

Prabuddha Bharata

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत



प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

Katha Upan. I. iii. 4

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

—Swami Vivekananda.

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CONVERSATIONS AND DIALOGUES OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

(RECORDED BY A DISCIPLE.)

PART II.—VI*

[Place—*The Belur Math (under construction)*. Year—1899.

Subjects: *The causes of India's downfall.—How to remove them.—To reconstruct the country after the Vedic ideals, and train up men like Manu and Yajnavalkya etc.*]

Disciple.— Why is it, Swamiji, that our society and country have come to such degradations?

Swamiji.— It is you who are responsible for it.

Disciple.— How, Sir? You surprise me.

Swamiji.— You have been despising the lower classes of the country for a very long time and as a result, you have now become the objects of contempt in the eyes of the world.

Disciple.— When did you find us despising them?

Swamiji.— Why, you priest-class never let the non-Brahmin classes read the Vedas and Vedanta and all such weighty

Shastras—never touched them even. You have only kept them down. It is you who have always done like that through selfishness. It was the Brahmanas who made a monopoly of the religious books and kept the question of sanction and prohibition in their own hands. And repeatedly calling the other races of India low and vile, they put this belief into their heads that they were really such. If you tell a man, "You are low, you are vile," in season and out of season, then he is bound to believe in course of time that he is really such. This is called hypnotism in English. The non-Brahmin classes are now slowly rousing themselves. Their faith in Brahminical Scriptures and Mantrams is getting shaken. Through the spread of Western education all the tricks of the

* The first five chapters of Part II have already appeared in the Complete Works, Vol. V.

Brahmins are giving way, like the banks of the Padmá in the rainy season,—do you not see that?

Disciple.— Yes, Sir, the stricture of orthodoxy is gradually lessening now-a-days.

Swamiji.— It is as it should be. The Brahmins, in fact, gradually took to a course of gross immorality and oppression. Through selfishness they introduced a large number of strange, non-Vedic, immoral and unreasonable doctrines—simply to keep intact their own prestige. And the fruits of that they are reaping forthwith.

Disciple.— What are these fruits, Sir?

Swamiji.— Don't you perceive them? It is simply due to your having despised the masses of India that you have now been living a life of slavery for the last thousand years; it is therefore that you are objects of hatred in the eyes of foreigners and are looked upon with indifference by your countrymen.

Disciple.— But, Sir, even now it is the Brahmanas who direct all ceremonials, and people are observing them according to the opinions of the Brahmanas. Why then do you speak like that?

Swamiji.— I don't find it. Where do the tenfold Samskaras or purifying ceremonies enjoined by the Shastras, obtain still? Well, I have travelled the whole of India, and everywhere I have found society to be guided by local usages which are condemned by the Srutis and Smritis. Popular customs, local usages, and observances prevalent among women only—have not these taken the place of the Smritis everywhere? Who obeys and whom? If you can but spend enough money, the priest-class is ready to write out whatever sanctions or prohibitions you want! How many of them read the Vedic *Kalpa* (Ritual), the *Grihya Sutras* and *Srauta*

Sutras? Then look here, in Bengal the code of Raghunandana is obeyed: a little farther on you will find the code of Mitakshará in vogue; while in another part the code of Manu holds sway! You seem to think that the same laws hold good everywhere! What I want therefore is to introduce the study of the Vedas by stimulating a greater regard for them in the minds of the people, and to pass everywhere the injunctions of the Vedas.

Disciple.— Sir, is it possible now-a-days to set them going?

Swamiji.— It is true that all the ancient Vedic laws will not have a go, but if we introduce additions and alterations in them to suit the needs of the times, codify them, and hold them up as a new model to society, why will they not pass current?

Disciple.— Sir, I was under the impression that at least the injunctions of Manu are being obeyed all over India even now.

Swamiji.— Nothing of the kind. Just look to your own province and see how the Vámáchára (immoral practices) of the Tantras has entered into your very marrow. Even modern Vaishnavism, which is the skeleton of the defunct Buddhism, is saturated with Vámachara! We must stem the tide of this Vámáchára, which is contrary to the spirit of the Vedas.

Disciple.— Sir, is it possible now to cleanse this Augean stable?

Swamiji.— What nonsense do you say, you coward! You have well nigh thrown the country into ruin by crying, 'It is impossible,' 'It is impossible.' What cannot human effort achieve?

Disciple.— But, Sir, such a state of things seems impossible unless sages like Manu and Yajnavalkya are again born in the country?

Swamiji.— Goodness gracious! Was it not purity and unselfish labour that made them Manu and Yajnavalkya, or was it something else? Well, we ourselves can be far greater than even Manu and Yajnavalkya if we try to; why will not our views prevail then?

Disciple.— Sir, it is you who said just now that we must revive the ancient usages and observances within the country. How then can we think lightly of sages like Manu and the rest?

Swamiji.— What an absurd deduction! You don't at all see my point. I have only said that the ancient Vedic customs must be remodelled according to the need of the society and the times, and passed under a new form in the land. Have I not?

Disciple.— Yes, Sir.

Swamiji.— What then were you talking? You have read the Shastras, and my hope and faith rest in men like you. Understand my words in their true spirit and apply yourselves to work in their light.

Disciple.— But, Sir, who will listen to us? Why should our countrymen accept them?

Swamiji.— If you can truly convince them and practise what you preach, they must. If, on the contrary, like a coward you simply utter Slokas as a parrot, be a mere talker and quote authority only, without showing them in action,—then who will care to listen to you?

Disciple.— Please give me some advice in brief about social reform.

Swamiji.— Why, I have given you enough advice; now put at least one in practice. Let the world see that your reading of the Scriptures and listening to me has been a success. The codes of Manu and lots of other books that you have read,—what is their basis and under-

lying purpose? Keeping that basis intact, compile in the manner of the ancient Rishis the essential truths of them and supplement them with thoughts that are suited to the times; only take care that all races and all sects throughout India be really benefited by following these rules. Just write out a Smriti like that; I shall revise it.

Disciple.— Sir, it is not an easy task; and even if such a Smriti be written, will it be accepted?

Swamiji.— Why not? Just write it out. कालो ह्ययं निरवधिर्विपुला च पृथ्वी—“Time is infinite, and the world is vast.” If you write it in the proper way, there must come a day when it will be accepted. Have faith in yourself. You people were once the Vedic Rishis. Only, you have come in different forms, that's all. I see it clear as daylight that you all have infinite power in you! Rouse that up; arise, arise—apply yourselves heart and soul, gird up your loins.—What will you do with wealth and fame that are so transitory? Do you know what I think—I don't care for Mukti and all that. My mission is to arouse within you all such ideas; I am ready to undergo a hundred thousand rebirths to train up a single man.

Disciple.— But, Sir, what will be the use of undertaking such works? Is not death stalking behind?

Swamiji.— Fie upon you! If you die, you will but die once. Why will you die every minute of your life by constantly harping on death like a coward?

Disciple.— All right, Sir, I may not think of death, but what good will come of any kind of work in this evanescent world?

Swamiji.— My boy, when death is inevitable, is it not better to die like a hero than as stocks and stones? And what is

the use of living a day or two more in this transitory world? It is better to rust out than to wear out—specially for the sake of doing the least good to others.

Disciple.— It is true, Sir. I beg your pardon for troubling you so much.

Swamiji.— I don't feel tired even if I talk for two whole nights to an earnest enquirer; I can give up food and sleep and talk and talk. Well, if I have a mind, I can sit up in Samadhi in a Himalayan cave. And you see that now-a-days through the Mother's grace I have not to think about food, it will come anyhow. Why then don't I do so? And why am I here? Only the sight of the country's misery and the thought of its future do not let me remain quiet any more!—Even Samadhi and all that appear as lifeless—even the sphere of Brahmá with its enjoyments becomes insipid! My vow of life is to think of your welfare. The day that vow will be fulfilled, I shall leave this body and make a straight run up!

Hearing Swamiji's words the disciple sat speechless for a while, gazing at him, wondering in his heart. Then with a view to take his leave, he saluted Swamiji reverently and asked his permission to go.

Swamiji.— Why do you want to go? Why not live in the Math? Your mind will again be polluted if you go back to the worldly-minded. See here, how fresh is the air, there is the Ganges, and the Sadhus are practising meditation, and holding lofty talks! While the moment you will go to Calcutta, you will be thinking of nasty stuff.

The disciple joyfully replied, "All right, Sir, I shall stay to-day at the Math."

Swamiji.— Why 'to-day'?—Can't you live here for good? What is the use of going back to the world?

The disciple bent down his head, hearing Swamiji's words. Various thoughts crowded into his brain and kept him speechless.

OCCASIONAL NOTES.

OF all the forces which are shaping modern India, setting its ideals and creating a future for it, religion and transcendentalism are operating as mighty agencies. The Indian mind has lost nothing of its strong religious bent, and even now nothing so enthuses the Indian population, nothing rallies such numbers round it as the banner of religion. The best minds that India has produced have been produced by monasticism; though she has excelled in secular branches of life, the highest flower of Indian life has been religious.

In the present age, with its machineries, its commercial struggle to capture the markets of the world, and to grow rich at the expense of others, the struggle for material existence has been intensified to a great extent; for the bare necessity of existence consumes such an amount of energy, as is disproportionate to its importance, and everything is judged by the standard of success in this material struggle. Everything is appraised by its capacity of ministering to the sense-pleasures of man.

Science is esteemed because its services will harness the forces of nature and its

mechanical inventions and discoveries will add to the physical comforts of life. These are boomed as great triumphs of human genius and the high-water mark of human achievement, while the motive behind appears principally to be the intensifying of the physical nature of man. We do not question the usefulness of science in advancing the happiness of man, but it is undeniable that the exaggerated importance of merely material sciences has contributed not a little to the miseries of mankind.

The West asks for the physical basis of things. It demands to bring all human ideals to sense-demonstration and sense-experience; but in the very nature of things the major portion of human knowledge cannot be brought to sense-proof and demonstration. The higher branches of all the material sciences yield highly abstract principles and ideals and it requires a high equipment of intellectual and spiritual faculties to understand, appreciate and enjoy them. Invariably physics melts into metaphysics, the study of physical sciences pushed makes way for the study of the mental or spiritual sciences. Where is the ardour and enthusiasm amongst votaries of science to push it to its nobler issues, and seek to realise the abstract principles which they point? The forest is forgotten in the trees and the best minds are entangled in the mere physical applications. A Sir Oliver Lodge or a Sir William Crookes' researches in Spiritism go a little way in the direction of truth but they are overlaid by masses of the finer forms of what are in reality mere material powers.

The evolution of the Aryan mind as it flowered on the Indian soil shows a peculiar

growth. The Aryans also started by a study of external nature, but no sooner did they succeed in discovering a higher principle, than the grosser and more material objects were left behind and they pushed forward in the search for the finer and superfiner. They discovered different comprehensive, all-inclusive principles, the Akasa, the Prana, the Manas in the course of their investigation of Nature, and all their powers were employed in stating, clearly defining and ultimately realising and being one with these first principles. One after another they were discarded, as something of the gross, something of matter clung to them, till at last the grandest discovery was made of the effulgent Self of man, the Atman or the Brahman, the Birthless, the Deathless, where alone Life Eternal, Bliss Eternal, Freedom unbounded was found to exist. All the capacity of their wonderful language of Sanskrit was exhausted to state, define It in unmistakable terms and the powers of their being to realising and being one with It. Thus they attained to real conquest of Nature, attained to Swárájya-siddhi, "the attainment of their glorious empire."

The mischievous notion prevails among men fostered by the votaries of material sciences that these ramifications and diversifications of external or physical life are an essential precondition of human evolution and progress; that the intenser and more strenuous the external struggle, the quicker and surer the perfection of the human type; that the laws of mere physical evolution are perpetuated and extended in reference to the moral and spiritual growth of man. But the first law of the ethical life of man negatives the rule and demands the renunciation of self. This

struggle, competition, labour-saving machines, aggregations of business etc. are not essential to human evolution. They are mere bye-products thrown out by individuals in the course of evolution on account of ignorance—Avidya. As man outgrows his physical life, he negatives the physical struggle and finds greater repose and establishment in his intellectual and spiritual nature. As the Swami Vivekananda says to this effect: What great glory is there in learning to send a current of electricity through the wire? Nature does a thousandfold more than that. What great glory is there in imitating dull and insentient nature? Man remains just where he was, a slave to the sense, only the circle of his sense-life is widened a little by science. The only good that it does to man is that these scientific investigations and inventions and manipulation of external objects give him an opportunity for the exercise of his mind and hence contribute to his growth. But this exercise and culture can be had without such a disproportionate amount of extraneous struggle and competition, with all the cruelties, rancour and hatred incidental to it. With the opening out of man's moral and spiritual nature, the struggle will be shifted from the external world to the internal; the struggle will be within with his lower nature, with Tamas and Rajas, with inertia and passion and with the development of spiritual thought more and more of Intelligence will shine forth. Struggle and competition and absorption in external interests may be necessary in ignorance for the preliminary awakening, but man must outgrow it to reach higher levels of his being.

Civilisation, then, lies in the capacity to live above the sense-plane, "in taking

man out of the sense-plane and giving him tastes and visions of planes other than the sensuous" and perfection and excellence of the individual "in the length of time he can live on that high plane, the amount of thought-oxygen he can breathe in." So long as the higher spiritual life does not open out before him and he learns to live there, so long as the intensity of his outward-going energies is not considerably curbed and directed inwards, transmuted as spiritual powers, he is a mere puppet in the hands of Nature and there will be no end to his miseries. He is armed with strong natural passions, desires, lust and greed which powerfully draw him outside and he does not know where they will carry him. One misery will be followed by another without end, for his out-going desires and passions will always seek outlets and sprout up in new forms. When such is the case no manipulation of external conditions, no outward machinery of government will solve his destiny. Political alliances, economic alliances, league of nations, and other outward machinery of international fellowship will fail of their desired effect of bringing peace on earth and will be dashed to the ground by internal friction and by the power of the untutored and unredemptive human tendencies. So long as the great bulge of humanity towards the external life persists and he is dissociated from his spiritual inheritance, the world will continue to be torn by war.

For the birth of the Sâttvic world-civilisation that is yet to be, a great tidal wave of spirituality passing over human society, carrying away all that is weak and vile, and changing wrong human tendencies, is an indispensable precondition. Many forces are silently and imperceptibly working, and one that specially interests us is the Power

that was manifested on earth as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Here was a manifestation of Soul-power startling alike by its intensity and profundity of depth. In the person of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was lived the whole spiritual thought-life of man. The wealth of spiritual thought, the profound depths of realisations, every phase of religious life found embodiment in him—he was verily an emperor in the region of spiritual thought. Immersed in the Ocean of Sachchidánanda that he was, a little spray from the ocean of his spiritual emotion gathered in the lives of individuals will make Gods of them. The heaving of this ocean of spirituality, rushing upon human society like a tidal wave, will carry everything before its

omnipotent flood and bring mankind the great wealth of spiritual heritage, his Swárájasiddhi, the attainment of his real empire in the spiritual realm. To us this Power has come opportunely for the transformation of the world, quelling the tumult of waves into which the waters of Life have been lashed, and establishing again the Spiritual Empire and the reign of Peace on earth. It is to this Power then that we render obeisance, praying that It may reach all on earth, that It may bring each and all the remembrance of his Real Nature, the great wealth of spiritual inheritance which is the birthright of man, and the end of all miseries on earth or hereafter.



BHAGAVAN SRI RAMAKRISHNA.*

(SRIJUT BAIKUNTHA NATH SANYAL)

I shall record here what little I have understood of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. My object is twofold: We shall purify ourselves by singing praises of the Lord, and we may learn to mould our lives after the great ideals of saints.

It will be difficult to give an idea of what peace and bliss I have obtained from Sri Ramakrishna, unless I refer briefly to the state of my mind before meeting him. Being born a Hindu, I had from my boyhood a yearning for religion and used to have talks and discussions whenever I chanced to meet a preacher of religion. But the longing of my heart would not be satisfied. Rather, the more I searched, the more I found confusion and deceit. I began to mix with teachers of

different sects, but found to my mortification that they taught one thing and acted in quite a different way. Days and months went on in this way and left me stranded in doubt and disillusionment as ever. Religion seemed to be an empty sound, meant to hoodwink the ignorant merely. A sort of opportunism and a formal adherence to moral rules seemed to be pointed out to me as the only course left.

At this juncture I met a Vedanta teacher, a near relative of mine, and had a long discussion with him. With great love he said to me, "My boy, we are not real teachers of religion, nor do we lead a religious life; we are mere traders in religion, that is all. Like other traders we deal out a few set phrases of religion to people and make our living. I too had a time like you when I searched and struggled much for religion. I have sought in many places from Calcutta to Kurukshetra,

* Adapted from a Bengali article published in the Udbodhan, Vol. VII. The writer is a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna.

but nowhere did I come across a saint or sage. It seems that no one will have access to a real teacher until the right moment comes, when the Guru can be met at one's very door. I do not know if there be some such law in this, but so I am inclined to think, for I was about to be lost in worldliness like you, when I had the good fortune to meet a great saint near Calcutta itself, in the Kali Temple of Rani Rashmoni at Dakshineswar. Ramakrishna Paramahansa was his name. With the little understanding I have, I think him almost as great as an Avatara. If you want to know what religion is, or wish to realise it, go to that saint, and your desire will be fulfilled."

I listened to his words, but had not at first the inclination to go to Dakshineswar, for I feared this might be another case of humbug. After inquiry, however, when I found everyone spoke the same thing, I thought of visiting the saint personally. So one day I accompanied a favourite disciple of the sage to see him at Dakshineswar, but I little dreamt that his sight would transform my life in the way it did.

A wonderful man I beheld,—who, though aged, was childlike in behaviour; such expressive lips, and eyes swimming in emotion; his face was radiant,—as if he was the very embodiment of joy. It made a deep impression upon me, instantaneously suggesting Divinity to my mind.

What is this, I thought? Is he so immersed in the constant thought of the Lord as to lose his identity, and is disporting in an ocean of bliss? What superhuman attitude of mind is this in a mortal frame? He is in the world but not of it! Seeing his unique expression and deportment all my egoism was shattered, my whole soul was in raptures, I felt him to be nearest and dearest to me, and my sceptical tendencies vanished altogether. As a moth is charmed at the dazzle of the flame and madly embraces it, my mind suffered a similar fate, and instantly the proud head

bent itself low before his luminous feet. Before I knew what I was doing, I had bowed before him, and the Master too very cordially asked me to sit near him.

I took my seat, and as I gazed at his remarkable features, I wondered why he was so kind to me. I was a sceptic, and how could I deserve his ethereal love? Or, did he fathom the secrets of my heart, that I was thirsting for the haven of peace, but in vain? Was it this that made him so compassionate towards me? I thought, every incident has its cause, and there must be some cause for the manifestation of this embodiment of light and love. Was it that he was born to deliver erring souls like me from a wilderness of doubt and despair, and hold up an ideal of religion before humanity? Thoughts like these arose in my mind and the more I listened to his words, the more I became attracted towards him. I scarcely noticed how the day passed by. I returned home, with tender thoughts about him and his extraordinary behaviour. I was overjoyed to think that he had asked me to visit him again.

I have already said that I considered him as very near to me from the very first sight—as if I were an old intimate relative of his! This feeling gradually deepened; I began to visit him whenever I had an opportunity, but the more I became acquainted with him, the more I considered him as ever-new, and his tenderness to me wore newer and newer aspects every day. None knew as he how to make others his own,—he opened himself to me as to an intimate acquaintance, and I too, moved by his love, poured out my heart to him without the least reserve. Before I became aware of the fact, I found that I was a prisoner to his love. And no wonder, for no one who beheld that matchless juxtaposition of manly austerity and feminine softness, that firmness and grace, that gravity and lightness, could ever hold himself aloof. I have had experience of love and affection, but such selfless love I have met with nowhere else. Before the

Master's love all other love pales into insignificance. Nobody ever saw or heard of such love, it was inexpressible, only known to the happy man who enjoyed it. When we went to him, he would be delighted beyond measure,—his very manner of caressing, talking to, feeding and joking with us indicated that. I had read in the Bible, God is Love, and Love is God. These words now stood explained in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's love. Whoever visited him must have felt this fascination over him.

I remember, it was not so much to listen to his teachings as to be with him and behold him, that I used to visit him. Those who would be content to hear his teachings instead of being in his company, seemed to me to have missed the mark. I thought, words might fade from memory, but his form would leave an indelible mark on the heart. Who, for instance, could forget his beautiful dance?

I observed with mute wonder his superhuman renunciation—he was so thoroughly imbued with the idea of it, that far from touching coins, he could not even bear the touch of brass utensils—and his fingers would become stiff if he caught hold of them. Even in sleep the merest touch of metal would stiffen his hands.

I also observed his passion for truth. The world has not seen another example of truthfulness like him. I had read in the Ramayana that Sri Ramachandra had gone to the forest to make good His father's promise. It seemed as remarkable. But it fell short of what I actually witnessed. Many a time did I notice how Sri Ramakrishna in the course of his meals would perhaps say, "I won't take any more," and the hand would become stiff and never reach the mouth, try he ever so much. He had therefore to stop eating, and in consequence would be very hungry in a short time.

He was so active. No one could work as incessantly as he—from morning till ten o'clock at night he would be engaged in teaching, or

making pleasantries, or chanting the Lord's name, or dancing in ecstasy and so forth, for the welfare of the assembled people. On days he had not even the leisure for eating he would snatch off a meal in five minutes and again begin talking and singing etc., without a moment's rest.

His Samadhi or trance was another unique phenomenon—he would frequently lose himself in the course of devotional talks, the mind would be drawn in from the external world, and no bodily consciousness would remain, the body becoming motionless like a statue, with no activity, sometimes even without respiration and heart-beats. Such deep Samadhi would be manifest whenever he was wholly concentrated upon something. During such a state one day his body came in contact with a piece of live charcoal, a part of which burnt into the body, but he knew nothing of it at the time. A doctor had to be called in to extract it and it left for ever a scar on the right side of his back.

How shall I describe his boundless Bhakti, at whose touch many a scoffer have been observed to turn into Bhaktas? But the uncommon traits which are mentioned in the Vaishnava Scriptures as bespeaking the highest development of divine emotion, were constantly noticeable in him. And what shall I say as to his Jnanam,—only this much I can say that he had not that farthing's worth of knowledge that we ordinary mortals have. I have seen him look upon all beings as part and parcel of himself through his Jnanam, and he used to notice the manifestation of the One among all. His mercy transformed lots of common people into great knowers of Truth. This may serve as a hint.

One day I made bold to ask the Master, "Sir, what is meant by Tapas or Sádhana? And why did you undergo so much of it?" He smilingly answered, "Tapas or Sadhana is the concentrated effort of the mind to gain some desired end. One undergoing it has not the least concern for the body or sense-

pleasures. For example, an angler is fishing and a fish is nibbling at the bait, while it is raining hard and someone is asking him a question,—but he heeds them not. It is after the fish has been hooked that he spreads his umbrella and answers the man. Without Tapas and hard practice no one attains the Brahman. How much labour is needed to pass an examination, the end of which is to bring in a little money,—one has to read day and night, and scarcely pays heed to his meals, and so forth. Then he is successful. Just fancy then, how much more energy is needed for the realisation of Brahman!

“Tapas is the source of all strength. Even God, the Scriptures say, performs austerities for the creation, maintenance and dissolution of the world,—how much more then do we need it! A twelve year-long tempest of Tapas swept over me—heat and cold and rain would pass over my body. I used to sit on an uneven ground lost to outward sense, the eye would not blink, I would be entranced. Someone used to strike my back with a ruler to bring back a little consciousness, and used to feed me in that way, while I would become senseless in the very act of eating. Sometimes I would laugh heartily, blessed with a vision of the Divine Mother, at other times I would bitterly wail for not having Her vision.—I have heard that people would throng round me to see the fun. Sometimes again the body would become stiff, with no sign of life. I used to meditate, and they say birds would sit on my head mistaking it for lifeless matter; I had no idea of the world and things of that sort. At first I used to meditate on the Lord, thinking He was the object of worship and I was the worshipper. Then all distinctions were merged, and a state of perfect identity was the result.

“The Scriptures say that if one remains for three weeks in this state, the body falls off, but didn't I say that a man used to force food down my throat by beating me? That preserved the body. After about six months

that state passed off. I had a desire to realise the Mother in diverse forms. I had heard that Hanuman was an exemplar in worshipping God in the attitude of servant to his master, and had thus realised Sri Rama. I too remained in that attitude for some time, and had a vision of Sita and Rama. Practising in the attitude of a Gopi, or maid of Brindaban, I realised Radha and Krishna; calling upon the Divinity as a child does his mother, I saw Mother Kali, the Fountain of Primeval Energy; while meditating in an attitude free from emotion, I attained the Nirvikalpa Samadhi (the highest rung in the scale of realisations); in three days I realised Brahman. My Guru—the naked one—noticed it and said, “What a Divine phenomenon, in three days he attained the knowledge of Brahman, which took me forty years of hard struggle to achieve!” I meditated on Allah and got Him, and Jesus also I saw. I have gone through all the different Tantra practices also.”

I said, “Sir, I listen to it all, but why was so many-sided a preparation, what was the need for so many different phases of practice?” Immediately, like a child, with his eyes quivering with emotion, he replied, “My boy, I have done all this simply for you all, otherwise I personally had no need of them,”—and he fell into Samadhi as he said this! When the Samadhi was broken he spoke with faltering accents half-audibly, “O man, I have done so much for you, you do a minute fraction of it for me.” Then getting back his full consciousness he said with a smile, “My hoy, do you think everyone has got to cook for himself? The mother has cooked everything ready, have faith, partake of the ready meal and be blessed.” I thought within myself, “Is not this what is called the ‘ocean of mercy, boundless and without motive’?”

Again the Master solemnly said, “Look here, to serve as an example to men also, such practices are needed. I have gone through the full course, you just go through one-sixteenth

of it." I asked, "Sir, while talking on or listening to divine topics you become quite stiff and senseless, but the countenance beams with joy and ripples over with smiles, the body too becoming radiant—what is that, and what do you experience in that state?" He smilingly replied, "Well, it is called Samadhi; it is the culmination of meditation. I borrow one-sixteenth part of the whole mind from the Mother, and talk and laugh with you; but the remaining portion rests with the Mother, meditating on Her real Essence as Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. When, in the act of talking or hearing about Her, the whole mind goes to that Absolute region, immediately that Bhâva-Samâdhi ensues.

"Do you know what Samadhi is?—It is the perfect resting in Him. Do you know how I feel then? Suppose, on the sea-shore there is a basin of water and confined in it there is a fish. Suppose next, that basin is accidentally broken and the fish finds its way to the unfathomable ocean. It then plays in the height of joy, does it not? In the Samadhi state also, my mind leaps as it were out of this body, and plunges in the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Hence the body appears like that, in other words, there is no body-consciousness and the soul merges in the higher Self—the Paramatman—in the thousand-petaled lotus of the head, and experiences unspeakable bliss. That sends a wave of divine bliss to the face and the body becomes radiant. This very self then becomes Shiva, the Absolute."

I shall briefly refer to one or two of the wonderful manifestations of spiritual power that I constantly observed in him. Arguments and doubts which I would think out for a week or a fortnight and have them in my mind with a view to get them solved by Sri Ramakrishna,—I found that he would raise those very topics in a conversation with some boy, and solve them! A devotee would perhaps put some sweets in a plate, of which a few only were meant for him—the others

being intended for somebody else—I found that the Master would accept his own share and reject the rest. I have seen him convert unbelievers and atheists into great devotees by the mere wish, or blessing, or touch. Whenever out of grace he touched one, a peculiar joy would come over his mind and body, which would last for three or four days. It was a thing not to be described in words. It was known only to those who witnessed or experienced it.

One day I was extremely hungry, and the Master, as if aware of the fact, hastened to take up two sweetmeats from the shelf. I thought he knew I was hungry and would give them to me to appease my hunger. But he did just the opposite thing; he took them himself, had a glass of water filled in and brought by me, drank it, and giving out evident signs of satiety, said, "Oh, how relieved I am! I am satisfied." But strange to say, his satisfaction did away with my hunger and thirst. I was reminded of the story in the Mahabharata, how Sri Krishna had taken a particle of spinach from the cooking pot of Draupadi, and appeased the hunger of the sage Durvasa and his party. An analogous phenomenon revealed itself to me on this day.

Unlike us, Sri Ramakrishna would not announce a meeting for lecture. He used to say, "Mother, if Thou hast kept this body for doing Thy work, do Thou muster men and make it utter whatever Thou liketh." He would say, "Lust and gold are the two things that have kept the world spell-bound, these are the obstacles to the realisation of God; I have therefore discarded them both with great assiduity, as if they were poison. But there is a funny thing about them. If you can always look upon woman as your mother, instead of retarding you, she will be your help in the spiritual path; I therefore look upon all womankind as the reflection of the Divine Mother. And gold too will not be so harmful if you apply it to the service of God or that of His devotees."

Again he would say, "Look here, the best austerity for realising God is truthfulness, to make the tongue conform to the mind, that is to say, you must speak out only what you think at heart. Otherwise, where there is double-dealing He will never manifest Himself. The more the mind will become pure through devotional exercises, the clearer will be the reflection of God in it. As a dusty mirror does not well reflect the face, so an impure mind fails to adequately catch His reflection. Therefore I say, weep in the name of the Lord,—and when the heart's impurities will be washed away with tears, you will attain the Lord; otherwise, mere dancing and jumping will do nothing. The practice of devotion is necessary only so long as tears do not trickle down one's eyes. Another means of attaining God is renunciation. What is meant by this?—When there is deep love for God, all other things drop off by themselves, as when one advances northward, the south is left more and more behind. Therefore I ask you to love the Lord intensely,—you must have as much longing for Him as the wife feels for her husband, the child for its mother, and a miser for his hoard. Another thing,—whatever you do through the body, mind and speech, you must always think you are doing His work. He is the Master, and you are the servant. Another method of discipline is to discriminate always between what is real and what is unreal, holding the mind in a state of perfect balance, and to try to see the manifestation of the Lord in all beings. My boy, the choice of the Lord's name and that of doctrines does not make any difference. Every doctrine is a path to Godhead, all names are His. Keep steadfastly to one doctrine or one name, this is called attachment to the Ideal.

"And do you know what Yoga is? It is joining the mind to God. One may attain to this union by all the three paths—work, devotion and knowledge. What is work? Karma-yoga consists in disinterestedly serving the Lord's children, offering the fruits to Him,

and constantly bearing Him in mind. It removes the bondage of transmigration and unites man to God. And why not! When one is thinking day and night of the Lord along with work, He is sure to manifest Himself in Him.

"Bhakti and Jnanam are both identical at bottom; people do not consider them well and make mistakes, thinking them different. What is Bhakti?—Love for God,—to play with Him in diverse aspects. And the devotee says, 'Thou art the Master, and I am Thy servant; Thou art all and all is Thine.' Jnanam also means absolute love. The love has become so intense that the Jnani does not want to be ever so little separate from God, he wants to become one with the Lord. Hence he says, 'I am He, I am Shiva, the Absolute! The prince of devotees, Hanumân said to Sri Ramachandra, 'Lord, when I have consciousness of the body, then Thou art the Master and I, Thy servant; when I consider myself as a Jiva, a finite soul, then Thou art the Whole and I, Thy part; and when I think I am the Atman, that is, in the Samadhi state, I feel Thou art I, and I am Thou,—there is no more difference.'

"But then this is a question of different states. As a mother has five children, and all have not the same digestive power; she knows this and gives them different kinds of food to suit their stomachs. Otherwise they will not be able to digest. And how will one get strength from things that he cannot digest? The Guru also does not instruct all in the same way. He suits his instructions to the needs of the disciple, and this does them good. If on the other hand anyone attempts to take up a particular standpoint through rashness, he lags behind and cannot live up to the ideal.

"For the common people of our country, in the present age, the Bhakti which Narada enjoined,—that is, the chanting of the Lord's name etc.—is best, for their minds have been scattered in different directions, and how can

they find leisure for discrimination, or Japam, or meditation and all that? But for the devotee, the man of knowledge, and the worker,—for all alike it is bad to make that one path the be-all and end-all; I do not at all like that. The Lord, who is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, who, though One, has become the many,—is the union of an infinite number of aspects; and I worship Him in various ways—through knowledge, devotion, work, worship, meditation, repeating and chanting His name and so on. Do you think, only the particular aspect which appeals to you or me is in Him, while all the other aspects must be counted as nothing? I am not in favour of such exclusiveness. This is limiting Him; remember neither He nor His aspects have any end. As the Vedas say, 'Not this, not this.'

"Some say God is with form, others say that He is without form; this is also limiting Him. What I say is that He is with form, He is without form, and is also what lies beyond both. Take for instance the chime of a bell—ding-dong. The first letter represents the aspect with form, the nasal portion His formless aspect, and the impression the word leaves in the mind after the whole has been pronounced, stands for the Absolute aspect. In the first aspect again, viz. that with form, there are infinite varieties of name and form. As a confectioner takes fresh cheese and sugar and makes a common preparation of them over the fire, which he puts into various shapes under different names, but the real substance is the same—the preparation of fresh cheese and sugar, similarly whatever names and forms of the Lord you hear of, are all made up of the blend of the Purusha and Prakriti aspects—the Absolute and phenomenal aspects—of the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. All names are His and all aspects are His. That He looks small or variously coloured, is due to distance merely. Go near Him and you will find He is omnipresent and self-luminous.

"Would you like to know what Brahman and Shakti are?—It is a subject that cannot be described, cannot be comprehended. He who is beyond mind and speech,—how can I describe Him, or you understand? Let me therefore suggest them by a simile. Brahman and Shakti are identical. He who is Brahman is also the Shakti; as fire and its heat are identical. The fire represents the Brahman, the heat or burning power His Shakti. Or like the example of the snake moving and the snake at rest; when it is at rest it may be likened to Brahman, and when it is active, it represents the Shakti."

* * * * *

The supreme principles of religion are eternal, only new clothings are put upon them in different ages, according to the taste and capacity of the individuals constituting the society, in short, according to the need of the times. This is specially true of India, of which religion is the backbone. India has never given up religion, nor religion has ever given up India. It is therefore, it seems, that after a series of vicissitudes and a shining galaxy of epoch-making prophets, we find the advent in India of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, the apostle of the harmony of all religions.

The new interpretation that he has put upon the religion eternal has, by its inherent catholicity and breadth, thrown all the previous Yugadharmas—religions of the age—into the shade, and some tokens of its innate power are to be had from the echo it has made in the distant shores of America and Europe soon after its inauguration. As to the originality of the path which Sri Ramakrishna has struck out, it scarcely needs to be dilated upon. While almost everyone of the foregoing Teachers and Incarnations has declared that the particular set of doctrines which *he* preached was the only royal road to the progress and wellbeing of humanity, Sri Ramakrishna has held that all the doctrines that have up to this day been preached in the world are equally true, each one of

them being a path leading to the highest and indivisible Truth. The previous Teachers have said, "Man, have pity on your fellow-beings;" but Sri Ramakrishna has said, "O man, look upon every human being as the veritable form of the Lord and serve him with all your might." The preceding Teachers have described womankind as engines of degradation; but Sri Ramakrishna has declared, "Every woman is the Divine Mother Herself in another form, give her special reverence and serve her without the least taint of carnality. Then the Divine Mother will be pleased with your worship and open the gates for your prosperity and liberation." The past Acharyas have said, "Kill out your passions and you will attain religion;" while Sri Ramakrishna has said, "Turn those passions Godward and they will be your best assets for realising the Truth." The previous Teachers have said, "Unless you read various Shastras, your eye of illumination will never open;" but Sri Ramakrishna has boldly declared

through life and precept, "O man, if you give up all pride and egoism and are eager like a child for the blissful companionship of the Mother of the universe, then full realisation will be within your easy reach, even if you happen to be illiterate."

It is not for me to describe the infinite facets of Sri Ramakrishna, the embodiment of the synthesis of all religions, the unfathomable ocean in which an infinite number of ideals, like so many streams, were engulfed. Let us now all prostrate ourselves to his holy feet, and fired with new life and inspiration through his power, let us shout at the top of our voice, "Glory to all religions—Hindu, Buddhist, Musalman, Christian and all; glory to the Vedas, the Bible, the Koran, the Puranas and all other Scriptures of the world; glory to the four great paths, Jnana, Bhakti, Yoga and Karma; glory to the Prophets of all countries and all ages; and glory to Sri Ramakrishna, the embodiment of all religions, of all ideals, of all Avatars.



WHY I ADORE SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA.*

(PROF. V. GOPALASWAMY IYENGAR, M. A.)

TO the late Swami Ramakrishnananda of Madras I owe my first knowledge of the Ramakrishna Mission and its work. When this Swami was here some fifteen years ago on a lecturing tour, I was a student whose attitude to religion was one of indifference. But they say, "Every human heart has its religious yearnings; it has a hunger for religion which sooner or later waits to be satisfied." I was somehow attracted by the inspiring lectures of Swami Ramakrishnananda, not one of which I missed, and they made me long to hear more about our faith and in due course to seek instruction at the feet of the Sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Mission that have been here from time to time. I may state here that I have nothing but admiration for the selfless life they lead. They

do not lead us away from the path of our own sect, nor do they teach us politics or social reform. There is no doubt a vast scope for social work which we need not be ashamed to do, whatever caste we may belong to, high or low, and which by the way could be placed on a proper basis if only we had more workers. Sri Ramakrishna is the inexhaustible fountainhead from which the Swamis of the Mission draw their inspiration. This is the first reason why I adore Sri Ramakrishna.

Going into further reasons, I am reminded of the saying that Swami Vivekananda referring to the attempts to publish the life and teachings of his divine Master exclaimed, "But after all it was not even what he taught us! It was that great life that we lived with him; and that can never be told!" What Swami Vivekananda himself could not tell, nobody else who has not had even a

* Read at the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore.

glimpse of the life that he speaks of can adequately describe. Yet any one who hears of the life led by the Master with the disciples cannot but adore him. In spite of spiritual attainments of the highest order which entitle him to be worshipped as an Avatara, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was quite human, simple as a child, and easy of access to one and all; there was no secrecy about him; and the life that he led is sure to convince one that his spiritual experiences are not unattainable where there is a will and properly directed attempt. He was the personification of love itself. We may well exclaim with the talented author of the Gospel, "Never till now has it been given to us to see such marvellous Wisdom, Love of the Lord, Faith, Renunciation and Communion with God, and Catholicity, all in one and the same person. Verily a lightning sent down to set ablaze into life the dead bones of dry, work-a-day world! Embodied Love like the dew of heaven falling on the thirsty heart of man! A voice crying unto sunken, self-weary man, 'Thou must be born again and love'! A healer from another clime of this strange disease of modern life. A man among men eager to solve for them the enigma of the universe."

Sri Ramakrishna was human in this that he did not attain to spiritual eminence all at once but acquired it through constant practice. His early life was one of ceaseless struggle to distinguish the real from the unreal, and the essential from the non-essential. He went to school but gave it up saying that the object of the education imparted did not reach higher than the earning of a secular living. On the occasion of his *Upanayana* he chose a Sudra woman to give his first Bhikshá, though he was a highly orthodox Brahmin. Nevertheless, on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the Dakshineswar Temple, he refused, in the hereditary orthodox spirit, to take Prasada there as the temple belonged to a non-Brahmin and even remonstrated with his elder brother for taking up service there. It required a great effort on the part of Pandit Ramkumar to justify his action to his younger brother. The justification was that the non-Brahmin proprietress, Rani Rashmani, had gifted away the property to her Brahmin Guru, so that it became a Brahmin's. Thus we find in Sri Ramakrishna's own life an illustration of his teaching that so long as there is the consciousness of

distinction and difference, we have to keep to distinctions of caste and that when the knowledge of Self is gained, all distinctions fall off themselves. During this period he used at times even to grow sceptic about his own progress and about the existence of God. He solved his doubts in his own way by a direct appeal to the Mother. Thus if we study his life during the Sâdhana period from the human standpoint, we see in him extraordinary strength of mind and perseverance. To realise how intensely he devoted himself to his Sâdhana, we have only to look at the way he trained himself to see no difference between gold and mud, that the former was as much limited in its use as the latter. The training had left in him such traces that his body would shrink at the very touch of gold—nay even at the presence of a coin under his pillow. We are all aware also of the pains he took to free himself from ideas of sex distinction. He would dress himself like a woman, speak like one and giving up all occupations of men, live in the midst of the women of his own family. He taught himself to look upon every woman as 'mother.' Whatever he desired to do, the strength of his desire was so great that by some happy coincidence he got the necessary help to do it. His teacher came seeking him. At a time when he wanted to practise Tapasyâ he selected a spot in the temple garden and wished to enclose it with a fence, but would not ask Mathuranath (Rani Rashmani's son-in-law) for it. Just then he noticed a bundle washed ashore on the bank of the Ganges which was then in floods. He had it picked up and what was his surprise when he found in it the very materials he wanted. In his anxiety to see God he would often roll on the ground and weep, "Mother, Mother, where art Thou? Show Thyself to me, Thy helpless child, but once;" and sometimes he would even think of doing away with himself. To translate his own words: "A hurricane passed over, sweeping everything before it until I was blest with the Divine Vision." In short it may be said that in his earlier Sâdhana period "he was the living embodiment of the words that fell later from his lips, untouched by the taint of the present-day materialistic civilisation, though living in it."

Of the several relations in which God can be worshipped Sri Ramakrishna chose that of Mother; for of all the human emotions of mutual relation-

ship, none is so pure and high, none so unselfish and ennobling, none so innocent and sweet, none so free and unrestrained as that of a child to its mother. It is perhaps this that accounts for the lovable, childlike simplicity of Sri Ramakrishna. In his own teachings we find that the test for a man of realisation is that he should be as simple as a child of five. And he stood that test. Whenever anybody invited him he would like a child say, "I shall ask Mother and come." When once a student referred to his Samádhi as a brain-disease, he immediately ran in crying, "Mother, Mother" and returned saying, "Mother tells me there is nothing wrong with my head, but it is a mistake on your part to think so." Here is another striking instance. One hot summer afternoon Swami Ramakrishnananda was on a visit to the Master. He bought a piece of ice on the way and tied it in a corner of his cloth. When he came to the Master, he saw many people there and felt shy to take out his offering. But Sri Ramakrishna noticed the small bundle and would not rest until its contents were shown to him, and when the ice was given he was overjoyed like a child. A gentleman once went to see Sri Ramakrishna. Just then the latter was suffering from a sprain in his arm. Learning that the gentleman had come to see him, he said, "What will you see, Sir; my arm is sprained and it is so painful." The gentleman knew not what to say and at last said, "It is nothing, Sir, you will be all right soon." Sri Ramakrishna was immediately consoled and exclaimed, "Will it be so! Will it be so!" How childlike!

This characteristic of the divine Master naturally takes us to another equally admirable—namely, humility and patience. Nobody ever saw him but received the salutation first from him. He would not allow anybody to call him 'Baba' or father; for he said, "I am the child of my Mother, how can I be anybody's father?" He did not mind even sweeping a temple servant's house with his own hair. Egoism was totally absent in him. He would not use the first person singular but referred to himself as "this body" or "my Mother." "If you keep the I at all," he said, "keep the servant I." But it ought to be remembered that while he preached humility, he forbade self-debasement. He would not brook anybody underrating himself and much less anybody calling himself a sinner.

"The weak-minded man who always says, 'I am a sinner, is sure to have a fall,' said he, "but he is free who says, 'I am free from bondage.'" On the contrary he loved strength even in sin; for he was of the opinion that such strength could be diverted into channels of great usefulness. The sinner was to him a potential saint like Jagai and Madhai, the robber disciples of Lord Gauranga. His temper was never roused. In his earlier days, no doubt he used to take offence at people straying from the path of devotion and once even gave a slap to Rani Rashmani for musing on her private affairs at the time of worship. He chid himself for this and knew not anger any more. In this respect as in several others he was his Guru's Guru. When Totapuri felt enraged at somebody lighting the hookah from his holy fire, Sri Ramakrishna reminded him that to a Jnanin the man who offended him was as much Brahman as the fire and himself and there was no reason why he should be excited. Totapuri was thenceforth cured of his anger.

Sri Ramakrishna was a man of action and a practical teacher. He did not encourage vain disputations. He used to say, "Common men talk bagful of religion, but act not a grain of it; but the wise man speaks little but his whole life is a religion acted out." His favourite illustrations were the following: Two men entered an orchard. One began counting the trees, their leaves and fruits, while the other went on plucking the fruits and eating them. 'Which of them was the wiser?' he would ask. Again, "so long as the bee is outside the petals of lotus and has not tasted the sweetness of its honey, it hovers round making a buzzing sound. When it is inside the flower it noiselessly drinks the honey. Similarly so long as a man quarrels and disputes, it is a sign that he has not tasted the nectar of true faith." As instances of the practicality of his teachings I would refer to his saying, "Return not evil for evil; but resist evil." Can anything be more practical? Again let us look at the following incident: The image of Sri Krishna in the Dakshineswar Temple was once carelessly handled, fell down and a leg was injured. Several learned Pandits who were consulted decided that the image should be thrown away and replaced by another. Rani Rashmani approached Sri Ramakrishna for his advice. He asked her what she

would do if any of her sons-in-law fractured a leg—to throw him away or treat the fractured leg? The Pandits, when they were told of this, saw the wisdom and practicality of the solution and agreed to the broken leg being repaired, which was accordingly done to perfection by Sri Ramakrishna himself.

Sri Ramakrishna's life is full of such lessons of immense value to us whether we are aspirants for spirituality or for worldly eminence. Is it not then natural that such a life should win the hearts of those who hear of it?

The scope of this paper will not permit further expatiation on the teachings conveyed by the numerous sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. I shall conclude with what I feel is the unique feature of Sri Ramakrishna's religion. I do not mean that he added one other to the already numerous sects or forms of faith. If I may so call it, his religion is one of universal tolerance and love. He did not disbelieve any of the recognised religions of the world but proved that all religions are but different paths leading to the one Reality. He arrived at this conclusion by no intellectual processes; those who lived with him bear testimony to the fact that during a long period of twelve years' arduous devotion he practised one religion after another in due succession and under proper guidance. On the one hand he realised the ideals set up by the various sects of the Hindu religion and on the other the ideals of Islam and of Christianity. He had a vision of Jesus as truly as he had that of his Divine Mother or Sri Krishna. It is said that in his chamber are hung pictures of Hindu Gods and Goddesses as also that of Jesus. His religion is thus that the Almighty God is One and that He is called by different names in different countries, that all religions are true and whoever is true to his own religion will ultimately reach the goal. The originality of his religion consisted only in intensifying the faith of each individual in his own religion. Rites and ceremonies he did not despise, but he considered them necessary for the growth and perpetuation of religion. He compared them to the husk of the paddy. The husk contains the rice but the husked grain will not sprout up and grow into a plant. So also every man must perform the rites enjoined by his religion before he reaches its truth. He sounded, however, the

warning note that there was no use in clinging to the mere external forms, forgetful of the underlying spirit. The husk of the paddy is useful only in so far as it preserves the inner kernel. It is the rice that we need.

He instructed his disciples each according to his own tendencies. He never destroyed any one's faith—be it the lowest fetish worship or the highest monism; but he pushed one further in the direction in which he was going instilling strength and giving help and advice at every stage.

The author of such a religion must undoubtedly be dear to one and all. To me in particular, Sri Ramakrishna appeals most as a powerful exponent of the path of Devotion and absolute faith in the Lord. Not that he did not value the other paths, but all incidents in his life go to show that this was his favourite path. He advises it as best suited for the age we live in, for he says, communion by Love of God will enable one to see God with far less difficulty than any other kind of communion. He had firm belief in the power of faith. He used to say, "Love of God and self-surrender to Him are the various elements of Bhakti. By faith shall a man be able to cross the mighty ocean itself without the slightest difficulty. Faith is omnipotent; before it the powers of Nature all shrink and give way." He used in this connection to cite the instance of Krishna Kishore, an orthodox Brahmin, who feeling thirsty on his way back from Brindaban took water from a man of low caste after asking the latter to repeat the name of the Lord. Such was the strength of his belief in the name of the Lord that its very mention elevates one of the lower class!

Sri Ramakrishna's love knew no bounds. He was not very much in favour of the modern reform movements. Yet his love for Keshab Chunder Sen, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj, was so great that he would miss his absence even if it were for a short time, and when Keshab was sick he used to pray constantly to Mother for his recovery, and even vowed tender cocoanuts to the Mother in his own simple way. Sri Ramakrishna was taken by Mathuranath on a pilgrimage. On the way they stopped at a place called Vaidyanath. There Sri Ramakrishna saw a number of low-caste people who looked famished and had no covering of any kind. Immediately he told Mathuranath that he

would like to see them clothed neatly and fed. Before Mathuranath could give a reply Sri Ramakrishna began to weep and said that unless those hungry Narayanas were fed, he would abandon the pilgrimage. Thousands and thousands of these poor wretches were got together by tom tom and clothed and fed to the great satisfaction of the Master. In his eyes everything was full of life and an object of love. Sometimes he could not even pluck a flower and would weep if he saw anybody treading upon grass. In his last days of terrible physical suffering when he was under medical advice not to talk, he could not keep his visitors away and withhold his loving enquiries of them.

As regards householders like us, he was not at all destitute of hope. He did not insist on everybody taking the fourth Ashrama. When some of his householder disciples offered to take it, he did not allow it in their case. The readers of the life of Nag Mahashaya will have no difficulty in realising this. His advice to householders is, "Do all your duties with the mind fixed on the Lord. Serve your parents, wife and children as if they were your own, but believe in the inmost recesses of your heart that they are really not yours but God's."

Thus Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine of love and faith and work without attachment cannot be lost upon us. Be it any walk of life, where is the scope of success for a man who has not a spark of love in him, no faith in himself or others and is so attached to the fruits of his work that the slightest disappointment upsets him? He can enjoy no contentment, peace or happiness.

Do we not feel what a marvellous power he ought to have been to have turned the lifetime of many a brilliant man imbued with ideas just the opposite of his, to have been the prime cause of the spread of Hinduism throughout the modern world and to have helped Mother India to receive homage at the hands of other nations in the realm of spirituality? He was an embodiment of ideals and grand examples to give us strength and courage to follow and persevere. Truly may he be regarded as a divine Avatara of the age but not to add one more to the many existing Gods to be idolised, placed in a temple and worshipped, but to be idealised in the temple of our hearts and followed in our everyday life. To make my meaning clearer, we shall be true to Sri Ramakrishna and doing great service to ourselves and to our country if we could but study him and his ways and learn to act as he did under similar circumstances. There can be no denying that this is the best form of adoration. Sri Ramakrishna himself said, "If you live up to one-sixteenth of what I say and do, you will surely reach the goal."

In conclusion let me read out that prayer of Sri Ramakrishna which appeals most to me as containing the essence of the path of self-surrender to the Lord :

"Mother, I am the Yantra (instrument), Thou art the Yãntri (mechanic). I am the room, Thou art the tenant. I am the sheath, Thou art the sword. I am the chariot, Thou art the charioteer. I do just as Thou makest me do. I speak as Thou makest me speak. I behave as Thou makest me behave. Not I, not I, but Thou, but Thou."

HYMN TO SRI RAMAKRISHNA.

(Composed by the great Bhakta, the late Pramadas Mitra of Benares.)

ॐ शुद्धविज्ञानमगाधसौख्यं

विश्वस्य वीजं करुणापयोधिः ।

अनाद्यनन्तं प्रकृतेः परस्तात्

तत्तत्त्वमकं भुवि रामकृष्णः ॥१॥

TRANSLATION.

1. That pure Knowledge and unfathomable Bliss,—the origin of the universe, the ocean of mercy, without beginning and end, and beyond Prakriti—that one Supreme Principle is manifest on earth as Sri Ramakrishna.

न नेति भीत्या श्रुतयो वदन्ति
 वदन्ति साक्षात् च यं कदाचित् ।
 चिदेकरूपो शिव ईश्वराणां
 महेश्वरोऽसौ भुवि रामकृष्णः ॥२॥

यं नित्यमानन्दमनन्तमेकं
 शिवेति नाम्ना श्रुतयो गृह्णन्ति ।
 तस्यावतारो नररूपधारी
 कृपासुधाब्धिर्भुवि रामकृष्णः ॥३॥

विज्ञानपीयूषनिमग्नमूर्तिः
 परस्पर्शं यान् यान् हृदयया करेण ।
 ते कामिनीकाञ्चनरिक्तचित्ताः
 सद्यो बभूवुर्भुवि रामकृष्णः ॥४॥

प्रेमाब्धिगम्भीरतरङ्गभङ्गे-
 रान्दोलितो यो भगवद्विखीनः ।
 भक्तिर्विशुद्धा स्वयमाविरासीत्
 पुंविग्रहोऽहो भुवि रामकृष्णः ॥५॥

तमद्भुतं कञ्चिदचिन्त्यशक्तिं
 वन्दे प्रशान्तं परिपूर्णबोधम् ।
 ज्ञानस्य भक्तेश्च विशुद्धमूर्तिं
 द्विमूर्तिमेकं भुवि रामकृष्णः ॥६॥

इति श्रीप्रमदादासमित्रस्य श्रीरामकृष्णाष्टकं
 समाप्तम् ।

2. That which the Srutis, through fear, describe as 'not this,' 'not this,' but never in a direct way; whose only form in the Chit (Intelligence Absolute); That which is the Essence of Good, and the supreme Ruler of Rulers,—That is manifest on earth as Sri Ramakrishna.

3. That which the Srutis praise under the name of Shiva; which is eternal, infinite, the One without a second, and Bliss Absolute;—an Incarnation of That on earth, in human form, is Sri Ramakrishna, the ocean of mercy that confers immortality.

4. Whoever in this world were blessed with a touch of the hand of Sri Ramakrishna who had drunk deep of the nectar of Realisation, at once had their minds freed from the attachment for lust and gold.

5. Who though merged in God, was moved by the heaving waves of the deep ocean of love,—who looked as if Pure Bhakti herself had appeared on earth in a masculine body,—Oh, such indeed was Sri Ramakrishna!

6. That wonderful Power Inscrutable, calm, the Essence of infinite Illumination, the immaculate embodiment of Jnana and Bhakti—the union on earth of Purusha and Prakriti in one,—that nameless One they call Sri Ramakrishna, I salute.

WITH THE SWAMIS IN AMERICA.

(Continued from page 68.)

ONCE entering the kitchen while the food was being prepared, the Swami noticed that some one tasted the food to see whether salt had been added. "We never taste the food in India," the Swami said, "because it is offered to God. We do not cook for ourselves or the family,

we cook food as an offering to God. And after we have offered the food to God it is distributed amongst the members of the family. So we keep our kitchen and everything connected with it, very clean and holy. We take our bath, say our prayers and put on a clean cloth before we enter the

kitchen. Every act of our life must be made an offering to God, then we will advance spiritually."

I had noticed that when flowers were presented to the Swami, he would place them before the picture of Sri Ramakrishna without any comment or without smelling them. Once I said: "Don't you care for flowers, Swami?" "Oh, yes," he said, "otherwise how could I offer them to the Master? But we never smell flowers before offering them to God."

Sometimes new students would arrive. Once a young lady came. She had heard that in India the students serve the teacher in the forest retreats. "Let the student, sacrificial fire in hand, approach the teacher." She went into the forest, gathered a few sticks of dry wood and went to the Swami's tent. "Yes, come in," the Swami said, hearing someone at his tent. She entered, laid the wood before the Swami and sat down. The Swami at once understood the meaning and he was touched at the simplicity and humility of this highly cultured young lady.

It was a sweet life and it was surprising how soon new-comers imbibed the spirit of the place. There was no idleness, it was a life of external and internal activity. The Swami was full of fire and the fire was communicated to the students. Enthusiastic and sincere, everyone tried his best to realise God.

There were no formal rules or regulations in the Ashrama and once a student asked the Swami to make some rules. "Why do you want rules," the Swami said, "is not everything going on nicely and orderly without formal rules? Don't you see how punctual everyone is, how regular we all are? No one ever is absent from the classes or meditations. Mother has made Her own rules, let us be satisfied with that. Why should we make rules of our own? Let there be freedom, but no licence. That is Mother's way of ruling. We have no organisation but see how organised we are. This kind of organisation is lasting but all other kinds of organisation break up in time. This kind of organisation makes free, all other kinds are binding. This is the highest organisation, it is based on spiritual laws."

The Swami made this point still clearer when on another occasion a student remarked: "How wonderful it is, Swami, that men and women of

such pronounced and different temperaments can live together peacefully!" "That is because I rule by love," the Swami said. "You are all tied to me by the string of love. How else would it be possible? Don't you see how I trust everyone and I leave everyone free? That I can do because I know that you all love me. There is no hitch anywhere, all goes on smoothly. But remember, it is all Mother's doing. I have nothing to do with it. She has given us that mutual love that Her work may flourish. As long as we remain true to Her there is no danger that anything will go wrong. But the moment we forget Her there will be great danger. Therefore I always ask you to think of Mother."

Once a student versed in Christian Science asked: "Is it not our duty to keep our body healthy?" "Yes," said the Swami, "but from the highest standpoint body itself is the great disease. We want to go beyond the idea of body and to realise that we are the Atman. It is the love for our body that stands in the way to our realisation of that higher state where we can say: 'I am not this body, I am the Atman, the body is an illusion.' As long as we love the body we can not realise the Self and we shall be born again and again. But when we love the Atman then we become indifferent towards the body and when all love for the body goes, liberation will come very soon."

One of the students was psychic and one day the Swami found her practising automatic writing. Making her mind passive she sat with a pencil in her hand and automatic writing would begin. The hand would begin to move and write and our friend would see afterwards what was written. In that way beautiful things would be written on the paper. But when the Swami saw her thus engaged, he rebuked her severely. "What is this foolishness," he called out. "Do you want to be controlled by spooks? Give up that nonsense. We want Mukti, liberation, we want to go beyond this world and all worlds. Why should you want to communicate with the departed? Leave them in peace, it is all Maya. Get out of Maya and be free!"

To live with the Swami was a constant joy and inspiration and it was an education, for one was learning all the time. And we all felt that spiritual help came through him. Sometimes gentle, some-

times the "roaring lion of Vedanta," the Swami was always fully awake. There was not a dull moment in the Ashrama.

Different austerities were practised, but this was done individually. The Swami never asked us to do that. It came spontaneously with some of the students. One would restrict his diet, another would observe silence, a third would remain in solitude, etc. Everyone was at it with a will. No one could remain lukewarm with such a spiritual dynamo in their midst.

We were all vegetarians and we did not kill or allow outsiders to kill game on the premises. But how far was this principle of non-killing to be carried? It had never been the subject of our special attention. There had been no occasion for it. But one day unexpectedly an occasion arose. The Swami occupied a tent with a wooden floor. There was a little space between the floor and the earth. And one day, just as the Swami was about to enter his tent a big rattlesnake was seen to enter in the space under the floor. What was to be done? The snake might enter the tent some day. It was easy enough with long sticks to drive her from her hiding place; but what then? Should we kill her, or not? A war-council was held on the spot. The Swami left the decision to us. There was a slight difference of opinion, but the majority was for not killing. Let us catch her, we said, and carry her off to the hills, she can do no harm there. But how to bag the cat? To catch a large, venomous snake and carry her off was not so easy. But we managed it. The snake was driven from under the tent and we stood around her from a respectable distance. She was rattling with all her might. Evidently she was angry, but she did not try to attack. But she was very watchful, coiled up, her head raised and turning towards any one who came a little nearer.

First of all we held her down with long sticks, and then managed to put a loop of string round her neck and two of us carried her to a safe distance holding her aloft by each end of the string. There we again held her down with sticks as before and carefully cut the pieces of rope on either side. After performing this feat, in which Sadhu Charan of course had taken the most active part, we came back satisfied that the trouble was over. But to our surprise there she was again, and we readily

recognised her by the loop round her neck. Again a similar campaign was gone through and she had to be removed to a goodly distance to ensure safety. Afterwards we used to refer to her playfully as the "snake with the neck-tie."

With such little occasional variations our life of austerity and meditation glided smoothly on.

A BRAHMACHARIN.

FAMINE IN MANBHUM & BANKURA.

Ramkrishna Mission's Work & Appeal.

In our last report and appeal, the public has been informed that we have opened famine relief centres at Bagda, in the interior of District Manbhium in Thana Puncha and have sent workers to open relief centres at Bankura. Distribution of rice has already commenced from Bagda, the report of which we append below. In Bankura, our workers in consultation with the Magistrate who invited us to help in the relief work, have also started one centre in the Indpur Thana, one of the most affected portions of the District. The condition of the people, of which we are getting reports daily from our workers, is simply heart-rending. The famine with its crew, diseases and pestilence etc., has already encroached on the major portion of the District and is menacing the rest. In the famine area of the Manbhium District 80 per cent. of the people, including all shades of the society, are already suffering. For want of proper food and owing to influenza epidemic the labourers who are on the verge of starvation, are so weak that it has become impracticable for them to stick to their manual labour to earn their everyday morsel, and they are thus thrown entirely upon the charity of the local people. The wretched condition of the middle class people has reached its climax. Workers have met with instances of Purdaneshin ladies who were formerly in well-to-do circumstances, going abegging with bowls in their hands and accepting handfuls of rice with exceeding gratefulness. The condition is so serious, that if we are to be of any use to them for their safety from the cold grip of death, it behoves us to offer them relief immediately. The number of

recipients is daily increasing in accordance with the intensity of distress, thus entailing increased expenditure and expansion of area; while we are perfectly handicapped for inadequate funds. We appeal, therefore, to our generous countrymen, to replenish our funds with their contributions, and a copper piece even will push on our work a great way to save a man's life. The inhabitants of these Districts are proverbially poor and illiterate and do not know how to ventilate their distress to their neighbours. As such, they deserve our immediate sympathy. Let not our ever kind countrymen be silent spectators in this critical time.

Below we give the abstract of weekly distribution of rice :—

Districts.	Centres.	No. of villages.	No. of recipients	Mds. Srs.
Manbhum	Bagda	11	196	9—32
		11	199	10—0
		11	201	10—18
		17	434	21—28
Bankura	Indpur	24	187	9—38

Any contribution either in money or in kind will be most thankfully received and acknowledged in either of the following addresses: (1) The President, Ramkrishna Mission Belur, Howrah, (2) The Secretary Ramkrishna Mission, Udbodhan Office, Baghbazar, Calcutta.

Saradananda.

Secretary, R. K. Mission.

THE EIGHTY-FOURTH BIRTHDAY ANNIVERSARY OF BHAGAVAN SRI RAMAKRISHNA.

THE 84th Birthday Anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at the Ramakrishna Math, Belur, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission, with imposing solemnities. The Tithi-puja was observed with special Puja and Homa during the greater part of the day and night. There was Bhajana and Prasada was distributed among the assembled Bhaktas. The most note-

worthy function of the day was the initiation of eighteen Brahmacharins of the Order into Sannyasa, and of a few into Brahmacharya. It certainly augurs well for the future of the country, that so many young men armed with purity and fired with enthusiasm have devoted themselves to the noble task of working out their Moksha and serving humanity at large.

The public celebrations took place on Sunday, the 9th March. There was an excellent steamer arrangement between Calcutta and the Math, under the direct management of Messrs. Hoare Miller & Co. and steamers plied from morning till 8 p. m., every half hour or so. This enabled the Bhaktas to assemble in large numbers throughout the day. The Math premises wore a gala appearance, and under a huge canopy a life-size portrait of Sri Ramakrishna was placed on a throne exquisitely decorated with leaves and flowers. There were numerous musical parties, each vying with the others in their art and excellence. Sri Ramakrishna was all things to all men, and it is quite fitting that his birthday festival should be attended by people of all sects and creeds, of all countries and nationalities. The distribution of Prasada on this day was a gigantic affair, but was skilfully managed. In all hearts there was the same feeling—that of homage to the great Teacher who laid down his life for the sake of the suffering millions. Joy and admiration were writ on all faces, and for at least one short day the assembled men and women forgot their daily cares and anxieties and were blessed with a taste of that bliss which only a spiritual atmosphere like that of the Math on this day could confer. It was quite late at night before the bustle of the day was hushed leaving the Math in its usual quiet and stillness.

The 84th birthday was celebrated at Sylhet with great pomp and ceremony by the Ramakrishna Seva Samiti. On the 4th March the Bhaktas performed Tithi-puja and on the 6th a public meeting was held in the Town Hall, which was literally packed, and many had to return disappointed for want of seats. The meeting was presided over by Prof. Vanamali Vedantatirtha M. A. of the local Government College and addressed by several gentlemen including another Professor of the same College. On the following Sunday the public

function of the august ceremony was observed. In the morning the lepers of the local Leper Asylum were treated with sweetmeats and in the evening about a thousand people including the sweepers of the town were sumptuously fed.

The 84th birthday was celebrated at Doranda, Ranchi on Sunday, the 9th March. There was Sankirtana from 6 to 8 p. m. on the 8th March. On the next day the following programme was observed: Sankirtana—6-30 to 11 a. m.; Puja and Aratrika—11 a. m. to 12 a. m.; Distribution of Prasada—12 a. m. to 3 p. m.; Essays and Discourses on religious subjects—4 to 6 p. m.; Kalikirtana—6 to 7 p. m.

The birthday was celebrated on the 9th March by the members of Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mymensing at the local Durga Bari. There was Nagara Sankirtana from 6-30 to 8-30 a.m. Prasada was distributed from 11-30 a. m. to 5 p. m. This was followed by Bhajana, Kirtana and the chanting of scriptures.

Sri Ramakrishna's 84th Birthday was celebrated by the Bhaktas of Sambalpur on the 9th March, in the premises of the Fraser Club. There was Prabhati-kirtana in the morning. The feeding of the poor lasted from 11 a. m. to 3 p. m., which was followed by a lecture on "Universal Religion." Music and distribution of Prasada terminated the day's proceedings.

The 84th Birthday Anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Luxa, Benares City, on the 9th March, 1919. The following was the programme:—The feeding of the Sadhus, 11 a. m. to 2 p. m.; Bhajana with music 2-4 p. m.; Lecture on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in English by Prof. Jadunath Sircar M. A., P. R. S. (Hindu University) and in Hindi by Babu Kaliprasanna Chatterjee, late editor, Tribune, 4-5 p.m.; Sankirtana 5-7 p.m.; and Distribution of Prasada.

The 84th Birthday Anniversary was celebrated at the Ramakrishna Sevashrama, 18 Hewett Road, Lucknow, on the 9th March last. The programme was as follows: Nagara Sankirtana, 7 to 9-30 a. m. Feeding of the poor, 12 a. m. to 4 p. m. General meeting of the members and sympathisers; and Bhajana, 6 to 8 p. m.

The 84th Birthday Anniversary of the Bhagavan was duly celebrated at the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal, Saharanpur Dt. on the 9th March, 1919. The Ashrama was tastefully decorated. The feeding of the Sadhus was the special feature of the day. There was music followed by discourses by eminent scholars on Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings.

At the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Kishanpur (Dehra Dun) the Birthday was celebrated on the 9th March with Puja, Bhajana, a public meeting, and distribution of Prasada.

The 84th Birthday Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at the Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras on the 9th March, 1919. The following programme was observed:—Bhajana 8-30—12 a. m.; Feeding the poor 9 a. m.—2 p.m.; Harikatha 2-30—5 p. m.; Lecture on "Sri Ramakrishna's Place in our History," by Prof. K. V. Rangaswami Iyengar M. A., at 5-30 p. m.

The event was celebrated with usual zeal in the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Basavangudi, Bangalore, on the 4th and 9th March, 1919. On the former day, which was the Tithi-puja day, Bhajana was performed, some light Prasada was served, and a number of children were treated to a feast. On the 9th, food-grains were distributed to 600 poor Narayanas in the morning. At noon, Bhajana parties from various parts of the city came in procession to the Math, carrying pictures of the Lord in decorated cars. The noteworthy feature this year was that the Panchamas (people of the depressed classes) of the place had managed to raise some money and constructed a small beautiful car of their own. Bhajana was performed till 2 p. m., when the Harikatha by Brahmasri Ramanujachar began, in which the story of Ramdas, the great Bhakta of Sri Ramachandra was dwelt on. He kept his audience spell-bound. The Harikatha being over at 6-30 p. m. Mr. N. Venkatesaiengar, Meteorological Reporter to Mysore Government, read a thoughtful paper written in fluent Kannada on the message of Sri Ramakrishna. He impressed upon the audience that Sri Ramakrishna's message to us was to lead a life of pure devotion,—not clinging to mere external forms, but to try and find out reason for our faith and be true to it. He was followed by Mr. V. Gopalaswami Iyengar, Assistant

Professor in the local College, who read a paper in English entitled 'Why I adore Sri Ramakrishna,' the substance of which has been reproduced elsewhere.

The Birthday was celebrated by the Vedanta Society, Trivandrum, on the 2nd March. There was Bhajana in the morning. At noon about 600 poor Narayanas were sumptuously fed. A public meeting was held at 5-15 p. m., presided over by Mr. G. Sankara Pillai Avl. B. A., B. L., District Judge. Mr. N. S. Ramakrishna Iyer Avl. B. A. delivered a lecture on "Sri Ramakrishna and Modern Civilisation" and Mr. R. Mahadeva Iyer Avl. on "Sri Ramakrishna and His Sayings." There was another lecture in Malayalam on "Sri Ramakrishna, an Avatara" by Mr. P. Krishnan Nambithiri. Some Tamil songs on Sri Ramakrishna were sung and the meeting dispersed after a universal prayer. On the Tithi-puja day there was Puja and Bhajana.

The Birthday was celebrated at Hosur (Salem) on 22nd Feb. last. There was Puja, Bhajana, a procession, and a Bhagavata Kalakshepam, accompanied by distribution of Prasada. A public meeting was held in the Chatram Hall, and Mr. K. S. Seshagiri Iyer delivered a stirring speech on Sri Ramakrishna before a crowded audience. He was followed by Mr. Venkatachariar who spoke in Telugu. Many ladies were present in the meeting.

The Anniversary was celebrated on the 9th March within the precincts of the temple of Sri Muralidhar at the Sangam, Sitabaldi, Nagpur. There was Marathi and Hindi Bhajana on the previous evening. The poor Narayanas were fed throughout the afternoon. Hari Sankirtana was held from 6 to 7 p. m. after which there was a public meeting presided over by Prof. Dinkar Dhundiraj Jatar M.A., in which S. Anil Chandra Bose M. Sc. and Prof. Rampratap Shastri were the principal speakers.

The 84th Birthday Anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was also celebrated in a befitting manner with Bhajana, discourses, feeding of poor Narayanas etc. at the Ramakrishna Mission Centres at Dacca, Barisal, Allahabad, Brindaban, Mayavati, the Rk. Sevashrama, Lahore, and other places in India and abroad.

NEWS AND NOTES.

FOR want of space we are sorry we cannot put in Swamiji's Epistles and Vivekachudamani in this issue. They will be regularly continued from the next issue.

THE tenth Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at the Belur Math premises on the 16th March, 1919, at 3-30 p. m. The agenda of business taken up at the meeting was as follows:—1. To consider the General Report of the Mission. 2. To sanction the amendment in the Bye-laws. 3. To elect auditors for the Mission. 4. To elect members proposed at the meeting.

—WE are glad to announce that Mr. Kunja Behari Lall, Engineer, Ahmedabad has kindly promised to pay Rs. 1000 for the foundation of the proposed dispensary building at the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal, Dt. Saharanpur in memory of his late revered parents and has paid Rs. 700 in the first instalment.

People desirous of perpetuating the cherished memory of their dear relatives may do so by paying for one or more rooms of the said building. The cost of each room is Rs. 1250. The building will consist of four main rooms and two store rooms. The total cost will be more than Rs. 5000.

MANAGER'S NOTICE.

From the 1st of April, 1919, an Experimental Post Office has been opened at Mayavati. Our constituents will therefore, until further notice, address all communications to us as follows. Our Exchanges also will kindly take note of this fact.

Manager, Prabuddha Bharata,

P. O. Mayavati, Dt. Almora, U. P.