

Prabuddha Bharata

OR

Awakened India



वसिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत।

Katha Upa. I. iii. ६.

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इतिष्ठत जाग्रत



प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

Katha Upa. I. iii. 4

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

—Swami Vivekananda.

VOL. XXI]

NOVEMBER 1916

[No. 244

CONVERSATIONS AND DIALOGUES OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

(RECORDED BY A DISCIPLE.)

VI.

[Place: *Alambazar Math.* Year: *1897, May.*

Subjects: *Swamiji gives initiation to the disciple—questions before initiation—the testimony of the Vedas about the origin of the sacred thread.—Initiation is that which is to keep the mind always devoted to the thought of one's own liberation and the good of the world. }*

Swamiji had come back to Calcutta from Darjeeling and was staying at the Alambazar Math. Speculations were going on to remove the Math to some place on the bank of the Ganges. The disciple, now-a-days, used to go very often to Swamiji and sometimes would also pass the night there. Nâg Mahashoy, the first guide in the spiritual life of the disciple, did not give him formal initiation, and if the question was brought up would digress to Swamiji and say, "Swamiji Maharaj is the only fit person to become the Guru of the world." So, after being resolved in mind to take initiation, the disciple had, before this, expressed his desire to Swamiji in a letter addressed to Darjeeling. Swamiji in reply wrote: "If Nâgmohashoy has no objection, I shall gladly initiate you." The letter is still with the disciple.

It was the 19th Vaisakh of the year 1303 B. S. Swamiji agreed to initiate the disciple to-day. It was *the* red-letter day in the life of the disciple. So early in the morning, after taking his bath in the Ganges and buying some liches and other things, he reached the Alambazar Math at about 8 a. m. Seeing the disciple Swamiji jocosely said "Well, you are to be sacrificed to-day, is it not?"

After this remark to the disciple, Swamiji with his smiling face resumed his talk with others about American subjects. And in due relevency came along such topics also as how one-pointed in devotion one has to be in order to build up spiritual life, how firm faith and strong devotion for the Guru have to be kept up, how deep reliance has to be placed on the words of the Guru, and how even one's

life has to be laid down for his sake. Then plying some questions to the disciple, he began to test his heart: "Well, are you ready to do my bidding to your utmost whatever it be and whenever it may come? If I ask you, to plunge into the Ganges or to jump from the roof of a house, meaning it all for your good, could you do even that without any hesitation? Just think of it when there is time even now, otherwise don't rush forward on the spur of a moment to accept a Guru." By asking some such questions, Swamiji began to test the strength of faith in the mind of the disciple. And the disciple with his head bending low answered 'yes' to each of them.

Swamiji then continued: "The real Guru is he, who leads beyond this Maya of endless rounds of birth and death,—who graciously destroys all the griefs and maladies of the soul. The disciple of old used to repair to the hermitage of the Guru with fuel in hand, and after ascertaining his competence, the Guru would teach him the Vedas after initiation, fastening round his waist the threefold filament of *munja*, a kind of grass, as the emblem of his vow to keep his body, mind and speech in control. With the help of this girdle, the disciples used to tie up their *Kaupinas*. The custom of wearing the sacred thread then superseded this girdle of *munja* grass."

Disciple— Would you then say, Sir, that the use of thread we have adopted is not really a Vedic custom?

Swamiji— Nowhere is there mention of thread being so used in the Vedas. The modern author of *Smritis*, Raghunandan Bhattacharya, puts it thus: "At this stage,* the sacrificial thread should be put on." Neither in Govila's *Grihya-sutras* do we find any mention of thread-made girdle. In the Shastras, this first Vedic *samskara* before

* Referring, that is to say, to some steps in the Vedic ceremony of a Brahmana's initiation.

the Guru has been called the *Upanayana*; but see, to what a sad pass our country has been brought! Straying away from the true path of the Shastras, the country has been overwhelmed with usages and observances originating in particular localities and fortuitous circumstances and with the womenfolk! That's why I ask you to proceed along the path of the Shastras as in olden times. Have faith within yourselves and thereby bring it back into the country. Plant in your heart the faith of Nachiketa. Even go off to the world of Yama. Yes, if to know the secrets of the Atman, to liberate your soul, to reach the decisive truth about the mystery of birth and death, you have to go for Truth's sake to the very jaws of death, well, go there with an undaunted heart. It is fear alone that is death. You have to cross beyond all fear. So from this day, be fearless. Off at once, to lay down your life for your salvation and for the good of others. What good is it carrying along a load of bones and flesh! Initiated into the *mantra* of utter self-sacrifice for the sake of God, go, lay down for others this body of flesh and bones like the Muni Dadhichi! Those alone, say the Shastras, are the real Gurus, who have studied the Vedas and Vedantas, who are knowers of the Brahman, who are able to lead others beyond to fearlessness; when such are at hand, get yourself initiated, "no speculation in such a case." Do you know what has become of this principle now?—"like the blind leading the blind"!

It is now about nine o'clock in the morning. Swamiji did not go out to the Ganges to take his bath to-day, but finished it in-doors. Donning a new *Gerua* after his bath, he entered the chapel with calm footsteps and seated himself on the worship-seat. But the disciple did not follow him into the room but waited outside, expecting to be called in at the proper time. Now Swamiji withdrew into deep meditation,—in the 'free lotus-posture' as it is called, and with eyes almost closed;

as if body, mind and vitality all became perfectly motionless. After meditation, Swamiji called out to the disciple, "Come now, my child." Enraptured by this affectionate call, the disciple moved like a machine into the chapel. Directly on his entrance there, Swamiji bade him lock the door, and this done, he said: "Sit calm and quiet to my left side." The disciple then took a seat in due obedience to Swamiji's bidding. His heart within him was then all agog, pulsating with some unspeakable sentiment. Now Swamiji laid his 'lotus-hand' on the head of the disciple and asked him certain secret questions and he gave his replies as best as he could. Then thrice into his ear, Swamiji uttered the holy *mantram* selected for him and made the disciple utter it thrice before him. Then after some little advice regarding

spiritual practice, Swamiji looked in a fixed gaze into the eyes of the disciple for a while. The mind of the disciple being now highly self-involved and concentrated he sat quite still, wrapped up in some unspeakable mood and could not feel how long this state of things lasted. After this Swamiji spoke out: "Give me the Guru-dakshina."* The disciple replied, "Oh, what shall I give." On this Swamiji suggested, "Well, fetch any fruit from the store-room." So the disciple ran for the store-room and came back into the chapel with ten or twelve *liches*. These Swamiji took from his hand and ate up one by one, saying, "Now, your gift of Guru-dakshina is made."

* i. e. the special gift which a disciple has to make to his Guru as the symbol of the mutual relation being consummated.

OCCASIONAL NOTES.

THE greatest possessions of the human soul are really one and indivisible. We speak of it as many,—as love, wisdom, holiness, renunciation, piety and so forth. And then we speak of each of these as a multiplicity,—your love, my love, A's love, B's love, your wisdom, my wisdom, A's wisdom, and so on. But the real fact is that we are many, not the reality we possess. We only participate in it, and our participations are many and various. The egos honeycomb the reality they live upon; they distinguish the indistinguishable by their own self-distinctions. And this obstinacy of self-distinctions even ferments the one nectar into lethean vapours called the evil passions of man.

But the endless rounds of subject-object relation produce this illusion of distinctions, above which stands the reality in its inalienable unity. Call it by whatever name indicates your perspective of approach,—Love,

Wisdom, Renunciation, Spirituality, God or Brahman,—it is one and the same. We only participate in it to make it as many as we are and then pit my ideal against yours, A's ideal against B's. For each one has one's peculiar angle of experience and thought. It is the whole truth only that can dissolve this angularity, and the vision of the whole truth is vouchsafed but to the few. This truth is as simple as simple can be. It abolishes all the mockeries of the intellect and swallows it up as if in its material cause. The froth and foam of intellect is dispersed in a wink into the rippling water of truth. Blessed is he who has his intellect caught hold of as in a vice by the brooding sense of this simplest and highest truth. To him the subtleties of the massive intellects of his day are as children's play, for his penetration is like the pricking of endless bubbles of the intellect.

And this real One is having all the many

sucked into itself, and of the many one says: "My love is growing," another feels: "My renunciation is growing," while again another thinks his wisdom is growing, and so on. But the fact is that our participation in reality is deepening and widening all the while. Otherwise Buddha loved with a love that was as much his as mine, and Christ manifested the self-sacrifice that was as much his as mine, and the great Rishis gloried in spiritual possessions that belong to all for ever. The "mine and thine" is only an illusion of speech, of intellect, for the possession eventually swallows up the possessor, who is then relieved of his "I-ness" just as one is relieved of the intrusive body-consciousness in the enjoyment of some mental happiness. So the reality, the absolute, is neither yours nor mine; it simply is. We only seek it as ours, and it is the seeking which makes an I and a Thou, a God and a man.

And the great Sought-for stands as the relating bond between God and man,—the Bhágavat between Bhagavan and Bhakta. Both God and man own this bond as greater and more real than either, for they keep it up by seeking to deny themselves for its sake. In the all-consuming presence of this bond, call it Love or Wisdom or something else, the "I-ness" of God and man hides its diminished head as if it had rather not be. God and man run through endless gamuts of change to suit each other, but the great relating principle is like the fixed centre in the wheel of change, while love, wisdom, renunciation, holiness and so on are the loci of the moving axis of our vision of it. Once established in this centre, we transcend this variety of readings, and the simple glory of truth emerges from all the confusion of moral and religious terminology. Jnana, Bhakti, Karma, Yoga, shade into one another completely, and the clamouring voices of sects and preachers die out below. The smallest act and experience of life become instinct

then with the whole plenitude of truth. The flux of life at every point bears the fullness of the whole.

Our religion is the pilgrimage to this One Reality in which God and man participate as in their common substance and sustenance. And every man is a pilgrim to the Shrine who by his life moves in the right direction, no matter how his intellect accepts or rejects the truth about God and himself. The growing participation in this Reality is a term of wider connotation than theism, atheism, heathenism, idolatry and so forth. All believers and non-believers may be included in its roll of participators, and it marches an Ingersoll and the grossest idolater side by side as compeers in spiritual progress. Whoever grows in love and compassion, in wisdom and truth-seeking, in selfless work and renunciation, his is the Pilgrim's progress, no matter how he accepts the truth about God. For that truth actualises itself far more in that inner process of growth than in any mere intellectual process which gives you and me our idea of God. Our God in idea is a mere idol with us if we have not the true divine manifestation in growing love and wisdom and renunciation. So here is the true definition of idolatry. Whenever we cease to grow from within towards that Reality which manifests itself in the terms of our love, wisdom and selflessness, our God becomes idolatrous, however much conceived in supremely ideal attributes.

And in all forms of worship, sincerity is the criterion of truth and excellence,—sincerity which best draws us out towards the Reality in which God and man participate,—and not the degree of intellectual perfection in the conception of God. If we remember that God as He is in Himself is the Reality which our worship seeks to manifest *in us* as our love and wisdom and selflessness, then we find that the truth of God lies essentially in

the fact of sincere worship and not in the object, outside of us, that we worship. So whatever this object may be, if the worship is true, our God is bound to be true. It matters not how God is true or false as being the object we worship; if the truest worship comes out symbolised round that object, the truest God also comes out to accept that worship. It is the truest worship which makes the truest God and not the truest idea of God our intellect may form. In the Talmud, the story is told how Moses was rebuked by God for frightening away a true worshipper, when the latter, praying alone in a forest solitude to his God to appear before him to accept his endearments such as combing the hair and the like, was interrupted and put to flight by Moses suddenly invading his solitude and accusing him of foolish ideas. God surrenders Himself to us not in the subtleties of our idea about Him but in the sincerity of our love, whatever form it may happen to take.

And this sincerity is a thing very difficult to understand. It means the putting forth of our whole, undivided, being at any instant,—the integrity of the life that we have in process at that moment. To have this integrity, this wholeness of life at its command, the mind must keep for the while all its ideas, sentiments and impulses on an even footing with one another, none getting the better of the other. We are truly sincere in proportion as our mind unreservedly asserts itself through this equipoise in thought, sentiment and impulse, so that its abstract ideas and feelings may not run off with it heedless of its realistic impulses. For in the modern rationalistic culture, religion is too apt to overlook our realistic impulses which go to make the concreteness of life. The symbolism of ancient faiths was the check which human mind used to exercise over its abstract ideas and feelings in the interest of its realistic impulses. Our pseudo-rationalism tends

to do away with this check, deluding us into a false, puffed-up attitude of sneer towards things "idolatrous." Modern rationalism, therefore, makes for insincerity in religious worship. In all other activities of life, in all our usual transactions with reality, we keep our eyes open to the concreteness of life, but in worship we must keep them closed. The measure of reality our senses give to all other activities is obstinately denied to the sacraments of worship, and this, only for the sake of an *abstract idea* we have of a higher order of reality which is bound to remain a mere implication of our religion, whether we move with closed eyes amongst the ideas and sentiments of the intellect or move with open eyes amongst the sensuous adjuncts and symbols of worship. But still there is this vital difference that in the latter case nothing but a higher realism and concreteness can ever claim to supersede the lower one, while in the former case a spurious and abstract intellectual satisfaction may easily succeed throughout our life in usurping the birthright of our soul to the concreteness of a higher realisation.

So it is of the highest moment that our worship should be sincere in the truest sense. The very essence of worship, we have seen, lies in what comes out of the soul in the act of worship and not in what we happen to hold out before us as the object of worship. And as our actual life deals both with objects of sense and intellect, our worship to be sincere in the fullest sense must have symbols both of sense and of intellect. So long as man has to worship with his human mind, the same mind that he asserts in real concrete life-experiences must be carried along in all its integrity and richness into his acts of worship, and for him it is insincerity to come into the presence of *his* God invariably with a mind crippled in its sense-experience. For this reason, the Vedic religion that developed in India never sought to abolish

the external, symbolistic form of worship (बाह्य-पूजा), however much its inferiority might have been brought to view, almost in season and out of season; while credal religions, priding themselves on their intellectual conceptions of God, anthropomorphic because personal, and consequently erring in their psychology of worship, have always tended

towards an exaggerated deprecation of symbolistic worship, being betrayed ultimately by modern rationalism into its out-and-out condemnation as idolatry. But we have seen that worship becomes unreal and eccentric, only when we worship more for the sake of *our God* than for the sake of *our worship*.



THE REAL PROBLEM IN INDIA.

I.

MOST people who have learnt to talk about India carry in mind their own idea of the real problem for India, and having imbibed, more or less, the Western culture in thousand ways from a prevailing atmosphere of thought created by modern civilisation, they have this problem created for them by an intellectual contrast drawn implicitly or explicitly between India and the West. But is it correct to have the real problem for India deduced wholly from such a contrast?

The history of every country gives it a characteristic individuality, a special line of its own in the organic growth of life and thought. So its central and vital problem in every age is peculiarly its own, and we can never derive it wholly from circumstances which react on its life and thought from outside.

But to this argument the modernist reformers in India would reply that actual histories dealing with the varied march of events in different countries may of course differ in their contents and records, but there is such a thing as the philosophy of history, a generalised view of all the histories of the world, and this philosophy is equally applicable to the historical study of every country on earth, be it India or England, Persia or Peru, Mexico or Kamaskatka. So if we study Indian history from this philosophical standpoint, we

cannot shut ourselves up within the narrow range of purely Indian efforts and struggles; we must at every step take a comparative view of history, seeking to read in the events of one country essentially the same story of human achievement and failure that we read in the events of another. This philosophy of history lifts up our historical studies to the universal standpoint of a world-history and a world-culture, and even India cannot refuse to be studied from this universal standpoint involving constant comparison and contrast.

Yes, nobody denies that there must be a philosophy of history, imposing on us the utmost necessity of a comparative study of the evolution of different nations and countries of the world. But you do not get such a philosophy unless first you philosophise on some definite data of historical facts. You must start with some given materials for your philosophisings. And how and whence, pray, did you derive all those historical data on which you based your generalisations to provide yourself with the modern philosophy of history?

To this question there is one and only one reply to be given by our modern philosophers of history. They cannot help admitting that the scheme of life and its achievements, with which they started, was purely a deduction from the course of history which Western

countries have been following close before their eyes. Experience is ultimately the bed-rock of all philosophy and the modern philosophy of history really makes experience in Western history the standard and measure for all experiences in the history of the world. Human life on the globe, past, present and future, has thus come to be interpreted and valued purely in the terms of the European life and its own peculiar achievements. Europe is practically seeking to dominate the whole outlook of humanity on its past, present and future. Alas, for our universal philosophical standpoint in history!!

And the pity and shame of it is that this European domination in thought has mostly been forced on humanity at the point of the political conqueror's bayonet, the present war being quite a side-issue as to which member of the European confraternity is to hold in hand this political weapon of thought-domination. Do not, please, point to Japan as the politically unconquered disciple of the Western philosophy of life; it was the fear of political fetters that made the modern Japan, and it may yet be that the weight of cultural fetters would unmake it again,—which God forbid!

So why should we go to understand and study India through the historical eye-glasses of European experience? Comparative study of Indian history is a good thing no doubt, but what is that philosophy of life on which the basis of our comparisons should be laid? The evolution of a society or a nation is but a process embodying a progressive organisation of life. It is evident that this process cannot be quite alike—alogous in every particular—in every case, for the simple reason that the ultimate principle, purpose or ideal which governs the organisation of life in one case may differ from that in another. We are apt to lose sight of this fundamental difference in the scheme of organisation when making a comparative study of Indian history and Indian problems.

No careful student of historical facts can deny that Indian history starts with a positive scheme for the organisation of life, but none has yet evinced insight and patience enough to follow step by step the issues and the fortunes of this scheme,—to ascertain what becomes of it in every age in the constant tangle of events. For this reason, the history of India has not yet been written. Yet we have a history of our own, and we assert this on the strength of the indubitable fact that our earliest forefathers really had their own definite scheme for the organisation of life, and it is our fault and misfortune if we do not keep this scheme constantly before us as the chart for our historical research and study.

Now every scheme for the organisation of life has a central, a pivotal, feature, and it consists in how we conceive of the efficiency of life. In the Indian scheme, the *spiritual* efficiency of life is the central or pivotal idea, the efficiency in other respects has to come merely as a means or an implication. In the European scheme of organisation, the *material* efficiency of life is the central, the governing idea, while efficiency in other respects is valued in the measure of its subserviency to this central idea. As our present-day comparisons between ourselves and the Europeans mostly resolve themselves into questions of comparative efficiency and inefficiency, it may be just useful to our present discussion to make use of the idea of efficiency in characterising the different schemes of life which the course of history in India and Europe serves to bring out in our view.

But before we proceed to consider how this difference in the fundamental schemes of life necessarily involves a difference in our outlook on the future and in the nature of our problems for the present, the very claim of the Indian scheme of life on our present-day efforts to organise a nation in India may be contested on the ground that it has already been given a trial longer by far than any trial which

would have brought the Western scheme of life to a successful fruition in any country on earth. So even granting that there was a definite scheme for organising life in ancient India, the very history of this scheme justifies us in rejecting such a scheme wholesale or modifying it in its essential features.

We are what our history has made us through its successes and failures, and our history is really the history of that scheme of life with which the Vedic civilisation started in the earliest ages. So although you and I and some thousands of educated men in India may turn round and spurn at the scheme of life which in its process of fulfilment has just brought us where we stand to-day, that brave action on our part will not serve any bit of that tempting purpose for which that action is taken. In individual life you may go back upon a choice, but a collective choice which has already made history, good or bad, for thousands and thousands of years does not admit now of our going back upon it. You cannot even modify it in its essential features, you can only restate or re-interpret the whole on the unalterable basis of its essential significance. So the choice has been made for all time. It cannot be revoked; it can only be supplanted by a choice of death.

And the trial it has stood for so many centuries cannot be ended abruptly now by the fiat of any number of the dupes of the Western scheme of life. Yes, it has been a very long trial that the Indian scheme of life has stood through history, but then its problems have been peculiar and very difficult. India is a vast country, and a proper organisation of life on this vast scale can never be the work of a few centuries. During long periods of history before the Moslem invasion, problems of racial fusion and harmony had persistently to be tackled by the Indian scheme of life while keeping in tact on the other hand its essential significance and features in the teeth of the most trying circumstances. Islam not only accentuated most

of the old problems but created for it a deeper problem of religious harmony. But it never succumbed to the crushing weight of its many problems, but was silently at work during all the centuries of Moslem political ascendancy. And when Moslem power was on the wane, it was found quite competent to create new political forces to meet the situation. If we look at the results obtained after all these many centuries of trial, we find it evident that its work of organisation has all along been proceeding apace, obviously at a very slow rate. For, beyond all the diversity of language and sect, a wonderful unity of culture and thought-life is found to have been assiduously built up. All parts of India are found to pulsate with common thought-ideals and a common mentality, and this deeper community in thought and life makes the veil of linguistic difference too transparent to withstand any process of collective organisation. The English language and the various facilities of communication provided by Western science have only served to give a fuller scope and a richer opportunity to this essential unity of life and thought already established all over India before the advent of Western politics. And this essential unity of Indian thought and life was but the silent achievement of the old Indian scheme of life toiling perseveringly with its task of organisation beyond all the superficial din and clash of sweeping political changes.

So it is not true that the Indian scheme of life has proved hopelessly remiss or backward in its task of organisation. It may be said only that it is taking a longer time than the other scheme of life has generally taken to organise life in any Western country. But our contention is that this is due not to any defect in the scheme of life itself but rather to its superior intrinsic merits. So let us see more closely into this issue.

It is generally complained that the Indian scheme of life is vitally defective because the stress it laid on the political efficiency of life

is almost zero, and it is further pointed out that all the serious delay, serious to the point of being rather hopeless, to which it has been exposed in its work of organisation is undoubtedly ascribable to this one supreme defect. The Indian scheme of life neglected to develop the political consciousness in our collective life of old, and as a result we find in Indian history such shameful instances of political imbecility among common people as would have been impossible in any country where life is sought to be organised by the Western scheme.

But as far as the head and front of this plausible complaint against the Indian scheme of life is concerned, it is baseless and untenable. For though this scheme makes the spiritual efficiency of life the supreme, central concern, it does not, in the first place, necessarily follow that it discourages political efficiency. Politics can never be eliminated from any organic scheme of human life, but its claim to be valued as the governing end may be denied. In the Western scheme of life, politics organises and governs all the other ends of life, so political efficiency is the greatest stake and it must be maintained, even though efficiency in other respects be forfeited under the stress of peculiar circumstances. Similarly, in the Indian scheme of life the spiritual end organises and governs all other ends and the *āpaddharma* or the rule of grave crisis is that the spiritual efficiency of life must be somehow maintained even though efficiency in other respects be put in jeopardy. In Indian history during the whole of that long period which followed the age of Kurukshetra, we find this important rule, this vital principle, followed most faithfully, and simply because the collective energies of the people kept themselves focussed on this central aim of spiritual efficiency, it was found always possible to develop efficiency on other lines whenever or wherever the pressure of critical circumstances happened to be removed for a while. And again and again in

history we find this central efficiency in spiritual pursuits coming out as the creator of new political forces whenever or wherever it is exposed to serious danger by political causes. It is too much to expect political efficiency according to modern conceptions in people living in ancient or mediæval ages, and if we compare the popular growth in political consciousness in Western and Eastern countries, we find the marked superiority of Western peoples in this respect really asserting itself during the last few centuries. But what stands out as the most unique and important fact in the history of India before these centuries is the wonderful capacity of the Indian people for preserving in tact the real foundation of their nationality in the face of political circumstances which would have swept away for ever the same foundation in the case of peoples who had laid it in politics. When we study this fact, we cannot help feeling profoundly thankful that the history of India in the earliest ages gave a spiritual basis instead of a political one to the historical development of our nationality, and even all the many historical instances of political imbecility, arising mainly from failures to assign true political values to circumstances in life, appear pardonable in a people who succeeded so wonderfully on the whole in maintaining their superior scale of spiritual values to be applied to the changing conditions of life. The problem which comes out unsolved through all these failures in Indian political life is really a problem for modern ages and India is yet to enter the arena of modern life through the threshold of its solution. How this consummation is to be brought about forms actually the subject of our discussion.

And no wonder this political problem in India had to wait so long, if we consider how the greater problem of laying, broad and deep, the truest foundation for her nationality kept India silently at work during this long period of history amidst misfortune and in-

security pressing on her from all directions. Elsewhere—in any other country where this chosen foundation has been political, its up-building has no doubt taken much less time. Political interests of human life lie fairly on its surface, and corporate activity and thought may be organised, as a general rule, more easily and quickly round the centre of such patent, palpable interests which the human mind learns to appreciate with very little or no training at all. But as there was this advantage in the choice of a political foundation for nationality, there were disadvantages which absolutely counterbalanced it in the case of India. In the first place, consistently with her own scheme of human life, India could never have proceeded to build on politics, for that would have amounted to disowning her real self. Secondly, she had to deal with a vast country, and the attempt to organise a lasting unity of life here on the pivot of any type of life's surface interests would have been the most precarious experiment in nation-building. Such an attempt would have naturally resulted in an inevitable partition of the whole country by political states, creating a greater problem of solidarity on a political basis, and it can be proved that without a deeper solidarity in thought and spirituality, any real future for India would have remained a despair along such a line of historical development. So ancient India took the only possible line left open for organisation of life, and that was to build up a unity of life on the basis of interests that lie much closer to the core of that life, so that the diversity of surface interests might not interfere much with that work. And because the foundation was thus laid much deeper and truer, more time was naturally demanded for the task of making men's life in India habitually conform and correspond to that foundation of their nationality—the task of rallying thought and life in India over that foundation.

It may be said therefore that the Indian

scheme of organising life has not proved itself backward in its work of organisation taken in the bulk, but that only a particular section of that work has been delayed by a century or two. It is really in one item of the organisation work that India finds herself lagging behind other Western nations, and that is the taking over by the people at large of the work that the Indian scheme of life was doing *for them* through the chosen few. All makers of Indian history, great and small, through countless ages, have been working, *for the people* and from scattered centres, towards a national unity of thought and life. Now the hour has struck to make of these scattered centres one broad platform of work and to bring the people up on this one platform to take upon themselves the whole task and its responsibilities. The unity in thought and life, we spoke of above, has now to become self-conscious in the life of the individual. The scheme of life which has all along been seeking to assert itself throughout our history by creating opportunity and environment out of circumstances over which it had very little control must now reveal itself as our nationalism moulding every circumstance of our life and thought to its own supreme uses, and every individual life must be baptised into this national creed. This is the real problem in India to-day.

This process of nationalising the Indian scheme of life implies the growth of that collective consciousness in every individual the want of which has been the saddest feature in the past history of India. Even that highly promising institution of village communities which commands to-day the admiration of all students of Indian history could not prove the success that it deserved to be, only because of this want of collective consciousness. But we must remember that this deplorable deficiency is not any necessary outcome of the Indian scheme of life. It is simply the result of an unavoidable delay, to which that scheme was subjected by

peculiar circumstances, in reaching a particular stage in its work of organisation where over and above its significance for individual life it begins to assume its all-round significance for collective life. And just when the Indian scheme of life is on the point of entering upon this stage of assuming its own proper collective significance, we the educated men in India are blindly rushing forward to disown it and set it aside so that our favourite Western scheme of life may occupy the field only to confuse the real issues and thereby undo the whole work done through untold centuries!

For collective consciousness implies thought and action directed *conducively* towards some central collective purpose in life. In the Indian scheme of life this central purpose is spiritual, and this spiritual purpose is to organise all our collective thoughts and activities. We acquire our national unity by rallying round this central spiritual purpose; we pursue all the collective interests of our life, political, economical, social and so on, just to make them conducive to this central spiritual purpose. Here our national self-consciousness is centred in our collective spiritual mission in the world. It is essentially a collective spiritual consciousness, and it just takes the hue of political consciousness only when it works in the sphere of our political interests to shape them according to the central spiritual purpose. But in spite of this assumption of different colours and complexions, our collective consciousness remains inalienably spiritual at its core, and the nature of that sympathy and interest which bind one individual in the nation to another remains spiritual all the while. So the organisation of collective life in the case of the Indian scheme of life is as thorough, compact and complete as in the case of the Western scheme of life; the texture and make-up shows a similar plan of warping and woofing and is as strong and rigid as can be desired, but still the finished product is quite

different in its significance and value to humanity.

In the Western scheme of life, collective consciousness is essentially political at its core. It is political sympathy and interest which form the bond between individuals in the nation and collective political efficiency is the central governing purpose of the national life. Here political interests form the organising principle in national unity, and all other collective pursuits must look up to this organising principle for having their value and place assigned in the scheme of collective life. So is it possible to transplant such a scheme of collective life into the soil of India which for centuries has surrendered itself to the operation of another scheme fundamentally different in its spirit and outlook? No muddling in collective human affairs can be more fatal in its effects than an attempt at such transplantation. And yet it is this fatal muddling that is going to be introduced into our country with the laudable object of imparting political efficiency to our collective life, while the self-same object can be gained to an extent necessary in our case by giving the Indian scheme of life that collective significance which it is just waiting to receive at our hands. In another article, we propose to consider how this blind preference for an alien scheme of life is multiplying insoluble problems on all sides, while the real problem in India lies unheeded and neglected at the very threshold of a glorious national life, the real and the only promise of a glorious future.

Everything is hideous because the building is unfinished. We had to stop building during centuries of oppression. Now finish the building and everything will look beautiful in its own place. This is all my plan.

—Swami Vivekananda.

EPISTLES OF
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

C.

(Translated from Bengali.)

Baranagore,
7th Aug. 1889.

Dear Sir,

You have expressed embarrassment in your last favour for being addressed as above.* But the blame attaches not to me but to your own excellent qualities. I wrote in one letter before that from the way I feel attracted by your lofty virtues it seems we had some affinity from previous births. I make no distinction as to householder or Sannyasin in this that for all time let my head bend low in reverence wherever I see greatness, broadness of heart and holiness—*santih, santih, santih!* My prayer is that among all the many people embracing Sannyasa now-a-days, greedy of honour, posing renunciation for the sake of a living, and fallen off from the ideal on both sides, may one in a lakh at least become high-souled like you! To you my Brahmin fellow-disciples who have heard of your noble virtues tender their best prostrations.

About one amongst my several questions to which you sent your replies, my wrong idea is corrected. For this I shall remain indebted to you for ever. Another of these questions was: whether Acharya Sankara gives any conclusion, regarding caste based on *gunas* as mentioned in Puranas like Mahabharata. If he does, where is it to be found? I have no doubt that according to the ancient view in this country, caste was hereditary, and it cannot also be doubted that sometimes the Sudras used to be oppressed more than the helots among the Spartans and the Negros among the Americans! As for

* The form of address alluded to is an expression in Sanskrit meaning "To one of adorable feet"—a form used customarily of superiors.

myself, I have no partiality for any party in this caste question; because I know it is a social law and is based on diversity of *guna* and *karma*. It also means grave harm if one bent on going beyond *guna* and *karma* cherishes in mind any caste distinctions. In these matters, I have some mental attitude developed in me by the grace of my Guru, but if I come to know of your views, I may just confirm some points or rectify others in that attitude. You don't have honey dripping unless you poke at the hive,—so I shall put you some other questions, and looking upon me as ignorant and as a boy, please to give proper replies without taking any offence.

1. Is the Mukti, which the Vedanta-sutras speak of, one and the same with the Nirvana of Abadhuta-Gita and others?

2. What is really meant by Nirvana, if according to the aphorism † beginning with "without the function of creating etc." none can attain to the fullest Godhood?

3. Chaitanya-deva is said to have told Sârbabhoma at Puri, "I understand the Sutras of Vyasa, they are dualistic, but the

† This aphorism is: जगद्व्यापारवर्जं प्रकरणादसंनिहितत्वाच्च । IV-4-13, Vedanta-sutras.—"Having regard to the context which ascribes the threefold function relating to the universe only to God, and because the fact of their conscious mental distinction comes between that function and their liberated state, we have to conclude that the state of final liberation or Mukti in the case of men is devoid of the capacity to create, preserve and dissolve the universe." So if this capacity is reserved only for God, what is meant, Swamiji asks, by saying that in Nirvana the human merges completely into the Divine?

We must remember that many of the questions here reflect only the intellectual stages through which Swamiji was reaching out in those days towards that plenitude of Vedantic wisdom, which was his in future years. We also find a glimpse of those processes through which his intellect was growing towards a fuller understanding of our ancient scriptures and customs.

commentator makes them monistic, which I don't understand." Is this true? Tradition says, Chaitanya-deva had a dispute with Prakashananda Saraswati on the point and Chaitanya-deva won. One commentary by Chaitanya-deva was rumoured to have been existing in Prakashananda's Math.

4. In the Tantra, Acharya Sankara has been called a crypto-Buddhist; views expressed in Prajnaparamita, the Buddhist Mahayana book, perfectly tally with the Vedantic views propounded by the Acharya. The author of Panchadashi also says, "What we call Brahman is the same truth as the Sunya of the Buddhists." What does all this mean?

5. Why no foundation for the authority of the Vedas has been adduced in the Vedanta-sutras? First, it has been said that the Vedas are the authority for the existence of God and then it has been argued that the authority for the Vedas is the text: "it is the breath of God." Now, is this statement not vitiated by what in Western logic is called an argument in a circle?

6. The Vedanta requires of us faith, for conclusiveness cannot be reached by mere argumentation. Then, why has the slightest flaw, detected in the position of the schools of Sankhya and Nyaya, been overwhelmed with a fusillade of dialectics? Whom, moreover, are we to put our faith on? Everybody seems to be mad over establishing his own view; if, according to Vyasa, even the great Muni Kapila, "the greatest among perfected souls" ‡ is himself deeply involved in error, then who would say that Vyasa may not be so involved in a greater measure? Did Kapila fail to understand the Vedas?

7. According to the Nyaya, "Sabda or Veda, (the criterion of truth), is the word of those who have realised the highest"; so the

Rishis as such are omniscient. Then how are they proved, according to the Surya-siddhanta, to be ignorant of such simple astronomical truths? How can we accept their intelligence as the refuge to ferry us across the ocean of transmigratory existence, seeing that they speak of the earth as triangular, of the serpent Vasuki as the support of the earth and so on?

8. If in His acts of creation God is dependent on good and evil Karmas, then what does it avail us to worship Him? There is a fine song of Nareshchandra, where occurs the following: "If what lies in one's destiny is to happen anyhow, oh Mother Kali, then what good all this invoking by the holy name of Durga?"

9. True, it is improper to hold many texts on the same subject contradicted by one or two. But why then the long-continued custom of Madhuparka and the like are repealed by one or two such texts as § "The horse sacrifice, the cow sacrifice, Sannyasa, meat-offerings in Sraddha" etc? If the Vedas are eternal, then what are the meaning and justification of such specifications as "this rule of *dharma* is for the age of Dwa-para," "this for the age of Kali" and so forth?

10. The same God who gives out the Vedas became Buddha again to annul them; which of these dispensations is to be obeyed? Which of these remains authoritative, the earlier or the later one?

11. The Tantra says, in the Kali-yuga the

§ Madhuparka was a Vedic ceremony usually in honour of a guest in which a respectful offering was to be made consisting, among other dainties, of beef. The text which Swamiji partially quotes forbids such food. For the full text means that in the Kali-yuga the following five customs are to be forsaken: The horse sacrifice, cow-killing ceremonies, meat-offerings in Sraddha, Sannyasa, and maintaining line of progeny through the husband's younger brother in case of failure through the husband.

‡ Kapila is so spoken of in Gita, X 26. In his commentary of V-s, II-1-1, Sankara doubts the identity of the Vedic Kapila with the Sankhyan Kapila.

Veda-mantras are futile. So which behest of God, the Shiva, is to be followed?

12. Vyasa makes it out in the Vedanta-sutras that it is wrong to worship the tetrad of divine manifestation, Vasudeva, Sankarsana etc. and again that very Vyasa expatiates on the great merits of that worship in the Bhagavata! Is this Vyasa a mad man?

I have many such doubts besides these and hoping to have them dispelled from my mind through your kindness, I shall lay them before you in future. Such questions can't be all set forth except in personal interview; neither can satisfaction be obtained as much as one expects to. So I have a mind to lay bare before you all these facts when presenting myself to you very soon by the grace of the Guru.

I have heard it said that without inner progress in the practice of religion, no true conclusion can be reached concerning these matters simply by means of reasoning; but satisfaction, at least to some extent, seems to be necessary at the outset.

Yours etc.

Vivekananda.

BRAHMOPANISHAT.

ब्रह्मोपनिषत्

(Continued from page 195)

कर्मण्यधिकृता ये तु वैदिके ब्राह्मणादयः ।
तैः संधार्यमिदं सूत्रं क्रियाङ्गं तद्धि वै स्मृतं ॥

But those belonging to the three castes (Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas) who have the right of performing Vedic works have to put on this (i. e. the common) sacred thread, as surely this thread is ordained to be a part of such works.

This verse admits that though the ordinary

sacrificial thread is a mere external symbol that may be discarded by those who put on the real girdle of Jnana, it cannot be dispensed with in the performance of Vedic works; so its putting off presupposes the giving up of such works. Compare the Vedic injunction: तस्माद्यज्ञोपवीत्येवाधीयीत वाजयेद्यजेतवा ।

शिक्षा ज्ञानमयी यस्य उपवीतं च तन्मयम् ।
ब्राह्मण्यं सकलं तस्य इति ब्रह्मविदो विदुः ॥

One who has the *Jnana* for his tufted hair, and the same for his sacred thread, has everything about him characterised by Brahmanhood,—so know the knowers of the Vedas (a)!

(a) ब्रह्मविदः—Here “Brahma” should mean the Vedas; for the contention implied here is that those who understand the real spirit of the Vedas recognise a Jnani, who has even cast off the Vedic symbol of the three higher castes, as being still a Brahmin in a real sense.

इदं यज्ञोपवीतं तु पवित्रं यत्परायणम् ।
स विद्वान्यज्ञोपवीती स्यात्स यज्ञः स च यज्ञवित् ॥

This sacred thread (of *Yajna*, i. e. of the all-pervading Reality) is, again, the purification (itself) and that which is the end-all (of Vedic works); and the wearer of this thread is the wise one,—is *Yajna* himself as well as the knower of *Yajna*.

Here “*Yajna*,” which in its sense of Vedic works justifies the use of a sacred thread, is used four times in its higher sense for the sake of effect.

एको देवः सर्वभूतेषु गूढः सर्वव्यापी सर्वभूता-
न्तरात्मा ।
कर्माध्यक्षः सर्वभूताधिवासः साक्षी चेता
केवलो निर्गुणश्च ॥

The one Lord (self-effulgent) in all beings remaining hidden, all-pervading and the Self of all beings, controlling and watching over all works (good or bad) living in all creatures and the Witness (i. e. not the doer of any acts nor the enjoyer), the Supreme

Intelligence, the One without a second, having no attributes.

Now the texts rise to the theme of that Reality which releases us from the bondage of all codes.

एको मनीषी निष्क्रियाणां बहूनामेकं

सन्तं बहुधा यः करोति ।

तमात्मानं येऽनुपश्यन्ति धीरास्तेषां

शान्तिः शाश्वती नेतरेषाम् ॥

The one Intelligent (active) Being among the many inactive, He who makes the many from what is one,—the wise men who find out this Self, theirs is the eternal peace, not of others.

आत्मानमरणिं कृत्वा प्रणवं चोत्तरारणिम् ।

ध्याननिर्मयनाङ्गवासाद्देवं पश्येन्निसूढवत् ॥

Having made oneself the *Arani*, and the *Pranava* the upper *Arani* and by the practice of rubbing them together through meditation, see the Lord in his hidden reality.

अरणिः—A piece of wood of the Shami tree used for kindling the sacred fire by friction.

The analogy is simple in this *mantram*: Self-consciousness is the lower wood, the *Pranava* or the syllable *Om*, is the upper wood. The process of rubbing is meditation which produces the fire of 'the knowledge of Atman.' It is called **निगुढवत्** i. e. hidden or unmanifested, because just as prior to the process of rubbing fire is hidden in the wood, so is the Self or the Atman hidden in men.

तिलेषु तैलं दधिनीव सर्पिरापः स्रोतःस्वरणीषु

चाग्निः ।

एवमात्माऽऽत्मनि गृह्यतेऽसौ सत्येनैतं तपसा

येऽनुपश्यति ॥

As is the oil in the sesamum seed, the butter in the curd, water in the flowing waves and fire in the Shami wood, so is the Atman in one's self, to be discovered by one who finds for It through truth and austere practice.

(To be continued).

THE STORY OF GOPAL'S MOTHER.

(BY BRAHMACHARI BHAKTI-CHAITANYA)

"And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me."—Mathew.

Those who have read Sister Nivedita's masterpiece "The Master as I saw him" are well familiar with the name of 'Gopaler Mâ.' In that fervent style peculiar to herself, the Sister describes: "Gopal's mother was an old woman. She had already been old, fifteen or twenty years before, when she had first walked over, one day at noon, from her cell at Kamarhatty, by the Ganges-side, to see the Master in the garden at Dakshineswar. He received her, so they say, standing at his door, as if he expected her. And she, whose chosen worship had been for many years Gopala, the babe Krishna, the Christ-child of Hinduism,—saw Him revealed to her, as in a vision, as she drew near. How true she always was to this! Never once through all the years that followed, did she offer salutation to Sri Ramakrishna, who took her thenceforth as his mother. And never have I known her to speak of our Holy Mother, save as "my daughter-in-law."

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "First, obtain Bhakti and all other things shall be added unto you. Prema is like a string in the hands of the Bhakta, binding to him that Sachchidananda which is God. The devotee holds the Lord, so to speak, under his control." But how can love or Bhakti grow between man and God? It grows when there is some mutual relation between them. Hence, the Shastras which deal with Bhakti-yoga speak of various relations a man can have with his God. In Christianity as preached and practised by the present-day Missionaries only the Fatherhood of God is accepted. They say, that they are related to God as a son is to his father; the devotee must love God as his own father. But in the Vaishnava philosophy we find the highest development of this idea of relationship with God. According to it there are five types of love and relation to God:—शान्त, दास्य, वात्सल्य, सख्य, मधुर. The Shanta Bhakti is calm, peaceful and gentle. It is the lowest type. The fire and the madness of love have not yet grown. The Dasya

Bhakta thinks himself the servant of the Lord. Examples are not wanting of Dasya Bhaktas. It is very common in all countries and in all religions. But the other three kinds of Bhaktas are peculiar to India and particularly the Vaishnava philosophy. Vatsalya is loving God not as our father but as our child, Sakhya is loving Him as our beloved friend, i. e. the love of Arjuna to Sri Krishna. There is one more representation of the divine ideal of love which is known as Madhura—sweet. It is based on the highest manifestation of love in this world, and this love is also the strongest known to man. It is the love of the wife for the husband. The *Gopis* of Vrindavan are the highest exemplars of this love.

Of all these types the Vatsalya Bhava or loving God as our child looks very peculiar. But this is a discipline to enable us to detach all ideas of power from the concept of God. To conceive God as mighty, glorious, the Lord of Universe, this lover does not care. He loves for love's sake. He does not want anything in return and so any powers of God do not concern him at all. He cannot ask any favour from Him as he does not ask any from his child. It is to root out the superstitions of awe and fear in relation to God that this idea seems to have been developed in India. Those who are acquainted with the life of Sri Ramakrishna know well his relation to the image Ramlala or the babe Ram. How he used to love the image as his own child, nay, the Lord, the incarnation Ramchandra as his own son! Our Gopaler Ma belonged to this type of Bhaktas. She used to worship or, it would be better to say, love the Lord as her own child.

Gopal's mother, or Aghoremoni Devi as she was then called, was married very young. But she lost her husband soon after her marriage. So, she used to live in her brother's house. Her brother Nilmadhab Mukhopadhaya was highly regarded by the people of his village Kamarhatty near Dakshineswar. He was the priest of one Govinda Chandra Dutta who had a temple-house by the side of the Ganges. But Govinda Chandra did not live the mortal life for a long time and his widowed wife being also a devout lady, Aghoremoni made great friends with the widow, and she wanted to live most of her time in their temple-house. Her friend readily agreed to that and

henceforth she began to live in the temple-garden of Govinda Babu by the side of the Ganges. The room in which Gopaler Mâ used to live within the temple-garden at Kamarhatty was nicely situated. The surroundings were all calm and quiet and it commanded a beautiful sight of the holy Ganges. Aghoremoni would sit in her room alone and enjoy the grand view it presented. She was a great *Japaka* and would repeat day and night the holy name of her *Ishtam*, the chosen ideal. She would not care to meet people and had lived in that room occupied with her meditations, Japam and holy communion with the Lord for thirty long years when she met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time.

Dakshineswar was only two or three miles from Kamarhatty where Gopaler Mâ lived. Sri Ramakrishna's fame had then spread far and near and Aghoremoni heard that Sri Ramakrishna was living at Dakshineswar. So, without losing any more time she went to see the Saint at Dakshineswar with the widow of Govinda Babu. It was in the year 1884 and in the beginning of the winter season. They went on a boat from Kamarhatty and soon reached the garden-house at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna received them very kindly, as if they were known to him before this meeting. He took them in his own room and said that *Bhakti* or the love of God was the only thing to be attained in this life, and sang some devotional songs to them. They then took leave of him for that day and Sri Ramakrishna in his usual way did not forget to request them to come again. They also requested him to come to their temple-house once when he would find the opportunity. Sri Ramakrishna spoke very highly of Gopal's mother that day,—of her great devotion and love for Gopal or the Baby Krishna.

From the day of her first meeting Aghoremoni realised an unusual attraction for Sri Ramakrishna though she could not imagine at the time that they were eternally associated in spiritual affinity and that her Gopal was embodied in Sri Ramakrishna. However, she went home and passed her days in *tapasya* as usual. But many days had not passed when one day she sat in her meditation and a strong, irresistible longing came into her mind to see the saint of Dakshineswar. She could not help starting to see the God-intoxicated man. So,

she at once got up, bought some stale sweets (for they were the only ones then found in the market) for Thakur and went alone to see him at Dakshineswar. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw her coming, he said, "Well, you have come! Give me what you have brought for me." Gopal's mother could not make out what to do! How to put before him those bad sweets? How many people offer him so many good things every day! And what kind of saint was he that as soon as she reached there he wanted to eat from her? However, with great hesitation Aghormani gave him those sweets and Thakur also took them at once and began to eat with joy like a child. He then told her that he wanted to eat vegetable curry cooked by her own hand. Gopal's mother thought, what kind of a saint was this who instead of talking about God talked only of food and food! She was a poor lady, so how could she provide him food so often? No, she must not come to see this man again! But what an unearthly attraction was this to lead her soul captive? As soon as she crossed the gate of the garden of Dakshineswar, her feet would not allow her to move further homewards! However, after some struggle, she was able to come back to Kamarhatty that day. But again many days did not pass before she had to return to Dakshineswar with a bowl of prepared vegetable curry in her hand. And Thakur also as before begged of her that food at once and partook of it with evident gladness. A few months passed in this way; Aghormani had to come to Dakshineswar every now and then and every time she would come with some food for Sri Ramakrishna. And Thakur always would request her to bring different kinds of vegetable curry prepared by her. At last one day, Gopal's mother really felt disgusted at his conduct and thought, "Oh Gopal, what is this? Is it because I always think of you that you compel me this way to come to a Sadhu who always wants only to eat and eat? No, I must not come to him any more!" But again the same irresistible and undefinable attraction worked. As soon as she would be away from him, her mind would be filled by the thought of the saint and the thought of coming to him again.

In the mean time Sri Ramakrishna also went once to see the temple at Kamarhatty where

Aghormani lived. He sang devotional songs before the image in the temple and took his food there and came back to Dakshineswar. At the time of singing these songs everyone present there was astonished and charmed at his strange way of falling into a trance or Samadhi as it is called.

Aghormani used to get up at 2 A. M. in the morning and continue telling her beads till 8 or 9 A. M. Then she would get up and work in the temple. Afterwards she cooked food for the Lord and took *prasadam*. Then again after resting a while she would sit to meditate till evening. In the evening she would attend the worship in the temple and then sit in Japam till late at night.

Now one such day she began to tell her beads as usual in the morning, and before she had finished it, to her utter astonishment she found Sri Ramakrishna sitting by her left side. She saw Thakur as vivid and life-like as she used to see him at Dakshineswar, and could not find out how it was possible for him to come there at such a time. She astonishingly looked on to find Sri Ramakrishna smiling at her. She then mustered courage in her heart and as soon as she took hold of his hand, the form of Sri Ramakrishna vanished when a real babe about 10 month's old came out of his body. That real Gopal then walked on his hands and feet and lifting one hand and looking at her said, "Mother, give me cheese." The state of Aghormani at that time could be better imagined than described. She had missed all her bearings in life and replied crying, "Oh my dear child, I am a poor, unfortunate woman; where shall I get cheese or butter for you?" But that strange Gopal would not listen to all these. He entreated for some food from his mother. What could she do but take out some dry sweets she had in her store and offer them? The child then became satisfied.

She would now again sit in Japam, but her Gopal would not allow it. He would sit on her lap, snatch away the beads and play with her. As soon as it was clear morning, Aghormani rose up and madly ran towards Dakshineswar, and Gopal also got up in her arms and accompanied her. All throughout the way she found the rosy feet of Gopal hanging on her breast, so strange is the play of God with His devotees! Aghormani reached the temple of Dakshineswar and before she had met

Sri Ramakrishna, she cried aloud "Gopal, Gopal." And Sri Ramakrishna also fell into a deep Samadhi when she reached him, and was for the while as a babe resting on her lap. Tears of love began to flow from her eyes and she fed Sri Ramakrishna with the cheese and the butter she brought with her. After a while Thakur came back to his senses and got back to his own seat. But Aghormani did not return to the ordinary plane of consciousness. She was beside herself in joy and danced like a mad woman. She was seeing her Gopal sometimes entering into the body of Sri Ramakrishna and again coming out of his body, sitting on her lap and playing with her. She was talking to Sri Ramakrishna: "Here is Gopal on my lap! Oh, he is now entering into your body. Ah, again he is coming out! Oh my dear Gopal, do come to your poor mother!" In this way she was going on when Sri Ramakrishna gradually pacified her. That whole day she lived at Dakshineswar with Thakur, and just before evening she came away to her own place. This time also on her way she had the clear vision of Gopal resting in her arms. In the evening again, when she sat down to meditate as usual, Gopal began to disturb her. And what was the need of any more meditating? For He for whom it was all done was revealed before her and playing with her. Aghormani at last got up from meditation and laid herself down on her bed with Gopal. But Gopal began to complain of the hard bed, and as there was no second pillow for the head he would not sleep. Gopal's mother pacified the child, saying that the very next morning she would send for a soft pillow from Calcutta. The next morning when she went to cook for her Gopal, the child also followed her, and began to gambol about her in many ways.

Aghormani had this constant vision of her child Krishna continually for two months. She actually lived, moved and had her being twenty-four hours of the day in the Baby Krishna. Such God-vision only the blessed few may have! Her devotion for Gopal had become so much intensified that God really took the form of Gopal and lived and played with her.

But after these two months she could not always see Gopal before her, but whenever she liked

to see Him she would meditate a little and He would appear before her.

After the passing away of Thakur, Gopal's mother became very disconsolate and miserable. She would not come out of her room for many days and only when she began to get visions of Thakur every now and then, she became reconciled. And whenever again she was a little unhappy, she used to come to the Math to see the Sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and sometimes she would live there with them.

When Swami Vivekananda returned from the West, Mrs. Sara C. Bull, Miss J. MacLeod and Sister Nivedita accompanied him to India. They once went to see Gopal's mother at Kamarhatti. There she received them very kindly for she saw her Gopal in them. She made them sit on her own mat and served them with pure Indian titbits. She softly touched their chin and kissed them in the Indian matronly fashion, and being asked about her visions related them many things. Sister Nivedita thus describes this visit: "There, a few of us went, one full-moon night, to visit her. How beautiful was the Ganges, as the little boat crept on and on! And how beautiful seemed the long flight of steps rising out of the water and leading up, through its lofty bathing ghat, on the right, where in a little room,—built probably in the first place for some servant of the great house at its side,—Gopaler-Ma had lived and told her beads, for many a year. * * * Her bed was of stone, and her floor of stone, and the piece of matting she offered her guests to sit on, had to be taken down from a shelf and unrolled. The handful of parched rice and sugar-candy that formed her only store and were all that she could give in hospitality were taken from an earthen pot that hung from the roof by a few cords. * * * On those beads, Gopaler Ma had become a saint! Hour after hour, day after day, for how many years had she sat, day and night, absorbed in them? When Swami Vivekananda heard of their visit, he told, 'Ah, this is the old India that you have seen, the India of prayers and tears, of vigils and fasts, that is passing away, never to return!'"

And really did she represent old India! For, in India alone even a child knows that God has to be realised in this life and one can have His

vision face to face. And our Gopaler Ma, a widow when she was very young, quite ignorant of the ways of the world, had given up all enjoyments of the world and devoted her life to the service and realisation of God. And how strange and wonderful were her realisation and vision of the Lord! In this age of scepticism she was indeed a light-pillar to us!

In the year 1903 Gopal's mother fell seriously ill and she had to be brought to Calcutta in Balaram Babu's house at Baghbazar. Sister Nivedita was so much charmed at her life that she expressed her eager intention to nurse her. Gopal's mother had no objection to it, for she had realised that her Gopal was in the heart of everybody. So, from this time Gopaler Ma lived in the house of Sister Nivedita. In the year 1906, when the time of her passing away from this mortal life came, she was carried to the Ganges and the Sister decorated her body with flowers and garlands. She lived by the side of the Ganges for two more days and then passed away from mortal sight.

Before we conclude our story of this wonderful life let us bow down to the Lord in the form of Gopal:

नवीन-वीरद-श्याम नीलेन्द्रीवल्लोचनं ।
वल्लवीनन्दनं वन्दे कृष्ण गोपालरूपिणं ॥

THE RAMKRISHNA MISSION FLOOD AND FAMINE RELIEF WORK.

We have opened two centres in the district of Benares at Makulpur and Balua; from them nearly 800 people of 45 villages are receiving weekly helps in the form of Jap, Bhutta, Barley and other food grains. Later on, the reports of the two all-sweeping and terrible floods of the river Ajoy reached us. The floods came some days apart and have affected Birbhum and the Guskara locality of the Burdwan district. The first one was not so devastating in its effects as the second one which came on the 3rd October. The Guskara locality is the worst sufferer. Here it has pulled down all the houses of every village, laid waste the corn-fields, and either buried or swept away

everything that the people had—their means of sustenance. In this locality alone 80 villages have fallen victim to it, all with the same tale to tell. Shelter and food are the immediate necessities. We have sent a batch of workers to offer relief there, who have opened a centre at Mahta in the Sahebgunj Thana, nearly six miles from the Guskara Railway Station. First distributions of rice over 13 villages have taken place. At present we shall take up only 40 villages out of 80. In these 40 even we shall be able to offer only food and nothing for relief of the homeless; for the fund in our hand has become so scanty, that if the public do not come forward with their help soon, it will be impossible for us to continue even this form of help for a long period. So we have closed all our 8 centres in Bankura district. Only the excavation work of the Ladna Canal is still continuing.

In Midnapur, relief work is still going on, the reason being the failure of the last Aus crop. But as the Aman crop has grown sufficiently, we expect to close our centres here when the harvesting will begin.

Clothes were also distributed from our Bankura centres. In our last report we appealed for cloths for our Midnapur centres but we got no response to it. This time we appeal again for cloths not only for the above-mentioned centre but also for the people of the flooded areas, where they are badly wanted. The winter season is fast approaching, when the bare fragments even will be of great use to the shivering people. We have at this moment in our hands only Rs. 1000 left, with which we have to offer relief in the three districts viz. Midnapur, Benares, Burdwan (Guskara). This sum can cover our expenditure for two weeks only, that even most barely. So we appeal to all to send us their help however small it may be.

Any contribution either in money or in cloth will be thankfully received at either of the two addresses and will be acknowledged:—

(1) Swami Brahmananda, President, Ramkrishna Mission, Belur, P. O., Dist. Howrah, (Bengal).

(2) Manager, Udbodhan Office, 1, Mukherjee Lane, Baghbazar P. O., Calcutta.

Saradananda,
Secy. R. K. Mission.

NEWS AND MISCELLANIES.

THE Ramkrishna Mission Sevashrama at Kankhal (Dt. Saharanpur U. P.) has been earnestly appealing to the generous public for contributions to the construction of a General Ward the absence of which in their hospital is causing the workers no end of difficulties. In the short review of its fifteenth Annual Report in September last, we pointed out that the estimated cost of constructing each of the four rooms in the proposed Ward would be about Rs. 1225. The kind-hearted Rani of Searsole in Bengal has donated the whole cost of one room, and news have reached us that a generous donor from Bombay is paying the cost for another room. So the appeal for contributions to cover the remaining half of the estimated cost must continue vigorously, for the longer the project is allowed to hang fire the greater would the work suffer, and already the difficulty about accommodation has become keen enough. What with this growing proportion of distress that has to be denied relief everyday on one hand and the increasing difficulties about maintenance owing to high prices of food and medicines, the Sevashrama is passing through a critical time, and it will remain indebted to all sympathisers and well-wishers who would now help to relieve the precarious condition of its construction and maintenance funds. In September last there were 3753 entries in the outdoor register, 1618 being for new cases against 1559 new cases in August, and the number of indoor patients was 62 as against 52 in August. The number of patients relieved monthly in the Sevashrama thus shows a steady increase. The Sevashrama takes this opportunity to gratefully acknowledge the gifts (1) of fruit and vegetable grafts from Mr. J. B. Kriplani of Muzafferpar and Mr. L. C. Shahari of Peshwar, (2) of rice from Mahadeo Brahman of Kankhal and from a Sindhi gentleman and (3) of 2 gold rings from Mr. B. T. Kapur of Multan.

THE Vivekananda Ashrama, Kuala Lumpur, F. M. S., has brought out its twelfth annual report reviewing the work done from 1st April 1915 to 31st March 1916. Thirty-seven new members were enrolled during the year. The whole work is managed by small committees appointed from the members there being one Managing Committee at the head and a separate School Committee for conducting the Vivekananda Tamil School attached to the Ashrama. Religious classes in the Ashrama and elsewhere "were held," the Report says, "with more or less regularity; the one in the Ashrama prospered well under the guidance of Mr. M. Sundarampillay. The keen desire now expressed by a large number of Hindus here to have

a Sannyasin teacher in our midst is largely attributable to the interest created by these classes." Regular Pujas were held in the Shrine room, as also Bhajanas on special occasions, but the condition of the Reading Room and Library is not improving. The elementary school at the end of 1915 had five classes and the average of attendance in December was 71. The Govt. grant for 1915 was 414 dollars which with the fees realised is not sufficient for the expenses. So, much of the financial support has to come from the public. In fact, public support has yet to be largely appealed for in order to give the Ashrama and the school a fighting chance of stability.

IN response to repeated requests from the students of Vedanta in Los Angeles, the Swami Paramananda began a six weeks course of lectures and classes there on June 18th. Besides these meetings in the regular series he was invited to conduct a special course of Class Talks at the Metaphysical Library and deliver other special lectures elsewhere. At the close of his season, prolonged beyond the original schedule, he was so strongly urged to remain and establish a permanent Centre, that although he twice set a day for leaving, he was unable to resist the persistent pressure brought upon him. A house remarkably well-adapted for the work was secured at 1071 South Hoover St., in one of the best sections of the city, and the first Service was held there on Sunday morning, August 20th. Since that time regular Sunday Services and bi-weekly classes have continued without interruption and great enthusiasm has been manifested in the new Centre. The Swami will remain in Los Angeles until the end of October. He will then resume his work at the Boston Vedanta Centre, leaving some one in charge of the Los Angeles Centre during his absence.

THE Ramkrishna Mission Sevashrama at Brindaban continues its appeal for contributions to the general Building Fund, for its receipts for this fund in Aug. and Sept. last were very poor amounting only to Rs. 72-8-0. The number of outdoor patients in Sept. was 4991, of which 1080 were new cases and that of indoor patients was 41 of which 34 were new cases. The construction of its buildings on the acquired plot of land is going on, and particulars about this work and its scheme may be ascertained on application to the Hony. Secy. of the Sevashrama, Brindaban, Dt. Muttra, U. P.

THE Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Trichinopoly organised an interesting course of ten daily lectures (at 5 p. m.) by learned and well-known speakers as the programme of its Navaratra celebration. We congratulate the society on this attractive and edifying programme.