, therefore, rightly accounted prophets, God-possessed." The celebrated Quaker movement thus came into being.

In every civilized society there is a small group of people who rebel against orthodoxy. Liberal ideas haunt and agitate their minds, and they take the risk of being unpopular for their views. They give expression of their own convictions and thereby make friends as well as enemies. These pure minded, devout and conscientious individuals speaking from the depth of their souls, with passage of time, invariably find sympathy from people in distant futures. Since the period of the Renaissance in Europe new winds of liberal thought began to blow everywhere and Eastern spiritual ideas and thoughts began to percolate into the United States of America through that group who constituted the "Transcendental Movement" of 1830's. They were mentally nurtured by Indian scriptures tinged with the spirit of liberalism. "They brought into their vision a curious blending of both cultures, Indian and American, and developed an eclectic attitude to life."⁵ They were really speakers as well as writers of extraordinary abilities and of still more exceptionally sincere thoughts and ideas.

After many centuries of orthodoxy New-England had been riven by sterile controversies. The people were eager to hear new thoughts in religion and these transcendentalists brought the ideas which were "a new morning for even the rudest undergraduates in Harvard Hall." They sincerely believed that their message would further the cause of civilization. Emerson, Thoreau and Walt Whitman are well-known to the world of Transcendentalists. Of these transcendentalists Theodore

Parker (1810-1860) was "a religious Titan" who had "the largest regular congregation on the American continent. The great hall of Boston could seat four thousand people, and at his regular discourses every part of it was filled."⁶ This is indicative of the new enthusiasm for liberalism.

The new biblical study with its emphasis on "scientific history" and rationalism produced a work in 1881, the Revised Version of the New Testament. It was a great achievement in giving articulation "of a more frank and open dealing with scriptural criticism." "It was exceedingly cautious and conservative; but it had the vast merit of being absolutely conscientious." One can easily and unmistakably find "ethical progress in theological methods." The Chicago Times and the Chicago Tribune both printed the entire text, while 2,00,000 copies of this book were sold in New York in less than a week.

Again, the study of comparative religion was gaining considerable appreciation and it was revealed that non-Christian religions were being studied as an academic interest. "Comparative religion as an historical science was involved in each of the foregoing matters to a certain extent, notably in such questions as the relation of Hebrew religion to its ancient neighbours, or the Apostle Paul's indebtedness to Greek thought and the oriental mystery cults. In these pursuits many of the major disciplines for studying the history of religions were first developed. But it was the Western discovery of the great higher religions of the Orient, above all Hinduism and Buddhism, that raised the more difficult questions, because these highly philosophical religions possessed an intrinsic appeal for an age already imbued with

5. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1983 May, page 229.

6. A.D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, Vol. II, page 366.

idealistic philosophy and pantheistic theology. In Emerson's *Brahma* Americans savored the forbidden fruit in their parlors."⁷

James Freeman Clarke's liberal treatment of Ten Great Religions was quite a success in having twenty-one editions after its publication in 1871. William James' (1842-1910) Gifford Lectures, were published in 1902 as *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and this book created such an interest that within a dozen years it had been reprinted twenty-one times.⁸ Each of these several new thoughts gave a serious jolt to the traditional thinking of popular Christianity. Robert G. Ingersoll, the son of a Congregational minister, was a great orator and used his skill in undermining the authority of orthodoxy by questioning the basic tenets of Christian belief. Colonel Bob Ingersoll created a good deal of embarrassment among the Christians through his book, *The Mistakes of Moses*, and other publications. The scholars criticized Christianity for lack of intellectual basis. They became more anti-clerical, anti-religious and materialistic under the stress of conflict. Darwinian biology, the new trend of biblical studies and the scientific temper of the age seriously affected the image of traditional Christianity. J.W. Draper wanted to focus this incompatibility of science and religion in his book *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874). This study was undertaken by A.D. White in his *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* in two volumes (1896). When the proposed Parliament of Religions was talked about, it naturally did not receive approval from all quarters. The protagonists of conservatism did not share the view of liberal minded people in

supporting the cause of a Parliament of Religions. Years later one prime evangelist, Billy Sunday, "looked back on the Parliament as one of the biggest curses that ever came to America." "In 1892 the Presbyterian General Assembly called the anticipated parliament uncalled for, misleading and hurtful."⁹

In spite of all these reactionary forces working against the spirit of the Parliament, it was a grand success. "The fact that orthodoxy has allowed people of conflicting faiths to express themselves in the same city, without attempting to cut off their heads, or burn them alive speaks volumes for the progress of liberalizing thought."¹⁰ The nineteenth century was plagued by uncertainty and confusion. The people had no fixed goal and therefore they were subject to hope and fear, faith and doubt, optimism and cynicism. People of that century were living in an age which was not inspired by the spiritual insight of the illumined ones and consequently they were bewildered by the dazzling success of their intellectual ability and their dismal failure in the realm of spiritual affairs. This is highlighted by Einstein: "Perfection of means, confusion of the goal is the characteristic of the age."

The dichotomy between the two worlds—spirit and matter—demanded a synoptic comprehension of Truth embracing both the worlds. To overstep the limited area of human knowledge and embrace Truth in its totality and entirety, has been the supreme longing of philosophers in all ages and climes. To this supreme task Vedanta as interpreted by Swamiji provided the best solution in bringing harmony, making the mind free from nagging

7. S.E. Apelstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, page 773.

8. W.S. Hudson, *Religion in America*, page 226.

9. M.E. Murty, *Modern American Religion*, Vol. I, (1893-1919), page 22.

10. Ella Wilcox, *Neeley's History of the Parliament of Religions*, page 991.

confusion and giving the modern people a philosophy of life that can satisfy them intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.

The Parliament of Religions was held in Chicago in 1893 as an adjunct of the World's Columbian Exposition in celebration of the fourth centenary of the discovery of America by Columbus in 1492. This very noble conception of having a parliament of religions was a brain-child of Mr. Charles Carrol Bonney, an eminent lawyer. Mr. Bonney developed a cosmopolitan attitude in theology and "believed that there were common essentials by which everyone may be saved in all religions." The demand for a cosmopolitan outlook was in the air. This was highlighted by Rev. Dr. W.R. Alger of New York in his speech in the Parliament: "All over the world the hatred of the professors of religion for one another is irreligion injected into the very core of religion. That is fatal."¹¹

The immense popularity of religious liberalism having strong emphasis on the humanitarian impulse may be gathered from the tremendous enthusiasm shown by the public. "More than seven thousand persons were crowded into the halls of Washington and Columbus."¹² It was a grand and unique parliament of humanity where religious leaders, eminent philosophers, scientists, and common people assembled. It was indeed a unique phenomenon in the history of the world

The manner in which this penniless, forlorn monk became the most successful spokesman of Universalism in the Parliament suggest the hand of inscrutable destiny. Hinduism in the Bhagavad Gita gives us a clear picture of the deep mystery

of Divine Incarnation.¹³ God manifests Himself in a human form whenever *dharma* (righteousness) declines and irreligious impulses prevail, "He did so in the Western world with an appropriate flourish, setting the stage for His appearance there—or, more accurately, for the appearance of His Prophet—I had no desire to go to join the Parliament, but Shri Ramakrishna has come to me and insists that I go. He said, "You have come to do my work. You will have to go. Know for certain that the Parliament of Religions has been arranged for you. " ,¹⁴

Sister Nivedita wrote to Miss MacLeod in 1904 about this communion. Having received the direct command of Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of religious harmony, Swamiji himself told one of his bother disciples, Swami Turiyananda, at Mount Abu, "The Parliament of Religions is being organized for this (pointing to himself). My mind tells me so. You will see this verified at no distant date."¹⁵ Today it is known to all of us how true was his utterance.

The reason for the unprecedented and spontaneous oration on his first historic speech has been cited thus: "It was inspired by Swamiji himself and by something unspoken that came through his words, making them not sentiment but fact and recalling some long-forgotten sense of spiritual unity in the hearts of the people—a recollection that would henceforth work in its secret but ineluctable way to change the face of civilization and bring about a true harmony of religions. If for nothing else—and actually there was little else—it was for this, as Swamiji had said, that the Parliament was convened. But few at the

11. *Ibid.*, page 827.

12. Dr. J.H. Barrow's *The World's Parliament of Religions*.

13. *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 4, Slokas 5-7

14. M.L. Burke, *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1979 March, page 97.

15. *Spiritual Talks*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama), page 254.

time were aware of it."¹⁶

We may also give here the remark of C. Isherwood: "The other delegates to the Parliament were prominent men, admirably representative of their respective creeds. Vivekananda, like his Master, was unknown. For this very reason, his magnificent presence created much speculation among the audience. When he rose to speak, his first words, 'Sisters and brothers of America,' released one of those mysterious discharges of enthusiasm which seem to be due to an exactly right conjunction of subject, speaker and occasion. People rose from their seats and cheered for several minutes. Vivekananda's speech was short, and not one of his best; but, as an introduction, it was most effective. Hence forward, he was one of the Parliament's outstanding personalities."¹⁷

We also present the view of Miss Monroe, the then Editor of 'Poetry, A Magazine of Verse'. While writing her reminiscences of the Parliament of Religions and of Swamiji in her autobiography entitled 'A Poet's Life', she has impartially stated: "The Congress of Religions was a triumph for all concerned, especially for its generalissimo the Reverend John H. Barrows of Chicago's First Presbyterian Church, who had been preparing it for two years. When he brought down his gavel upon the 'world's first parliament of religions', a wave of breathless silence swept over the audience—it seemed a great moment in human history, prophetic of the promised new era of tolerance and peace. On the stage with him, at his left, was a black-coated array of bishops and ministers

representing the various Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches; at his right a brilliant group of strangely costumed dignitaries from afar and a monk of the orange robe from Bombay. It was the last of these, Swami Vivekananda, the magnificent who stole the whole show and captured the town. Others of the foreign groups spoke well...But the handsome monk in the orange robe gave us in perfect English a masterpiece. His personality, dominant, magnetic; his voice, rich as a bronze bell; the controlled fervour of his feeling; the beauty of his message to the Western World he was facing for the first time—these combined to give us a rare and perfect moment of supreme emotion. It was human eloquence at its highest pitch."¹⁸ "This resounding success of the Swami even in this opening session of the Parliament, made him one of the most popular figures in the whole assembly, and at the subsequent sessions, wrote the Northampton Daily Herald on April 11, 1894, 'Vivekananda was not allowed to speak until the close of the program, the purpose being to make people stay until the end of the session...thousands would wait for hours to hear a fifteen minutes' talk from this remarkable man.'"¹⁹

The liberal-minded people were touched by Swamiji's purity of life and his deep conviction of the oneness of humanity. His stupendous personality invigorated, strengthened and awakened the intellect and morale in the congregation. His magnificent eloquence, genuine love for all humanity and his universal outlook made a deep impact on them. Swamiji's speeches did impart to many their own verdure and freshness, impelled

16. M.L. Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries*, (Calcutta Advaita Ashrama) page 58.

17. *Vedanta for the Western World*, The Marcel Rodd Co., Hollywood, 1945, page 23.

18. M.L. Burke, page 60.

19. *Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume*, Swami Vivekananda Centenary, Calcutta, 1963, page 86.

them to think in terms of universalism and respect for other faiths. About Swamiji's famous "Paper on Hinduism" Burke's comment is given: "If some of the ideas which it contained had been presented before, they had never been presented with such sublime eloquence, nor with the full force behind them of a divine mission. There was actually no ground left for the evangelizing Christians to stand on, for not only Swamiji's paper but Swamiji himself gave proof that Hinduism was a religion that soared to the highest reaches of the Divine—and attained them."²⁰

During the entire historic sessions of the Parliament consisting of seventeen days, Swamiji was acclaimed by a consensus of opinion as an "orator by divine right." In the course of his enlightening addresses Swamiji extolled the dynamic message of Hinduism with its characteristic emphasis on universalism before the entire humanity. He said, "From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion...Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal....and the science of religion [would] become perfect when it would discover Him who is the one life in a universe of death, Him who is the constant basis of an ever-changing world, One who is the only Soul of which all souls are but delusive manifestations. Thus is it, through multiplicity and duality, that the ultimate unity is reached. Religion can go no further. This is the goal of all Science....As we find that somehow or other, by the laws of our men-

tal constitution, we have to associate our ideas of infinity with the image of the blue sky, or the sea, so we naturally connect our ideas of holiness with the image of a church, a mosque or a cross....The Hindus have associated the ideas of holiness, purity, truth, omnipresence, and such other ideas with different images and forms....If a man can realize his divine nature with the help of an image, would it be right to call that a sin? Nor, even when he has passed that stage, should he call it an error. To the Hindu, man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth. To him all the religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realize the Infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of these marks a stage of progress; and every soul is a young eagle soaring higher and higher, gathering more and more strength till it reaches the Glorious Sun...To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal...The Lord has declared to the Hindu in His incarnation as Krishna: 'I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls. Wherever thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and purifying humanity, know thou that I am there.'...If there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite, like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahmanic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all of these, and still have infinite space for development, which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for every human being, from the lowest groveling savage not far

20. M.L. Burke, page 76.

removed from the brute to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity, making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be centred in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature. Offer such a religion and all nations will follow you."

"May He who is the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father-in-Heaven of the Christians, give strength to you to carry out your noble idea ! "

"The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth. If the Parliament of religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: 'Help and not Fight', 'Assimilation and not Destruction', 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.' " 21

In Swamiji we find the best spirit of a

21. *Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume*, pp. 86-88.

synthesist. He envisioned a new age in which a new type of humanity, having universal ideas and aspirations would live together amicably. East and West would meet and learn from each other without misgiving, always remembering the great values of each culture. In the remarks of Christopher Isherwood: "No Indian before Vivekananda had ever made Americans and Englishmen accept him on such terms—not as a subservient ally, not as an avowed opponent, but as a sincere well-wisher and friend, equally ready to teach and to learn, to ask for and to offer help." He stood impartially "between East and West prizing their virtues and condemning the defects of both cultures. Who else could represent in his own person Young India of the Nineties in synthesis with Ancient India of the Vedas ? Who else could stand forth as India's champion against poverty and oppression, and yet sincerely praise American idealism and British singleness of purpose? Such was Vivekananda's greatness." 22

The impact of Swamiji's presence in the Parliament has been assessed by Marie Louise Burke. "The descriptions we have seen of Swamiji at the Parliament of Religions show him as colourful and dynamic, dominating the scene with the force of his personality and the utter purity of his message. He was in the full vigour of his youth, ready to face the entire world and to sacrifice his life for the poor, the ignorant, the oppressed of his motherland. And there was yet another reason for his phenomenal popularity. Never before had the people of America seen one in whom spiritual truths had been fully realized. Though the fact that Swamiji was such a one was not consciously known by the

22. *Swami Vivekananda in the West, (1893-96)*, Dr. Satish K. Kapoor, A.B.C. Publications, Jalandhar, page 363.

thousands who flocked to hear him speak, who waited interminable hours for even a few words and who applauded when he simply crossed the platform, the people through some inner knowledge unerringly recognized him for what he was and, from the start to finish, instinctively sensed that his very presence conferred a blessing. 'Darshan' was unheard of in America, but here at the Parliament was a spontaneous and unconscious manifestation of the attraction of the human soul to the spiritually great."²³ She further adds: "It is undeniable that the American people had

not been merely intellectually impressed by the nobility and supreme wisdom of Eastern doctrines which hitherto, in the words of Dr. Alfred Momaric, 'they had been taught to regard with contempt', but they had been touched by and had responded to the tremendous power of living spirituality that Swamiji embodied. Something far more important and more far-reaching had taken place than an intellectual appreciation of Eastern religions. It was as though the soul of America had long asked for spiritual sustenance and had now been answered."²⁴

23. M.L. Burke, page 63.

24. M.L. Burke, page 83.

The Vedantic Heritage of Swami Vivekananda

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Swami Vivekananda is one of those personalities who shake the world. He has influenced the human race of the present century in various profound ways. Our generation owes a lot to him. The first appearance of Swamiji on the global platform was in the Chicago Parliament of Religions held in September, 1893. It is befitting that our country as well as several others have planned to celebrate the Centenary of the event.

The heritage of Swami Vivekananda, the inspired son of our motherland, nay, of the mother earth, would include the entire history of mankind. And that would require more space and time for a person of any standard. Hence it would be more

pragmatic to limit oneself to a particular aspect of the heritage of Narendranath Datta (later on famous as Vivekananda). And presently the Vedāntic background of Swamiji, and that too very briefly, would be focussed on here.

As the very term 'Vedānta' is connected with the Vedas, the Vedic literature necessarily forms an important aspect of the Vedantic heritage of Vivekananda. As we know, the four Vedas are the foundations of the Indian culture. The R̥g Veda is known as the earliest existing text of the human race. The Vedic seers speculated about the creation, the Creator, and the creatures. They tried to visualize the purpose of all these and thought of a way out of the cycles

of birth, death and rebirth. The lawmakers established a society in this land of sacred mountains and rivers, based on *varṇāśrama-s*,¹ to be operated as per the ideals of the four ends (*puruṣārtha-s*).² The people were inclined to find out ultimate happiness in the realization of truth of this life, the absoluteness of the consciousness and the relativity of the physical appearances. The search for the Truth or Reality was the final step in the course of our march—*parama-puruṣārtha*. The close affinity between the sacred and the secular is exhibited in the *Puruṣa-sūkta* (*Rg Veda* X, 90, 12) where the four organs of the Cosmic Person have been identified with the four categories of our society. Swami Vivekananda approves of the classification, subject to rectification of later defilements.

The Upaniṣadic seers had realized that the Absolute and the individual are one (*ayamātmā Brahma—Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, II, 5, 19), since there is no Reality other than the Brahman (*Sarvaṃ khalu idam Brahma—Chhāndogya Upaniṣad*, III, 14, 1). Swamiji clearly realized this and extended the idea to the identification of the poor with God (*daridra-nārāyaṇa*).

Consciousness, developed as self-awareness at the advanced human level, is regarded as the sure path to distinguish between the real and the unreal, lasting and

transient (*nitya-anitya vastu viveka*, as Ācārya Śaṅkara would specify it). In the final analysis it is the consciousness, everlasting and all-pervasive, and not the matter, that assumes the supreme position. Hence the phenomenal layers of the Real are not so important; they are the outer covers of the inner core—the conscient Being, as explained by the principle of five sheaths (*pañca-kōśas* — *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, III, 2-6 & *Sarvopaniṣatsāra*, 2).

This conscient Being, through Its creative Power, fashions the world and the individual. In this context It is known as God. God looks after His creation and also withdraws it as the spider withdraws its web. It is a beginningless process or sport (*līlā* of the Supreme. It provides the individual an opportunity to understand the mystery surrounding him. The moment one becomes aware of the game (*Māyā*), the veil is lifted and the person realizes freedom from bondage, even in his own lifetime (*Jivanmukta*).

The philosophy developed by Swami Vivekananda is known as practical Vedānta or Neo-vedāntism. It is Monism, qualified in the sense that it retains the world as well as God. This is also the message of the Upaniṣads, and most clearly stated by the *Īśa Upaniṣad* as follows:

Īśāvāsyamidam sarvaṃ yat kiṃ ca jagatyām jagat,

tena tyaktena bhunjīthā mā gṛdhah kasyasvid dhanam.

(Know that all this, whatever moves in the moving world, is enveloped by God. Therefore, find your enjoyment in renunciation; do not covet what belongs to others.)

God, in Its essential form, is known as

1. Occupation (*brāhmaṇa*, *ksatriya*, *vaiśya*, *sūdra*) determined by one's propensities, and stage of life—(*brahmacarya*, *gārhasthya*, *vānaprastha* *sannyāsa*—celibate student, married householder, retired contemplative, or monk, respectively).
2. *Dharma* (following the path of righteous living), *Artha* (moderate and reasonable pursuit of wealth); *Kāma* (pursuit of legitimate pleasures and happiness); and *Mokṣa* (Spiritual liberation and attainment of life's greatest goal).

Sat-cit-ānanda, where all the three constituents are equally and fully the *Brahman*. Here *ānanda* (love, bliss) obliges God to extend his grace to all living beings. Swami Vivekananda, in such a context, develops the ideals of *samagra-mukti* (liberation for/of all) in tune with his practical Vedānta and universal religion.

The monistic philosophy of Vivekananda is not sheer continuation of the tradition. In fact he was a sceptic in his college days. Reportedly, he confided his scepticism to his friend, B.N.Seal (one of the most solid and erudite philosophers of our country), and sought guidance from him in search for truth. Seal, on his part, was a rationalist. His rationalism was amalgam of the monism of Śaṅkara, the Hegelian dialectic, and the Gospel of the French Revolution. The revolutionary nationalism of Seal had great appeal to Narendra, although he did not confine himself to national limits. Within him the soul was in quest for the citizen of the world. Appreciating the condition of Narendra, this friend suggested to him to read Shelley. Shelley's pantheism and the spiritual principle of the unity made lasting impression on the young Narendranath.

If one is asked to identify one singular personality that shaped the mind of Vivekananda, the answer would be—Thākur. Thākur or Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was the most outstanding spiritual leader of the 19th century India. He was a simple soul with intense passion for God. At times he claimed himself to be the incarnation of God. He was initiated into *Sannyāsa* by an *advaitic* monk, known as Totāpurī who taught Gadadhar (Thākur) the techniques of *nirvikalpa samādhi*

Sri Ramakrishna alone was able to answer affirmatively to Narendra when asked whether God could be shown. And

before he expired (in 1886) he made Narendra realize God. The six years of discipleship under Thakur at Dakshineswar and Cossipore were very formative for the mind of Vivekananda.

The keynote of Vivekananda's Chicago Addresses was the unity of religious faiths on basic questions. And the first formula of the unitary principle, according to Thākur was the service of man and God. He served Kālī, the deity in the Dakshineswar temple and also served people to the extent of identifying himself with the *caṇḍālas* (pariahs). He also practised beggary to get rid of egoism. Vivekananda imbibed humility at the instance of his Master.

Logical consistency was of utmost importance for Swami Vivekananda. He was happy with the Vedantic position wherein it is admitted that a statement made by a child, if logically consistent, must be accepted, rather than an inconsistent one made even by great men or even by Sukadeva himself. But he was also aware, although at a later stage, that one should know the limits of reason. He approves of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (II,4,1) position which talks of the Reality wherefrom our speech, along with the mind, returns being unable to grasp the Real. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (I,11,9) also confirms the same position when it says that 'This' cannot be obtained by reason: *naiṣā tarkeṇa matirāpaneyā*. And Śaṅkara also, while commenting on the *Brahma-sūtras* (II,1,11), has established that reason cannot be treated to be infallible. Vivekananda himself could develop complete faith in the Master only after the magical touch of Thākur at Dakshineswar.

The other spiritual figure who influenced Swami Vivekananda was Pavahāri Bābā, a learned saint, widely travelled and well-versed in several

languages. Narendranath visited this holy man of Ghazipur several times after the death of Sri Ramakrishna. And the Bābā enlightened him on the divinity of nature. Narendranath found in the Bābā a synthesis of the Vedānta and the social realization of the day.

Vivekananda travelled throughout the length and breadth of the country between 1891 and 1892 as a nameless ascetic in saffron robe. It was during this journey that he consolidated his Sanskrit, Vedic studies and philosophy. His stay at Porbandar for about nine months was most fruitful. He was more inclined to the Vedāntic tradition although he had sufficient awareness of other religio-philosophical schools of the country, namely, Jainism, Buddhism, Cārvāka, etc. He treated Buddhism as the fulfilment of Hinduism. He maintained that the *dhamma* professed by Śākyamuni was subsequently degraded till Ācārya Śaṅkara showed that the essence of Buddhism and Vedānta are not different. He also held that the Sāṅkhyā theory of evolution, coupled with ontology of the Advaita Vedānta, makes for a satisfactory understanding of the cosmos. He, further, had profound knowledge of the Western schools of philosophy. He had read the history of Western thought with serious mind. He was greatly influenced by David Hume's scepticism when he was in college. The logical accuracy and the rational analysis of Western thought had lasting impact on him. But he was more influenced by the philosophy of Advaita, beginning with the Upaniṣads and culminating in Śaṅkara's interpretation. He was at home with the Sanskrit texts. He was greatly inspired by the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* when it enjoins to 'Arise, awake, having attained the boons, understand them—*Uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata* (I,3,19).

The aphorisms of Bādarāyana present to

Vivekananda the basic texts of the Vedānta philosophy interpreted variously by the Ācāryas. He had very clearly understood the philosophies of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, based on the Brahma-sūtras. The combination of the two major currents, namely, Advaitism and Qualified Monism, finds expression in the Neo-vedāntism. As said earlier, in the Neo-vedānta of Vivekananda, the reality of the world has been retained along with the metaphysical Absolute of Śaṅkara. For him these two realms are not different; they are the two dimensions of one and the same Reality, namely, Brahman. The concept of essential unity of every thing owes its origin to the Advaita philosophy. The distinction between the empirical standpoint and the transcendental point of view is deeply influenced by the vyavaharika and the paramarthika categories of the Advaita system. The creation of the world, although due to *Māyā*, is not illusory. The world is an important step leading to the ultimate goal. Rāmānuja's concept of *bhakti* or devotion has also influenced Vivekananda. He finds *parā-bhakti* as the means to salvation. In his own life he used to sing devotional songs on various occasions.

Vivekananda was the greatest exponent of the Advaitic monism to the West. He was convinced that only Advaita Vedānta could be the future faith of the enlightened humanity. Vedānta, for him, was not only spiritual, but also rational and in harmony with the scientific outlook. The latest discoveries of science to him seemed like echoes of the spiritual flights of the Vedānta philosophy.

The Advaita Philosophy can be universally practised because it treats human beings to be spiritual. The finite and the infinite are not only not different paths which men take through various tendencies, all lead to the same goal, as different

streams. having the sources in different places, lead to the ocean. Lord Kṛṣṇa says the same in the Gita: "Whosoever comes to me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me."

The exposition of Vedānta by Vivekananda is called practical, or neo-Vedānta, as said earlier. It could be briefly stated as advocating i) identity of Brahman with His power—Māyā, ii) oneness of the formless and personal God, and iii) all-pervasiveness of God. He maintained that ultimate unity is reached through duality and multiplicity. They are not negated. But physical individuality is not the final position. Science has already shown that physical individuality is one little continuously changing body in an

unbroken ocean of matter, and Advaita (unity) is the necessary conclusion with our other counterpart—Soul.

Vivekananda had the capacity to discriminate between the real and the unreal, lasting and the changing, the truth and the falsity (*viveka*). He could also remain in blissful mood in adverse circumstances which were in abundance around him.

The brief account of the Vedāntic heritage of Swamiji would enable us to understand his entire thought in a more meaningful manner. The great mind of Vivekananda has enlightened humanity in many dimensions. It should be our endeavour to understand him properly and interpret him to the coming generation in unmistakable and practical terms.

The Divinity of Man / Chicago 1893

LETA JANE LEWIS

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My ideal is to preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.

—Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda had spoken only five words at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 when several thousand people jumped to their feet to give him a standing ovation. They clapped and shouted for two minutes. This spontaneous reaction was especially remarkable because the young man who spoke these words was a complete stranger and because the words themselves were neither original nor profound. The members of the audience have felt a singular presence in

the man standing before them and an unusual depth of meaning in his words. They had never experienced anything like this in their lives, and their reaction would surely have defied their analysis if, indeed, they had attempted it. How could they know that Swami Vivekananda was an illumined soul who embodied the very divine Existence they worshipped in their own religions? And how could they know that it was his perception of that same divine Existence in all of them that charged

those five words "sisters and brothers of America" with unprecedented meaning and power?

Swami Vivekananda did not identify his listeners or anyone else with the psycho/physical complex. On the contrary, he identified all mankind with the divine Self, the Atman, which is one with Brahman, the undifferentiated divine Ground of the universe. Brahman, the ineffable, transcends all finite attributes, but for practical purposes the sages apologetically define it as absolute Bliss, absolute Existence, absolute Consciousness, and absolute Wisdom. Since plurality is impossible in the Absolute, all souls are one in Brahman, and each has Brahman's divine attributes. Appreciative of the bewilderment such concepts would inevitably cause, Swami Vivekananda affirmed sympathetically: "You may wonder how this I of me can be the I of you. You may wonder how this limited I can be the unlimited Infinite, but it is so. The limited is a mere finite. The Infinite has been covered up, as it were, and a little of it is manifesting as I."¹

Although he was well aware of human faults and weaknesses, Swami Vivekananda abhorred the thought of labelling anyone a sinner. He knew that if we err, it is not because we are innately evil but because we are ignorant of our divinity. Thus he spoke eloquently to his audience at the World Parliament of Religions: "Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, O Lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blessed, and eternal; ye are not matter; ye are not bodies; matter

is your servant, not you the servant of matter."² It grieved him to think that anyone could be considered hopeless:

Never say that any man is hopeless, because he only represents a character, a bundle of habits, which can be checked by new and better ones. Character is repeated habits, and repeated habits alone can reform character.³ What good will it do you to think all your lives, "Oh, I have done evil, I have made mistakes?" "...Build up your character, and manifest your real nature, the Effulgent, the Resplendent, the Ever-Pure, and call It up in everyone that you see . . . This is the highest prayer that Advaita teaches. This is the one prayer, to remember our true nature, the God who is always within us, thinking of it always as infinite, almighty, ever-good, ever-beneficent, selfless, bereft of all limitations."⁴

Swami Vivekananda's avowed purpose in life was "to preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement in life."⁵

To have heard Swami Vivekananda proclaiming the divinity of man to his Chicago audience must have been the great experience, not merely of one lifetime but of many lifetimes. In this connection Romain Rolland wrote: "I cannot touch these sayings of his scattered as they are through the pages of books at thirty years' distance without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks, what transports, must have been produced when in burning words they issued from

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 Vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965-70) Vol. 2, page 305.

2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, page 11.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, page 208.

4. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, page 357.

5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, page 498.

the lips of the hero ! ”⁶ This last statement is supported by biographical sketches, letters, and contemporary newspaper accounts. The following item from the Chicago Herald is representative: “Vivekananda is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.”⁷

Swami Vivekananda’s perception of the divinity of man developed slowly and not without pain. The process began when as a quite young man (hardly more than a boy) he became acquainted with Shri Ramakrishna and visited him frequently at the temple garden in Dakshineswar. His first amazed reaction to Sri Ramakrishna was similar to the Chicago audience’s reaction to him except that his was still more intense. Taken by surprise, he found somewhat to his consternation that he was almost irresistibly attracted to this remarkable man, every pore of whose body seemed permeated with divine bliss.

Having received a Western education and read widely on his own, Swami Vivekananda had absorbed the skepticism then current among Western thinkers. Under their influence he struggled against naively accepting the validity of Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual experiences. But he did not deny his love for Sri Ramakrishna. “You see,” he told⁸ a critical, uncompromising friend, “you do not understand. I myself do not understand. No, even I do not understand, but I love that old man,

that saint Shri Ramakrishna.” Later he had the occasion to write, “Ramakrishna has no peer; nowhere else in this world exists such unprecedented perfection, such a wonderful kindness for all that does not stop to justify itself, that intense sympathy for man in bondage.”⁹

Time and time again he watched Shri Ramakrishna become miraculously absorbed in the blissful divine Ground of the universe and then open his ecstatic eyes to see that same divine Ground pervading the world as the Self of all. This perception of the divinity of man gave Sri Ramakrishna an indescribably genuine and unconditional love for all people regardless of caste, character, or personality type. But he especially loved his pure young disciples in whom he saw an unusual potentiality for spiritual development. He loved these fine young people not merely for themselves but still more for the sake of those whom they would serve and awaken spiritually when they grew older.

Swami Vivekananda could not comprehend why Sri Ramakrishna had higher regard for him than for any of his other friends and disciples, some of whom were prominent, talented people. He was baffled and somewhat taken aback by Shri Ramakrishna’s insistence that he was a great sage born on earth to remove human suffering. Shri Ramakrishna is said to have had an unusually beautiful smile, which was radiant with divine sweetness, and it must have been delightful to see him smile fondly at Swami Vivekananda. This beatific smile was gentle but also very powerful. As Swami Vivekananda himself wrote, “He who has realised the Atman becomes a storehouse of great power. From him as a centre and within a certain radius emanates

6. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda & the Universal Gospel* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1975), page 146.

7. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 8, page 327.

8. Swami Vivekananda’s Eastern & Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1960), page 87.

9. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 6, page 231.

a spiritual force, and all those who come within this circle become animated with his ideas and are overwhelmed by them."¹⁰

Seeing the Atman in everyone, Shri Ramakrishna caused people—even those whom society labelled wicked and sinful—to feel good about themselves. Of course Shri Ramakrishna was fully aware of the evils—anger, jealousy, lust, and greed—which lurk in the personality. But he looked deep within the human psyche and found the divine Self, the real Self, there. They had had no idea that they were pure and holy in their real natures. Lives were changed quietly, almost imperceptible, by the overwhelming creative power of Shri Ramakrishna's penetrating vision.

The unity which Shri Ramakrishna experienced when he looked out into the universe and found his own Self, the Atman, everywhere present as the Self of all, broke down the barriers the sense of individuality usually raises. He loved other people as himself because he knew they were himself. All people were dear to him, and he felt their suffering intensely. On one occasion he was making a pilgrimage through an area where the severely deprived villagers were weak with hunger and clothed in rags. Upon seeing their pitiable condition he felt such agony that he could not travel on until a wealthy man who was with him took steps to meet their most pressing needs.

Shri Ramakrishna must have sorrowed to hear the famines, plagues, floods, and other disasters occurring in India at that time, and it is hardly surprising that he taught Swami Vivekananda to worship God by serving Him in the sick and downtrodden. He especially emphasized the fact that service of others is a sacred

privilege which egotism profanes. One day when he had been discussing the *Vaiṣṇavas'* ideal of "compassion to creatures," he reflected ecstatically, evidently addressing himself: "Compassion for creatures! Thou fool! An insignificant worm crawling on the earth, thou to show compassion to others! Who art thou to show compassion? No, it cannot be. It is not compassion for others, but rather service to man recognising him to be the veritable manifestation of God!"¹¹ These words struck deep into Swami Vivekananda's heart giving his life the direction which eventually brought him to the World Parliament of Religions and beyond.

Drawn by the compelling magnetism of Shri Ramakrishna's wonderful love and the delightful joy he felt in his company, Swami Vivekananda underwent a gradual elevation of consciousness, which culminated in the highest, the non-dual, absorption shortly before Shri Ramakrishna's death. In this unitive consciousness which taught him that his own Self and all other Selves are one in the divine Ground of the universe, Swami Vivekananda discovered man's true identity. He then knew from his own experience that all are essentially divine and that the common image which equates humanity with the body, the mind, and the senses is illusory and false.

Usually those who experience the unalloyed peace of the non-dual vision have no desire to return to the world. Why not cast off this burdensome body? Shri Ramakrishna was afraid that Swami Vivekananda might forget his mission for suffering humanity and do just that. So he told him firmly, "Now then, the Mother has shown you everything. Just as a treasure is locked up in a box, so will this realisation you have just had be locked up and the key

10. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, page 736.

11. *Ibid.*, page 107.

shall remain with me. You have work to do. When you will have finished my work, the treasure-box will be unlocked again; and you will know everything then, just as you do now."¹² Swami Vivekananda had once told Shri Ramakrishna, "I wish to remain immersed in samadhi for three or four days at a stretch—breaking it just to take food." To this Shri Ramakrishna had responded sternly: "You are a fool. There is a state higher than that even. Do you not sing, 'Thou art all that there is?' "¹³ Shri Ramakrishna once chided Swami Vivekananda for seeking his own liberation. "Shame on you!" he scolded. "You are asking for such an insignificant thing. I thought you would be like a big banyan tree, and that thousands of people would rest in your shade. But now I see that you are seeking your own liberation."¹⁴ Of course Swami Vivekananda was moved by Shri Ramakrishna's appealing admonition, but it was not until later when he saw others helplessly suffering tragedy and grief that he fully realized the necessity of temporarily renouncing his own salvation for the benefit of others. "To embrace the world after transcending it is the last divine sacrifice."¹⁵ For him the sacrifice was not only to be real but deadly. It was to be "work, work, strenuous, terrible work and struggle, and much difficulty and asceticism. That work was to break his body to pieces; he was not to know any rest."¹⁶

After Shri Ramakrishna's death, his young disciples were uneasy for fear that the source of their spiritual lives might be dried up. So they began to practise intense

spiritual disciplines in order to establish themselves in the sublime states of consciousness which they had taken for granted when Sri Ramakrishna was alive and with them. Most of them took long pilgrimages, wandering with their staffs and begging bowls and relying upon the Lord for shelter and meager sustenance. On the whole, Swami Vivekananda preferred to travel alone foregoing even the companionship of his beloved brother disciples of Shri Ramakrishna. At times he was tempted to forget the world and merge in the perfect bliss of the Atman, but he remembered Shri Ramakrishna and was unable to do so.

The factor which solidified his dedication to humanity and prepared him for his participation in the World Parliament of Religions was the experience of suffering, not personal suffering, although he had had plenty of that, but the experience of suffering in others. In his wanderings throughout India, Swami Vivekananda encountered intolerable distress in various parts of the land. History relates that at that time there were frequent famines in India. The statistics are horrible. A million or two people would starve to death at one time. And there were raging epidemics of cholera and other infectious diseases. The poor villagers, who did not have simple medicine, died of illnesses which might have been cured with proper treatment. Swami Vivekananda was shocked to see how abject poverty, disease, and ignorance made life a burden for the poor, uneducated villagers. He told his brother monastics: "I have travelled all over India....But alas, it was agony to me, my brothers, to see with my own eyes the terrible poverty and misery of the masses, and I could not restrain my tears."¹⁷

12. *Ibid.*, page 145.

13. *Ibid.*, page 131

14. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda, A Biography* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1982) pp. 58-59.

15. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, page 139.

16. *Ibid.*, page 284.

17. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda & the Universal Gospel*, page 30.

The climax came several years after Shri Ramakrishna's death when Swami Vivekananda's wanderings finally brought him to the southernmost tip of India. Upon his arrival there, he first worshipped God the Mother in a lovely small temple on the shore. Then he swam out to a large rock a considerable distance from the mainland to spend the night. Meditating and thinking alone on the isolated rock he came to the full realization that, whatever the cost to himself, he could not forsake unhappy India. "Only one idea was burning in my brain," he later wrote in a letter to a friend, "to start the machine for elevating the Indian masses."¹⁸ At that time he believed that if people in the West learned of India's great spiritual heritage, they would gladly exchange food as well as their scientific and technological knowledge for it. There on that lonely rock (now known as the Vivekananda rock) he made up his mind to follow the Raja of Ramnad's wise suggestion and go to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in order to get help for India. So it is not to be wondered at that when the thousands gathered at the Parliament gave him that initial standing ovation, his heart went out to India. He did not take the applause for himself but thanked his audience in the name of "India, the mother of religions."

According to contemporary reports, Swami Vivekananda, who became known as the "cyclonic monk," was probably the most admired of the two or three hundred speakers at the Parliament. Although he was not a haughty person who held himself aloof, he distinguished himself in part by his majestic bearing. Far from being egotistical, he carried himself proudly as a tribute to the divine Self, which he revered in every human being. He urged everyone regardless of his caste, nationality, or situation in

life to hold his head high as a token of Self-respect, and he vehemently opposed anyone's insulting the Atman within by cringing before others.

Given his impressive personality and his extraordinary mind, it is not surprising that Swami Vivekananda was courted by the socially elite and sought after by leading artists and intellectuals. But no praise or adulation could turn his head. The prospect of succumbing to the temptation of name and fame was so revolting to him that he unhesitatingly refused Harvard's offer of the Chair of Eastern Philosophy and Columbia's offer of the Chair of Sanskrit. He wished to remain as he was, a selfless monk dedicated to the service of others.¹⁹ His admirers occasionally offered him generous hospitality, but it pained him to be thrown into the lap of luxury when there were people in India and elsewhere in the world who did not have enough to eat. Sleeping in a comfortable American bed one night, he was so overcome with sorrow for hapless India that he threw himself out of the bed weeping and spent the remainder of the night on the floor.

Although Swami Vivekananda could never forget the horrible suffering he had seen in India, his concern was not exclusive. His expansive heart went out to suffering humanity wherever he found it, and he was soon saddened to observe misery even in the wealthy United States, misery which had its origin not so much in material as in spiritual deprivation. "Social life in the West is like a peal of laughter," he declared, "but underneath, it is a wail. It ends in a sob. The fun and frivolity are all on the surface; really, it is full of tragic inten-

18. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, page 517.

19. "I long, oh I long for my rags, my shaven head, my sleep under the trees, and my food from begging."—Swami Vivekananda. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, page 352.

sity."²⁰ Determined to do what he could to remedy such an unhappy situation, Swami Vivekananda initiated a series of lectures and classes oriented to Western needs. His schedule was exhausting, often including two or three public appearances in one day as well as several personal interviews. These classes and lectures brought him friends and disciples, not a few of whom regarded their association with him as a kind of spiritual miracle. One such admirer wrote in retrospect: "He literally radiated spirituality. Indeed that same atmosphere of ecstasy and insight that hovered about the Master at Dakshineswar now hovered about the Swami in the strange surroundings in a far off land. An atmosphere of benediction, of peace, of power and of inexpressible luminosity was felt by one and all who came to his classes."²¹

In spite of his burning desire to get help for India, Swami Vivekananda asked nothing, even for her, in exchange for the blessings he freely gave his Western followers. He did not expect them to devote their lives to his Indian work or to donate money for it. But when they learned of the heart-breaking conditions that were ravaging India, some of the most dedicated volunteered to contribute money for his work there or to go to help him. Thus, for example, we find Mr. and Mrs. Sevier assisting in the foundation of an ashrama at Mayavati in the Himalayas, Mr. J.J. Goodwin following Swami Vivekananda to India to record some important lectures, Sister Nivedita lecturing in the West to raise money for her girls' school in Calcutta, and Sister Christine arriving in India to teach there. Several of Swami Vivekananda's self-sacrificing disciples died prematurely in India of diseases to which their immune systems were unaccustomed.

20. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, page 588.

21. *Ibid.*, page 339.

The solid establishment of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission to carry out Swami Vivekananda's plans for the good of humanity would have been difficult, if not impossible, without the assistance of these and other friends who came to him as a result of his appearance at the World Parliament of Religions. Under his guidance, the monks of the Math and Mission dedicated themselves to the twin goals of Self-realization and the service of God in man, goals toward which succeeding generations of Ramakrishna monks have earnestly worked. From the inception of these two organizations Swami Vivekananda emphasized Shri Ramakrishna's fundamental teaching that the highest spiritual realization is that in which the devotee sees God everywhere in the universe. He described this realization and its results to one of the young monastics: "In that state you will be speechless, carried beyond yourself, by seeing your own Self in every being that breathes, and in every atom in the universe. When you realise this, you cannot live in the world without treating everyone with exceeding love and compassion. This is indeed practical Vedanta."²²

Worshipping the divine in the miserable and deprived, Swami Vivekananda and his brother monks nursed the sick, directed sanitation efforts in the slums, and extended their meager resources as far as possible to build schools and hospitals in the destitute areas. They taught scientific agriculture, sanitation and disease control to the simple village folk, who had been and still were victims of social injustice and oppression. Although he sorrowed for the villagers, Swami Vivekananda harboured no animosity toward the priests, the landlords, and the foreign rulers, who, among others, were responsible for their pitiable condition. He did not believe, as

22. *Ibid.*, page 610.

some reformers seem to do, that if you love the poor, you must hate the rich. On the contrary, he told his fellow monastics: "Let us through the force of our character and spirituality and our austere living convince the rich man of his duty to the masses and induce him to give money for the service of the poor and distressed."²³ Although Swami Vivekananda was deeply pained by the physical oppression which burdened millions of Indians, there was another kind of oppression, which, if anything, pained him still more. In this second case the oppressed were the untouchables and others like them, and the oppressors, instead of being the rich landlords or the foreign rulers, were the other Indians, their neighbours. Moved by the woeful lack of courage and self-esteem on the part of these poor souls who were despised by society in addition to their being impoverished, Swami Vivekananda exhorted his brother monastics: "Go to the untouchables, the cobblers, the sweepers, and others of their kind and tell them, 'You are the soul of the nation and in you lies infinite energy which can revolutionize the world! Shake off your shackles and the whole world will wonder

at you!' "²⁴ He taught everyone, rich and poor, outcastes and maharajas alike:

This is the way to reach the goal, to tell yourselves and everybody else that we are divine. And as we go on repeating this, strength will come. He who falters at first will get stronger and stronger, and the voice will increase in volume until the truth takes possession of our hearts and courses through our veins and permeates our bodies. Delusion will vanish as the light becomes more and more effulgent, and then will come a time when all else has disappeared and the sun alone shines.²⁵

As we have seen, the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 was of crucial importance to Swami Vivekananda in achieving his goal of "preaching unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life." Not only did the Parliament give him the opportunity to proclaim the divinity of man publicly for the first time but it opened up opportunities for him to manifest it with astonishing power and beauty in his own life.

23. *Ibid.*, page 733.

24. *Ibid.*, page 576.

25. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 2, page 202.

Parliament of Religions—The Legacy

SWAMI SHIVAPRASADANANDA

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The 1893 World Parliament of Religions brought men and women together from all parts of the world in a spirit of human solidarity and good will. One wonders whether such a convention can be convened a second time and accomplish so

much?

At the turn of the 20th century world population was only about a fifth of its present numbers. Astonishing discoveries in Science and their applications to human

life were gaining momentum and people were both expectant and apprehensive about what the future might hold. As if rising to meet the unseen challenge of a new materialistic order and power in the world, that would work for evil as well as for good, a desire rose up in the hearts of people to come closer to the Divine and closer in touch with the rest of humanity in all parts of the world, to share a common culture and spirituality, and, if possible accumulate strength in so combining with others. Soon ideas began to be expressed like "uniting all religions against all irreligion", uttered by Charles C. Bonney; and the Rev. Patrick Feehan's:

"When learned men, representing the thought of the world on religion, come to tell us of God and of His truth, and of life and of death and of immortality, and of justice and of goodness and of charity, then we listen to what will surpass infinitely whatever the most learned or most able man can tell us of material things."¹

Vivekananda, too, called on the monastic brotherhood to "unite all the powers of goodness against all the powers of evil."²

Spiritually, throughout human society there were urgent needs. Materialism, in the name of 'scientific progress' was challenging belief and faith in God, also eroding the moral fibre of communities and society. Ethical rules and moral precepts were being abandoned and forgotten. Spiritual teachings of the great Saviours of the world were being passed over as irrelevant to the changing world. Strong races of men were

ruthlessly exploiting and oppressing weaker ones. Economic and social imbalances were rife and wreaking tremendous suffering on whole nations. Armed force was becoming the prime and effective instrument for realizing policy of nations over each other, and individuals too were behaving like the nations. Women of the world were chafing over their own underdevelopment and started the great suffrage movement to secure them some of their natural rights and the right to vote. Brown and black races, long in economic and physical subjection, had not found their voice yet.

So the convening of a world convention to examine all these matters was looked upon as most opportune and timely. Appropriately enough Augusta J. Chapin, a woman, was a prominent apologist for the Parliament of Religions at the opening ceremony, she being the fifth speaker. Her felicitous greeting shows something of the atmosphere:

"The world's first Parliament of Religions could not have been called sooner....we had to wait for the hour to strike, until the steamship, the railway and the telegraph had brought men together, levelled their walls of separation and made them acquainted with each other...until scholars had broken the way through the pathless wilderness of ignorance, superstitions and falsehood, and compelled them to accept each other's honesty, devotion and intelligence. A hundred years ago the world was not ready for this Parliament....Woman could not have had a part in it in her own right....Now the doors are thrown open in our own and many other lands."³

1. *The World's Parliament of Religions*, J.H. Barrows, Editor (Chicago: The Parliament Publ. Co., 1893) Vol. I, pp. 72, 79-80.

2. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981) page 86.

3. *The World's Parliament of Religions*, Vol. I, page 82.

Midst surging joy and expectation of the thousands assembled, Mr. Bonney, President of the Parliament, first spoke, saying:

"If this Congress shall faithfully execute the duties with which it has been charged, it will become a joy of the whole earth, and stand in human history like a new Mount Zion, crowned with glory and marking the actual beginning of a new epoch of brotherhood and peace."⁴

Chairman of the Executive committee, Mr. J.H. Barrows, hailed:

"Welcome, most welcome, O wise men of the East and of the West !...Welcome, one and all, thrice welcome to the world's first parliament of religions"⁵

Well it was not quite the first in every respect. The fifteen men appointed to the Executive Committee in 1891 had been surprised and pleased when they learned from Mr. H. Dharmapala of Ceylon—

"...Twenty centuries ago, just such a congress was held in India by the great Buddhist Emperor, Asoka, in the city of Pataliputra, modern Patna....One of the noble lessons it enunciated was: 'King Priyadarshi (Asoka) honours all forms of religious faith....and enjoins reverence for one's own faith and no reviling or injury for that of others. Let reverence be shown in such a manner as is suited to the difference of belief....for he who honours his own religion, and reviles that of others...throws difficulties in the way of his own religion; this, his conduct, cannot be right.'"⁶

Even at the outset as the Parliament opened, it could be seen that great emotional optimism and good intent were straining to express themselves. The question was whether it could be safely controlled or not. But enthusiasm for God, hope for a future better world, and that the great Parliament could meet its responsibility were unbounded. On the first day when the welcoming addresses were read and responses to them were invited, feelings of universal brotherhood were at a high pitch. It was a thoroughly joyous occasion.

Responding to the welcoming addresses of President Bonney, Chairman Barrows, Bishop Feehan, Cardinal Gibbons and others, Mr. Mazoomdar of the Brahmos was the first to reply representing India. Then Mr. Dharmapala, Mr. Gandhi, and Mr. Chakravarti spoke, representing Buddhism, Jainism and Theosophy. Swami Vivekananda followed representing Hinduism in its universal aspect, and he was followed by Mr. Nagarkar, another Samajist. All were impressive speeches. And there were men of other nations. Mr. Mazoomdar, addressing the Parliament as "Leaders of the Parliament of Religions and Men and Women of America," was loudly cheered. When the Greek Orthodox archbishop Latas stood up and thanked and praised the Parliament organisers and the American hosts there was a great outburst of emotion. When he said:

"I thank the great American nation...I raise up my hands and I bless with heartfelt love the great country, and the happy glorious people of the United States. . . ."⁷

Mr. Bonney rose from his seat and cried enthusiastically, "This indeed is glorious ! " The audience acknowledged the archbishop

4. *Ibid.*, page 67.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 73 & 78.

6. *Ibid.*, page 8.

7. *Ibid.*, page 86.

with prolonged cheering. Following, there was yet more waving of hats and handkerchiefs in the air as men and women rose to their feet greeting the Chinese Imperial Commissioner, Pung Kwang Yu. Swami Vivekananda wrote in a letter to India: "Mazoomdar made a nice speech, Chakravarti a nicer one, and they were much applauded. . . . Dhammapala. . . was one of the favourites." When Swamiji delivered his own address and received a thunderous ovation, the atmosphere was like very heaven. Only three more speakers followed Swamiji and they were warmly received also. The impressive last address was given by the American negro pastor and bishop, Benjamin Arnett.

Certainly it showed that the spirit of religious harmony was not altogether absent from the world, nor in the mind of individual delegates, though it was a harmony of temporary feeling that could be easily ruffled. But Swami Vivekananda was all appreciation for it and saw in it the spirit of non-dualism or Advaita:

"...What is needed is a fellow-feeling between the different types of religion, since they all stand or fall together...a fellow-feeling which springs from mutual esteem and mutual respect, and not the condescending, patronizing...goodwill..."⁸

"...whether we call it Vedantism or any ism, the truth is that Advaitism is...the only position from which one can look upon all religions and sects with love..."⁹

8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. 2, page 68.

9. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, by His Eastern & Western Disciples (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) Vol. I, page 333.

"What a wonderful achievement was that world's Fair at Chicago," he wrote on another occasion, "and that wonderful Parliament of Religions where voices from every corner of the earth expressed their religious ideas!"¹⁰

It was due to the most gracious modesty on the part of Swami Vivekananda, however, that he held the Parliament so wonderful and himself of no importance for its success. From his *"Life,"* by the Eastern and Western Disciples, we know that he once had an intuition that it was for him that the Parliament was Divinely ordained, so that the universal ideas of Vedanta could come out.¹¹ By great popular acclaim, however, of the public, the newspapers and other delegates, we know that Swamiji was the single man who best typified the spirit of the great convention. Newspapermen wrote:

"This man with his handsome face, magnetic presence and wonderful oratory is the most prominent figure in the Parliament." ... "He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions." (*N.Y. Herald*)

'...but eloquent as were many of the brief speeches, no one expressed as well the spirit of the Parliament and its limitations as the Hindu Monk...for he is an orator by Divine right.' (*N.Y. Critique*)¹²

Mr. Barrows said he was... "the orange monk, who exercised a wonderful influence over his auditors."¹³

"...beyond question the most popular and influential man in the Parlia-

10. *"Letters,"* page 77.

11. *"The Life,"* Vol. I, page 385

12. Quoted in *"The Life,"* Vol. I, pp. 428-29.

13. *"The World's Parliament,"* Vol. II, page 1562.

ment....People thronged about him everywhere he went and hung with eagerness on his every word [saying of him], 'He is indeed a prince among men,'" wrote the Assistant Chairman.¹⁴

Yet, the Swami would take no credit, but would say, "My heart was fluttering and my tongue nearly dried up; I was so nervous!" The history shows that this was his great humility speaking. Whence comes such another? Vivekananda created waves in the 1893 Parliament, which fortunately have not died down.

Strangely he and Sri Ramakrishna have not been acknowledged. This perhaps is the work that Vivekananda left unfinished for future generations and future parliaments. As for his own country, Swamiji said, "If this nation [India] wants to rise, it will have to rally round his name [Sri Ramakrishna's].¹⁵ One might think it true as well for the whole world now in ferment.

The Parliament of Religions was meant to bring humanity nearer to each other and nearer to God, and if the first day's proceedings did not prove this was *already* an accomplishing fact, it was only because during the next ten days everyone was brought back to the sordid reality of the real world.

Col. T. W. Higginson, whom Swamiji referred to as "a broadminded man," was one of the behind-the-scenes leaders of the Parliament. He was witty and was given "freedom of the platform" in the interim, to "as gently as possible" remind the audience and representatives where they stood—with respect to reality, that is. He was full of wry humour, but his innuendoes were not

lost on anybody. Yes, there *were* rivalries and competition between religions and religious denominations; there *were* narrow and self seeking individuals, who had not much desire to bring humanity together in harmony and peace in the same parlour; and there *were* points where different religions could not come to agree in practice. The speaker indicated that all this would come to the fore in the following days of the Proceedings, when "social reform" would be the topic under study. He told several funny anecdotes which relieved some of the spiritual tension. He said it is when we come to the question of "good works" that we fail so pitifully—everyone may talk well, but who can deliver the goods?—who can really do the work, true charity and atonement? Smiling, he said it was not enough for the admirable Chairman, Mr. Barrows, to assemble all the people together and preach to them like St Anthony did to the fishes in the old German poem—

"The poem records," he said, "how eloquently the good saint addressed them and how well they all listened to him. He explained to the pickerel that they ought not to eat each other; he told the trout they ought not to steal each other's food, and he said the eel ought not to go reeling around miscellaneously, getting into all manner of mischief." It is recorded that the fishes heard him in raptures, but at the end, the poem says, at the end, after all—

"The trout went on stealing,
The eels went on eeling,
Much delighted were they,
But preferred the old way.'

Let us guard against that danger, said the speaker, and how can we guard against it so well as by a little mutual humility when we ask ourselves how well any of

14. "The Life", page 429.

15. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III, page 315.

us have dealt with the actual problems of human life? When it comes to that, after all, have any of us so very much to boast of? With the seething problems of social reform penetrating all our community, and raising the question whether one day the whole system of competition under which we live may be swept away as absolutely as the feudal system disappeared before it...is it quite time for us to assume the attitude of indefatigability?"¹⁶

Col. Higginson's remarks, pointing to the need and necessity of self-effort and not mere talk in spiritual life, were altogether fitting and suited to the occasion. It was the *true legacy* of the first Parliament of Religions to posterity up to our own time. Hardly any other thing said in the Convention agreed more with what Swami Vivekananda represented and taught; that we have to put our shoulders to the wheel to realize and bring into reality the things which we talk so much about. Why Vivekananda was admired greatly in the West and at the Parliament of Religions was that he was the perfect exemplar of how to make religion practical in life in the modern age. "My ideal can indeed be put into a few words," he wrote in reply to a question, "and that is to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life." Vivekananda was a great Soul (*mahāpuruṣa*), in history a great leader of the world. Whence comes such another?

As if urging others (his followers) to continue to work hard, and cautioning them against the danger of letting go their duties, thinking to imitate *him*, he wrote that as the leader he had done what was needed:

... "Never let go your hold on the rudder, grasp it firm. We are steering all right, no mistaking that, but landing on the other shore is only a matter of time. That's all. Do you understand? And it is a very difficult task to take on the role of a leader. One must be *dāsasya dāsaḥ*—servant of servants, and must accommodate a thousand minds. There must not be a shade of jealousy or selfishness, then you are a leader. First, by birth, and secondly, by unselfishness—that's a leader. . . . He (the Lord) casts the net all right, and winds it up likewise. Ours is but to follow; love is the best instrument. Love conquers in the long run. It won't do to become impatient—wait, wait—patience is bound to give success...

"I tell you brother, let everything go on as it is...unity in variety—see that universality be not hampered in the least. Everything must be sacrificed, if necessary, for that one sentiment, *universality*. Whether I live or die, whether I go back to India or not, remember this specially, that universality—perfect acceptance, not tolerance only—we preach and perform. Take care how you trample on the least rights of others. Many a huge ship has foundered in that whirlpool."¹⁷

The world cannot expect another Vivekananda to come forward as soon as it would merely like for that to happen. If we find a void where he once stood in the vanguard of *ṛṣis* and philosophers, and find that we are helpless to alter the course of world events, we should not give up the faith. We have only to read a few lines of the great "*Life*" of Sri Ramakrishna to understand that he gave the world enough teaching to last a thousand years. Rather, it is now for us to "hold the rudder firm" by acting according to His, and Vivekananda's

16. "*The World's Parliament*", Vol. I, pp. 132-36.

17. "*Letters*", page 85.

directions. Fellow-feeling for people of all faiths should not be neglected, and it is always right to remember that Ramakrishna and Vivekananda always taught that the inner life of the man takes precedence over

all the affairs of the world both religious and secular. Who knows, we may one day open our eyes and find we've reached the other shore.

"Watching the fall of dead leaves once, in the stillness of an autumn evening, he did not deny that there was poetry in the sight, but he declared that the mental excitement roused... was childish and out of place. All Western people, he said had to learn the great lesson, of holding experience and emotion apart. 'Watch the fall of the leave, but gather the sentiment of the sight from within, at some later time!'"

from: *The Master As I Saw Him*, Vol. I, page 207—Nivedita

Swami Vivekananda, The Universal Inspirer

R.N. LAKHOTIA

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In the last century, India has produced many saints, but very few were like Swami Vivekananda, who can rightly be called not merely a saint of India, but a saint of the whole world. His immortal address at the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in the U.S.A. in the September 1893 is the most important event which made him known the world over. Swami Vivekananda's inspiring message is applicable to all the people of the world without any distinction of caste, colour, creed or country. He spoke on different aspects of life, both material and spiritual. Fortunately, his writings and speeches have been compiled and they are now available in the form of eight volumes of *"The Complete Works"*, published by the Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta. The references to quotations of Swami Vivekananda in this article refer to the volume and page number of the said *Complete Works*.

bered throughout the world as a saint who boldly explained that the human being is essentially divine and that we should all try to realize this divine power which is in us. In this connection he said:

"All power is within; you can do anything and everything. Believe in that, do not believe that you are weak; do not believe that you are half-crazy lunatics, as most of us do nowadays. You can do anything and everything without even the guidance of anyone. All power is there. Stand up and express the divinity within you."¹

Universality of Religions:

Swami Vivekananda was born as a Hindu and he often expressed this fact with pride. But he respected all the religions of the world. He believed that different

Divinity of Man:

Swami Vivekananda would be remem-

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 3, page 284.

religious paths ultimately lead to one God, just as different streams having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea. He said that which exists is One; sages call it by various names.

Based on this belief about the universality of the different faiths and about the necessity of having a workable harmony amongst them, he said:

"The final idea is that my religion cannot be yours, or yours mine. Although the goal and the aim are the same, yet each one has to take a different road, according to the tendencies of his mind; and although these roads are various, they must all be true, because they lead to the same goal."

Faith in Self:

Swami Vivekananda exhorted the people of India in particular to rise, awake and stop not till the goal is achieved, and for the purpose, he wanted the people to have self-confidence and faith in self, and not to regard themselves as weak. This is what he says:

"Our first duty is not to hate ourselves, because to advance we must have faith in ourselves first and then in God. He who has no faith in himself can never have faith in God."²

Practical Spirituality:

Swami Vivekananda gave a new direction to spirituality by showing it is possible for human being to practise it in this life while performing their worldly duties. For this, of course, he relied mainly on the ancient scriptures of India. His interpretation and bold statement on practical spirituality has inspired millions of people the world over, and will continue to do so

in future as well. He strongly believed that the mainspring of strength in every race lies in its spirituality. He was emphatic in his statement that the death of the race begins the day spirituality fades and materialism gains ground. He has expressed his views on spiritual knowledge in the following words:

"He who gives man spiritual knowledge is the greatest benefactor of mankind and as such we always find that those were the most powerful of men who helped man in his spiritual needs, because spirituality is the true basis of all our activities in life."³

He enunciated a practical universal religion. This is how Swamiji expressed his views on the practical religion:

"The Kingdom of Heaven is within us. He is there. He is the soul of all souls. See Him in Your own soul. That is practical religion. That is freedom. Let us ask each other how much we are advanced in that: how much we are worshippers of the body, or real believers in God, the spirit; how much we believe ourselves to be spirit. That is selfless. That is freedom. That is real worship. Realise your Self."⁴

Youth:

Swami Vivekananda wanted the youth of India to be strong and not to remain weak. The following is a famous quotation about strength to be gained by the youth:

"Make your nerves strong. What we want are muscles of iron and nerves of steel. We have wept long enough. No more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making educa-

2. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, page 38.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, page 52.

4. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, page 246.

tion all round that we want."⁵

Ahimsa and Vegetarianism:

Swami Vivekananda expounded his thesis of practical spirituality by inspiring human beings to recognize that the same soul and the same divine principle is found in the soul of all, and therefore wanted no one to inflict any injury on others. Thus, on the principle of Ahimsa or non-injury, his inspiring message is :

"Never producing pain by thought, word, and deed, in any living being, is what is called ahimsa, non-injury. There is no virtue higher than non-injury. There is no happiness higher than what a man obtains by this attitude of non-offensiveness, to all creation."⁶

The essential element in the practice of Ahimsa is that we should not be cruel to animals. We should be compassionate towards animals and should not kill them for our selfish use. He wrote in favour of vegetarianism and against meat-eating. This is what Swami Vivekananda says:

"All exciting food should be avoided, as meat, for instance; this should not be taken because it is by its very nature

impure. We can get it only by taking the life of another. We get pleasure for a moment, and another creature has to give us that pleasure. Not only so, but we demoralise other human beings."⁷

Purity:

In the present India, where corruption is rampant in all walks of life, Swami Vivekananda's message of having purity in thought, word, and conduct is very important and should be taken to heart by all persons. This is what Swami Vivekananda has boldly said:

"Nothing is gained except by sacrifice....The holiest function of our human consciousness, the noblest function of our human consciousness, the noblest, do not make it unclean! Do not degrade it to the level of the brutes.... Make yourselves decent men! Be chaste and pure."⁸

From a glimpse of the inspiring message of Swami Vivekananda on certain aspects as given above, it cannot be gain said that Swami Vivekananda has inspired millions and will continue to do so through-out the world

5. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, page 224

6. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, page 189

7. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, page 4.

8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, page 520.

When a man has reached the highest, when he sees neither man nor woman, neither sect nor creed, nor colour, nor birth, nor any of these differentiations, but goes beyond and finds that divinity which is the real man behind every human being—then alone he has reached the universal brotherhood, and that man alone is a Vedantist.

The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (1992) Vol. 1, pp. 391-92.

Training the American Disciples

DOROTHY MADISON

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To imagine Vivekananda training American disciples is to imagine shock and concussion—the Undifferentiated at the gates of the western frontier. An odd figure of speech, but correct insofar as it accentuates Vivekananda's gravity and impact. He was a world teacher, not a guru in a cave flat. Most of all he was a shaper of the new man for a new age; he lectured, preached, prophesied, and taught. Working on three continents, he called upon men and women to realize themselves as infinite, irreducible Spirit, not matter, and to see everything that is as God.

Allotted nine years in which to create both climate and occasion for his spiritual labours, Vivekananda had to work fast. He could not, for example, dawdle with disciples, taking them over the same ground a dozen times. And although he knew every nut and bolt of the embodied mind and soul, he cared infinitely more for the soul's freedom than for the mind's pleasure in the world of the senses. Hence, he gave little time to bruised egos of mulish minds, but initiated his disciples, gave them something to practise, and pushed them toward spiritual freedom. Somewhere in this simple transaction he "trained" them. Our inquiry is, along what paths, and prescribing what practices, did he train his disciples?

Immediately two facts get in the way. First, Swamiji instructed disciples to the principle, "as many people, so many paths." Plainly his paths were as the rays of the sun.

Second, religion has always been thick with practices: ritual, singing, dancing, whirling; repeating a mantra; watching the mind; concentrating on an object; meditating on an aspect of Divine Being; working without attachment; seeing everything as God; serving God as man; discriminating between the real and the unreal; practising a virtue such as going without food, talk, sleep, or clothing. One sadhu known to Sri Ramakrishna liked to hold a prism up to the sun and laugh at its flashing colours. Another liked to read a book with nothing but the name "Rama" written on each page

Far from creating confusion, these practices, along with the each-person own-path principle, flow toward the same ocean. All have the same basic function to fulfill, namely, to make the mind quiet and motionless. Nothing more, nothing less. All of them, from whirling to grappling with the mind, are helpful to the extent that they make the mind calm, motionless, and glasslike. The skill of the teacher lies in matching method with disciple, and when necessary, to add, modify, subtract, or mix. As Swamiji told San Franciscans: "If you can realize God by standing on your head, or on one foot, or by worshipping five thousand gods with three heads each—welcome to it! Do it any way you can! Nobody has any right to say anything."¹

1. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 8 Vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986, Vol. 1, page 469.

Swamiji's cheer notwithstanding, to realize God means that the mind must become not merely as motionless as glass, but as clean as the mirror of a telescope. Just as a telescopic mirror reflects galactic "points of light," so the mirror of the mind reflects God. As Swamiji said to his disciples at Thousand Islands, "Cleanse the dust from the mirror, purify your own mind, and in a flash you know that you are Brahman."² Such being the case, it is not out of place to ask how ritual, whirling, japa, or even meditation can make the mind as smooth, clean, and motionless as a space mirror. Can practice change choppy, turbid water into a lake of crystal? The answer is yes, action can do that, but not without a few hard-line conditions.

It is these conditions—moral, psychological, behavioural—that Swamiji insisted upon at every step of his life's work. They formed, in fact, the no-nonsense fibre of his teachings. Luckily, being as elemental as earth, air, fire, and water, they are easy to recognize. But before we tackle them, let us take heart from the fact that the *natural* tendency of the mind is to reflect God. That is, to be calm. As Swamiji explained in Raja-Yoga:

The mind-stuff is always trying to get back to its natural pure state, but the organs draw it out. To restrain it, to check this outward tendency, and to start it on the return journey to the essence of intelligence, is the first step in yoga...³

Objectively speaking, then, the struggle to calm the mind is neither against nature nor flying in nature's face. It is, rather, taking advantage of the mind's basic tendency just as an eagle rides the wind or a fish swims with the current or a hemlock

bends under its weight of snow. In a certain sense it is not unlike hoisting one's sail, as Sri Ramakrishna advised, to catch the Lord's grace that is always blowing. The stumbling block here is that many do not have the good sense to raise the sail. This lack of sense brings us directly to the sinew of Swamiji's teachings, namely, the exacting conditions faced by every soul who undertakes a spiritual path—the conditions ignored, for example, by the man who built his house on sand.

Lest these words have a churchy ring, the fact is—Swamiji had no use for clerical dogma. In California he went so far as to say to his listeners, "If any one of you believes what I teach, I will be sorry. I will be only too glad if I can excite in you the power of thinking for yourselves."⁴ The notion of limiting, hiding, or appropriating truth numbed his heart. More than once he said anybody could experience God in a flash—so tenuous is the line separating the embodied soul from the divine Being. Sail or no sail, rules and regulations have no say-so in the ways of Divinity. In whose heart God chooses to make His or Her throne is decided neither by a hierarchy of trained minds nor a show of democratic hands. And so on.

Nonetheless, Swamiji would be the first to agree that waiting for divinity to strike is a dubious practice in any spiritual path. "Do something for your souls! Do wrong if you please, but do something!" he told San Franciscans.⁵ As it was, his immediate reaction to the rhythm and energies of American life was to preach the active virtues and how to tilt them toward the direct knowledge of God. For example, Americans liked to work hard; no work and they sickened. They had the fidgets when

2. *Ibid.*, 1986, Vol. 7, page 34.

3. *Ibid.*, 1986, Vol. 1, page 203.

4. *Ibid.*, 1978, Vol. 6, page 64.

5. *Ibid.*, 1978, Vol. 6, page 66.

told to "take rest," wait, watch, invite their souls, or even sit by a river—except to fish. Spiritual practice for the action-prone had to be active and it had to be practical, whatever else it was. It also had to support America's two great founding principles, liberty and equality, held in unthinking reverence by the populace.

What Swamiji finally came up with, not merely for America's democratic citizens, but for people everywhere, and for India's in particular, was a body of teachings, capable of breathing new life into religion, shortening spiritual path, and shaking the human heart out of its self-centred stupor. Rational, magnanimous, potent, and razor-edged, it cuts through fog, cant, lumber, and humbug. In substance it is his own reading and commentary on certain principles and practices drawn from the Upanishads, and from the teachings and example of his Master.

In sum, Swamiji's words constituted his prophetic message for the new man and the new age dawning. From the standpoint of religious practice, it confers three special benefits. First, it adds steel to the moral foundations of spiritual life, accentuating freedom, initiative, strength, will, and individual powers. Second, it explains how these moral foundations support and influence spiritual practice and are in turn kept strong and sound by spiritual practice. Third, it makes clear how the ends of spiritual practice, the Self, the Absolute, and union with God, are in themselves the original force and motive behind all spiritual striving of whatever kind.

As seen from Swamiji's teaching-preaching viewpoint, the earth was populated by two kinds of people: one kind wants to be spiritual, the other does not. Again, anyone can learn to be spiritual by effort, just as one goes to school. Swamiji

had his eye on both kinds of people, the want-to-be-spirituals and the don't-wants; he did not play favourites. All were the same embodied Self whom he everywhere beheld. If the majority of them chose to bypass spirituality, he did not hold this against them, but turned on his powers of persuasion.

In monologues, dialogues, sermons, and lectures, Swamiji went after the whole human race. "Strength," he said, "is the medicine for the world's disease."⁶ And strength, he taught, lies within everybody's reach, rooted in the depths of each person's own divinity. Nobody was ruled out from getting it—not even those who did not want to be spiritual. When Swamiji addressed Americans, Englishmen, or his own countrymen, he spoke, not to the eager, spiritually-minded segment, but to every soul listening. He told all to rouse the divinity within themselves, to free themselves from their self-made darkness, and to reclaim their identity with the Infinite, in freedom and in truth. The greater part of his life's energy went into this struggle to turn humanity toward the strength of the Spirit.

Now ordinarily, the desire to be spiritual does not grow in isolation like a potted plant, but develops within a network of moral strength and qualities. At bottom, this desire is the bound soul's ancient compulsion to struggle toward freedom, but refined, buffed, and concentrated on God within the network of moral strengths which sustain it. No network, no spiritual desire; only the wear and tear of standard reality. Plainly, this network of moral strengths has always magnetized saints, prophets, philosophers, parents, and social engineers. How could it be otherwise? For it is the yeasty stuff of ethical principles and moral behaviour. As

6. *Ibid.*, 1983, Vol. 2, page 201.

such, it includes the areas of discourse which argue questions about the human good, human happiness, human conduct, and every strength and virtue in the book.

As with others, this network of moral strengths worked its magic on Swamiji. To him it was nothing less than the refracted essence, the rays of the Atman, man's own self-shining divinity. As Swamiji explained:

It is his (the Atman's) freedom that is percolating through layers of thought and matter, and, in spite of the colourings of name and form, is ever asserting its unshackled existence. It is his deathlessness, his bliss, his peace, his divinity that shines out and makes itself felt in spite of the thickest layers of ignorance. He is the real man, the fearless one, the deathless one, the free.⁷

All it took to make the great subjective leap from moral vigilance to matchless divinity was the intense desire to be free. This getting beyond all qualities—including the excellent virtues—Swamiji wanted for everyone. But knowing that the means to spiritual freedom was the practice of morality, he taught man's great moral strengths, beginning with strength and ending with self-abnegation, as part and parcel of spiritual life and practice.

"Character" was the word Swamiji chose to cover these strengths and qualities close to his heart. "Look back on yourselves," he said,

from the state of the amoeba to the human being; who made all that? Your own will. Can you deny then that it is almighty? That which has made you come up so high can make you go higher still. What you want is character,

strengthening of the will.⁸

Assigned to the first circle of virtues were courage, love, reason, loyalty, generosity, diligence, truthfulness, single mindedness, and purity, with faith in oneself standing at their head. In Swamiji's view not to have faith in oneself was to be a mindless automaton, tempest-tossed and servile; to have it "makes a lion of man." His most notable opinion in this matter was that without first having faith in oneself, one cannot have faith in God.

Because Swamiji made little distinction between moral and spiritual behaviours, on the one hand, and spiritual practice, on the other, it comes as no surprise that his master practice for the whole of humanity was spiritual steel. As he told a London reporter,

My ideal can be put into a few words and that is to preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.⁹

By this he meant, stand up, be strong, know yourself as Spirit, love God, and serve Him as the indwelling divinity in everybody. The service he had in mind was not done by fits and starts; it was a lifelong commitment, a lifestyle. Imbued with the same reverence that infuses ritual worship, repeating a holy name, or meditation, it is wine for blood, heart, and brain. Among other things, it feeds unselfishness, starves self-absorption, purifies motives, converts bustle into force, and creates pure delight in the direct service of God in man. Wonderfully, it asks nothing, but accomplishes everything. It is, incidentally, the classic way to take spiritual advantage of the forces of nature, which in this case is man's necessity to work. In the

7. *Ibid.*, 1985, Vol. 4, page 256.

8. *Ibid.*, 1983, Vol. 2, page 357.

9. *Ibid.*, 1986, Vol. 7, page 501.

thick of things it takes a poor devil to God.

Because character was the nub of Swamiji's spiritual game plan, the bottom line in training his disciples was to build character and bring it to perfection, whatever the path or practice. Another speciality was the pressure that he tended to put on his disciples, mostly because his time was short. As he wrote to a brother monk, "I am in a tremendous hurry, I want to work at hurricane speed, and I want fearless hearts."¹⁰ In any case, he was a no-nonsense guru. It was not that he demanded results—that was between the disciple and God—but that he expected his disciple to do his utmost to break his bondage to the senses and the mind.

Lest all this seem unnerving, Swamiji was neither a drill sergeant in a bootcamp nor a master whacking the backs of novices sitting in a row. But neither was he a gutless man or a peripheral man, teaching diet and exercise or how to rise in the air or get in and out of the body. Healing was also out, as were astrology, hypnosis, and communing with the dead. Humbug he called it all. How, he demanded, can matter prove Spirit?

Plainly, Swamiji did not belong to the spacéy genre. Neither, however, did he foist anciently orthodox religious ritual upon his Americans. It was not that he did not value the heightening of reverence and the sense of the holy evoked by ritualistic worship. But the rite he wanted Americans to practise was the worship of God as *Virāt*, as the actual universe around them. This means that every creature in it—most immediately human beings—are perceived as the breathing embodiments of conscious Divinity, and duly treated as such.

At this point it may be asked whether Swamiji actually drilled his American disciples in this bold and certainly radical practice? The answer is an unqualified yes. He did indeed train them in the attitudes and habits of mind they could learn to sense and perceive the presence of Divinity in their fellow beings. Mind you, seeing God in everything, as when Swamiji told his disciples at Thousand Island Park to see God, not seek Him, is the pinnacle reached at the end of every path. But there it is—if Swamiji could see God in everything, so could everybody else, including energetic Americans. He insisted on it.

In what, then, did Swamiji's training consist? To answer takes a bit of doing. First, about the meaning of training, apart from Swamiji's method. In general, training is the practical side of education. Specifically, it means learning a skill, an art, or a technique. You learn it from an adept whose job it is to show you how a thing is done, guide your steps, point out your mistakes, and bring you to the desired level of mastery. You learn best and fastest when your attitude is lamblike and your mind receptive and free from demur. Some teachers call this attitude submission, others subjugation, still others humility; Swamiji called it the intense desire to be free.¹¹

Whatever the name, you do what the teacher tells you to do, and you do it over and over again. This constant repetition goes by the name of "drill." Sufficiently drilled, you acquire a habit, that is, the ability to do something without having to think about it. The drudgery of drill is unavoidable, because you cannot advance in your art until you master the basics. When the basics have become second nature, you are ready to "overload," that is, you try to

10. *Ibid.*, 1977, Vol. 8, page 432.

11. *Ibid.*, 1977, Vol. 8, page 120.

do something that is a bit more than you can easily handle. Then, just as soon as that extra bit becomes easy to do, (but not necessarily painless—witness the bloody toes of ballerinas) something harder is added, and again you huff and puff to master it. Many are the failures along the way, but you learn to pick yourself up, bow to the teacher, at which point you learn to bow to the Witness watching within your heart.

Plain or fancy, training is an uphill battle. But there is a technique within everyone's reach that helps in the pinches: be a copy cat. Watch, appreciate, imitate. This is the old hominid way to learn. Called "the master technique," it never fails. But it has two catches. First, imitate only the best and brightest, for every kind of woe afflicts the fool who copies losers. Second, be absolutely sure you have mastered the basics before you try to copy dives, glides, and lazy eights.

Mastering the basics applies even more to spiritual skills than it does to flying aircraft. Swamiji, for one, never ceased to warn against the human tendency to settle for less, to be happily mediocre, fake, or gaudy. "Do not go for the glass beads, leaving the mine of diamonds," he warned the Hale sisters.¹² But they did. In truth, this folly—this pursuit of the unreal instead of the real—nettled him as nothing else. It was foot-dragging at its costliest; it was the perversity of sloth inherent in ignorance. As he explained in Raja-Yoga:

The misery that we suffer comes from ignorance, from nondiscrimination between the real and the unreal. We take the bad for the good, the dream for the reality. Soul is the only reality, and we have forgotten it. Body is an unreal dream, and we think we are all bodies.

This nondiscrimination is the cause of misery. It is caused by ignorance. When discrimination comes, it brings strength, and then alone can we avoid all these various ideas of body, heavens, and gods.¹³

To be shaken by the world's indifference to its own chief good is, of course, the unhappy lot of world teachers. Still, in the beginning Swamiji was content to address Americans in lecture halls and churches; he had no idea of taking them on as disciples in personal wars against spiritual ignorance. But after a year of lecturing he changed his mind. The change seems to have got under way at Greenacre, a tented summer religious camp of many faiths, plummy with pastors, experts, and mobs of happy seekers looking for health, wealth, truth, God, ghosts, and random celestial secrets. Delighted to be in the thick of things, Swamiji attracted a small army of followers who not only attended his classes under the pines, but slept there one night "on the lap of mother earth," and he along with them. To these "healthy, young, sincere, and holy men and women" he taught not only Atman and Brahman, but how to chant heretical mantras such as "I am Shiva, I am Shiva." It is also, more than likely that at Greenacre he began to define his great "message to the West."

In due course, during the months following Greenacre Swamiji got down to the business of teaching students, that is, the men and women who attended his classes day after day. He was looking for the Americans who were ready, willing, and able to dig for diamonds. Avoiding his rich and famous friends who valued him mainly as a conversation piece, he happily sat on the floor of his New York roominghouse, surrounded by earnest nonentities bent on

12. *Ibid.*, 1978, Vol. 6, page 262.

13. *Ibid.*, 1986, Vol. 1, page 287.

getting to know God. Out of this pioneer batch of students he found his first Americans disciples

Some of these disciples, mad for God and guru, spent the following summer with Swamiji at Thousand Island Park where he trained them to a fare-thee-well. His entire purpose, as he wrote to Mrs. Bull, was "to manufacture a few 'yogis' out of the material of the classes."¹⁴ And to the Maharaja of Khetri he wrote, "I shall make several Sannyasins, and then I go to India, leaving them to work."¹⁵ The best account of what the disciples underwent at Thousand Island Park was written by Christina Greenstidel, subsequently called Sister Christine, a poor, young school-teacher from Detroit. *Inspired Talks*, the best and fullest record of what Swamiji taught them in their morning classes, was taken down by Sara Ellen Waldo, a capable, talented pillar of strength from Brooklyn, to whom Swamiji later on entrusted the instruction of his Raja-yoga classes.

It is clear that by the time the Thousand Island venture got under way, Swamiji had become the complete teacher. No two ways about this. "Teaching has become a part of my life," he wrote to a friend, "as necessary to my life as eating or breathing."¹⁶ Such earnestness in the guru can have a rather paralyzing effect, offset only by an equal earnestness in the disciples, "The cobra has bitten you. You cannot escape."¹⁷ or, "I have caught you in my net. You can never get out."¹⁸ Plainly, no one was playing games at Thousand Island Park. Swamiji

was out to make some yogis, and the disciples hung on for dear life. They were becoming the forced, as in "out of season," token yogis and sannyasins of Swamiji's fierce seven-week training course. Something heavy and unprecedented was taking place—the American psyche was undergoing Upanishadic shocks and seismic pressures. As Swamiji said:

The mind has to be gradually and systematically brought under control. The will has to be strengthened by slow, continuous, and persevering drill. This is no child's play, no fad to be tried one day and discarded the next. It is a life's work; and the end to be attained is well worth all that it can cost us to reach it; being nothing less than the realization of our absolute oneness with the Divine.¹⁹

According to Sister Christine Swamiji initiated all of them, giving each a mantra, and setting their feet upon suitable paths. He told them that Truth is for all, for the good of all, not secret but sacred. That when they had heard the truth, they were to "let the flood of reason flow over it, then meditate upon it, concentrate your mind upon it, make yourself one with it."²⁰ Night and day he plied them with the tonic of truth, goodness, and beauty until they could understand how virtue became distilled into potent spirituality, and how all religions gave proof of this. He also hammered away at truth-telling, probed the musts of nonviolent behaviour and chastity, and the uses of austerities in strengthening the will. In the end his disciples, having gone over Niagara Falls in a barrel, were as eager as he for spiritual freedom. He had brought their desire to be spiritual to the boiling point. His final blast

14. *Ibid.*, 1978, Vol. 6, page 306.

15. *Ibid.*, 1979, Vol. 5, page 91.

16. *Ibid.*, 1986, Vol. 7, page 489.

17. Eastern and Western Disciples, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1961), page 172.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1979, Vol. 5, page 294.

20. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, page 174.

was renunciation. Over and over he admonished them:

Don't let yourself be tempted by dolls.
They are dolls of sugar, or dolls of salt,
and they will melt and become nothing.
Be a king and know you own the world.
This never comes until you give it up and
it ceases to bind. Give up, give up.²¹

In what ways did this handful of disciples at Thousand Islands—twelve altogether, but never more than ten at one time—differ from Swamiji's ordinary students? In two ways. One, each of them had asked to become his disciple, and two, he saw that they were ready and able. Other students, to whom he gave mantras, and who certainly considered themselves to be his followers, he called his "friends." The difference between the two groups was that he tended to treat his disciples as if they were soft dough which he pounded, let rise, shaped and pounded again. His friends, in contrast, he treated with utmost courtesy and never questioned their wish to say, act, think, and feel as they pleased. Blessings by the dozen he showered on them, and he loved them every one, sometimes to distraction. But he did not interfere with their personal freedoms nor did he browbeat them as in the case of his disciples. The principle at work was that he had assumed entire responsibility for the spiritual welfare of his disciples whereas to his friends he offered love, help, instructions, kindness, and warm good will. Certainly these students caused him the fewest headaches.

Taking one thing with another, the disciples of Thousand Island Park were, in a very benign sense, the experimental pigeons and primates in Swamiji's effort to turn Americans into yogis and sannyasins. Two of them, a man and a woman, did in

fact become sannyasins, distinctly and erratically American. Most of the disciples, moreover, took vows of brahmacharya, that is, they committed themselves to lives of chaste celibacy, the tremendous first step in the successful practice of yoga. All of this is happy news, considering the rigours of their training.

Very soon the vanities, postures, and prepossessions of these yogis-in-the-making were "knocked on the head." Swamiji spared not even his gentle Methodist hostess who took to her bed after one of his talks. Especially did he lay to rest such bits of wisdom as that the world was beautiful, reality was good, and evil did not exist. Rapidly their heads began to clear and their self-centredness to diminish. Still, it was hard for some of them to agree that this world, as Swamiji insisted, was a "mud puddle."

But Swamiji left it to them to figure out the truth of his words. He would not help them. His job was to explain the principles, their's to apply them. The whole idea was that they had to learn to stand on their own feet. He was, of course, training them to build strength by using their own resources. The name of the game was character building.

Needless to say, during this process no disciple walked away without his or her special set of bruises. As Swamiji paced back and forth talking, he would stand in front of an innocent, and eyeball to eyeball, take her or him apart for the state of the world, human delusion, disease, old age, and death. No one was spared this in-group shock. Individually, he fitted his treatment to the disciple's particular blot or weak spot. Thus, while he treated one of his disciples with nothing but ridicule, another he would either coldly ignore or else chew out. Still another disciple would be told to

21. *Ibid.*, page 174.

observe strict asceticism in diet, habits, clothing, and speech, while someone else was coddled in fluff and eiderdown. Happily for one or two of the disciples, their "pet foibles were gently smiled out of existence."²²

In a manner of speaking, Swamiji took his disciples apart, unplugged their spiritual arteries, and put them back together again, ready for the great climb. And here it may be asked—who is there to identify, except some Vivekananda not yet born, what great things Swamiji worked in this first seed pot of Americans? In praise of the disciples, the stress of seven concentrated weeks of being born again must have been very hard to endure. But if the disciples are to be believed, these seven weeks at Thousand Islands were more like a blissful, blessed rite of passage, "so fraught were they with unusual opportunity for spiritual growth," as Ellen Waldo said.²³ Mrs. Funke remembered no anguish at all:

I think the thing which impressed me most in those days was his [Swamiji's] infinite patience and gentleness—as of a father with his children, though most of us were several years older than he. After a morning in the classroom, where it almost seemed as if he had gazed into the very face of the Infinite, he would leave the room, returning soon to say, "Now I am going to cook for you."²⁴

Which brings us to the other features of Thousand Islands, all part of the great training, but tempering, funny, and often delicious. Imagine, then, a woodsy island, nine miles long, two miles wide, in the middle of the mighty St. Lawrence River.

Imagine there a summer dwelling of gingerbread decor built mostly on a rock. Imagine within this dwelling a tiny ad hoc colony of mostly middle aged Americans of every shape, size background, and accent who go about, completely in awe of, their young, brilliant, God-centered, God-driven, God-exuding teacher. They have drawn up some rules: no outsiders and no outside help, meaning that they share the entire upkeep, housework, cooking, and shopping for groceries. Gradually this arrangement was modified as one after another the inmates faltered. The only really happy cook, for instance, was Swamiji himself, but he used too many pots and pans

Their days and nights had a schedule which moved along in phase with Swamiji's lessons, talks, walks, and meditation. When they could snatch the time, the disciples meditated on their own. As a group they meditated with Swamiji before the morning class, which began as soon as duties permitted. This class was never under two hours long. On the whole, it was a crash course in the three main schools of Vedanta, and the world religions, all of them analyzed, cross-referenced, and alluded to in a continuing synthesis. Luckily, Miss Waldo, an old hand at note-taking, jotted down copious non sequitur notes, to be edited years later by a lady-like hand (with Miss Waldo's full approval) into the small book called *Inspired Talks*.

After the morning class came the meal of the day prepared by one or two capable disciples or by himself. And then it was time for the afternoon walk in two's, three's, or singly, and sometimes with Swamiji himself. Whoever went with Swamiji was entertained with tales from India's myths, legends, and history, with a few pointed stories thrown in. But all these activities were as nothing next to the evening sessions, when Swamiji settled down

22. *Ibid.*, page 212.

23. *Ibid.*, page 129.

24. Swami Vivekananda, *Inspired Talks*, (Madras, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1980), page 24.

in a big chair with all the disciples sitting around him. For hours they listened as he talked to them, to himself, and to God, sometimes far into the night. No notes could be taken during these times because the group sat in darkness or in the light of the moon. One small note jangles this peaceful picture: at one time or another Swamiji made everyone of them prepare and deliver a speech. Sage and prophet that he was, he was preparing them even to teach their fellow Americans what they knew about soul, nature, God, and the divinity of man.

As a teacher Swamiji knew exactly how to train these highly favoured disciples; as a prophet he knew why this had to be done. These, and Americans after them, would catch his fire, understand his message, and having awakened the divinity within themselves, persuade others to do likewise. There was absolutely nothing to stop them from doing so in their new democratic nation. And although he himself said that, "When you deal with roots and foundations, all real progress must be slow,"²⁵ he was as impatient for his century plant to grow in America as he was for the oppressed of the earth to stand up in their own divinity.

After Thousand Island Park Swamiji went to teach other disciples in England,

India and once again in America. But never again did he conduct a course in spirituality at such white heat or with so grave and urgent a purpose. In the long view, he was pointing the way to future generations established in spiritually strengthened identities. In the short view, he covered in seven weeks the training of a lifetime. Far from leaving his Thousand Island disciples in the lurch, he provided them with all they needed, and then some. As he often said:

The plant grows of itself. So it is in regard to the spiritual growth of every man. None can teach you; none can make a spiritual man of you. You have to teach yourself; your growth must come from inside.²⁶

Not only does this sentiment put the whole of humanity on their metal, but assures them the freedom not to be interfered with, dictated to, or classed as unteachable. If people want to be spiritual, they are free to learn the ropes from an expert and proceed. If, on the other hand, they do not want to be spiritual, that is their business. But, Swamiji's spiritual descendants, in imitation of his example, shall surely make a "joyful noise" so that the spiritual fire may spread from heart to heart, and the divinity within each waiting soul may wake up, take over, and come into its own

25. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 5, page 193.

26. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, page 385.

You make yourselves suffer, you make good and evil, and it is you who put your hands before your eyes and say it is dark. Take your hands away and see the light; you are effulgent, you are perfect already, from the very beginning. We now understand the verse: "He goes from death to death who sees the many here." See that One and be free

—The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (1991), Vol. 2, page 182.

Impact of The World's Parliament of Religions—1893

SWAMI SATYAPRIYANANDA

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Swami Vivekananda, then an unknown itinerant monk, travelled the length and breadth of India, staying with the rich or the poor as chance brought him. A country which had such an admixture of castes, customs, manners, languages and local traditions, has just one common point under which all could stand united. This, Swamiji knew, was religion. He found that even the poor and illiterate of India were wide awake to religious ideas, which as it were, permeated their blood. Religion was always the *life-centre* of the country, and only upon the eradication of religious ideas from the land could India die. For as long as religion remained the bedrock of her existence, so long no power under heaven would ever be able to crush out India's national life or her dignity in the community of nations. That is where comes into prominence the role of India in the world, the *mission* of her race. In this context the World's Parliament of Religions was of much significance and importance.

To Swamiji, the individual is the basis of the nation. So there is much meaning in the exchange of cultural and spiritual ideas between individuals as between nations. The history and development of a nation has for its basis human psychology, and man can learn to behave and live better after making a comparative study of the history of nations. It was therefore that Swamiji loved to talk of the historical events of the countries which he visited

during his tours. Perhaps this love of history was what prompted him to discuss for several hours on the rise and fall of nations, even on the last day of his life. It is easy to see that the nation extrapolated further is the world, and further extended, includes all of existence.

Religion in Sanskrit is *dharma*, meaning that which holds an individual, and it holds the nation too. Therefore religion must be recognized as the basis not only of an individual's life, but of the nation and the world as a whole as well. India is ever awake to religious ideas and has religion as her life-centre and the propagation of religion as her mission. It is thus believed in the hearts of Indians that, as Swami Vivekananda taught, religion alone can save the whole of humanity from sure disintegration and destruction. The calling of the World Parliament of Religions was the first great recognition of this by people from all parts of the world. Secondly, the Parliament was a call to India to play her destined pivotal role. Third, it expressed a deeply-felt need for balance in Western thinking, which was materialistic, with a dormant spiritual potency that required to become active. Fourthly, it was recognized that science, which had already delivered a battering to traditional religious beliefs, was posing a challenge that could only be countered by a scientific approach in religion. Fifth, the calling of the Parliament showed that there were many earnest

spiritual aspirants in the West who were looking forward to Vedāntic ideas, and sixth, the enthusiastic response from all over the world showed that there was a common trust that both the East and the West would profit in great measure by a healthy exchange of their grand achievements in different vital fields of human endeavour

In *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western disciples,¹ we find some salient features of the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago: that it was (a) one of the greatest events in the history of the world, marking an era in the history of religions; that (b) delegates representing every form of organized religious belief came from all parts of the world with great hope and expectation of its success; that (c) the Parliament of Religions was in a very real sense not only a parliament of religions, but also a parliament of humanity, motivated with one great wish (d) to unify the religious vision of mankind; that through it, (e) human society would be made aware of the prevailing "Unity in diversity" and "Diversity in unity" of the religious outlook, and (f) that the Parliament roused a wave of new thought in the West, which caused the West to become conscious of contrasting Eastern thought and wisdom, that disproved the inflated sense of superiority Westerners had in all things in the 19th century, especially in religious thought.

Though to all appearances the West was taking the leading role in the World's Parliament of Religions, there was another country on the other side of the globe making an equal preparation, though silently. That was India—whose actions

have been aptly described as benign as that of "the gentle dew that falls unseen and unheard yet brings into bloom the fairest of roses."

After the *mahāsamādhi* of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and some of his brother-disciples moved about as wandering monks, while others among them lived in a monastery. The wanderings of Swamiji were full of rich experience and it was an occasion for him to feel the pulse of India. He felt deeply for the poor of India and realized that religious thought, the life-blood of the country, was clear. Lacking in proper food, clothing and education, the strength of the people was being sapped by foreign rule. The country appeared almost inert and corpse-like, without hope or energy. But piercing through appearances, Swamiji could see that the nation was not dead or dying, but was only in deep slumber. At Kanyakumari, there flashed before his mind's eye a picture of India—her enviable past, and future possibilities. He saw that India was capable of rising to glory and taking her seat as the Queen of nations. His wanderings took him to Madras where many young men became his devoted followers.

News of the proposed Parliament of Religions was already abroad. During the months of March and April 1893, Swamiji's disciples in Madras took definite steps to raise subscriptions for paying his passage to America, some of them even going to Mysore, Ramnad and Hyderabad for this purpose. They were headed by Alasinga Perumal, one of the most devoted of the young men. In their attempts to raise money, for the most part they approached middle class people, for Swamiji had told them, "If it is the Mother's will that I go, then let me receive the money from the common people." Seeing them so eager to collect funds, Swamiji thought, "Well, their

1. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, by His Eastern and Western Disciples (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) Part I, page 413.

readiness is perhaps the first sign!" He spent hours praying to the Mother and Master for guidance. Though filled with a certain assurance, he demanded actual vision—he desired an actual divine command. After some time he one day saw, in a dream, the figure of Sri Ramakrishna walking from the shore of the sea over the water, beckoning him to follow. Thereafter he sought the blessings of the Holy Mother too. Despite initial hesitancy she recognized the will of the Master that Swamiji should go, and she sent her blessings and loving counsel to him.

First Experiences

It may be surprising that Swamiji could have taken the bold step to decide to go to an unknown foreign land from India. He had not much information, no credentials in writing giving him authority, nor the wherewithal to support himself for a long stay in America. He was to represent the eternal religion of the Hindus (*Sanātana Dharma*), before an audience that would be primarily made up of Christians. Later in a letter from America in 1894, Swamiji wrote that he actually found himself "a wandering preacher of a far distant country without name, fame, wealth, or learning to recommend me—friendless, helpless, almost in a state of destitution."² But the situation can be understood when one notes that Swamiji did not make plans, but depended entirely on the Divine Will. He also disclosed later that he was always aware of the divine help of the Lord during his travels. He felt convinced that he was under the protection of the Master and of his divine consort, Sri Sarada Devi. But still, on reaching America he came face to face with some grim realities. Understandably, sometimes he felt strange in this foreign

land, knowing no one and left completely to himself. Once when he was feeling dejected, he felt he had been foolish to come to America solely on the strength of the enthusiasm of a few of his Madras disciples. And yet at other times he was fully confident that he was divinely ordained. "...All my life I have been taking every circumstance as coming from Him and calmly adapting myself to it. At first in America I was almost out of my water. I was afraid I would have to give up the accustomed way of being guided by the Lord and *cater* for myself...and what a horrid piece of mischief and ingratitude was that. I now clearly see that He who was guiding me on the snow tops of the Himalayas and the burning plains of India is here to help me and guide me."³

Swamiji arrived in Vancouver, Canada on 25 July 1893, travelled on to Chicago by railway and reached there about five days later. He spent twelve days observing the city and the Fair grounds, for he discovered that the great religious convention would not commence until the first week of September. He was taken aback to learn that no one would be admitted as a delegate without proper credentials, and that the time for submitting such credentials and references had already gone by. In the words of Sister Nivedita, who looked upon this precarious position as any normal person would do: "In their unbounded faith, it never occurred to them that they (the Madras disciples) were demanding what was, humanly speaking, impossible. They thought that Vivekananda had only to appear, and he would be given his chance."⁴

Finding that his funds were being quick-

2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. 6, page 248.

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, page 454

4. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Part I, page 402.

ly depleted by the high cost of living in Chicago, and learning that Boston was much less expensive, Swamiji left for Boston. An elderly lady, an authoress, Miss Katherine Abbot Sanborn by name, who was travelling in the same carriage with him was attracted by his personality and invited him to be her guest. Soon in Boston many distinguished persons, like Professor J.H. Wright and others, came into Swamiji's acquaintance. Professor Wright remarked, "To ask you, Swami, for your credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine!" He wrote to one of his friends connected with the Parliament stating: "Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together."

Undoubtedly Swamiji rejoiced to find such warm friends in Boston and unexpected help. Professor Wright, knowing he had not much money with him, purchased his train fare to Chicago and gave him the address of the Committee in charge of receiving and accommodating foreign delegates to the Parliament of Religions. Swamiji started back for Chicago in the first week of September. When he arrived however, he found unfortunately that he had lost the address to that part of the city where Dr. Barrows lived, and as he was unable to communicate with people in that predominantly German neighbourhood where the railway station was situated, he rested that first night in a huge empty box-wagon in the station itself—he who would soon stir America with his Chicago Addresses in the World Parliament of Religions! The next morning he arose and "smelling fresh water" reached the most fashionable residential drive in the metropolis. At length, being exhausted by the long walk, he sat down quietly on the roadside, when a regal-looking woman living in a residence opposite, accosted him saying, "Sir, are you a delegate to the Parliament of Religions?" She arranged for the Swami's breakfast and

took him to the offices of the Parliament of Religions. She was Mrs. George W. Hale, who with her husband and children became forever the Swami's warmest friends.

Recalling the events of the first day of the Parliament, Swamiji wrote later: "On the morning of the opening of Parliament, we all assembled in a building called the Art Palace. . . . Men from all nations were there. . . . It was opened in great form with music and ceremony and speeches; then the delegates were introduced one by one, and they stepped up and spoke. Of course my heart was fluttering and my tongue nearly dried up; I was so nervous, and could not venture to speak in the morning. Mazoomdar made a nice speech—Chakravarti a nicer one, and they were much applauded. They were all prepared and came with ready-made speeches. I was a fool and had none, but bowed to Devi Saraswati and stepped up, and Dr. Barrows introduced me. I made a short speech...and when it was finished, I sat down almost exhausted with emotion."⁵

Swamiji's brief opening speech was clear in content, direct in expression and powerful. It is relevant today as it was a hundred years ago, and prophetic of what is yet to come. It clearly expressed that religion is the approach of mankind towards something supersensuous, a quest for Truth—Truth which is not limited to a race, land, people, or sect. Thus people professing different religious faiths have one thing in common which is that they are fellow-travellers on the path to Divine Realization. Their strength is that they can wage a collective fight against sensuous, worldly and materialistic values that cause man's forgetfulness of his essential spiritual nature and result in individual and collec-

5. *Ibid.*, page 416.

tive degradation. It is least befitting that there should be inter-religious quarrels and strife. That is what sane-minded religious leaders have always held. In his talks on "Why We Disagree," Swamiji held that the 'frog-in-the-well' attitude of sectarian believers is the chief cause of disagreement and bloodshed in the name of religion. What we require today in his point of view is: seeing the common bases of all religions. This is possible only for those who have a mind of liberal predisposition; they only can think and work on a common platform with others.

In a letter addressed to Mrs. Bull dated 21 March 1895, Swamiji wrote:

"My master used to say that these names as Hindu, Christian, etc. stand as great bars to all brotherly feelings between man and man. We must try to break them down first. They have lost all their powers and now only stand as baneful influences under whose black magic even the best of us behave like demons."⁶

Sri Ramakrishna, who had practised the disciplines of various religions of both Indian and foreign origin, could recognize that each religion was ideally suited to make men and women reach their spiritual goal. Followers of these religious denominations used to frequent Dakshineswar during Sri Ramakrishna's life time. It was verily a Parliament of Religions. Sri Ramakrishna always gave the advice that one should not hold the view that one's own religion is true and that all other religions are untrue. Aptly did Swamiji point out the significance of the advent of Sri Ramakrishna in a letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda in 1895:

"...And he was the harbinger of Peace—the separation between Hindus...and

Christians, all are now things of the past. That fight about distinctions that there was, belonged to another era. In this Satya-Yuga the tidal wave of Sri Ramakrishna's love has unified all."⁷

In the rest of the lectures given before the Parliament on various days, we find Swamiji giving expositions of the Vedantic ideas of the Hindus and the conditions that were prevailing in India, and what the real needs of the country were. He brought out a clear presentation of Hinduism on a scientific basis and painted a true picture of India that removed many misconceptions in the minds of the unknowing or badly informed foreigners. His great work as he said was.

"to put Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds...a task only those can understand who have attempted it."⁸

Later in another letter (8 Aug. 1896) addressed to Alasinga, Swamiji pointed out that:

"Our countrymen must remember that in things of the Spirit we are the teachers, and not the foreigners—but in things of the world we ought to learn from them."⁹

Swami Vivekananda was not a one-sided patriot who felt that his own country was the repository of the best elements that one could imagine. He knew the limitations as well and desired that Indians should compare notes with the latest achievements

7. *Ibid.*, page 335.

8. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, page 104.

9. *Ibid.*, page 112.

6. *The Complete Works*, Vol. 6, page 301.

of other countries, and held that the life of the nation in the past, in isolation from the rest of the world, was part of the cause of India's downfall. He wrote to Alasinga in 1896:

"As soon as a man comes over to the West and sees different nations, his eyes open. This way I get strong workers—not by talking, but by practically showing what we have in India and what we have not. I wish that a million Hindus had travelled all over the world!"¹⁰

Thus Swamiji pointed out that the Hindu's view is that the ideal religion of the world, the Sanātana Dharma, which in thought content is as deep and broad as the infinite sky and ocean, should be made practical and capable of accommodating the strivings and needs of every man, whatever his stage of development. Spiritual life is—

"a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal. Every religion is only evolving a God out of the material man, and the same God is the inspirer of all of them."¹¹

Even as science is universal, so is religion universal—whose principles and practice lie beyond doctrines and dogmas, sectarianism, books, castes and creeds, sex, nationalities, or languages. It is something for all humanity—in whatever stage an individual may be—to practice in an environment free from all persecution or intolerance. It recognizes in the sinner the divinity waiting to manifest itself and accepts the immense possibilities of the human soul. Its scope and whole force is centred in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature.

10. *Ibid.*, page 119.

11. *The Life*, Part I, page 423.

Swami Vivekananda's Impact on the West: Some Dimensions

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Swami Vivekananda's impact on the West may be studied in the light of four propositions: Prior to his visit, Hindu philosophy had trickled to the West in

droplets, not poured in by draughts—and that too, in a westernized way. Hinduism had been grossly misinterpreted and distorted by some Christian missionaries; it

evoked interest not admiration. The knowledge of Hindu scriptures had remained confined to intellectuals and did not filter down to the masses; Hindu influence could be traced on some religious bodies in the West, but there was no viable Hindu organization as such.

Swami Vivekananda was not the first Indian to go to the West and receive ovations there. Eminent persons such as Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Keshab Chunder Sen, and P.C. Mazoomdar had already attempted to introduce the light of the East into the western nations, but their tone and tenor was somewhat akin to the Christian thought. Whatever influence they had wielded evaporated with their departure. No one among them left an organization to keep the torch of his gospel burning.

It must be stated at the outset that Swami Vivekananda's eloquent speeches at the Chicago Parliament, along with those of other oriental delegates, like Vir Chand Gandhi, H. Dharmapala and Kinza Riuge M. Hirai helped in dispelling the myth of Christian superiority over other religions. It was widely felt that "heathendom" was not simply a conglomeration of debased superstitions and voodooistic rites, and that it must not be judged by its idolatrous or other savage practices, any more than apple trees should be judged by their rotten fruits. Professor David Swing, Vice-chairman of the General Committee of the Chicago Parliament observed:

"The proud Churchman of Anglican or Roman garb and colour finds his piety equalled by the worshippers from the solitude of the Himalayas. The Christian, indeed, holds the better religion but the other religions contain great worth and can shape the soul into great moral

beauty."¹

Professor Swing made the prophecy that the Chicago Parliament would hasten the end of sectarian self-conceit and make the Christian Minister realize that he was only one of a vast brotherhood.² The purport of speeches delivered on the last day of the Parliament revealed that men of the orient had made a deep impression on the Christian priest and theologians. Bishop Arnett, for example, remarked: "While we have truth on our side, we have not had all the truth. While we have had theory, we have not had all the practice."³ One may well recall that liberal Christians like the Rt. Rev. John J. Keane of Washington D.C. had heartily approved of Swami Vivekananda's criticism of Christianity by saying that if by these criticisms, he could "stir us and sting us into better teachings"...they would remain beholden to the Hindu monk..."I endorse the denunciation that was hurled forth last night (Sept 20th) against the system of pretended charity that offered food to the hungry Hindus at the cost of their conscience and faith. It is a shame and a disgrace to those who call themselves Christian," he said.⁴

The noted scholar, Marie Louise Burke, compared the Parliament of Religions to a huge boulder dropped into the middle of a pond, causing upheaval on all sides. Even without Swamiji, she wrote, the Parliament

1. Walter R. Houghton, editor, *Neeley's History of the Parliament of Religions* (Chicago: 1893) page 977.

2. *Ibid.*, page 977.

3. *Ibid.*, page 859.

4. *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sept. 21, 1893. See also Rev. J.H. Barrows, editor, *The World's Parliament of Religions* (Chicago, 1893) Vol. I, page 228.

would have created no little confusion, for it was a shock to people to discover that oriental priests were at par "with grotesquely masked medicine men; but with Swamiji the effect was galvanizing and permanent."⁵ It is obvious that the light from the East would have flickered weakly, if not been completely extinguished, if Swami Vivekananda had returned to India, like most of his fellow delegates. Through his lecture engagements, parlour discussions and press interviews in different parts of America and England, he not only championed the cause of Hinduism, but also occasionally observed that Christianity, with its boastful civilization, was only "a collection of scraps from the Indian mind—a very patchy imitation."⁶

The most formidable task of Swami Vivekananda in the West was to remove gross misconceptions about Hinduism. It was generally believed that the Hindus were somewhat like a fiendish race, who burnt their widows, killed their female babies, wallowed in mysticism and jugglery, derived masochistic pleasure in tormenting themselves and did other atrocious things; and that their religion consisted of many gods and idols, puerile beliefs, quixotic rituals and a cloistered caste system. Rev. T.E. Slater, of Bangalore (India) for example, argued at the Chicago Parliament that no literature, not even the Jewish, contained so many words relating to sacrifice as Sanskrit. "The land has been saturated with blood."⁷ Rev. George T. Pentecost of London and other orthodox Christians, like Prof. M. Valentine of

Pennsylvania, and Rev. Maurice Phillips of Madras, actively participated in the tirade against Hinduism. But Swami Vivekananda turned the tables on them. He dispelled many prevalent notions about Hinduism, and raised it in the eyes of the West. He argued that Hindu religion and philosophy stood unrivalled, both in terms of subtlety of thought and sublimity of sentiments, and there was much that the West could learn from the Hindus. Hinduism was not a jigsaw puzzle with confusing or contradictory schools of thought, beliefs and practices; or a jumbled matrix of esoteric cults harping on myths and marvels relating to the lives of multi-handed or multi-headed deities. It was an ancient faith with a catholic outlook, comprehensive system of ethics, lofty metaphysics and a monotheistic base. Hindu philosophy did not reduce the world to a phantasmagoria, human life to an empty dream, or the apparent polarities between life and death, pleasure and pain, creation and dissolution, to apparitional realities. It was rather a purposeful and brilliant commentary on God, man and the universe from various angles, ranging from that of an anthropomorphic deist, transcendental dualist and crude pantheist to that of an absolute monist (not rejecting even atheistic, agnostic, animistic and totemistic interpretations of the Supreme Reality).

The sublimity of Hinduism, vis-a-vis other belief-systems, consisted in the fact that it recognized the existence of various methods for attaining the unknowable. Every other religion, he said, enunciated certain fixed dogmas and tried to force society to adopt them. "They lay down before society one coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry all alike. If it does not fit John or Henry, he must go without a coat

5. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1966) page 146.

6. Wendell Thomas, *Hinduism Invades America* (New York, 1930) page 79.

7. For T.E. Slater's paper see: Barrows, pp. 456-60; & Houghton, pp. 164-67.

to cover his body."⁸ Such an attitude was deleterious to peace and harmony, and encouraged fissiparous tendencies among mankind. Truth could be expressed in a hundred thousand ways, and each one of these was true in its own way.

By establishing harmony between Vedanta and Science, reason and faith, mysticism and logic, polytheism and monotheism; by delineating the essential divinity of human nature as against the Christian belief in Original Sin, and laying emphasis on the spiritual oneness of mankind; by applying the principle of unity in variety in nature to societal conditions and religious diversities; by lifting religion from the abyss of dogmas and doctrines, and giving it a dynamic meaning and interpretation which could lead humanity towards peace, harmony and progress, Swami Vivekananda succeeded in evoking admiration and gaining some adherents for his faith. In a letter to the editor of *Hope*, Merwin Marie Snell, President of the Scientific Section of the Chicago Parliament, wrote:

"...no religious body made so profound an impression upon the Parliament and the American people at large as did Hinduism...But by far the most important and typical representative of Hinduism was Swami Vivekananda, who, in fact, was beyond question, the most popular and influential man in the Parliament. He frequently spoke, both on the floor of Parliament itself and in the meetings of the Scientific section, over which I had the honour to preside and on all occasions, he was received with greater enthusiasm than any other

speaker, Christian or pagan. The people thronged him wherever he went and hung with eagerness on his word. Since the Parliament he has been lecturing before large audiences in the principal cities of the United States and has received an ovation wherever he went....Never before has so authoritative a representative of genuine Hinduism as opposed to the emasculated and Anglicised versions of it so common in these days—been accessible to American inquirers....America thanks India for sending him, and begs her to send more like him. . .⁹

Swami Vivekananda's audience consisted of all sections of society—bishops and clergymen, rabbis and professors, judges and opera singers, students and the common people. The Unitarians and the Congregationalists were swayed by his oratorical skill and philosophical depth. Perhaps none of his Indian predecessors ever received so many invitations to speak from the pulpit as did Swami Vivekananda after the end of the Chicago Parliament. Rev. Reed Stuart, who had heard Swami Vivekananda's lecture on "The Divinity of Man...in Detroit on Feb. 17, 1894, got so much inspired that he preached a sermon with the title "The Gate Opening Towards the East" at the Unitarian Church on the following day. He pointed out that there was no need for any nation to send missionaries half around the world merely to point out the defects of another nation.¹⁰

The liberals among both Catholics and Protestants lauded Swamiji for his universal approach and outlook, his urge for social reform and his emphasis on service and sacrifice. But the bigots, especially among Presbyterians and Methodists

8. Swami Vivekananda's Paper on Hinduism, See Barrows (ed.), pp. 968-78; & Houghton (ed.), pp 438-45.

9. Cited in *The Indian Mirror*, March 9, 1894.

10. *The Detroit Tribune*, February 19, 1894.

(sometimes abetted by his own countrymen) who found their name and fame eclipsed "by a new rival"¹¹ opposed him tooth and nail, because of his criticism of the methods of missionaries, his rejection of the doctrines of original sin and 'one book, one prophet,' his lampoons at proselytizers and the 'infalliablists' in the domain of religion, and his admonitory call—"You are not Christians. No, as a nation you are not. Go back to Christ."¹²

Swami Vivekananda had many friends among the Christian Scientists, including the Hale Sisters of Chicago. Though he did not fully agree with the occultism of Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910), he attended the Greenacre Conference in 1894 and won applause for his lucid exposition of the Advaita Vedanta.¹³ It is on record that some transcendentalists, neo-Christians, Universalists, and even Theosophists, held Swamiji in high esteem.

There is some evidence to suggest that Swami Vivekananda influenced a considerable section of the Jews. He spoke twice from the Jewish platforms during his first itinerary—at the Young Men's Hebrew Association Hall in Memphis on Jan. 21, 1894, and at the Temple Beth El in Detroit sometime in the middle of March 1896. It was natural that the Jews should develop a liking for Swami Vivekananda because he had denounced the religious bigotry of

Christians and pleaded for religious tolerance. Jews having suffered long in the course of history, saw in Swamiji a man of universal vision. Rabbi Grossman, for example, delivered a sermon with the title: "What Vive Kananda has Taught Us" on Feb. 18, 1894. He remarked:

"We, Westerners, we have a God in the sky. Kananda has a God on earth....Let us learn from the Hindu the lesson that God lives and reigns, now and ever, that God is in every flower of the field; in every breath of the air; in every throb of our blood."¹⁴

When Swami Vivekananda argued in Memphis and Detroit that the Christians could not crush the Jews because bigotry and intolerance can never triumph over truth, he was echoing the sentiments of Rabbi K. Kohler of New York who observed at the Jewish Church Congress of 1893, that 1600 years of persecution had not been able to destroy Judaism, which remained a living and vital force in the world because it was founded on an indestructible system.¹⁵ Leon Landsberg, one of Swami Vivekananda's first two disciples in America, (the other being Marie Louise, who was given the monastic name of Swami Abhayananda), was a Russian Jew.

Swami Vivekananda left a deep impression on the cultural and intellectual circles of the West. After his success at the Chicago Parliament he was invited by the rich and lionized by literary clubs, prominent among them being the Peripatetic Club of Minneapolis, the Nineteenth Century and the Tennessee Clubs of Memphis, the Unity and Witenagamote Clubs of Detroit, the Lynn Club of New York, the North Shore

11. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970) Vol. V, page 31.

12. *The Detroit Free Press*, February 22, 1894.

13. For a detailed description of the Greenacre Conference of 1894, see *Swami Vivekananda's letter to the Hale sisters, dated July 31, 1894; The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, VI, page 261. Also Satish K. Kapoor, *Cultural Contact and Fusion: Swami Vivekananda in the West*, (1893-96), (Jalandhar City, Punjab: ABS Publications, 1987) pp. 181-83.

14. *The Detroit Tribune*, February 19, 1894.

15. "Proceedings of the Jewish Church Congress" 1893, Houghton, (ed.), page 868.

Club of Lynn, the Ethical Association of Brooklyn, the Hindu Association of London, and many women's clubs of both the U.S. and England, the Shakespeare Club of Pasadena, the Amity Church of Los Angeles, the Universalist Church of Pasadena, the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, and many more. At some places he was given a hero's welcome. When Mrs. John J. Bagley gave a reception in his honour, *The Detroit Journal* (Feb. 14, 1894) wrote that it was one of the most important social functions that had taken place in Detroit that season. The American Press described Swami Vivekananda as "the Cyclonic Hindu", and "an orator by divine right", "the high priest from India", the many-sided intellect", "a sensation of the World's Fair Parliament", and "Indian Yogi". On a number of occasions he was persuaded to extend his stay because of the incessant demand of his admirers. For example, Swamiji intended to deliver a series of three lectures during his first visit to Detroit, but he was compelled to give two more lectures. *The Detroit Journal* (Feb. 21, 1894) wrote that if Swami Vivekananda could be prevailed upon to remain a week longer, the largest hall in the city could not hold the crowds anxious to hear him.

Max Muller was among Swami Vivekananda's friends and frequently corresponded with him. Paul Deussen, the famous German indologist, invited Swamiji to his house at Kiel and found in him "an original thinker and a spiritual genius,"¹⁶ Madame Emma Calve, the great French opera singer, was delighted to meet the Hindu monk whom she described as "a man who truly walked with God, a noble being, a saint, a philosopher, and a true

friend."¹⁷ Mrs. Ella Wheeler Wilcox, one of the founders of the New Thought Movement in America was highly impressed by Swamiji's teachings, which she regarded as an anodyne for despair and gloom.¹⁸

Sarah Bernhardt, the famous French actress, is said to have sought an interview with Swamiji, and expressed her admiration and interest in the Vedanta Philosophy he so eloquently interpreted.¹⁹ Sara Bard Field, an American poetess, also fell under his spiritual spell.²⁰ Nicola Tesla, the famous American electrical engineer and inventor, after listening to Swamiji's exposition of the Sāmkhya Philosophy, approved of its cosmogony and declared that its concepts of *kalpa*-s (cycles of time), *prāna* (life-force), and *ākāśa* (space as a subtle element), etc. offered the only rational theory modern science could use to explain the cosmological problem.²¹

Vivekananda's intellectual attainments were recognized when he was invited to address the Harvard Graduate Philosophical Club, and offered the Chair of Eastern Philosophy which he politely declined, being a monk. Members of the Dixon Society of New York invited him a number of times, and promoted his cause. Swami Vivekananda had also made many friends outside the circle of his followers. As Helen F. Huntington wrote to the editor of *The Brahmavadin*, April 11, 1896:

"He has met all phases of society on equal terms of friendship and brother-

16. His Eastern & Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta : Advaita Ashrama, 1979) page 425.

17. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern & Western Admirers* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964) page 264.

18. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, page 387.

19. *Ibid.*, page 350. Also *The Brahmavadin*, March 28, 1896.

20. Marie Louise Burke, pp. 213-14.

21. *The Brahmavadin*, March 28, 1896.

hood; his class and lectures have been attended by the most intellectual people and advanced thinkers of our cities; and his influence has already grown into a deep, strong undercurrent of spiritual awakening. No praise or blame has moved him to either approbation or expostulation....He is altogether such a man as 'kings delight to honor.' "

Swami Vivekananda became so popular that his name was selected for inclusion in the National Encyclopedia of America.²² His impact was no less significant in England. Canon Wilberforce, the famous ecclesiastic, held a levee to honour him. So wrote the London correspondent of *The Indian Mirror*, dated Jan. 1896:

"It is indeed a rare sight to see some of the most fashionable ladies...seated on the floor cross-legged, of course, for want of chairs, listening with all the *bhakti* of an Indian *chela* towards his *guru*."

The influence of Swami Vivekananda was not confined to the higher echelons of society—he was popular with the common masses too. The large crowds of people that went to hear him at Unitarian or Congregational churches, theatre halls or auditoriums did not belong to the elite. But, with the passing of time curiosity evoked interest not only in his pleasing countenance but also in his philosophy. Helen F. Huntington wrote thus to the editor of *The Brahmanavadin* (Nov. 21, 1896):

"It will always be a marvel to us that an oriental could take such a firm hold on us occidentals, trained as we have been by long habit of thought and education to opposing views."

However, some recent attempts to

belittle Swami Vivekananda and to demythologize his image of "the warrior-monk marching into the citadels of Western materialism and triumphantly demonstrating the powers of Indian spirituality," smack of sophomoric iconoclasm, plain sciolism, or sheer prejudice.²³ The argument that he could not speak in the name of "the most ancient Order of monks in the world",²⁴ which he did during his first speech at the Chicago Parliament, is rooted in the historical fallacy that Sankaracarya lived in the 9th century after Christ. Astronomical calculations and other corroborative evidence—*The Punya Sloka Manjari* of Sadashivabodha, the *Guru Ratnamālā* of Sadashiva Brahmendra, and the *Sushuma of Ātmabodha*—are works that reveal that Sri (*Abhinava*) Sankara (38th pontiff of Kanchi) born in A.D. 788, need not be confused with *Adya* (the first Sankaracarya, born in 509 B.C. (as per tradition) in the Kali Era 2593, Nandana year, Sunday, the 5th day of the bright fortnight of Vaisakha, when the *punarvasu nakṣatra* was in the ascendant.²⁵ Another charge, that he "allowed himself to be known as a brāhmin...identified himself as being from Bombay or even Madras, and was credentialed to speak before the World Parliament of Religions on the basis of these verbal claims"²⁶ is equally fallacious. The misinformation about Swami Vivek-

23. Perhaps the most recent of these attempts is by George M. Williams, Professor of Religious Studies at California State University, Chicago (U.S.A.). See his two articles: "The Ramakrishna Movement: A Study in Religious Change" and "Swami Vivekananda: Archetypal Hero, Or Doubting Saint" in Robert D. Baird (ed.) *Religion in Modern India* (Delhi: 1991) pp. 55-79, 313-42.

24. Wendell Thomas, page 261, n.15.

25. For these and other details about the date of *Adya* Sankaracarya, see V.G. Ramachandran, *Historic Dates* (Madras: 1991) pp. 124-91.

26. See George Williams' article in Baird, page 61.

22. *Ibid.*

ananda's antecedents was the working of the American press which was taken unawares when an unknown monk from India stole the limelight at the Chicago Parliament. The reporters considered every Hindu intellectual to be a brāhmin from a metropolis, and so presented him in that manner. It is puerile to say that he was accepted as a delegate because he claimed to belong to the highest or priestly class among the Hindus. Need one recall the words of Prof. J.H. Wright of Harvard University, who in his letter of recommendation of Swamiji to the Chairman of the Committee for the Selection of Delegates, wrote:

"Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together..."²⁷ Without having been

convinced of Swamiji's religious potential, Mrs. George W Hale would not have played the Samaritan after he had lost the address of the Committee of the Chicago Parliament, nor would the organizers have admitted him merely on the ground that he was a caste brāhmin. But his noble (some called it royal) mien, fluent English, modest manners and oriental dress gave ample proof of his fitness as a delegate, even though he had not been sponsored by any recognized religious body. Or, shall one argue that his acceptance into the Chicago Parliament was determined by the will of God?²⁸

(To be continued)

27. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, page 297.

28. For Swami Vivekananda's Initial travails and experiences in America, see: Satish K. Kapoor, pp. 38-42.

Conquest By Other Means : Vivekananda's Approach

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Swami Vivekananda's address at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in September 1893, one of the most august assemblies ever held, was an epoch-making event in the history of civilization. It signified the spiritual conquest of the West by India which, on the authority of the Christian missionaries, was long considered to be a degraded country, inhabited by wretched

people, steeped in poverty, ignorance and superstitions. The brilliance of Swamiji's Chicago addresses stunned the Westerners. So India too—the poor India, the degraded India, the wretched India had something special to give to the world, especially to the mundane West used to thinking of India as the white man's burden. That something special which India had to con-

tribute to the enrichment of the white men of the West and others in the world was the Indian ideal of spirituality—the concept of divinity¹ and oneness² of all beings, based on the Vedantic proposition that man in the central core of his being, in his essence is not a mere body-mind, but *that* spirit,³ that spark of the Divine which makes him one with the Absolute, that despite the differences of caste, creed, language and culture, all beings are essentially one in spirit. That this unity of existence means that there is no point in rivalry of creeds,⁴ they being different approaches to the realization of the same Absolute from which all creations emanate. Thus, while all else in the Parliament spoke on behalf of the superiority and even supremacy of their respective creeds,⁵ Swamiji alone represented that Indian ideal of spirituality which was universal in its

outlook and as such, had the potentiality of providing for a better world, free from all religious tensions of caste and creed that endanger the peace of man. The assembled delegates at the Parliament listened to Swami Vivekananda in stunned disbelief and could not but applaud the profundity of this “cyclonic” Hindu. Cyclonic, Swamiji truly was. He carried everything before him in Chicago. The triumphant Chicago addresses of his could therefore be aptly called the ‘spiritual conquest’ of the West by Swamiji.

Swamiji’s spiritual conquest of the West was also significant in this, that the event gave birth to a new India—an India strong in self-confidence and proud⁶ of the universality of its spiritual ideal, which the discerning West had to recognize at long last.

Indeed, in the wake of Swamiji’s triumphant Chicago addresses and other subsequent addresses in America, England and

1. To quote Swamiji, “Man is to become divine by realising the divine. Idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of his spiritual childhood; but on and on he must progress.” (See *Chicago Addresses*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968, page 31.)

2. As Swamiji put it, “One is the only Soul of which all souls are but delusive manifestations.” *Ibid.*, page 27.

3. *Ibid.*, page 16.

4. To quote Swamiji’s Chicago addresses: “The whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal. Every religion is only evolving a God out of the material man and the same God is the inspirer of all of them.” *Ibid.*, page 34.

5. Swamiji found the roots of disagreement and superiority complex in the parochial attitude of the respective creeds which, he said, was the same as the thinking of the proverbial frog of the well which, not being able to see beyond the confines of its well, said to the frog of the sea, “Nothing can be bigger than my well;

there can be nothing bigger than this; this fellow must be a liar, so turn him out.” “That has been the difficulty all the while.” See, *Ibid.*, page 6.

6. ‘Pride’ was a constant refrain in the Chicago addresses of Swami Vivekananda. He declared before this august assembly of the world that even though Indians were subjugated as a people, they still had reasons to be proud as a *nation* and reasons as well to be proud of the universal outlook of its religion. To quote him, “I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth.” *Ibid.*, page 2.

elsewhere, a number of Westerners⁷ who saw light in the spiritual ideal of India as expounded by Swamiji, flocked to him for further enrichment of their soul. Margaret Elizabeth Noble, an English woman of the Irish ancestry (born in Ireland on October 28, 1867), was the most enthusiastic of this group, having been keen to come to India in search of "the greatest spiritual treasures"⁸ of the world and fulfil herself through service to the land which had so much to give to the world spiritually. Margaret Noble's tormented soul, not being able to find the truth in the Christianity,⁹ was at last comforted by Swamiji's Vedantic spirituality. The solace the whole group of Westerners received from Swami Vivekananda's teachings in the West is best expressed in the words of Margaret Noble herself, after she became "Nivedita".

"To not a few of us the words of Swami Vivekananda came as living

water to men perishing of thirst. Many of us had been conscious for years past of that growing uncertainty and despair, with regard to Religion, which has beset the intellectual life of Europe for half a century. Belief in the dogmas of Christianity has become impossible to us, and we had no tool such as we now hold, by which to cut away the doctrinal shell from the kernel of Reality in our Faith. To these, the Vedanta has given intellectual confirmation and philosophical expression of their own mistrusted intuitions. 'The peoples that walked in darkness have seen a great light.' So that, if it had done no more, merely by the enlargement of our religious culture, this system of thought would have been of incalculable benefit to us. But it has done much more. . . .

To one, the very conception of a religion which preached universal tolerance—which held that *we proceed from truth to truth, and not from error to truth*—was enough. . . .

To another...it was the Swami's *I am God* that came as something always known, only never said before. . . . Yet again it was the Unity of Man that was the touch needed to rationalise all previous experiences and give logical sanction to the thirst for absolute service never boldly avowed in the past. Some by one gate, and some by another, we have all entered into one great heritage, and we know it.¹⁰

The influence of the spiritual thoughts of India over the West articulated by Swami Vivekananda finds further acknowledgement in the following assertion of Miss

7. A reference to some of these people who came to live in India at some time or other has been made in footnote no. 17.

8. As Margaret Noble wrote later (as Nivedita) 'giving us the reasons for her coming to India: "You have the ingenuity of six thousand years of conservatism. But yours is the conservatism of a people who have through that long period been able to preserve the greatest spiritual treasures for the world, and it is for this that I have come to India to serve here with our burning passion for service." *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1972) Vol. 2, page 400.

9. "Christian religious doctrines were of course early instilled into me. . . . But after the age of eighteen, I began to harbour doubts as to the truth of the Christian doctrines. Many of them began to seem to me false and incompatible with truth," wrote Sister Nivedita, reminiscing of her days as Margaret E. Noble. See her "How and Why I adopted the Hindu Religion," *Ibid.*, pp. 460-62.

10. First published in *The Brahmavadin*, September 15, 1897, it is included in *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. 2, pp. 389-90.

Noble:

"I cannot tell you in detail of the personal energy that has been shown by people, whom I could name, in consequence of their intense realization of the world as the manifestation of God, and of themselves as the manifestation of God, and for whom, therefore, errors, sins, and impossibilities can not exist.

"It is indeed a new light. It is a new light to the mother in dealing with her children. Because, if sin does not exist, if sin is only ignorance, how changed, how different is our position towards fear, instead of the old position of condemnation! The old position, the old conception of any sort, which has at the bottom hatred, goes away, and instead there is love—all love.¹¹

For Miss Noble, who acknowledged in such candid terms the influence of the spiritual thoughts of India in the West, it was only natural to long for coming to India. And, indeed, in her quest of the greater enlightenment and fulfilment in the Indian ideal of spirituality, she followed Swami Vivekananda to India in January 1898. i.e., exactly a year after Swamiji returned to India in January 1897. Having initiated Miss Noble as a *brahmacarini* of the Ramakrishna Order, and having named her Nivedita, 'The Dedicated', Swamiji had to train her in that Indian ideal of spirituality which he preached in the West from 1893 to 1897, and which he now had to actualize in the case of this Western disciple, whom he considered to be "really an acquisition"¹² from the West. In Nivedita's case this

inevitably entailed her Indianization as well-identification with the country she was to work for. Miss Noble was intellectually ready to be at the service of India. How could she work for the cause before she was thoroughly conversant with the cause itself? And there was no better means of preparing her for the cause than by giving her a thorough exposure to the land and its people. In the absence of living personal experiences, the identification in all its totality, intensity and intimacy could not come about. Swamiji began working towards the goal of Miss Noble's 'Indianization' almost immediately after her arrival in Calcutta, via Madras in January 1898.¹³ The following is an account of Swami Vivekananda's approach.

I

In keeping with his desire to give Margaret Noble an intimate exposure to Hindu family life, Swamiji planned to lodge her, upon her arrival in Calcutta, in her mother's house in Calcutta, but as the old lady was away from Calcutta at the time of Miss Noble's coming, Swamiji decided that she should stay for some time with some friends of the Ramakrishna Order at a house in Chowringhee.¹⁴ She was encouraged to spend her first few days in Calcutta "looking at what is going on around you"¹⁵ and cultivating acquaintan-

(Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977), Vol. 8, page 447.

13. Margaret Noble arrived in Calcutta via Madras on January 18, 1898. She was welcomed at Madras by Mr. Goodwin, the stenographer-disciple of Swami Vivekananda, but received at the Calcutta docks by Swamiji himself.

14. It can be seen from the letters that Margaret wrote at this time that she was lodged at 49, Park Street.

15. Lizelle Reymond, *The Dedicated* (Madras: Samata Books, 1985) page 77.

11. See *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Vol. 2, page 399.

12. See Swami Vivekananda's letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda, March 1898, included in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*

ces with Indians such as Dr. J.C. Bose, the scientist and Rabindranath Tagore, the poet. Among the educational institutions that she visited were Miss Labanyaprabha Bose's (sister of Dr. J.C. Bose) school and the Bethune College. In order that she might make the most of such visits and acquaintances and in the interest of the effectiveness in work that she would soon be called upon to undertake, Swamiji arranged for her to take lessons in Bengali from a *Sādhu* of the Ramakrishna Order, a novice at that time, who became subsequently known as Swami Swarupananda.¹⁶

Miss Noble's stay at the Park Street came to an end with the arrival of the two American disciples of Swami Vivekananda, Miss Josephine MacLeod and Mrs. Sarah C. Bull, to Calcutta in the beginning of February, 1898. They came to live in the riverside guest house on the fifteen acre estate at Belur, a small village five miles north of Calcutta, that Swami Vivekananda bought with the monetary help of Miss Henrietta Muller,¹⁷ with a view to establish the main centre of the Ramakrishna Order and Mission on the said estate. The two American ladies, who came into close collaboration with Swami Vivekananda since

his first visit to the United States, wanted Miss Noble to live with them in the guest house on the Ganges and Swamiji, according to their requests, arranged for her transfer to this new residence of hers.¹⁸

Of the two ladies, Miss MacLeod was already known to Margaret Noble. They attended Swamiji's discourses in London together, and this re-union of theirs at Belur helped them to forge a lifelong friendship, thereby inspiring the numerous letters that became a treasure of information on Sister Nivedita's life and activities. Swami Vivekananda too entertained so much affection for Josephine MacLeod that he would address her as 'Jaya', 'Joe', 'Jojo' or 'Yum'.¹⁹ Like Josephine MacLeod, Mrs. Sarah Bull, the older woman, the hostess of Swamiji at Boston during his first visit to the United States, came to India to help her beloved master fulfill his mission in every possible way. The more immediate purpose of Mrs.

16. Swami Swarupananda did all he could to help Margaret learn not only Bengali, but also meditation. Nivedita regarded him, to quote from her letter of August 7, 1898, as "one of the best and finest friends I ever had. He is one of 3 Bengali men—besides Swami—whom I am just proud of knowing". See Sankari Prasad Basu (Ed.) *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, (Calcutta: Naba Bharat Publishers, 1982) Vol. 1, page 19.

17. Miss Muller was one of the group of seven Western disciples of Swamiji who were in India at this time. The others were Mr. Goodwin, Captain and Mrs. Sevier, Miss Margaret E. Noble, Miss Josephine MacLeod and Mrs. Sarah C. Bull.

18. "You will find that little house of Dhira Mata [Mrs. Bull] like heaven, for it is all love, from beginning to end," wrote Swamiji to Miss Noble. See *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1982) Vol. 1, page 278.

Referring to Margaret Noble's joining Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Bull at the guest house at Belur, Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, aptly writes: "A guest was soon to join them to make the threesome, the 'trinity', as Vivekananda called them, who would be bound in their dedication to work of India." See Tantine: *The Life of Josephine MacLeod: The Friend of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Sarada Math, 1990) page 34.

19. For fuller details, see Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, (*Ibid.*) Joe was called "Jaya,"—"Victory" for her invincible spirit. "Yum" is the Tibetan name for the feminine principle of energy and Joe, being the personification of energy, was called as such by Swami Vivekananda.

Bull, the forty-eight year old widow of the famous Norwegian violinist, Mr. Ole Bull, now independent and quite wealthy in her own right, in coming to India at this time was to finance the project of her young master towards the establishment of the Math and the Mission. She was like a mother to Swamiji and Swamiji was really used to calling her 'Dhramata' (the steady mother) because of her ever-reliability as a mother of steady wisdom. "Let me be a mother to you in temporal things," Mrs. Bull used to say to her young Guru. "You are still a child incapable of understanding a simple addition!"²⁰

Indeed, Mrs. Sarah Bull, ever since she came to know Margaret Noble through living with her in the small cottage by the side of the Ganga at Belur, became a mother-figure to Margaret Noble as well, and the latter, as Sister Nivedita, would often write to her like a daughter and stuck with her through thick and thin till the last day of her life. The fact of these three kindred souls living together and making a home out of a ramshackle, almost dilapidated cottage, was no ordinary fact. It indicated by all means the significant beginning of the *Indianization* of all three of them, especially Margaret Noble whom, more than anybody else, Swami Vivekananda wanted to mould in the image of a true lover and devoted servant of India.

Swamiji would visit these ladies in the guest house every morning, sometimes alone, and sometimes accompanied by his brother-monks or the novices, who would benefit as well from the discourses he gave to these ladies in the initial period of their learning. And what were the discourses about?

Quite in keeping with the process of Indianization that the ladies, especially Margaret Noble, had to undergo, Swamiji's talks with them always centred on India and the things that were Indian. That was always his central theme. "He spoke of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon; of the great religious teachers, of saints and patriots; of Rajputs, Sikhs and Marathas; of the history of the people; of the geography of the land, of ethnology, sociology, science and metaphysics."²¹ He would speak of the glorious past of India to drive home the message that India, seemingly old and effete, was really "young, ripe with potentiality, and standing at the beginning of the twentieth century on the threshold of even greater developments than she had known in the past."²² The best way to describe how "India" was heard by these 'early learners' through the lips of Swami Vivekananda is to quote the language of Sister Nivedita herself:

"To our cottage here, then, came the Swami daily at sunrise, alone or accompanied by some of his brothers. And here, under the trees, long after our early breakfast was ended, we might still be found seated, listening to that inexhaustible flow of interpretation, broken but rarely by question and answer, in which he would reveal to us some of the deepest secrets of the Indian world.

"...It was here that we learnt the great outstanding watchwords and ideals of the Indian striving. For the talks were, above all, an exposition of ideals. Facts and illustrations were gathered, it is true,

20. Lizelle Reymond, page 71.

21. Pravrajika Atmaprana, *Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1977) page 40.

22. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, (1982), Vol. 1., page 47.

from history, from literature and from a thousand other sources. But the purpose was always the same, to render some Indian ideals of perfection clearer."²³

Elsewhere, Sister Nivedita writes:

"For the most part, it was the Indian religions that he portrayed for us, today dealing with one, and tomorrow with another, his choice guided, seemingly, by the whim of the moment. But it was not religion only that he poured out upon us. Sometimes it would be history. Again, it would be folklore. On still another occasion it would be manifold anomalies and inconsistencies of race, caste, and custom. In fact, India herself became, as heard in him, as the last and noblest of the Puranas, uttering itself through his lips."²⁴

On the plane of philosophy, Margaret Noble and her companions were given to understand the value of the attainment of the impersonal standpoint in matters personal, the value of purity—the child-like type which goes to the extent of making a saint unconscious of the body, the value of renunciation, the value of that ultimate sense of oneness which made the saint Raghunath faint "when the bullocks were beaten in his presence, while on his back were found the weals made by the lash."²⁵

Since Margaret Noble was to work for Indian women in India, Swamiji wanted her to understand and appreciate the sense and values of Indian women—their mentality, their quiet and modest attitudes and their sacrifices for the sake of their family, their society and their country. Without a knowledge of Sita, Mira Bai, Chand Bibi,

Laksmi Bai and other great women of Indian history, how would she ever get an inkling of the way the mind of the Indian women work? Margaret, Swamiji insisted, had to be an Indian woman herself to be a successful worker for the cause of Indian women. "He asked her, for example—during a relatively short period, it is true, but with no half-measures—to accept the living conditions of the most orthodox brahmins, to dress like a poor woman who possessed only one sari, to sleep on the ground, to eat with her fingers, to submit to all the restrictions and limitations imposed upon women in India until she understood their sense and value."²⁶

In brief, Swamiji, the Master, did all that he could do to convey to his disciples the true physiognomy of India. With these first materials he wanted to provoke the mind of the learners towards a *new line of consciousness* which, logically, had to entail a break of the mind with many of its former associations.

II

Though Swamiji's objective, primarily, was to train Miss Noble, he would not ordinarily single her out for such training. He would address her along with others and talk to the whole group of Western ladies rather than Miss Noble in isolation. "In all that year of 1899,"²⁷ as Nivedita writes, "I can remember only one occasion when the Swamiji invited me to walk alone with him for half an hour, and then our conversation—for it was towards the end of the summer, when I had begun to understand my own position a little—was rather of the

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 278-79.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 52.

26. Lizelle Reymond, page 79.

27. The year mentioned in the quotation should be read as 1898. "1899" is obviously a misprint of an unintended inadvertence.

policy and aims of the future, than of anything more subjective."²⁸ That way, Swamiji's method of training proved to be "entirely general."²⁹ In order to explain what she meant by an *entirely general method*, Nivedita wrote: "We would sit all together in garden or verandah, and listen, all together, to the discourses or the hour, each appropriating as much as she chose, and studying afterwards as she liked."³⁰

"Each appropriating as much as she chose" is an observation loaded with significance. It brings out the whole approach of Vivekananda as a teacher and as a thinker. He was not the one to give directions. In fact, "no one ever lived who more anxiously sought to escape the office of the spiritual director."³¹ He would light the fire himself. He would show the thing itself, and then leave it to the taught to absorb as much as she liked or as much as she could. "It was not in his nature, as he said once, to interfere with liberty, even to prevent mistakes. It was for him to point out the source of an error, only when it had been committed."³² In a word, he believed in growth from within and his method was to encourage the growth from within by one's own labours, maybe at some later time, consequent upon a consciousness that, as Guru, he sought to encourage. "All Western people," he said, "had to learn the great lesson of holding experience and emotion apart. Watch the fall of leaves, but gather the sentiment of the sight from within, at some later time."³³ Thus, if Swamiji's method, as Nivedita observed, was a *general* one, it was a *subtle* one too, aim as it

did towards evoking creative faculty that perhaps lay hidden in a disciple. Swami Vivekananda's method was to encourage the inner nature of the disciple to develop to its highest point. Such a method demanded of the disciple the elimination of the *ego* through *humility* and at the same time the encouragement of the *spirit* in liberty.

Vivekananda knew that Nivedita had inherent capacity for self-abnegation which had to be nurtured and developed by the Guru to its highest point. But, at the same time, he also knew that Nivedita was intensely emotional and the emotional streak in her nature had to be eliminated. As late as October 1, 1899, he wrote to Nivedita, then Margaret Noble living in England but wanting to come to India:

"I see persons giving me almost the whole of their love. But I must not give anyone the whole of mine in return, for that day the work would be ruined. Yet there are some who will look for such a return, *not having the breadth of the impersonal view.* (emphasis added) It is absolutely necessary to the work that I should have the enthusiastic love of as many as possible, while I myself remain entirely impersonal. . . . A leader must be impersonal, I am sure, you understand this."³⁴

Nivedita did not or could not really grasp the essence of what Swamiji sought to convey in this letter. She had lost her father in childhood and she clung to Swamiji with all the attachments of a spiritual daughter to the beloved father, and this emotional streak in her attitude towards him is something that he wanted to end for certain. Nivedita, for her own good and for the

28. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, (1982), Vol. 1, page 77.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, page 76.

32. *Ibid.*, page 205.

33. *Ibid.*, page 207.

34. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 8, page 429.

good of the work she was to do for India, must be given the *breadth of an impersonal view*, and this was the end towards which Swami Vivekananda directed his teachings to the disciple.

Another essential characteristic of Swami Vivekananda's method of teaching was to make the end the means, and means the end. The *end*, so far as it concerned a Western disciple like Sister Nivedita, who was to enter into the Hindu way of life soon, was to endow her with the *Indian consciousness*. Since *Indian consciousness* was the end, the means, as per Swamiji's conception, had to be Indian too. Such conception of the end and the means as Swamiji had could not be better expressed than in the words of Nivedita herself:

"He [Swami Vivekananda] had his own reasons—which every Hindu will perhaps understand—for feeling that a European who was to work on his behalf for India must do so in the Indian way. And in this demand, while he never confused essentials and non-essentials, he regarded no detail as too trivial to be unimportant. To eat only of approved foods, and to do this with the fingers, to sit and sleep on the floor, to perform Hindu ceremonies, and bind oneself strictly by the feelings and observances of Hindu etiquette, were all, to his think-

ing, *means of arriving at the Indian consciousness* (emphasis added) which would afterwards enable one to orient oneself truly to the Indian aspects of larger question."³⁵

Swamiji wanted to imbue the whole being of Nivedita with *Indian-ness*. With this end in view, he exhorted Nivedita in the following terms:

"You have to set yourself to Hinduise your thoughts, your needs, your conceptions, and your habits. Your life, internal and external, has to become all that an orthodox Hindu Brahmin Brahma-charini ought to be. The method will come to you, if only you desire it sufficiently. But *you have to forget your own past and to cause it to be forgotten. You have to lose even its memory!*"³⁶ (emphasis added)

In a word, the essence of Swamiji's approach lay in giving a unified purpose to Nivedita. Both in the method of education and in the aims of it, he was like a gardener digging, rolling and hoeing the earth for the purpose of making it ready for the seed that is to germinate in it.

35. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (1982), Vol. 1, page 203.

36. *Ibid.*, page 206.

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.

What They Said Of Swamiji and His Speeches

At The Parliament Of Religions, Chicago

1. Swami Vivekananda exercised a wonderful influence over his audience.

—Dr. J.H. Barrows,
Chairman of the General Committee of
the Parliament of Religions, Chicago.

2. ...by far the most important and typical representative of Hinduism was Swami Vivekananda, who in fact was beyond question the most popular and influential man in the Parliament.

—Mr. Merwin-Marie Snell,
President of the Scientific Section of
the Parliament of Religions, Chicago.

3. He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.

—*The New York Herald.*

4. Vivekananda's address before the Parliament was broad as the heaven above us, embracing the best in all religions, as the ultimate universal religion—charity to all mankind and good works for the love of God, not for fear of punishment or hope of reward. He is a great favourite of the parliament. . . . If he merely crosses the platform he is applauded. . . . At the Parliament of Religions they used to keep Vivekananda until the end of the programme to make people stay till the end of the

session. . . . The four thousand fanning people in the Hall of Columbus would sit smiling and expectant waiting for an hour or two to listen to Vivekananda for fifteen minutes. The Chairman knew the old rule of keeping the best until the last.

—*The Boston Evening Transcript.*

5. Of the Swami's address before the Parliament of Religions, it may be said that when he began to speak it was of "the religious ideas of the Hindus"; but when he ended, Hinduism had been created. . .

For it was no experience of his own that rose to the lips of the Swami Vivekananda there. He did not even take advantage of the occasion to tell the story of his Master. Instead of either of these, it was the religious consciousness of India that spoke through him, the message of his whole people, as determined by their whole past. . .

Others stood beside the Swami Vivekananda on the same platform as he, as apostles of particular creeds and churches. But it was his glory that he came to preach a religion to which each of these was, in his own words, "Only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances to the same goal."

—Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret E. Noble) in her introduction to
Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.

6. Vivekananda championed the cause of Hinduism in the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago (U.S.A.) in 1893 in connection with the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus. There, in the presence of the representatives of all the religions from almost all the countries in the world, the young monk from India expounded the principles of Vedanta and the greatness of Hinduism with such persuasive eloquence that from the very first he captivated the hearts of the vast audience. The repercussions of this on the vast Hindu community can be easily imagined. They had almost taken for granted the inferiority of their culture vis-a-vis that of the West, which was so confidently asserted by the Western scholars. Now, all on a sudden, the table was turned and the representatives of the West joined in a chorus of applause at the hidden virtues of Hinduism which were hitherto unsuspected either by friends or foes. It not only restored the self-confidence of the Hindus in their own culture and civilization, but quickened their sense of national pride and patriotism.

—Dr. Ramesh Chandra Mazumder in
*his History of the Freedom Movement in
India, Vol.1, pp.358-63.*

7. Swami Vivekananda's participation and his magisterial and at the same time sweet and reasonable pronouncements at the International Congress of Religions at Chicago in 1893 form a very important event in the intellectual history of modern man. There he proclaimed for the first time the necessity for a new and enlightened kind of religious understanding and toleration. Although the ordinary run of people are not conscious of it, the message which was given out by Vivekananda to America and the Western World at Chicago in 1893, and subsequently to people in America,

England and India, has been an effective force in the liberalization of the human spirit in its religious approach.

—Suniti Kumar Chatterjee,
Swami Vivekananda Memorial Volume,
pp. 228-33.

8. On Monday, September 11, 1893, the first session of the Parliament was opened... but it was the young man [Vivekananda] who represented nothing...and everything...the man belonging to no sect, but rather to India as a whole, who drew the glance of the assembled thousands. . . . His speech was like a tongue of flame. . . . it fired the souls of the listening throng. . . .

Each of the other orators had spoken of his God, of the God of his sect. He—he alone—spoke of all their Gods, and embraced them all in the Universal Being. It was the breath of Ramakrishna, breaking down the barriers through the mouth of his great disciple. . . . During the ensuing days he spoke again ten or twelve times. Each time he repeated with new arguments but with the same force of conviction his thesis of a universal religion without limit of time or space, uniting the whole Credo of human spirit from the enslaved fetishism of the savage to the most liberal creative affirmations of modern science. He harmonised them into a magnificent synthesis which...helped all hopes to grow and flourish according to their own proper nature. There was to be no other dogma but the divinity inherent in man and his capacity of indefinite evolution. . . .

The effect of these mighty words was immense. Over the hands of the official representatives of the Parliament they were

addressed to all and appealed to outside thought. Vivekananda's fame at once spread abroad, and India as a whole benefited...

—Romain Rolland,
The Life of Swami Vivekananda, pp. 36-40.

9. The visit of Swami Vivekananda to America and the subsequent work of those who followed him did more for India than a hundred London Congresses could effect. That is the true way of awakening sympathy...by showing ourselves to the nations as a people with a great past and an ancient civilization who still possess something of the genius and character of our forefathers, and have still something to give to the world and therefore deserve freedom—by manliness and fitness, not by mendicancy.

The going forth of Swami Vivekananda marked out by the Master as the heroic soul destined to take the world between his two hands and change it, was the first visible sign to the world that India was awake not only to survive but to conquer. Once the soul of the nation was awake in religion, it was only a matter of time and opportunity for it to throw on all spiritual and intellectual activities in national existence and take possession of them.

—Sri Aurobindo, Vol.2,
pages 171 and 37.

10. The spirit that reigned over the Parliament and dominated the soul of almost every religious representative present, was that of universal toleration and universal deliverance, and it ought to be a matter of pride to India, to all Hindus specially, that

no one expressed, as the American papers say, this spirit so well as the Hindu representative, Swami Vivekananda. His address, in every way worthy of the representative of a religion, such as Hinduism is, struck the keynote of the Parliament of Religions. . . . The spirit of catholicity and toleration which distinguishes Hinduism, forming one of its broad features, was never before so prominently brought to the notice of the world, as it has been by Swami Vivekananda, and we make no doubt that the Swami's address will have an effect on other religions, whose teachers, preachers and Missionaries heard him, and were impressed by his utterances.

The Indian Mirror (21 March 1894)
quoted in *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*,
Vol.1, (1979) page 437.

11. A striking figure, clad in yellow and orange, shining like the sun of India in the midst of the heavy atmosphere of Chicago, a lion head, piercing eyes, mobile lips, movements swift and abrupt...such was my first impression of Swami Vivekananda, as I met him in one of the rooms set apart for the use of the delegates to the Parliament of Religions. . . .

Enraptured, the huge multitude hung upon his words; not a syllable must be lost, not a cadence missed! . . . That man a heathen! . . . said one, as he came out of the great hall. . . . and we send missionaries to his people! It would be more fitting that they should send missionaries to us. . . .

—Dr. Annie Besant, quoted in
The Life of Swami Vivekananda,
Vol.1 (1979), page 429.

12. In his deep voice, he began, "Sisters and Brothers of America"... and the entire audience, many hundred people, clapped and cheered wildly for two whole minutes.... No doubt the vast majority of those present hardly knew why they had been so powerfully moved. The appearance—even the voice of Vivekananda can not fully explain it. A large gathering has its own strange kind of subconscious telepathy, and this one must have been somehow aware that it was in the presence of that most unusual of beings, a man whose words express exactly what he is. When Vivekananda said, "Sisters and Brothers", he actually meant that he regarded the American women and men before him as sisters and brothers; the well known orational phrase became simple truth

—Christopher Isherwood in
*What Religion Is in the Words of
Swami Vivekananda*, (1991) page xvi.

13. The immediate results of the Parliament were mixed. Perhaps it is correct to say that the bigots became more bigoted,

for their backs had been pressed to the wall, and that the liberal minded became more liberal, for they were now confirmed in their views, and that this latter outcome was undoubtedly more important and enduring. It is undeniable, moreover, that the American people had not been merely intellectually impressed by the nobility and supreme wisdom of Eastern doctrines which hitherto, in the words of Dr. Alfred Momerie, "they had been taught to regard with contempt," but that they had been touched by and had responded to the tremendous power of living spirituality that Swamiji embodied. Something far more important and more far-reaching had taken place than an intellectual appreciation of Eastern religions. It was as though the soul of America had long asked for spiritual sustenance and had now been answered.

—Marie Louise Burke, in her
*Vivekananda in the West:
New Discoveries*,
Vol.1 (1983), pp.134-35.

Each soul is potentially divine.

The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.

Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free.

This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

—Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 1, page 124.

Narendra—The Man Lion

RICHARD PRESCOTT

The writer, who has made a special study of Indian spiritual literature, is of Edmonds, Washington, U.S.A.

One Hundred Years ago...what a Wonder, after such a long journey our dearest Swami Vivekananda stood before the Parliament of Religions and uttered those simple words, "Sisters and Brothers of America: It fills my heart with joy unspeakable..." Yet before Swamiji could finish his words, thousands of people rose to their feet and applauded him for two minutes. He had touched 'something' inside each of them by his simple and sincere presence, 'something' that would roll through time for the next ten decades. Something that still rolls forward, raising and awakening human beings wherever they may be.

In what little we can see of this Vast Ocean which was called Swami Vivekananda, this 'Something' is 'Svastha'—his 'Standing on the Self!'—something Swamiji proclaimed the world over, wherever he went. "Be strong, be brave, have courage, free yourself of all superstitions, love boldly, work selflessly, educate with real knowledge, manifest your own potential divinity, and stand forth as the Self!"

But where and when did this great wave of Truth begin? Where did this man lion come from? Who was Narendra, later to take the name of Swami Vivekananda, the Bliss of Discrimination between the Real and the Unreal...this Lion of Self Reality?

As our history tells us, before Ramakrishna put on the physical body, he went to the realm of the seven sages, on the Divine Threshold of the Eternal (*nitya*) and the Relative (*līlā*). And there he whispered into the ear of one of them, "I am going down. You too must come with me."

Which of those sages was the one to come down with Ramakrishna? Was it Sanaka or Sanatana, Sananda or Sanat Kumara, Atri, Vasishta or Gautama? Who can say? Yet when Narendra first met Ramakrishna he recognized him to be the one whom he had asked to accompany him. On their second meeting, the Great Master touched Narendra and put him in *samādhi*. This is something only an Incarnation can do. As the world was vanishing and Narendra was entering into that ecstasy, he exclaimed, "What are you doing to me? I have my parents, brothers, and sisters at home." On their third visit, Ramakrishna put him in a kind of sub-conscious state and asked him questions about the past, his purpose in the world, and the duration of his life span. Wondrous events were these...

One should not be too amazed after understanding this, that once Narendra had finished the theatre of his life's great events, that he would actually choose the very day of his death, his dropping of the body, his 'final samādhi'. The day of this great

moment was the Fourth of July. A day full of meaning, Independence and Freedom. "To leave the body laughing," was Narendra's definition of a good death. Yet what more can one say than Swamiji's very words,..."It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body...to cast it off like a disused garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God." Outstanding!

Narendra loved samādhi. Yet Ramakrishna would tell him that there is 'something greater' than samādhi. Yet Narendra is known to have had Nirvikalpa Samādhi (Ultimate Realization), at Cossipore Garden and Thousand Island Park. Yet, it is said in our history, that Ramakrishna would hold the 'key' to this Nirvikalpa State, for when Narendra remembered who he was, he would leave his body then and there. But his play would not be done until he was almost forty year old.

Narendra's entire life is a wondrous example of the emergence of *Svastha*! From his years with Ramakrishna and Saradamani, to the 'passing away' of the Master, to forming Baranagore Monastery, to his time as a Parivrajaka, a holy wanderer. In the Himalayas, it is said that Narendra encountered, that is actually met, Ramakrishna. A luminous form? A material form? One cannot say, but we know that death itself is no barrier for great souls.

It was at Kanyakumari that Swamiji had his realization of what he must do. This is now Vivekananda Rock. It was after this that he set out for the West, the Parliament of Religions. He travelled twice around the world, lecturing, teaching, awakening souls to reach their goal. He encountered resistance from some and welcome from others, meeting many remarkable people whose

lives were changed for the better by his friendship. Even nowadays, there are accounts of persons who claim they have seen Vivekananda in 'subtle luminous form' and he has helped them in some way. This is a matter of spirit, not hard examination.

Between his two world journeys, during his triumphant return to India, Swamiji visited the Holy Cave at Amarnath. Dressed in a loin cloth, with his body covered with ash, he went before the Ice Linga, sacred image of Siva. In that holy cave Narendra had a great experience of which he never spoke, except to say, "Siva Himself has entered into my brain. He will not let go."

But a glimpse of what went on there in the cave might be gathered by reading his beautiful poem, "Kālī, the Mother". For it is shortly after this, that his devotion to the Mother Goddess became intense. To Her, who was Ramakrishna's All in All, the Blissful Mother...

Vivekananda was indeed a great defender of Womanhood. For Narendra said, "...because man oppresses woman; she is the fox, but when she is no longer oppressed, she will become the lion." Look at what lions, Nivedita and other women (as well as men) became by their friendship with Narendra.

"Give up the world, then alone you are loosened from the body. When it dies, you are 'āzād', free. "Be free," Swamiji sang boldly, "Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless ocean which I am.' Bow down to nothing but your own higher Self." "You must worship the Self in Krishna, not Krishna as Krishna." "Dis-identify yourself with the body, and all pain will cease." "De-hypnotise yourself..." "...and at last you will find that the one

crying for help has vanished, and so has the Helper, and the play is over; only the Self remains." "Whom to worship? Who worships?" "Let go the rope." "Get rid of the little 'I', and let only the great 'I' live." Who can plunge the depth of Narendra's insight?

Swami Vivekananda was born January 12, 1863 and entered his final samadhi July 4, 1902. It is believed that he voluntarily left his body behind at the appropriate moment. It is known that he told another Swami where to cremate his bodily frame and where to place the ashes, Belur Math. This man lion most excellent, beautiful, bold and kind, compassionate and intelligent, did not see death as others see it...listen to Narendra, "There can be no physical death for us and no material death, when we see that all is one. All bodies are mine; so even body is eternal, because the three, the animal, the sun, the moon, the universe itself is my body; then how can it die? Every mind, every thought is mine, then how can death come? The Self is never born and never dies. When we realize this, all doubts vanish. 'I am, I know, I love'...these can never be doubted. There is

no hunger, for all that is eaten is eaten by me. If a hair falls out, we do not think, we die; so if one body dies, it is but a hair falling...."

The 1993 Parliament of World Religions at the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago, will have representatives from every religion and philosophy, from Native American to Advaita Vedanta, from the Feminine in Religion to Death and Dying; come together to see this world become free of hatred and bigotry, superstition and fanaticism. A world where what is truth, is the only priority. Like flowers in a meadow, it grows and grows through centuries.

As Narendra put it, remember for yourself what is ultimately free, "Great saints are the object-lessons of the Principle. But the disciples make the saint the Principle, and then they forget the Principle in the person." It was for this reason that Swami Vivekananda took up his life on this Earth, that each and every person in the world would remember and recognize this *Svastha Principle* for themselves. May it be so.



Is religion to justify itself by the discoveries of reason, through which every other science justifies itself? Are the same methods of investigation, which we apply to sciences and knowledge outside, to be applied to the science of Religion? In my opinion this must be so, and I am also of opinion that the sooner it is done the better. If a religion is destroyed by such investigation, it was then all the time useless, unworthy superstition; and the sooner it goes the better. I am thoroughly convinced that its destruction would be the best thing that could happen. All that is dross will be taken off, no doubt, but the essential parts of religion will emerge triumphant out of this investigation. Not only will it be scientific—as scientific, at least, as any of the conclusions of physics or chemistry—but will have greater strength, because physics or chemistry has no internal mandate to vouch for its truth, which religion has.

Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol 1, page 367.

Reviews & Notices

LECTURES ON PHILOSOPHY, by Mahendra Nath Dutta; Published by The Mahendra Publishing Committee, 3 Gour Mohan Mukherjee Street, Calcutta, 700 006; 1990, 174 pages; Rs. 20/-

DISSERTATION ON POETRY, by Mahendra Nath Dutta; Published by The Mahendra Publishing Committee, 3 Gour Mohan Mukherjee Street, Calcutta 700 006; 1992, 120 pages; Rs. 25/-

Swami Vivekananda had illustrious brothers. Both Mahendra Nath and Bhupendra Nath were 'Lights' unto themselves and to the world. Of the two, Bhupendra Nath is more known to people because of his revolutionary activities and his writings, especially the book on Swami Vivekananda titled as *Swami Vivekananda: The Patriot-Prophet of India*. Mahendra Nath spent most of his time in seclusion, austerity and meditation. But he was a scholar in his own right and left his mark on almost all branches of knowledge, including Art, Architecture, Logic, Philosophy, Psychology, Philosophy, Science, Sociology, and Biology. He lectured on various dimensions of these subjects at different times. The Committee formed for publishing his diverse works has done a good job in bringing together some of these lectures within the covers of the two books reviewed here.

The Lectures on Philosophy is the summation of five branches of knowledge, namely, Psychology, Metaphysics, Mentation, Ethics, and Logic. The lectures delivered by the author on these subjects, which find a place in this book, reveal the most subtle ideas of Indian Philosophy and brings out the *difference* in the approaches of Indian and Western thinkers to the philosophical issues. While the Western thinkers put their emphasis upon *knowing* the outside world, the Indian thinkers take their stand on knowing the mind. The internal, the consciousness, is regarded as fundamental and

the external or the outside world is looked upon in Indian Philosophy as derivative from the *mind*. It is the mental energy which manifests itself into various forms and every object and every idea is reduced into different grades of such energy. The end is to know the *prana*, the spirit which is the real substratum of all matter. In conceptualizing the cause of manifestation in this way, the Indian Philosophy aims to go beyond relativity in thought, and reach the stage which is the non-qualified Absolute stage. The goal of Ethics is not different. In seeking to see Self in every one, it aims at a consciousness which is numerically one.

In the concluding chapter of his book, the author distinguishes between Linguistic Logic and Psychological Logic, indicating his preference for the latter in which the object becomes the subject and vice versa, the consciousness in every case being the same.

Taking it all in all, one can safely say that the book is no ordinary research study; the discourses presented in the book bear the authoritative stamp of the author's realization of the truth of his deliberations. It will be a rewarding experience for both the scholarly and lay people to read this book.

Dissertation on Poetry, presented in nine chapters, traces the origin of the poetry as well as the source of its inspiration, and reflects on the relation between poetry and religion, poetry and philosophy, poetry and cadence, poetry and music, and poetry and national life. The origin, inspiration and relations apart, the book deals also with the *classes* of poetry and the *tendency* of poetry as it should be in the future.

Holding that visualization of *prana* as expressed in rhythm is called poetry, the author asserts that poetry is philosophy presented in a concrete form and that its ultimate object, like that of religion, is to lead

the mind to a higher stage of communion. Such psychological test being the real merit of poetry, the guiding principle of national poetry (as also that of music and painting) should be the uplifting of the national spirit.

All will agree with the author's view that vigorous themes should be the subject of poetry. All, however, might not equally agree with his denunciation of romantic poems and the class of poems known as satires.

The author's final dissertation that a poet has a duty to perform towards his nation and towards humanity as well and that to a good poet divinity becomes humanity and humanity divinity, is a lofty echo of Swami Vivekananda's view that each soul is potentially divine and the goal of every human enterprise should be the realization of the divinity that is always within.

Let the knowledge of divinity spread throughout the society, and to that end one cannot but wish wide publicity for books such as these.

Dr. Anil Baran Ray

PHILOSOPHY OF SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN, Edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp. Jawaharnagar, Delhi, 110 007, Motilal Banarsidass, 883 pages; Rs. 375/-.

It is such a pity that this book of great value should have taken forty years to appear in its Indian edition. For this critical analysis and evaluation by a distinguished band of scholars—Western and Eastern—of the contribution of Dr. Radhakrishnan to world thought first appeared in 1952 in the Library of Living Philosophers Series, and made its mark for the high quality of the contributions and S.R.'s own autobiographical essay under the title *The Religion of the Spirit and the World's Need (Fragments of a Confession)* and his tour de force, *Reply to Critics*. We understand that only 600 copies of the Indian edition have been printed; we do hope, however, a paperback edition will be soon forthcoming. The

volume contains 23 weighty papers assessing the philosopher's approach to several knotty questions in social and political philosophy, modern religion, mysticism, modern Hinduism, universal religion etc.

Perhaps more interesting than the views of other scholars is the racy feature of S.R.'s own observations of many themes of moment. He notes that true philosophy is a function of life. (page 6) He takes a positive view of the world-movement: "The redemption of the world is not to be treated completely *sub specie historiae*. It is an eternal operation. There is a steady advance in our appreciation of the ideal which belongs to the eternal world." (page 43) He draws attention to the utterances of some of the Upanishads. He rebuts the common charge of world-negation against Indian thought. He points out: "A life of service and sacrifice is the neutral and inevitable expression and proof of the validity of spiritual experience." (page 65) He cites Buddha and Gandhi as illustrious exemplars in this regard. His comments on the contribution of the Christian Missions to the cause of Education and Health in India are worthy of his sensitive mind. He probes below the surfaces: "Christ is born in the depths of spirit. We say that he passes through life, dies on the Cross and rises again. These are not so much historical events, which occurred once upon a time, as universal processes of spiritual life, which are being continually accomplished in the souls of men." (page 79) None could better Dr. Conger's estimate of the versatile thinker in his paper, "Radhakrishnan's World":

"Radhaakrishnan presents a type of life, attractive and somehow essentially authentic. Notice how for him everything—psychology, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, education, politics, economics, religion—converges and culminates in spirit. With brilliant mind and glowing heart he beckons us to an integral experience, an integrated life. He summons us all to seek it, even though some of us must seek it in ways other than his own." (page 111)

His *Reply to Critics* is well couched and engaging in tone. He takes pains to underline his understanding of *Mayavada* which differs from his popularly understood *Illusionism*. He writes: "The tendency to regard Isvara or God as phenomenal and Brahman or the Absolute as real is not correct." (page 797) "When the Supreme is viewed not merely as Absolute Being but as Eternal Creativity, the creative power is called *maya*. In my account I distinguished Divine Being and Divine action, Absolute in itself, in repose, and the Absolute as active or energizing, Brahman and Isvara. The latter is said to be possessed of *maya* or power of manifestation. It delights in manifesting." (page 801)

His refutation of the charge that Indian Philosophy lacks naturalism is convincing. His comment on basic principles underlying the Caste system in India is revealing. Every page of this section of Replies is stimulating. The entire volume has a freshness about it though it was originally brought out four decades ago.

M.P. Pandit

THE CULT OF DRAUPADI, by Alf Hiltebeitel, Motilal Banarsidass, Jawahar-nagar, Delhi 110 007. 487 pages; Rs. 200/-

Draupadi as the fiery heroine of the Pandavas in *The Mahabharata* is well known. Her cult as a Goddess in the South, however, is not so known. The author of this research project, which has already spread over twelve years, explores "the inner dynamics of popular devotional Hinduism" through a deep study of this popular cult concentrated in the region of Ganges, the scene of many past royal splendours. The present volume—the first—concerns itself with the mythology of this cult as found in Gingee and described in the famous epic of Kurukshetra; the second volume is to focus on the rituals of the cult; the third is to interpret the *Mahabharata* through the centrality of the goddess.

The discussion covers many aspects of the theme: the way in which the epic and

classical features are changed and diluted in the folklore; the alterations undergone by the personality of Draupadi in the religious mind of the southern populace. Draupadi is here lauded as the protector of the Pandavas, and not the other way around; the episode of gambling and disrobing are turned into occasions for the display of her bravery. She is connected with the "Goddess-on-the-Lion" — Durga — and worshipped as such. What is more interesting is how Draupadi is not merely born of Fire, but is associated with the fire-walking ceremonies common in the south. There are songs celebrating her passing the fire-test—five times—imposed by Lord Krishna to prove her chastity even after marriage to the five princes. There is even mention of a Muslim Devotee, Muttal Ravuttan, of the goddess.

The author has taken meticulous pains to record the performances and recitations on the occasions of the annual festivals in different regions. It is interesting to watch the writer relate the traditions of the southern cult with the original (?) story as developed in the more famous epic up north. The maps, plates and genealogies included in the volume add to its value.

M.P. Pandit

SRI YOGA VASISHTHA, originally abridged and presented in Questions and Answers in Sindhi by R.M. Hari. Translated here into English by a Devotee. Published by H.M. Damodar, 1194 Shanti Nagar, Ulhas Nagar-3, Dist. Thane, 421 003, 1992; pp.xix plus 383. Rs. 100/-.

This well-known Vedantic text is in the form of a dialogue between Sri Vasishtha, the guru par excellence, and his worthy disciple, Sri Ramachandra, the most revered incarnation of Lord Vishnu. As the original Sanskrit work is voluminous as well as difficult, an attempt has been made here to offer a shortened version for the convenience of the common reader.

The book begins with the shortest of the six chapters: "Vairagya Prakarana" (On

Dispassion). It is followed by "Mumukshu Prakarana" (On Longing for Liberation). Then comes the longest chapter: "Utpatti Prakarana" (On Creation), to be followed by "Stithi Prakarana" (On Existence), and "Upashanti Prakarana" (On Quiescence of Mind). The last chapter is, appropriately enough, "Nirvana Prakarana" (On Liberation).

Although there are various discussions on various topics, often metaphysical and abstruse, the entire work can be summed up in one single word: *Vairagya*. It covers not only dispassion, but also what the Germans call *Entsagen* or renunciation: the Upanishadic concept of "*tena tyaktena bhunjithah*" The idea has been conveyed in the words of Sri Rama in the very opening chapter:

"The gratification of desires leads to their manifold expansion and hence the mind never comes to equilibrium. There are two ways of protection against desire, viz., *vairagya* and *vichar*. As a result of constant practice, when *vairagya* and *vichar* are developed in a jiva, then he is in a position to save himself from the demon of desire and attain Atmananda."

It is pointed out in the Introduction to the book that no other book can help an aspirant better in his progress towards spirituality: it teaches explicitly the oneness (non-duality) of Atma and establishes firmly that there is no difference between man and God—Jiva and Brahman. The fundamental point about the Truth and the untruth has been adequately explained. The original text is repetitive in nature, but the present editor has tried to avoid repetition as far as practicable. Brief biographical sketches of R.M. Hari and his father and guru Rochaldas Shib, and a glossary and index add to the value of the book.

Prof. Visvanath Chatterjee
Professor of English
Jadavpur University,
Calcutta

THE SPIRITUAL ATHLETE, a primer for the inner life, Compiled by Ray Berry. Joshua Press; Olema, California, U.S.A. 345 pages; \$ 19.95.

Here is an inspiring collection of biographies of saints and saintly people, representing many faiths from many parts of the world. The authors include some eminent writers and familiar names—like Toynbee, Swami Prabhavananda, Rabbi Asher Block, C.H. MacLachlan, and others. Ray Berry, an ardent admirer and devotee of the Vedanta movement in the West, has himself written four of the biographies. The following are the twenty-two chapter heads: Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Henry D. Thoreau, Rabi'a Gerhart Tersteegen, The Baal Shem Tov, Kabir, Sojourner Truth, Laotse, St. John of the Cross, The Soul of the Indian, Ramprasad, Peace Pilgrim, Brother Lawrence, Kenko, Thomas a Kempis, Mira Bai, Meister Eckhart, William Law, Plotinus, Daniel Considine, and Sarada Devi—Foreword by Georg Feuerstein.

Those interested to turn away from some of the turbulence and confusion in modern life and cultivate peace of mind and the religious attitude will find such a book worth their while. All the great minds of the past have held firmly that the real achievements in human life and the most meaningful struggles are psychological and spiritual. So did all the great ones treated in this book, *The Spiritual Athlete*. The title has been selected by the author because St. Paul compared the religious aspirant to an athlete—one who always practises self-control and trains himself for perfect achievements.

It is good to contemplate that more and more people are being attracted to the real teachers of humanity, both past and present, who lived the life. We hope such books as this ever gain in popularity.

Swami Shivaprasadananda
Mayavati







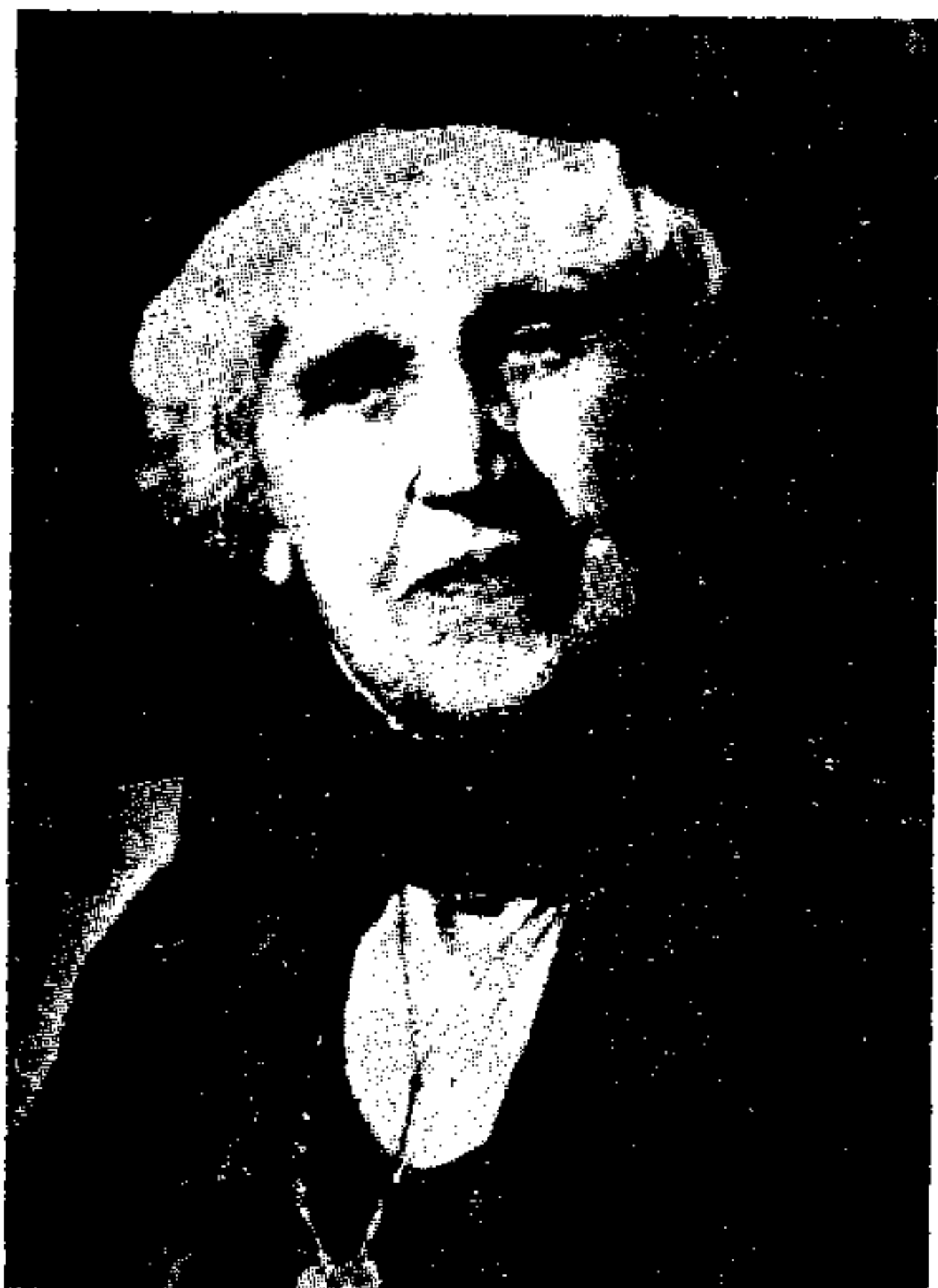


Vivekananda as a Wandering Monk

An Early Photograph in America



In California, 1900



Josephine MacLeod



Mrs. Ole Bull



Sister Christine



Sister Nivedita



Alasinga Perumal



J.J. Goodwin



Mrs. J.H. Sevier



Capt. J.H. Sevier



*J.H. Wright
(Professor of Greek at the Harvard University)*

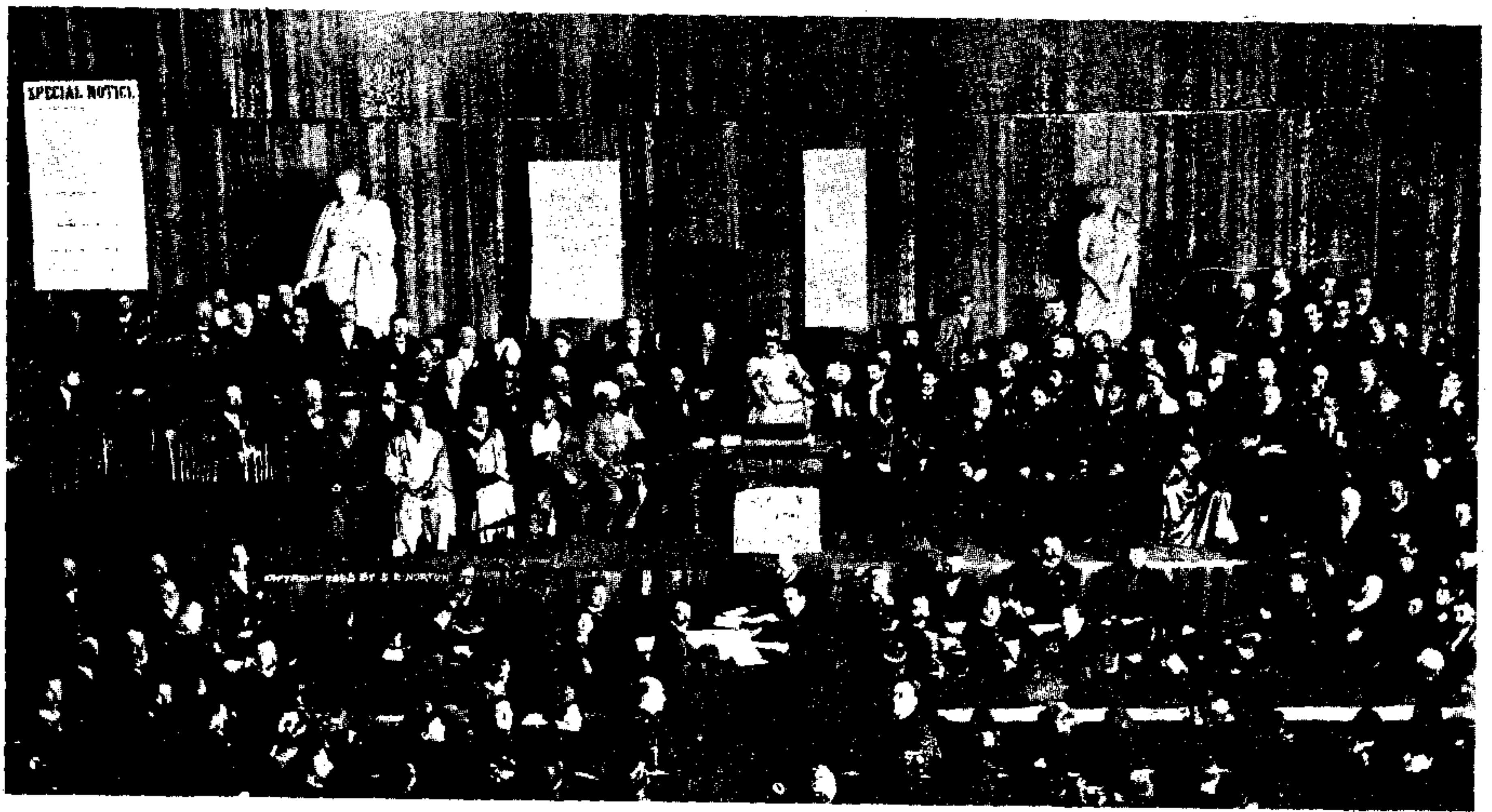


At the Parliament of Religions

The Four Cousins

Left to right: Harriet McKindley, Mary Hale, Isabelle McKindley, Harriet Hale





The Parliament of Religions in Chicago, 11 September 1893

Indian Group at Chicago in 1893

Left to right: Narasimhacharya, Lakshminarayan, Vivekananda, Dharmapala, and Virchand Gandhi



*Vivekananda as a Delegate to the
Parliament of Religions*



After the Parliament of Religions

At Greenacre, 1894



*Miss Dutcher's Cottage
at Thousand Island Park*

