

# Prabuddha Bharata

उत्तिष्ठत आयत



प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

Katha Upa. I. 44-45.

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

—SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

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## A CONVERSATION WITH THE HOLY MOTHER

RECORDED BY A DISCIPLE

During Mother's last illness, I once went to see her at the Udbodhan Office.\* She was doing slightly better at that time. I found her sitting alone in the southernmost room of the second storey. She looked very lean. After I had made my respectful obeisance to her, she asked me detailed news of my home. I then said: "Mother, you look exceedingly emaciated this time. I have never seen you so weak before."

Mother replied: "Yes, my child, I am really very weak. Methinks the Master has finished all that he wished to have done through this body. My mind now ever longs for him and is completely averse to all other things. You know how dearly I loved Radhu† and how hard I worked for her comfort. But my mind is totally changed now. Now if she comes before me, I feel displeased. I think within myself: 'Why does she come before me to drag down my mind?' The Master, for the sake of his work, has till now held down my mind to the realities

\* This is in Baghbazar, Calcutta, and is a branch of the Ramakrishna Order. The Holy Mother used to occupy the first floor of the house while she lived in Calcutta.

† She is Mother's niece and was brought up from a child by her.

of the world by means of all these attachments. Or else, how could I stay behind after he had passed away?"

Myself.—Mother, I am much pained to hear you talk like this. What will our fate be if you pass away? We have no renunciation or merit of penance. Of dispassion we have practically nothing. Without the strong support of your presence, how shall we live in this domain of Mahâ-mâyâ? Whenever we have felt any mental weakness, we have come to you and you also have graciously shown us the way out of it. To whom shall we go in future? We shall feel absolutely helpless.

Mother.—What, why will you be helpless? Is not the Master looking after you? Why are you so dejected? Have I not dedicated you to his feet? Now you cannot go beyond a certain limit ; all your wanderings must be *within* that circle.\* And he is ever protecting you.

Myself.—Though I often think of the Master's grace, yet I cannot always truly feel it. Sometimes I believe in it, but sometimes again doubts assail me. But you I have been seeing with these eyes. I have told you everything, good and evil, that is in me. And you also have always shown me the way that will be to my good. Thus I truly feel that you have given me protection.

Mother.—Always remember that the Master alone is your protector. If you forget this, you will lose yourself. Do you know why I enquired so minutely of your mother and home to-day? It was G. who first told me that your father had died. I asked him if your mother has any other relations and can do without your help. When I learnt that she can do without you, I said to myself: "Thank heaven, the boy is spiritually-minded,—he will not have, through His grace, many obstacles in his spiritual path."

Everyone must serve his mother, especially you who have dedicated yourselves to the service of all. If your father had not left money enough behind, I would have asked you to earn

\* Ordinarily man is led by his desires and *samskaras* into fresh entanglements of karma every day of his life, and remains thus far off from the redeeming vision of Truth. When he is, however, fortunate enough to be accepted as disciple by a knower of Brahman, he is freed from the grip of his latent karmas and his desires become limited. He is no more bewildered by them and does not go into fresh entanglements.



it to serve your mother. The Master however has saved you from all entanglements. You have only to look after your mother and see that the money is not wasted through her mismanagement. This is no small advantage. One can scarcely earn money by honest means,—it eventually soils the mind. Therefore I ask you to finish quickly your money affairs. Money is such that if you handle it long, you will be attracted by it. You may think that you have no fear of such attachment. But never think so ; anyday unawares the illusion may grip you by the throat. Moreover, you are a Calcutta boy and are apt to play with money. Therefore complete your home arrangements and leave Calcutta as early as you can. If you can take your mother to a holy place, both of you may live together in prayer and worship, forgetting worldly relations. Your mother is now in great grief owing to your father's bereavement. If you can do it, that will be very nice. She is also advanced in age. Try to persuade her and always speak about spiritual things with her.

That indeed will be the truest filial service if you can help her provide for her "way."\* You have grown on her heart's blood. What infinite pains has she not taken to bring you up ! To serve her you should know to be your highest duty except when she prevents you from going to the path of God. Why not bring her here one day ? If I find her good, I shall give her a few instructions. But take care, do not, on the pretext of serving your mother, be intoxicated by worldly things. You want very little, having only to provide for a widowed mother. Finish your money affairs quickly, even at some loss if need be. The Master could not even touch money. You have renounced in his name, you must ever think of what he did. Money is at the root of all evils in the world. You are young. Money in your hand would be tempting. Therefore be careful.

Myself.—I also thought of bringing my mother to you. But seeing you so ill, I no longer want to do so.

Mother.—No, no, bring her once. Many others come here. As to my body, well, it will grow daily worse. Get her soon one of these days. I feel better in the morning. Can you not

\* *i.e.*, in her spiritual progress.

bring her then? Come very early, or they\* may not allow you to come to me.

Myself.—Your words pain me. What you say about your body shows that you do not mean to keep it any longer.

Mother.—Whether the body shall remain or not, is not in my hands,—it must be according to his will. But why are you so cast down? How long do you spend with me? You often live at the Belur Math or elsewhere. How many have the opportunity to live and speak with me? You do not even care to inform me where you live.

Myself.—True we have not the opportunity to live with you, but we know that you are and that whenever any weakness comes to the mind, it will vanish as soon as we come to you.

Mother.—Do you think that if the Master does not preserve this body, I shall be quit till all those whose burden I have taken on myself have attained salvation? I shall have to be with them till then. I have taken the responsibility of their well-being. To initiate is no fun. It is a tremendous burden to bear and one has to think anxiously of the disciples. Thus when your father died, I felt very sad. I began to think of this fresh trouble of you and of how you can push your way through it. That is why I said all these things to-day. You do not understand everything. If you had, my anxiety would have been much relieved. The Master is playing with you in various ways. But I have to bear the brunt of his play. Those whom I have accepted as my own, I can never forsake.

Myself.—The thought of the future devoid of your presence, frightens me.

Mother.—Why, there are Rakhal† and others,—they are not insignificant. You also love Rakhal dearly. Go to him whenever you need any instruction. But then, what more instruction do you need? It is no good asking for too many instructions. Cannot digest even one and yet swallowing ten more, and then going unsettled about which one to take! Be immersed in what you have already got. Meditate and repeat his name, keep good company and never allow egoism to rear its head. Don't you see how childlike Rakhal is? And Sarat‡

\* Mother's attendants.

† Swami Brahmananda.

‡ Swami Saradananda.



—how hard he works, how silently and patiently he bears all troubles! He is a Sadhu, what need has he personally to do all this? They can, if they will, remain ever in uninterrupted thought of God. It is for your benefit that they are dwelling on the lower planes. Ever keep their character before your eye and serve them. Ever remember whose child you are and who is protecting you. Whenever any evil thought comes to the mind, say to yourself: “Can I, being her son, ever do such a thing?” And you will find that a new strength has come to you and you will be filled with peace.

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## CHALLENGE OF MAYA

BY THE EDITOR

It is characteristic of the Hindu view that it regards the phenomenal world as evanescent. It looks askance at the reality of the world and its attractions and at the ultimate value of human desires and impulses. The conduct of life aims ultimately at the negation of its manifold aspect. From this it must not be inferred that it leads eventually to a dead vacuity. The Hindu posits a reality above all phenomena, unattainable by the changing mind, and it is towards the perception of that that the entire life-activity is made to move. This antagonistic attitude towards what are generally conceived as life and reality, finds its complete expression in the Advaita philosophy or what is known as Mâyâvâda.

This Mayavada—doctrine of Maya—has unfortunately come in for a good deal of adverse criticism. It is often misunderstood, and that is also perhaps why it is criticised. We are sure that correctly understood, it will be found to be but a statement and a pointing out of a certain fundamental fact of the world of experience, which no sensible person can deny. It must be admitted that the usual presentation of the philosophy of Advaita or Mayavada also is partly responsible for this misunderstanding. A philosophy may be very finely argued. But the acceptance of it by people does not depend on its logical perfection. In fact, philosophy also like most other things must suit the *temperament* of the people to whom it is recommended



to be accepted by them. The same man to whom Mayavada is repugnant, revels in the Upanishads on which Mayavada is primarily based. There is no difference between the teachings of the Upanishads and Mayavada, and yet the popular reception of them is widely different. The explanation is that though both of them iterate the same truths, their modes of presenting those truths are different. The Upanishads are glad with the joy, freedom, peace, beauty and power of the monistic realisation. We catch the glimpse of a higher and fuller life through the rhythm of the Upanishadic words. The light of a wonderful world, a million times more glorious than our present experience, seems to suffuse these ancient utterances. The question of the reality or unreality of the phenomenal world does not seem to trouble us. We are swept off our feet into the heart of the Transcendental and revel in its glories. It is Advaita, but how realistic, how entrancing! In Sankara, however, we find the effort to prove the unreality of the phenomenal world more predominant than the enunciation of the glory of the monistic realisation. The emphasis has been shifted. It may be it was necessary. The Upanishads are content with stating certain facts without caring to fight contrary views or establish those facts on logical foundations. Sankara's was pre-eminently the task of a philosopher. He was born in an age of philosophical reconstruction. And after the extremes of the Buddhistic and Jaina philosophies and the plethora of creeds, all of which find mention and refutation in the *Brahma-Sutras*, his supreme concern became the systematisation and rationalisation of the conclusions of the Advaita philosophy and their foundation on a strictly logical basis. Therefore his philosophy is loud with the din of battle ; the final peace occupies only the short space of a conventional epilogue. Thus, though both he and the Upanishads deal with the same truths, in one the negative aspect is more prominent than in the other. This, in our opinion, is at least partly responsible for the bad reputation of Mayavada.

There are also other reasons. One is that the order of monks and the life and practice that he prescribed for it, kept formally too aloof from the ordinary life of the world. They shunned the common concerns of life and restricted themselves to the heights of contemplative idealism. Perhaps in his age when all kinds of vulgar practices were current in the name of



religion, and both monks and householders indulged in questionable rites and ceremonies, it was necessary that a group of men should stand out as examples of the highest conclusions and aspects of philosophy and religious life. But Advaitism does not necessarily mean this formal exclusion of the world. Here what a striking contrast Swami Vivekananda furnishes to Sankara! Both are as emphatic about the truth of monism and the ultimate futility of the world as they are unsparing of other philosophies. But whereas Sankara is busy demonstrating the worthlessness of the world, Swami Vivekananda calls us to the realisation of the inner Divinity of it and dedicates us to its service. Sankara asks us to shun the world and the common life; Swami Vivekananda asks us to jump into their heart and find therein the Highest enshrined. The one says, Renounce! the other, Conquer! Seen through the Swami's eyes, life and the world become intensely real. Every atom, every pulsation of life, seems a part of the Divine. These two great seers do not differ philosophically, they differ temperamentally. Therefore to the monks of Vivekananda there is nothing that is insignificant or ephemeral, everything is instinct with the Divine Infinite. No life is vain, everyone enshrines a Divine revelation. Here the emphasis is both on the transcendental and relative aspects of the Real. This is what the great Swami meant by bringing Vedanta from the seclusion of forests to the thoroughfares of everyday life. This is his Practical Vedanta. Yet the Swami does not deny Mayavada. In fact he is as staunch an advocate of it as any of his predecessors. It must not be understood, therefore, that Mayavada is such a disheartening proposition. It must be grasped as it truly is and thus grasped, it will appear as a highest philosophical solvent.

Another reason of the unpopularity of Mayavada is the extreme metaphysical form in which from Sankara downwards it has hitherto been presented. Not that the metaphysical presentation was wrong or unnecessary. It was on the other hand very much needed. But a mere metaphysical presentation of a fact which concerns also everyday life and reality, cannot but be partial. The theory of *Adhyâsa* and the philosophical subtleties of the post-Sankaran Advaitists—their predilections to Nyâya—have imparted a sinister colouring to this most fundamental principle. Perhaps Swami Vivekananda felt it. That is why we find him in his famous lectures on Maya delivered in



London, trying to go back from the logical lucubrations of the formal doctrinaires to the simple, direct statement of the principle. That is why he explained that it was not a theory, but a *statement of facts*. Thus conceived Mayavada becomes extremely realistic. It seems not merely a metaphysical theory, but a concern of everyday life. It stimulates us to noble action and ceaseless upward struggle. It destroys inactivity, ignorance and pessimism. It calls upon everyone to strain one's utmost to assert one's innate Divinity and discover the same in the objects of one's knowledge. It has got nothing to do with pessimism or fatalistic inanity and does not discourage enthusiastic action as is sometimes popularly but erroneously supposed. To think that it does so is to do great injustice to Mayavada. As we have mentioned above, such a misunderstanding is not quite without reason. We therefore need a presentation of this much misunderstood doctrine, which will avoid both the extremes of metaphysical subtlety and popular inanity. We must steer clear of both of them, if this doctrine should be made to yield its full measure of service. We want a psychological presentation of it, the statement of the fact that our everyday experience as we know it is a contradiction.

Mayavada emerges in a philosophical form first with Sankara. But it exists in the Upanishads in an essential form. Wherever the ultimate unity of existence has been spoken of, the reality of the world has been tacitly denied. The world of variety has often been referred to as existing '*iva*', 'as it were', not really. The world is a seeming world, not actual. It is true that the reason why we have this illusion of the world has not been seriously enquired into by the Upanishads. But the fundamentals are there. Later on, philosophers amplified them, elaborated the special theory of *Adhyâsa*, *Ajnâna* or *Mithyâ-jnâna*, and showed how out of ignorance, the manifold world has been conjured up and superimposed upon Brahman. The fact is that the truth of the Advaita perception being granted, Mayavada follows of course. How the one becomes many, and many one, is the most puzzling of ontological problems and no rational explanation has been as yet vouchsafed of this mystery. The only analogous experience is what is known as *Adhyasa*, as when we mistake a rope for a snake. Sankara and his followers therefore took up this experience as typical of the



cosmic delusion and sought through it to unravel the metaphysical mystery. Sankara's position is entrenched within two basic presuppositions: (1) that the monistic realisation is a fact and that in that realisation there is no vestige of duality, it being a state of pure, undifferentiated consciousness; and (2) that that state of consciousness is a negation of the consciousness of the world, *i.e.*, one cannot perceive Brahman and the world at the same time. The final proof of these presuppositions is found only in the experience of the knower of Brahman. Therein lies their final vindication. Till then, Mayavada as explained by metaphysicians appears not unnaturally too subtle and far off and almost unreal.

But the reasons stated above, which justify Mayavada do not suddenly appear at the culmination of our ascending spiritual experience. They are the accumulated and condensed form of the irrational bias that characterises all our experiences from the beginning to the end. There is no experience or life that is not affected by it. There is an inherent conflict in all our perceptions and states of being, an element of restlessness that makes us change from moment to moment and allows us no peace. The recognition of this essential conflict in all our knowing, feeling and doing is what we may call the psychological Mayavada. It considers Maya not in its final, absolute form, but piecemeal, in every moment of experience. It brings us into the very vortex of our daily transactions and points to the vitiating essential error.

Our perceptions are all self-contradictory. It is said that the perception of the finite presupposes the perception of the infinite, that without the latter the former is impossible. But though reason points it out as a fact, yet we know that in our perception of finite things, we are *conscious* only of finitude. If there is indeed also an infinite aspect of our perception, our consciousness is wholly defrauded of it. What is that which thus defrauds? Then again, it is common knowledge that all things are changing and ephemeral. Change and consequent disappearance of things are undeniable. Yet, who does not at the same time implicitly believe that they are also real, as real as can be? That is to say, at the actual moment of perception, we feel them to be eternal. But how can eternity and change inhere in the same thing? What is that magic that makes change and eternity blend into each other? Take our know-



ledge of man. We give him a name, and associate with it a certain body, a certain mind and also a soul. But how all these three can be associated together into an integral idea is a puzzle which the acutest reason will find impossible to solve. Do we, when we think of a man, think him to be a body? No ; no man considers a dead man to be the same as when he was living. The body has remained, but something has evidently gone out of it which constituted the essence of the man. Do we then think him as a mind? No, we do not consider man even as mind. For we find the mind of man changing beyond recognition as he grows up. We see it change from moment to moment. We must therefore conclude that when we know a man, we perceive him to be an unchanging, eternal, intelligent entity, beyond both mind and body, that is to say, as spirit. Yet we *know* we do not perceive him as such. Does not our entire behaviour towards him show that? Could man behave with man in his daily life in the way he does, if he had been conscious of him as a soul? He would have looked upon him as God himself. Evidently then, our perception of man contains in it all the three elements of body, mind and soul. But is it not absurd? The soul is infinite, the body and mind are finite ; all of them are qualitatively mutually exclusive. How do we simultaneously think of the finite and the infinite and these three incongruous entities? This is indeed Maya. And this is what psychological Mayavada points to. It analyses our actual experience and shows that a mystifying something is making fools of us, making us hold contradictory views of things in spite of ourselves, and leading us to irrational, absurd conclusions. It makes us feel that there is an irrational bias in our knowledge and perception, which we must destroy if we would know the truth and the peace thereof.

Not merely objective perceptions, but also our subjective perceptions are marked by the same absurdity. When we think of ourselves, we arrive at the same self-contradictory conclusions. In one aspect, we are creatures of time, subject to change and circumstances, born of mortals and destined to die. In another aspect, we are timeless—time itself exists in our recognition of it—and infinite and eternal. Reason cannot reconcile these contradictory aspects. Yet we are believing ourselves to be both at the same time. This is Maya.

Our actions which arise from this false knowledge and



kindred desires, are equally stupid and absurd. The ultimate justification of activity lies in its leading to self-realisation. But the very word, *self-realisation*, shows the inherent stupidity of the whole thing. Does not the self know itself that it should realise itself? Evidently something is hiding it from itself. Is it not funny to think that we do not know ourselves? Yet, how do we live if we do not know ourselves? Here again is the play of the cosmic illusion which reconciles contradictions and makes the impossible possible . . . . Actions are justified and have meaning on the ground of the truth and reality of our perceptions. But our knowledge of men and things is itself false. Supposing however that actions are quite justified, we find them ever dogged by a baffling sense of futility. There is no satisfaction. Our achievements turn into ashes in our mouth. We begin aiming at certain results, but by the time we reach them, we find them unsatisfactory and make at other things. Thus goes on the senseless race, unsatisfying and having no finality. We are ever athirst. Even the conquest of the entire earth and heaven with their untold powers and riches would not satisfy. We know there is no end to this game and that our activities ultimately lead to nothing\* and are swallowed up in death. Knowing so, we yet strive on day and night, without cessation, without rest. Something seems to drive us on. If we only turn back and look facts squarely in the face, the absolute hollowness of the whole procedure will become at once apparent and the pearl of great price, self-realisation, will become ours. But we do not, and this is Maya.

The hungers of our heart are equally subject to delusion. Love tends to unite. It reaches perfection in the absolute unity of the lover and the beloved. If then our love should be perfect, we must ever seek unity, which is possible only by learning to know the beloved as Divine ;—for in Divinity alone abides true unity. But human love, though it seeks unity, is yet afraid of it and through a freak of delusion, clings desperately to its evanescent individuality. Thus man suffers. For tossed by these contradictory tendencies, even his deepest love feels an unbridgeable gulf separating itself from its object. All human love is thus blighted. The more one loves, the more

\* Except what is called self-realisation, the absurdity of which we have noted before.

one finds that one does not know one's beloved. Husband, wife, father, mother, child, brother, sister, friend, all feel at one time or another that the objects of their life-long love are but strangers to them, distant inhabitants of other worlds. We seek to bind our beloved to ourselves. But it is easier to bind the air than the heart of man. For man is much more than we know him to be. An entire unknown universe dwells in his soul. We get a point of contact with that universe sometimes and fondly think that we shall bind it for ever to our own. The end is pathetic despair.

Such are some of the absurdities of our daily life and experience. The psychological Mayavada aims at exposing them and actuates men to eliminate them from their life and knowledge. It does not immediately concern itself with any theories of life or reality. It is content to point out the irrational bias and stimulate the dynamic principle of reason which consciously or unconsciously guides every man to his final destiny. All serious thinkers are conscious of the irrationality of our present life. The Advaitists alone have the boldness to declare it. Others are afraid of the truth. They prevaricate and console themselves by specious arguments.

There is thus one school of thinkers who hold that this self-contradictoriness is of the very essence of reality and that in the calm acceptance of it, not in chafing against it, lies true wisdom and self-fulfilment. Let us surrender ourselves to it, they say. Reality is both finite and infinite, it is both life and death, self and not-self. Error lies in taking only one aspect in rejection of the other. We shall not dogmatise here about what Reality in itself is, whether it is finite-infinite or only infinite. But even supposing that it is finite-infinite, it does not follow that man's fulfilment lies in his indulgence in and continuing of the finite-infinite game which our present life is. For man only seems to but does not and cannot really combine the finite and the infinite in the same moment of perception. If he is to successfully imitate God—supposing that God is finite-infinite—he must first know the infinite as clearly as he does the finite now, and he can know the infinite only by rejecting the finite. He must listen to the clarion call of Mayavada. Besides, this specious philosophy forgets one fundamental principle of the human mind. Even if it be true that the human



mind is capable of grasping the finite and the infinite simultaneously and in conjunction, emphasising this fact will not help. For over and above this, there is another mental principle which is ever impelling us towards undifferentiated unity, beyond all conflict and contradiction,—that which cannot brook any alliance of contradictions such as the finite-infinite game. We cannot overlook its imperious demands without changing our mental constitution itself. This is the principle of reason. Reason ever points to monism and is impatient of all duality. For man, therefore, there is only one way to traverse, the way to undifferentiated unity. And this is what the analysis of our daily experience points to. We must cut the knot that binds life to contradictions and soar high up towards the Infinite One.

This is peculiarly the age of the Advaita philosophy. An understanding of Mayavada is therefore urgently needed. We are inclined to think that the thought of the present age will furnish ever better interpretations and explanations of Mayavada than the philosophies of the past. We must make that doctrine a determining principle of our daily life. Let us accept the challenge of Maya. Let us recognise its teachings, and seek every moment to eliminate its vitiating effect from all our knowing, doing and feeling. If our present unhappiness is due to our holding on simultaneously to the finite and the infinite, let the fire of our wisdom-eye burn the finite and reveal the untrammelled glory of the infinite in every pulsation of our life. Let us try every moment to perceive correctly. Let us look upon everything as it is, that is, as spirit and transcend the Mayik conflict. Let us love and feel only for the One ; for so doing, we shall truly love. Let us act spiritually as serving the Divine ; for thereby we shall be free of the delusion that vitiates ordinary activity. Instead of being a mere metaphysical doctrine, let Mayavada be the philosophy of our everyday life. Let us carry out its warning in our daily life. This indeed is the truest service of Mayavada.

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# WITH THE HOLY MEN OF HRISHIKESH

BY A WESTERN WANDERER

After a journey of two days and nights in a stuffy railway compartment I alighted one bright winter afternoon at a little wayside station in Northern India, at the foot of the Himalayas. Here I took to the road and after a tramp of seven miles, toward evening came to the picturesque village of Hrishikesh nestled between the sweeping Ganges and a dense jungle.

Few foreigners visit this quaint little place with its thatched mud-built cottages shaded by mighty trees and its little cone-shaped temples dedicated to the god Siva. But to the Hindu the place is rich in traditions, and the *Dharmasalas*, or rest-houses, of which there are many, are always packed with pilgrims. At open shops where dusky keen-witted men and boys ply their trade, the pilgrims provide themselves with food and other necessaries for long journeys to the sacred shrines of Kedar Nath and Badri Narayan, twelve thousand feet up in the Himalayas.

Hrishikesh is a very ancient place. Here, it is said, the sage Vyasa, thirty centuries ago, collected the Vedas, the most ancient extant scriptures in the world; and here the Pandava brothers, heroes of the Mahabharata, halted on their way to *Swarga*, the Celestial Abode, to perform austerities. The great attraction of the place for Hindus, however, apart from its antiquity and historical or mythological connections, is the periodical concourse of "Holy Men," the Sadhus, or wandering monks, who during their peregrinations halt here in large numbers to contemplate and discuss the mysteries of Existence.

The place looked very peaceful in the calm of early evening. The temple bells were tolling for worship, and from all directions devotees came hastening toward the sacred shrines with offerings of flowers and Ganges water. High hills covered with dense vegetation, dark blue at the approach of dusk, rose on the opposite bank of the river. Toward the north appeared ranges of gray-blue mountains piled up one behind the other with towering summits covered with eternal snow, golden-red with the last rays of the closing day.

It was difficult to find lodging for the night, but I succeeded in securing a small room in one of the resthouses. All the other rooms were occupied by men, women and children who talked, sang, and read aloud from their scriptures till long after midnight.

I had come to see the Sadhus, and very early the following morning I started out on foot to visit them in their camp about two miles north of the village. The road led through a forest. The sun had not yet risen but the distant mountain peaks were already aglow.

Early as it was, many pilgrims had set out before me—men



carrying blankets across their broad shoulders, women balancing bundles on their heads. Almost everyone was provided with a stout bamboo staff. Pretty children trotted beside their mothers holding fast to skirt or sari; and babies carried astride on the hips of stately dames smiled at me as I overtook and passed them.

One party had a leader, a Brahman priest, in spotless white loin-cloth, shawl and turban, who at intervals shouted at the top of his voice, "*Haribole! Haribole!*" "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" His followers took up the note and the forest resounded with their joyous cries.

Walking at a brisk pace I was one of the first to reach the Sadhus who were camped on a stretch of gently undulating land between the river and the jungle. Nearly two hundred monks of different orders had established themselves in frail bamboo huts among the trees.

Approaching the camp I came upon a cluster of huts occupied by orange robed *Dandis*, the most exclusive sect of all the monks. They admit only high-born Brahmins into their order, and always carry a *danda*, or staff, their symbol of renunciation, which they receive at the time of initiation to be constantly reminded of their vow to constrain their thoughts, their speech and their desires. Half a dozen monks squatted on the ground were reading aloud from Vedic scriptures, each oblivious of the rest, their heads moving back and forth with the rhythm of the sacred text.

At a little distance two *Dadus* in red clouts, their earlobes pierced with heavy bone earrings, the insignia of their order, were sweeping their camp with brooms made of twigs.

Hidden behind a bush, in front of a kennel-like little hut a *Boureeah* in red shawl and loin-cloth, with long shaggy hair reaching to his shoulders, sat talking to a young pilgrim. He felt the pilgrim's pulse and gave him a medicine that he himself had prepared from roots gathered in the forest. He was an amiable old fellow with a kindly smile in his soft brown eyes.

A young fine-featured Sadhu with shaven head and bare feet dressed in a cream-colored tunic, moved leisurely among the trees counting his beads. Close by, under a huge white umbrella a *Jhuttadaree*, his long hair coiled upon the crown of his head, sat in meditation, like a bronze, his eyes closed, his hands folded in his lap.

A group of half nude *Nagas*, muscular fellows with long, sun-bleached hair and sharp features were seated around a burning log, the *dhuni*, or sacred fire, symbol of illumination. One was sifting ashes through a cotton cloth. An elderly monk rose, and taking handfuls of the carefully prepared ashes rubbed them over his hair and body, which gave him a weird appearance. A party of pilgrims, two elderly men and a young woman, one after the other knelt before him, touched his feet



with their foreheads and rising to their knees received from him between the eye-brows the mark of the sacred ashes. Then they went their way.

I also moved on, everywhere meeting Sadhus who came from or went toward the river, strong daring men of free and easy bearing, in salmon-colored loin-cloth, tunic, or clout, turbaned or bare-headed, sandaled or barefoot. Neophytes in white tunics, a *shikha*, (tuft of hair) on the crown of their heads were studying Sanskrit, or sat in groups under trees, listening to monks who expounded the Vedas.

Walking toward the river I found some monks still engaged with their morning toilet, vigorously brushing their teeth with the chewed end of a twig. Others were performing their ceremonial ablutions, saluting the sun with folded palms, or seated near the edge of the river were silently repeating their prayers.

One Sadhu with stentorian voice was reciting the thousand names of Siva ; and another in the solemn rhythm of the ancient, classical language, was chanting in Sanskrit parts of the Guru Gita :

*Akhanda-mandalâkâram vyâptam yena charâchram,*

*Tad-padam darsitam yena tasmai Srigurave namah. Etc.*

“Salutation be to the glorious Guru who has revealed to me the One Supreme Being whose shining form pervades the entire universe, animate and inanimate.” etc.

A splendidly-built youth about sixteen years old, a strip of ochre-stained cloth around his waist, the upper part of his golden-brown body quite naked, sat on a flat stone in the sun. The river lapped the stone, and the boy's feet were dangling in the water. To all appearance he sat there idling away his time, basking in the sunshine.

“You seem very young to have adopted this life,” I accosted him.

“It is never too early to adopt a holy life,” came like a flash.

“What are you doing here?” I asked.

“I listen to the song of Mother Ganga as she rushes by,” he answered with a smile. Then with a sweeping gesture of his right arm toward the river, he added, “Day and night she sings, ‘Hara! Hara!’ the name of God.”

The boy had walked three months from his home in Kashmir, he told me, alone, begging his food as monks do. “And now,” he said, “by the grace of God I am here.”

“How long will you remain here?” I asked.

“That,” he replied, “depends on His will.”

Then, with a few parting words I took leave of the brave lad, and walked back to the jungle.

Under a heavy limb of a magnificent tree, his arms resting on a swing fastened to the limb, stood an elderly man in a



long red garment. He was practising austerities, and had taken the vow to remain in standing posture during one entire month. He was now in his third week ; his legs were swollen and he looked very miserable. From a large crowd of pilgrims who stood gaping at him a woman wrapped in a white sari stepped forward and approaching him bowed her head to the ground close to his feet. Then she rose and handed a small coin to one who was attending to his needs.

An old Sadhu in white greeted me as I drew near him. In chaste Hindi, with the poise and grace of oriental manners he invited me to be seated by his side. Soon we were engaged in conversation. He told me that the religious mendicants are adressed as Swami, or teacher ; Mahatma, or great soul ; Maharaj, or prince among men ; or simply as Babaji, or holy father.

“There are a great number of religious orders,” he said, “and the monks of the different orders can be easily distinguished by their dress and general appearance. The Sannyasins dress in orange ; the Buddhists in yellow ; the Udasees in white. The Avadhutas are supposed to go nude, but the practice is hardly ever carried out nowadays. On special occasions, however, as during the Kumbha Mela, these men denude themselves and march in a great procession, the object of veneration to the vast crowds of pilgrims who visit this fair.

“The members of all these sects take the vow of chastity, poverty and obedience to the Guru who initiates them into the order. They are supposed to be unattached to the things of this world, to find their happiness in contemplating God, to do harm to no living creature and to curb their desires. They represent different schools of thought but do not subscribe to any binding articles of creed. The followers of the different schools meet on friendly terms and often reside together under the same roof. In the Maitrayana Upanishad the monks are told to study truth, speak truth, think truth and meditate on truth.”

Most of the Sadhus were now leaving the camp to beg their one daily meal at the village *chhatram*, or public kitchen. I therefore rose to take leave of my friend that he might also beg his food. But he held me back and proposed that I stay with him for a day or two. “I will beg food for both of us,” he said, “and you may occupy a hut that has just been vacated.”

Charmed with the beauty and quiet of the place I accepted his kind offer and established myself in the empty hut. My host went on his errand from which he presently returned, his alms-bowl filled with unleavened wheat cakes, his brass tumbler full of lentil soup. He spread a clean towel on the floor for the cakes and poured the soup into a cup plaited of leaves. My appetite was keen and I heartily enjoyed this unique dinner.

After the meal we visited a *digambari*, or “sky-clad” monk.



We found him seated on the sandy river-beach in the glaring sun. He was a peculiar type of man, the only monk at Hrishikesh who was entirely nude. He observed the vow of perpetual silence, and took no food except what was offered him without his asking, and then only small quantities ; a few fruits or sweetmeats would suffice him for days. He was a Yogi and an adept in *pranayama*, or control of the life-breath. I saw him look at the burning sun with unshielded eyes for some minutes steadily. For hours he would sit perfectly motionless, his body rigid as of stone. I marvelled at the wonderful calm and peaceful repose expressed in his features. Notwithstanding his nudity he carried a certain dignity, and there was not a trace of vulgarity.

Then we met a boy-Sadhu, a sweet child of twelve or thirteen, whose mother had consecrated him to the monastic life when he was born. He had now been two years serving his novitiate under an elderly monk who seemed very fond of him. He knew a little Sanskrit, and at my request recited a few slokas from the Bhagavad Gita.

In the cool evening when the sun had disappeared behind the bushy tops of bael trees amid a haze of rosy mist lightly streaked with purple and pale green, a score of Sadhus gathered around a blazing log-fire that threw fantastic shadows among the trees, and tinted the leaves with golden hue. Seated in a circle, presided over by a middle aged monk of remarkable erudition, they entered upon scriptural discussions. Pilgrims after saluting the Sadhus with joined palms bowing almost to the ground, squatted in an outer circle where they were allowed to enter into the discussions and to propose questions.

The arguments were often deeply philosophical and the measured tuneful intonations of Sanskrit texts in support of certain theses was impressive. There was considerable difference of opinion and the discussions grew hot ; still, the Sadhus retained perfect self-control and remained respectful toward one another. There was all through a mixture of dignity and good-nature which kept all sting from the controversy.

They discussed the three main systems of Vedanta, the monistic, the qualified monistic, and the dualistic systems. The problem was : has God form, or is He formless? Does He manifest in one form, or in different forms? The conclusion arrived at came to this : God reveals Himself in different forms according to the spiritual state of the devotee merged in all-absorbing meditation. But in the highest state of super-consciousness He is realized as the formless One, as the devotee's own Soul. Then the devotee comes face to face with the supreme experience, propounded in the Vedas, 'Aham Brahmâsmi,' 'I am Brahman.'

At a little distance a party of Nagas had lighted their own fire. Each monk was provided with a *chimpta*, or fire-



tongs, which was frequently used to pull small pieces of live-coal from the fire to keep their *chillums* (pipes) going. They smoked *charas*, a narcotic drug, giving out large volumes of white smoke, so pungent that it had to be drawn through a wet cloth, and a pull or two at a time was sufficient to satisfy their craving. The men were of little culture or learning. But they were reputed to be of good character.

There was a new moon when I returned to my hut for the night's rest. The snowy mountain peaks shimmered in the bright starlight, and the dismal hoot of an owl seemed to deepen the silence. I did not sleep much, for the ground was hard and my single blanket barely sufficient to keep me warm during the chill night. But I did not regret this, for now and then I heard the melodious chant of one who was evidently keeping night vigil. His deep sonorous voice vibrated through the sleeping forest as he called on the Lord in the language of the *Rishis*, the sages of India, who, countless ages ago, had composed these chants under probably the same conditions. Many of the slokas were familiar to me, but never had I heard them recited so feelingly, with so much fervour and under such enchanting conditions. I still remember :

*Yo devo agnau yo.apsu yo vishvam bhuvanamâvivesha ;  
Yo oshadhishu yo vanaspatishu tasmai devâya namo namah, etc.*

“To Him who resides in the fire,  
To Him who resides in the water,  
To Him who pervades the entire universe,  
To Him who resides in plants and trees,  
To Him be our adoration,  
To Him we bow down.”

“Thou verily art my Mother, Thou art my Father, Thou art my Friend and my Companion, Thou art all Wisdom, the Great Treasure, Thou art my All in All, Thou art the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, Thou art the only God.”

“We meditate on Thee, we worship Thee, we prostrate before Thee who art the Witness to this world, the One Existence, the Lord who supports all creation. We take refuge in Thee who art our guide across this ocean of Life.”

And so on it went through the long watches of the night. At last, I became drowsy and dozed off to happy dreams. After a short but peaceful sleep I rose to welcome the first glimmer of dawn and then the slowly rising sun and the majestic mountains with golden summits partly hidden by moving clouds.

Doves cooed in the wild plum trees, and the boy-Sadhu was taking his bath in the cool limpid river as I turned to leave Hrishikesh, grateful for an experience that will always remain fresh in my memory, one of my happiest experiences in India.



## SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

BY SISTER DEVAMATA

*(Chapter from a new book by the author entitled "DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY" which will soon appear in print)*

One day in early autumn Swami Ramakrishnananda said to me: "Swami Brahmananda is coming to Madras for six months. I am going to Puri to bring him." A week later he set out on his northward journey. At the station on leaving an incident occurred which revealed anew his unvarying habit of thought. Through a misunderstanding no place had been reserved for him in the train and the only thing available was an upper berth in a compartment with two Englishmen. A person of Swami Ramakrishnananda's size and weight in a lightly built upper berth meant no little peril for the one who slept beneath and the English travellers did not hesitate to talk of it with rude frankness. Swami Ramakrishnananda paying no heed to their words sat crosslegged on the long seat of the railway carriage, rocking slowly back and forth, a smile of calm unconcern on his face. In reply to an indignant comment from one of the many who had come to see him off, he said quietly: "Do not mind. Divine Mother will take care of me."

The hour for departure arrived but the train did not move. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, still the train remained motionless. Then the station master came running down the platform calling: "Engine derailed! All out! Go to track number five." He stopped to say to Swami Ramakrishnananda: "I have a place for you. Wait a moment." When he returned, he led Swami Ramakrishnananda to a single first class compartment with washroom attached. As Swami Ramakrishnananda stepped into it he said to me with the same quiet smile: "I told you, Sister, that Divine Mother would look after me."

Before leaving, he had charged Rudra and me to prepare for Swami Brahmananda's coming as for the Master himself. "Remember," he reiterated, "Swami Brahmananda was like his own son and when you see him, you have a glimpse of what Sri Ramakrishna was. The self in Swami Brahmananda is entirely annihilated. Whatever he says or does comes directly from the Divine Source.

Swami Brahmananda lived with Sri Ramakrishna for five



or six years before his passing away. We all regarded him as Sri Ramakrishna's son and he treated him exactly like an own child. Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) always slept in the same room with him ; sometimes under the same mosquito curtain. If the Master saw him with a torn cloth, he would weep, crying : 'Is there none to give Rakhal a new cloth?' Often when people brought him food he would say : 'Give it to Rakhal. I eat through his mouth. Feeding him is the same as feeding me.' Once at night the Master was thirsty, so he asked Rakhal to bring him water ; but Rakhal had already gone to bed and was sleepy, so he merely gave a little grunt of refusal, turned over on his mat and went to sleep. Gurumaharaj (Sri Ramakrishna) was overjoyed, 'Now I see he feels I am really his father,' he declared ; and all the next day he kept telling the incident to everyone with the greatest satisfaction."

We prepared the Monastery with joyous expectancy. It was swept, dusted, scoured and polished until it shone with cleanliness. Swami Ramakrishnananda's room had been thoroughly renovated not long before. We had done it for his use, but when he looked at it in all its freshness he said : "Very nice. Now we will shut it up and keep it for the President. I will sleep in that other room." The room he indicated served partially for storage. At that time no word had been spoken of Swami Brahmananda's coming to Madras ; but the room was left unoccupied until it was made ready for the Head of the Order.

When the cleaning was done we hung garlands everywhere over the doors, along the parapet of the roof terrace, at the gate. Rudra sat up the whole of the last night to make a mammoth "Welcome" in green leaves to stretch across the roof. A drenching rain in the early morning reduced it to a pulpy mass and left our garlands torn and dripping. We went to the station in a downpour ; but all the carriages of the neighborhood had been offered for the occasion, so we were protected.

When the train pulled into the station, the dense crowd that had gathered on the platform surged towards the railway compartment where Swami Brahmananda and Swami Ramakrishnananda were seated. To each one Swami Brahmananda gave a gentle, smiling greeting. I was already prepared for his great loving-kindness by the welcome he had sent me through



Swami Ramakrishnananda on my arrival in India. It read: "I come to learn from your letter to Ram that Sister Devamata arrived at Madras safely. Please convey our best wishes and greetings to her. I hope our Lord has brought her here for great works and may our Lord fulfill our hopes and grant her peace of mind and heavenly happiness."

Three young Swamis had accompanied the President to Madras and the enlarged household made me feel less free to go to the Monastery. For three days I remained at home in isolated solitude, then Swami Brahmananda sent for me. He made me sit beside him during the evening service, told me I must come to it every day and questioned me at length about the work in America. He showed special eagerness to learn what Swami Paramananda was doing. He expressed deep love for him and later whenever the weekly post from Europe went by without bringing news of the Swami he manifested the gravest concern.

After *Arati*, the conversation turned on feats of jugglery. He seemed to take keen boyish interest in them and told me this story which he knew to be true:—

"A Mahomedan in Calcutta seemed to have the power to draw solid articles through closed barriers. An Englishman challenged him, declaring that he could have all the money he could get out of the locked safe in his office. The Mahomedan accepted the challenge, merely asking to lay his finger for an instant on the roll of banknotes. Four thousand rupees were placed in the safe, the door was closed, the combination lock turned and with folded arms and scornful smile the Englishman leaned against it. Meanwhile the Mahomedans sat on the floor in an adjoining room and did not move. At the end of five minutes he told the English gentleman to feel in his pocket and there were the four thousand rupees."

Swami Brahmananda was very reticent. His face was always lighted by a childlike smile, but he talked little. At Madras whenever anyone came to him with a question or perplexity, he would say: "Go to Swami Ramakrishnananda. He is wise and learned. I know nothing." He would neither preach nor teach, except as he did it unconsciously by the nobility and holiness of his daily living.\* He seemed to shrink

\* The Swami had wonderful insight into human nature. He would impart earnest instructions only to those whom he found ready to



from everything that savored of public life and it was with difficulty that Swami Ramakrishnananda persuaded him to conduct the Vesper Service one evening. He did it almost shyly, declaring he was not suited to priestly tasks. If, however, he spoke little, the few words he uttered had in them the quality of gentle benediction. Often when I went over to the Monastery at nightfall I would find him walking up and down the hall, lifting and dropping his arms at intervals like a little boy. As soon as he saw me, he would say with kindly inflection: "Come in, Sister; are you doing well?" That would be all, yet that brief sentence never failed to bring me a vivid sense of well-being and blessing.

The renewing, exalting power of his word and touch is told in this extract from a letter written by the daughter of an Oxford professor.

"I had a great longing to see Swami Brahmananda, the Head of the Order," it reads, "and at last I accomplished it at his home in Calcutta. Kind Swami Shivananda took me himself in a boat. He knew I had a great longing to see him and was determined I should not be disappointed. Oh, Sister, it was far more wonderful than I had hoped. Only five minutes, but he said something so wonderful to me and so encouraging and he took my hand in his two hands and something definite happened. I went out of that room feeling twenty years younger, full of hope to struggle on and with a new faith that it was all true.

"It was a wonderful day for me. I have felt so much more content and peaceful ever since and so full of gratitude to him and to them all for helping it to happen. Now that I have got even an inkling of this peace, all the tension and unhappiness seem gone and I do not think, whatever reactions come, it could ever be as it was before. I know now that these things are all true and I am going to be allowed some day to realize them myself. I feel I must go on struggling for them, but the relief is more than I can describe. I have come back quite contented to do my work here and I shall do it better and more cheerfully, now that I feel I have the strong link with those blessed people at the Monastery. It is like a rock to me."

Swami Brahmananda's silence was always genial, never receive and profit by his teachings; and then his words would have tremendous power.—*Ed.*



solemn or sanctimonious. It sprang, I believe, from the habit of long hours of meditation, and also from the fact that his mode of thought sought subtler avenues of expression. I remember one early morning when he sent for me to request me to write a preface for Swami Vivekananda's "Inspired Talks," the manuscript of which I had prepared for publication. I brought the finished preface to the Monastery in the evening and read it to him. He made no comment but got up and walked into his room. I thought he did not like what I had written and determined to try again on the morrow. In a moment Nerode, one of the young Swamis who had come with the President, came from Swami Brahmananda's room with a small bottle in his hand. "Swami Brahmananda," he said, "has asked me to give you some of this sweet perfume," and he sprinkled over my head nearly all the contents of the bottle. For days it lingered in my veil and hair, conveying to me a fragrant sanction.

Sometimes Swami Brahmananda's approval was wholly dumb and unspoken. One day he laid in my hands a folded pongee *Chuddar* (shawl) with the words: "Sister, can you mend this for me? Some insect has eaten little holes all through it. I prize it because it was given me by Ram Babu." I took it home, tinted some sewing silk the exact shade and darned each little hole with meticulous care. It consumed the whole day and in the evening I sent the *Chuddar* back. Swami Brahmananda was delighted with it and showed it to every one explaining that I had done it, but he never mentioned it to me. He did not wish to cheapen a loving service by an ordinary expression of thanks. Once only did I hear him give direct commendation and then it was for a service rendered Swami Ramakrishnananda. I did not think he had noticed it, but unexpectedly he looked up and said: "Sister, I am very much pleased with you" and immediately withdrew his thought.

He rarely talked of himself and never mentioned the unceasing honors and attentions showered upon him. Wherever he went, people came in large numbers to bow at his feet and beg his blessing; but it seemed to reach his consciousness only impersonally, as if he had merely a casual acquaintance with the one who was being honored.

I recall a pilgrimage he made to the holy Temple of Conjeeveram. A gentleman living near the Temple had given him



the use of his house and servants, another had provided a carriage for him, the whole population had come out to welcome him and while he was there had sought to serve him. His only comment when he returned to the Monastery at Mylapore was: "Sister, the image in the Temple was so beautiful. I wish you might have seen it."

There was a lofty dignity about him that called forth willing reverence. It led his fellow-disciples to give him the name "Maharaj." When they were still boys together at the Temple of Dakshineswar, Swami Ramakrishnananda related to me, Swami Vivekananda exclaimed one day: "Let us call Rakhal 'Maharaj.'" They told Sri Ramakrishna. He was very much pleased, so from that time Swami Brahmananda was called Maharaj. Yet he never commanded, he always requested and left the person free to choose his own course of action. Every one was so eager to please him, however, that his gentlest request had the carrying force of a command.

A silent reserve marked his manner at all times and made many fear him, but this reserve sprang less from withdrawing than from in-drawing. He had a natural inward habit of thought and life which detached him from outward things. Occasionally it overpowered him completely and broke all connection with the external world. One evening while he was at Madras he went into *Samadhi* (the superconscious state) during *Arati*. He sat on the rug at the far end of the hall away from the door of the Shrine, his body motionless, his eyes closed, a smile of ecstasy playing about his lips. Swami Ramakrishnananda was the first to observe that he did not move when the Service was over. Realising what had occurred, he motioned to one of the young Swamis to fan his head. In deep meditation the brain becomes very much heated. For half an hour no one stirred—a boy who was crossing the hall did not even draw back his foot. Perfect stillness pervaded the Monastery—a radiant, pulsing stillness. Then Swami Brahmananda opened his eyes, looked round in dazed embarrassment, got up from his seat, went silently to his room and was not seen again that evening.

The same complete abstraction of thought overtook him again in the Temple at Madura which he had stopped to see on a pilgrimage to the sacred Shrine of Rameswaram. In the morning he had said to Swami Ramakrishnananda that he had a strange feeling, as if something was going to happen; and



afterwards he explained that as he entered the Temple, the image of the Divine Mother in the Sanctuary suddenly became living and moved towards him. At once all outer consciousness dropped from him and he entered into deep communion with the all-encompassing Mother of the Universe. For a long time he stood, supported by Swami Ramakrishnananda, there where the vision had come ; and people, perceiving him thus lost in inner seeing, prostrated at his feet in devout reverence.

Yogin, the young Swami who served Swami Brahmananda, told us at Madras that often when he went to his room at night, he found Swami Brahmananda seated on his bed in *Samadhi* and he would remain in that state until daybreak, without a throb of the pulse or a breath to indicate that he was living. In deepest meditation outer breathing and the outer pulse cease. Sri Ramakrishna at one period of his life spent so much time in meditation that his lungs lost the habit of motion and in his ordinary consciousness he would forget to breathe. He often said to his disciples : "If you see I have stopped breathing, remind me."

With all his power of spiritual vision, Swami Brahmananda was exceptionally practical and possessed remarkable judgment in business matters. He followed in detail every branch of the extensive work at the head of which he stood ; yet here again he never interfered, he merely made suggestions ; but his suggestions were invariably so wise that they were always accepted. I had personal experience of his practical ability. We published several books while he was at the Mylapore Monastery. Having been in charge of the Publication Department of a leading centre of the Order for a number of years, I had had long training in book-making, but a difference of opinion never rose between us that I did not find that he was right and I was wrong. A light burned within him that illumined whatever it shone upon. He had developed his basic instrument of knowledge and it gave him universal power of knowing.

A notable instance rises in my memory. On a very rainy afternoon in January Swami Brahmananda sent over to me a request to go in town to an English shop and buy him a word game. I got it at once, wondering what was to be done with it. When I went to the Monastery later, I found the entire



household playing the new game and I understood its purpose,—it was to enlarge the English vocabulary of the younger men. Swami Brahmananda himself never played, but he always watched and gave help to all the players impartially. Occasionally he suggested some impossible combination of letters and we would exclaim: “But, Swamiji, there is no such word in the English language.” “Oh yes, there is,” he would reply quietly. “Get the dictionary and you will see.” Someone would look in the dictionary and unfailingly the word was there.

A rarely keen sense of humor hovered near the surface of his thought, ready to bubble up into fun and laughter at any moment. Like a boy himself he would tease the young boy who brought the cow and milked it night and morning at the Monastery gate, and among those who knew him well he was constantly finding new and unexpected ways of giving expression to the childlike gayety inherent in his nature. One day he discovered a box of toy stationery at the Monastery. Someone had brought it in jest to Swami Paramananda when he was there. Swami Brahmananda gave me a sheet of it and had me typewrite a business letter regarding the management of the main Monastery to Swami Premananda, at that time in charge of the Head House of the Order. As there was room for three words only on a line, the letter could not be long. To see those solemn typewritten instructions on a minute pink sheet with a crude little flower printed at the top could not but draw forth a hearty laugh. The letter was mailed in a tiny pink envelope so covered with title of honour and reverence that the stamp had to go on the back.

Swami Brahmananda was equally lavish with honourable terms whenever he wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda. Letters would come addressed “To His Holiness The Right Reverend Swami Ramakrishnanandaji Mohunt.” “Mohunt” is a title like “Abbot” and “Ji” is a suffix which accentuates reverence. The letter on the inside would begin: “My dear Mohunt Maharajji of Madras.” Despite his natural reserve and reticence, he radiated an atmosphere of gladness and gayety. He was extremely fond of music and wherever he was living there was always much of it. While Swami Brahmananda remained at the Madras Monastery we had singing with violin and harmonium almost every evening and he himself frequently



accompanied the singing by playing on tuned drums or tamboura.

Swami Brahmananda possessed an ardent love of flowers and knew them all by their botanical names. Under his supervision a charming garden was created at the Monastery near Calcutta and every little flower in it became his special charge. He grieved that there was no garden at the Madras Monastery. He missed the companionship of small growing things. Finally he ordered a number of huge jars, had them filled with good soil and planted a variety of choice seeds. He had me write to America for some of them. When I went to the Monastery in the evening he would hand me now and then a flower with the words: "I picked this for you, Sister. I do not think you have ever seen it. Smell it, it has a special perfume." Or he would send over to my house by one of the young Swamis a rare blossom, wishing me to see and enjoy it while it was fresh and fragrant. As I was something of a gardener myself, he knew I would understand his interest.

When December came, he said to me: "Sister, you are the Christian member of the Math (Monastery), you should give us a Christmas party." "What kind of party do you wish, Swamiji?" I asked. "As much like a Western Christmas party as you can make it," was his reply. A Christmas tree was out of the question, but I went to the English shops and ordered plumcake, glacé fruits and whatever savoured peculiarly of Christmastide.

When Christmas day arrived, the boys brought green branches from the jungle and bound them to the pillars in the hall, then they made long garlands of mango leaves to hang between the pillars and over the doors. The Indian tradesman is quick to sense when his wares are needed and while we were trimming the house, a vendor appeared at the door with a basket full of jasmine garlands. We made curtains of them on the supporting beam of the smaller alcove in the large hall and draped them back, forming an arch with the Christmas Altar in deep perspective behind the fragrant hangings. Swami Ramakrishnananda had charged me to be sure to place beside the Altar some bread and wine as a symbol of the Christian Eucharist. A table in the larger alcove, almost a separate room, was piled high with fruit, sweetmeats and plumcake.

At four o'clock Swami Brahmananda, Swami Ramakrishna-



nanda and the Christmas party arrived. Swami Brahmananda took his seat at the far end of the hall opposite the Altar with Swami Ramakrishnananda beside him. The others, most of them orthodox Brahmans, sat in a long row down either side. Swami Brahmananda asked me to read the story of Christ's birth and I chose the account of St. Luke. When I had finished reading, the intense stillness in the air led me to look towards Swami Brahmananda. His eyes were open and fixed on the Altar, there was a smile on his lips, but it was evident that his consciousness had gone to a higher plane. No one moved or spoke. At the end of twenty minutes or more the look of immediate seeing returned to his eyes and he motioned to us to continue the Service. Lights, incense and burning camphor were waved before the Altar, the evening chant and hymn were sung, all those present bowed in silent prayer and the Christmas Service ended.

Swami Brahmananda then asked to visit the other rooms of the house, after which he told us to bring the refreshments. He explained with emphasis that the house was like a Temple, the food was blessed food and every one could partake of it freely. All obeyed him and ate heartily and without compunction of what I had provided. When Swami Brahmananda thought they had had enough he said to them with unexpected abruptness: "You would all better go home now. Swami Ramakrishnananda and I will stay a little longer." The company took their dismissal good-naturedly and left. After they were gone he said: "Now, Sister, bring your bread and butter, your English plumcake, your French chestnuts and your German prunes and we'll have a real Western party." He took a little of each thing and had me give it to him. I soon found, however, that I was not to lay it in his hand, but drop it into the hand from a short height. He specially enjoyed the bread and butter. He did not care so much for the fruit cake, it was too rich.

As he was eating he remarked to me: "I have been very much blessed in coming to your house to-day, Sister." I answered quickly: "Swamiji, it is I who have been blessed in having you come." "You do not understand," he replied; "I have had a great blessing here this afternoon. As you were reading the Bible, Christ suddenly stood before the Altar dressed in a long blue cloak. He talked to me for some time.



It was a very blessed moment." There was no more thought of food. I poured water over his hands, then some sweet perfume, and with Swami Ramakrishnananda he went back to the Monastery glowing with the joy of the vision.

The Swami visited my house several times after that. He disliked the noise and confusion of festival days. At such times I would empty my large upper room, put in his furniture and give the house over wholly to his use, reserving for myself a room which could be reached without going beyond the vestibule. Away from the singing and playing and lecturing at the Monastery he would receive a few special friends and pass his day in comparative quiet. I suspected always that he wished to escape from the ovation his presence would call forth should he mingle with the large assembly taking part in the celebrations.

Swami Brahmananda left Madras in the Spring and I never again had the privilege of personal association with him, but he sent me occasional letters. I give one or two passages from them.

"MY DEAR SISTER :

.....The memory of the happy days we spent in Madras still lingers in my mind,—in fact I cannot remember those days with any feeling but that of intense joy which I experience now all the more vividly by contrast. May you be pleased to let me hear from you now and then. My best wishes and loving affection always attend you.

I remain,

Yours affectionately,

Brahmananda.

"DEAR SISTER :

Very glad to receive your note of the 23rd and more so to hear that you have enjoyed your stay in Calcutta to the best content of your heart. I expected so of you. Had you written me beforehand I would have requested you to visit Puri on your way to Madras as some of our best friends and their wives had great mind to see you and make your acquaintance. However it was not to be. I hope you have reached Madras safe and sound. Please give my love to Swami Ramakrishnanandaji. Write to me from time to time. I shall be really glad to hear from you. With love and prayer.

Yours affectionately,

Brahmananda.

P. S. The Swamis here convey their best wishes and love to you through this letter.



“DEAR SISTER :

.....May the Lord shine more and more in you all. May we all slowly but surely come to that Great One where all blessings, knowledge and peace reside. That is my hope and my blessing. May real good come to you all. At present I am staying at Kothar. We are doing well. I shall be glad to hear of you all from time to time. Please send us a few more coloured slides of the stereoscope pictures at your leisure. We often enjoy the pictures which you presented to us at Madras. The Lord's blessings attend you all.

Affectionately yours,  
Brahmananda.”

Swami Brahmananda passed away in the Spring of 1922. He went with lofty visions before his eyes and a radiant smile on his lips. He has left a great void, even the Monastery garden beside the Ganges grieves for him.

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## AN ORIENTAL LOOKS AT CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

BY JOHN JESUDASON CORNELIUS.\*

Imperialism in religion, as in politics, has been one of the prolific sources of friction among nations and peoples. The zeal to proselytize—an unflinching phase of religious imperialism—provokes hostility in those who practice religious hospitality. When the Mohammedans came into India they began their process of proselytizing with the sword. The result, as one would expect, was much bloodshed and hatred. Christianity on the other hand, it must be said to her credit, did not embark on her missionary career to the East with a sword in her hand. Though she was intolerant of other faiths, she made a place for herself by her loving ministry. Fired by unquenchable enthusiasm, the Christian missionary pushed his way through scorching deserts, over dangerous mountains and boisterous seas, to the uttermost parts of the world. Wherever he went he founded schools to dispel the darkness of ignorance and superstition, hospitals to heal the sick and the wounded, orphanages to provide homes for the homeless, asylums to minister to the

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deaf, the dumb, and the blind. Though at first people were somewhat suspicious of him, he soon came to be better understood and his religion, which made him leave his own home to minister to the fatherless and the widows, began to be better appreciated.

But as years went on, commercial and political interests began to influence the missionary's activities without his being very conscious of it. The accumulated experience of the East with many undesirable consequences of those influences, having been focussed by the new spirit of nationalism, has resulted for many in a genuine dislike of the missionary and a decided aversion to his religion. On hearing or reading about this anti-Christian attitude, the churchgoer of the West loses his interest in foreign missions and turns away in disgust without seeing behind the clouds the dawn of a better day. But if one is to understand the East and its present hostility to Christianity, one must familiarize oneself with those aspects of missionary enterprise which have progressively interfered with its national and cultural life. The purpose of this article is, therefore, to explain to some extent from the Oriental point of view the inner meaning of this changed attitude commonly characterized as the anti-Christian movement! This attempt at an interpretation is made by the writer in the hope that with the better understanding of what has happened in the past, East and West can co-operate more efficiently in the future for the service of humanity.

## II

Rightly or wrongly, the East has come to think of Christianity as part of the political game of the West. In religion it talks of "going about doing good"; in politics this takes the form of "ruling others for their good." Has the East reasonable grounds for thinking so?

Let us look at China through Eastern eyes. She has been in continuous contact with organized Christianity for about three hundred and fifty years. Her early relations were most friendly; she undoubtedly found many of the missionaries to be sincere men, who had given up the comforts of "civilized" countries to dwell among "backward" peoples and to save their "heathen" souls from perdition. But the tragedy of the situa-



tion lies in the fact that foreign governments have frequently followed the path which the missionary had blazed. Where the missionary finds his field of activity, there the Chinese finds—not infrequently—the fixed bayonets of a foreign power.

The killing of a missionary, whether it be due to his own indiscretion, to the anti-foreign fury of some Chinese zealot, or to some other cause, has often been used by his government as an occasion for making demands for concessions from the Chinese Government. Chinese diplomatic history will furnish many examples of this kind. The Boxer war of 1900 was an evidence that the Chinese were weary of such frequent interference and were willing no longer to be oppressed by foreigners. And what was the result? The Chinese Government had to pay an indemnity amounting to \$320,000,000; besides this she had also to yield the important right of tariff autonomy. Similarly she lost most of her valuable seaports. Studying the history of their ancient land, the young patriots see how closely the expansion of the “spheres of influence” of foreign powers has been connected not only with the intrigue and wire pulling of commercial and political interests, but also with the killing of foreign missionaries by would-not-be-saved Chinese rebels. Thus, indeed, the patriotic feeling to rid China of the missionary pestilence was aroused.

The anti-Christian movement, while it admits that to a large extent the incentive, both for the missionaries and for those who back them up financially, has been religious belief, seeks to show to the thinking public how frequently the presence of the missionaries and the effect of their work have been taken advantage of by governments and traders, just as the missionaries have too often profited by privileges which could be claimed by citizens of foreign powers. The whole history of the relations of the Western nations to China reveals a long series of encroachments on China's sovereign rights. So much so, that Mr. Dennett very aptly remarks, “These Chinese were free to abstain from Christianity, as from opium, but they were not free to prohibit them.” Why? Simply because brute force and not the principle of right had given the Western powers the title to interfere with China's sovereign rights. If there were no treaties of Nanking, Tientsin, and Shimonoseki, if there were no Boxer protocols and demands and concessions, the attitude of young China toward Western Christianity would



have been, if less friendly than it was in its early contacts, at least not as hostile as it is to-day.

The feeling in India is not very different ; it is the common belief that the Bible comes first and then the gun-powder. Wherever the Christians go, says the Hindu, they somehow manage to meddle with the political rights of the people. Before the Christians went to Africa the Africans had lands but no Bibles ; now they have Bibles but no lands. In Kenya, for instance, the poor helpless natives are being driven out of all their desirable and fertile lands. Under the Lands Act of 1913, eighty-eight per cent of the land of the South African Union was reserved for the white men, leaving twelve per cent for the five million black men, who are four times as numerous. Again in Kenya we find that of the good land available six thousand square miles have been allotted under a system of "Reserves" giving no permanent but only an indefinite tenure, so that it may be said that the Africans there have no legal rights whatever to their own native land. Hence the East concludes that the political method of the West is first to send missionaries, then traders, and then gunboats to deprive the helpless peoples of their lands and to take possession of their natural resources.

Is it any wonder if, with such knowledge of Western penetration, the East becomes distrustful of the professed philanthropy of the Christian, turns hostile to a religion which has let itself be used by foreign powers for political expansion, and grows more and more suspicious of the real mission of the missionary ?

Rightly or wrongly even to-day the missionaries are frequently thought of as the "political agents" of alien governments. Does the missionary allow himself to be so mistaken by the East ? Let us look into his political relations.

Unfortunately an alien society, if it wishes to undertake missionary, educational, or other philanthropical work in a dependency, must first be recognized by the government concerned. Only on such recognition will permission to enter the country be given. Any American Society wishing to undertake work in India must be recommended, according to the present arrangement of the British Government, by the Foreign Missions Conference of North America. But before the Conference can recommend the society, it must obtain from that society



a declaration recognizing "that all due obedience and respect should be given to the lawfully constituted Government, and that, while carefully abstaining from political affairs, it is its desire and purpose that its influence, in so far as it may be properly exerted, should be so exerted in loyal co-operation with the Government of the country concerned, and that it will only employ agents who will work in this spirit." (British Memorandum A, Article 5 : iii.) The society or the board in turn requires every missionary who goes out under its auspices to sign a similar declaration.

The foreign missionary society which signs such a declaration for an imperial government may not realize the seriousness of the implications of this act, but to the East all these are so many evidences to confirm its lurking suspicion of the political mission of Christianity. The East sees two striking points in the declaration : First, the missionary should carefully abstain from politics ; and second, whenever his influence can be properly exerted in such matters, it should be in loyal co-operation with the Government. Or, in other words, the missionary is to support the iron arm of imperialism—which, be it understood, is not politics!—and to refrain from helping the people to the realization of legitimate national aspirations—and this, beware, is politics !

To be more specific, let us take the case of an American missionary in India. Having signed the declaration and having been duly recommended by the Conference, he is sent out to India. There he is to consider himself the guest of the British Government. His schools are inspected by the Government agent ; his work is visited in a most friendly way by the Governor of the state or province. He frequently receives Government aid for the maintenance of the mission school and for the erection of new buildings. In return for all these and in accordance with his declaration, he holds himself responsible for the behavior of the pupils and of the teachers in the schools of which he is in charge. He is expected, of course, to be careful to do or say nothing which would render the working of the British Government in India more difficult. These regulations and guest-relationships very seriously influence the work and attitude of the missionary, to an extent to which he himself is not fully aware. He believes he is neutral ; but under the conditions of his declaration is real neutrality possible ?



The missionary is thus placed in a false position and is subjected to very serious accusations. The British Government has a ruling that no student should take part in politics, though at present it is not quite so strict as it used to be. In a certain town a political meeting was held in the courtyard of a temple, and the missionary principal of the school was expected to keep the boys from going to the meeting. Some of the young enthusiasts attended the meeting and the missionary securing their names reported them to the local Government School Inspector. Immediately the news spread that the missionary was a spy of the alien government and that instead of training patriotic citizens to live for the country and work for its emancipation, he was trying to develop "slavish mentality" in the pupils and to promote loyalty to the British Government. In such cases the missionary appears to the non-Christian as a political agent masquerading under a religious cloak.

Instead of being powerful forces for righteousness, the missionaries have too often become instruments in the hands of political forces and have allowed themselves to be tied hand and foot by imperial governments. Professor Edward Thompson of Oxford, who was for many years an official in India, writes thus, "If the Churches wish to draw into their communion the non-Christian races of the world, they must shed a lot that seems to make for efficiency. They had the chance of a thousand years in the War ; it was lost—and everyone knows that it was lost—largely because of the very powerful recognition which the State then gave them. And now? There was a time when the missionaries were often the only channel of protest against injustice. That channel is largely blocked to-day. From being a heroic and lonely enterprise, foreign missions have become praised and petted by imperialisms that are both better and astuter than those that went before them. The races to which the British and American missionaries are sent might wonder, with some justification, whether the John R. Mott era has been a blessing or a curse to them. The mission field will always have its heroes. But missionary 'leaders' are now trusted and encouraged at Foreign Offices and Colonial Offices and 'missionary statesmanship' is a phrase that religious leaders delight in. The work of foreign missionaries has deserved all the recognition now accorded, and a thousandfold more. But a



gilded collar is a poor thing to take in exchange for the greatest liberty in the whole world.”

### III

The fear is also widespread, and not without reason, that Western Christianity tends to suppress not only national aspirations but also national cultures. The normal thing for any country is to promote its national culture and preserve its race experience ; but when it is interfered with by a foreign institution, either in the form of a government or a mission, then the national culture suffers. In India for instance, the British Government introduced Western education but pledged itself not to interfere with the religions of the people and left that field of activity to the missionaries of the West. The Hindus attribute the decay of Indian national culture largely to the fact that, on the one hand, the British Government has refused to encourage it under the pretence of non-interference with religions and, on the other hand, the missionary enthusiasts by their fanatical intolerance have attempted, not simply to ignore it as has the Government, but positively to destroy it. Not being “Christian,” it was “heathen,” according to the missionary, and hence pre-ordained to damnation !

The East is thankful for the introduction of Western education, but it resents its introduction at the expense of national cultures. Making English the medium of instruction results, as was the case in Ireland, in intellectual deterioration and social disintegration. The missionaries have not only despised our literature but have also condemned our music and art, because they are connected with “heathen” religions. Their intolerance of everything which in any way savored of heathenism has been so great that, in India for instance, they have not allowed their converts to retain their Hindu names. This would explain how it happens that some Indians have such names as the author’s, Joseph Gabriel, Mary McFarland, Henry Senecafalls, etc.

This sort of Christianizing process in India has succeeded so well in denationalizing the community that one of the leading weeklies—the *Indian Social Reformer*—expressed its opinion of the Indian Christian Community thus: “That the Indian Christian Community is politically apathetic, almost dead, is no news at all ; and yet one finds no leader to bring home to



the minds of the Christian people the fact deplored even among them. . . . The average Indian Christian is, as a rule, far from feeling and believing as an Indian. . . . Even as an Indian Christian he allows credal differences to remain keenly alive before his eyes ; and thus Indian Christians have been starting and maintaining institutions duly marked and sealed. The bond of their common origin as Indians is systematically ignored. They find themselves in the situation of aliens in their own country ill-prepared to bear a part in the national tasks." In fairness to the Indian Christian Community it must be said that within the last decade it has shown marked leadership and active participation in national movements. The editor of the *Indian Social Reformer* sounded his note of warning at the proper time ; and there is much yet to be done in the nationalizing of the community.\*

(To be continued)

### THE CHAKRAS—A REVIEW†

This volume is evidence of the increasing interest in the West in the Indian form of Yoga called Laya or Kundalini. I cannot say when the existence of Bodily Centres or Chakras were first known in Europe. The volume under review reproduces a Plate of Bodily Centres taken from Gichtel's *Theosophia Practica* first published in 1696 and republished in 1897. Gichtel was a disciple of the celebrated mystic Jacob Behmen. If I remember rightly the Quarto edition of Behmen's work as edited by Law also shows Plates of Bodily Centres. Knowledge of the subject has been more recently diffused owing to the writings of the members of the Theosophical Society, in particular Madame Blavatsky and the Rt. Rev. C. W. Leadbeater, Bishop of The Liberal Catholic Church. The latter wrote on it some twenty years ago in his volume entitled "The Inner Life". This is reproduced (with some additions) in the first four chapters of the present work in which also are published some coloured plates of the Chakras as they are said to have been 'seen'. The fifth chapter contains an account by Professor Ernest Wood of Kundalini Yoga as taught in India, largely based on Avalon's "Serpent Power". The last work for the first time gave complete and authoritative Sanskrit Text dealing with this matter, such as the "Shatchakra-Nirupana" of Purnananda Svami, which is an extract from his larger Tantric work entitled "Shri-Tattva-Chintamani". The Plates of the Centres

\* From *Harpers Magazine*, New York.

† THE CHAKRAS.—A monograph by the Rt. Rev. C. W. Leadbeater, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras. Price Rs. 10. Illustrated with coloured plates and diagrams.



given in Avalon's book are symbolical only and are drawn in accordance with the description given by the "Shatchakra-Nirupana". They are not presented as things 'seen' for no-one but the ignorant could suppose that (to take, for instance, the Heart Lotus,) an antelope is to be seen there, or that it contains real vegetable leaves with letters drawn upon them and so forth. The antelope is symbolical only of the fleetness of the element 'Air' of which the Anahata Chakra is the centre. On the other hand the Plates in Bishop Leadbeater's book purport to give the actual appearance of the Chakras as seen clairvoyantly.

According to the book reviewed, the Crown Chakra called by the Hindus the Lotus of a Thousand Petals, is also represented as having been 'seen'. But if so, then according to the Hindu account what has been so seen must be a lower aspect of this Lotus considered as a representative of complete Siddhi. Professor E. Wood says that for some reason the Lotus is not called by the Hindus a Chakra. That is so. The reason is that the Chakras belong to the Tattva world, but the Lotus of a Thousand Petals is in its fullness Tattvatita or transcendent of these. In its highest form it is Consciousness or Chitsvarupa and therefore not an object which can be observed. Whether the ecstasy of this Yoga is a complete union of Chit and Chidrupini Shakti or a stage lower than that is a question to be discussed. At any rate if and to the extent that there is an object, we cannot say that there is a complete union of Shiva and Shakti.

The account here given both differs from and agrees with that set forth in the "Serpent Power". Does not, it may be asked, such divergence militate against the truth of the doctrine and reality of the practice? Not necessarily so. An experience may be an actual fact, but the scientific explanation of that fact, the symbolism used to denote it and the method employed to produce it may differ. The difficulty however in answering such a question is the present insufficiency of material for judgment. What is needed is an explanation of the experience which is had by this Yoga, so far of course as such experience remains in the logical order. This account should be by an Indian who is Siddha or expert in it, together with a plain statement of the means employed to produce Siddhi. Only thus is the ground prepared for an examination of these likenesses and differences to be observed in the Eastern and the Western accounts. There are many questions to be asked which no-one has yet tackled. One of the most important is this. It appears to be the teaching that in Karma, Bhakti, and Jnana Yogas the Sadhaka and Yogi acts by his own individual efforts, whereas in Kundalini Yoga Shakti does for him what perhaps he might not otherwise be able to do for himself. Shakti does this provided the Yogi knows how to arouse her. Now is this method of rousing a mere psychophysical trick which any and everybody may perform given the necessary knowledge? If so, there appears to be no need of any moral competency or desire for liberation or spirituality in the sense in which that word is ordinarily understood. The character of the individual is not affected though his powers may be enhanced. If this be the true reading of this Yoga, then whilst it is of great metapsychic interest, it



has no more 'spiritual' value than the discovery of the existence of and means to employ any psycho-physical super-power. In however the classic Yogas, Karma, Bhakti, and Jnana, the Sadhaka must himself work in order to achieve result. He must morally transform himself and be truly detached and a knower before he can obtain the fruit of Yoga. Such Sadhana has moral and permanent value. As I stated in the Foreword to Dr. Rele's recent book "The Mysterious Kundalini", I am now doubtful as to the spiritual value of this form of Yoga. It has great parapsychic interest and may for all I know give its practitioners the powers mentioned in the Hindu books. But those Indians who seek true spiritual advancement will, I think, be better employed in working according to the methods of the other classic Yogas. If Kundalini be a gross form of the Creative Power, it may be an enormously interesting experience to be brought into direct touch with it. Of interest again to the occultist is the acquisition of various Siddhis. But from the Paramarthic standpoint more is needed than that. It is precisely those features of the Yoga which make it attractive to the Western who is 'curious' or who is out for 'evidence' that there is something more than ordinary sensible experience, or for 'Powers' and so forth which seem to make it inferior to others however slow and arduous their method of self-realisation may be. Nevertheless the volume under review is of great interest to the occultist European and Indian. But just because there is so increasing an interest in this Yoga it would be as well if both classes of enquirers should first understand its character and limitations. As I have said in the Foreword to Dr. Rele's recently published work, I did not at the time of the publication of the "Serpent Power" sufficiently appreciate the adverse criticism passed on this Yoga which was therein reproduced. This was in part at least due to the inefficient manner in which the criticism was presented. It missed salient grounds. I should like then to see these discussed and the work under review will supply some useful material for such debate.

J. W.

## THE ESSENCE OF VEDANTA

[VEDANTASARA]

अज्ञानं तु—सदसद्भ्रामनिर्वचनीयं त्रिगुणात्मकं ज्ञानविरोध  
भावरूपं यत्किञ्चिदिति वदन्ति; "अहमज्ञ" इत्याद्यनुभवात्;  
"देवात्मशक्तिं स्वगुणैर्निगूढाम्" इत्यादि श्रुतेश्च । ३४ ।

34. But<sup>1</sup> ignorance is a thing which<sup>2</sup> cannot be described either as being or non-being ; it is made up of three<sup>3</sup> qualities and antagonistic<sup>4</sup> to Knowledge. They describe it as something<sup>5</sup> positive,<sup>6</sup> though insignificant, from such experiences as "I<sup>7</sup> am



ignorant.” There are such<sup>8</sup> Sruti passages as, “The power belonging to God Himself, hidden in its own qualities.”

[1 *But*—The text offers a special theory on the subject.

2 *Which etc.*—It is not existent because it disappears at the awakening of Knowledge. It is not non-existent like the child of a barren woman, otherwise there would not have been any illusion of the world.

3 *Three qualities*—These are *Sattva* (serenity), *Rajas* (activity) and *Tamas* (inertia). These qualities have been thus mentioned in the following scriptural passages, though the Sankhya Philosophy may justly claim to have fully developed the theory of the three Gunas : “अजामेकां लोहितशुक्लकृष्णां बह्वीः प्रजाः सृजमानां स्वरूपाः” (श्वेतः उपः ४-५)—“There is one unborn being (female), red, white and black, producing manifold offspring of the same nature.” This refers to अज्ञान or प्रकृति (Nature) which is composed of the three qualities mentioned above. These three qualities are found to exist in all the products of Prakriti. Comp. “यद्गने रोहितं रूपं तेजसस्तद्रूपं यच्छुक्लं तदपां यत्कृष्णं तदन्नस्य”। (छांः उपः ६-४-१) —“The red colour of the burning fire is the colour of fire, the white colour of fire is the colour of water, the black colour of fire is the colour of earth”. Like its effects (कार्य) the cause (कारण), which is ignorance, is also made of three colours though in the latter case they remain in an unmanifested state. Though the three qualities are attributes (गुण) of अज्ञान, yet they are its essential parts, as substance (गुणी) is inseparable from its attributes (गुण).

4 *Antagonistic etc.*—This definition is given in order to refute the contention that there would be no cessation of phenomena as the eternal ignorance in the form of sky etc. appears to be permanent. Ignorance with all its modifications vanishes away at the dawn of Knowledge. Comp. “देवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया । मामेव ये प्रपद्यन्ते मायामेतां तरन्ति ते ॥” (गीता ७-१४)—“Verily this divine ignorance of Mine, constituted of Gunas, is hard to pierce. Those who take refuge in Me alone, they cross over this illusion.”

5 *Something*—Ignorance being constituted of three Gunas is positive something, still its nature cannot be positively stated. Therefore it has been described as “something” which eludes our understanding. Further this word has a special significance. It is not used to denote its indescribable nature, nor its antagonism to Knowledge and Truth as these ideas have been well-expressed by separate phrases. Its special significance is to posit ignorance as the source or cause of illusion (अमोपादान). Because ignorance is the producer of illusion therefore its effect eludes the mind of the Jiva. Cause itself is seen as effect in another form.

6 *Positive*—This is a difficult word and requires some explanation. This part of the definition is given in order to refute the contention



that ignorance is negation ( **अभाव** ), as it is antagonistic to Knowledge. But the Vedantist says that it is not a negation. He asks, What is that knowledge whose negation is contended to be ignorance? We can understand knowledge from three aspects. Firstly, knowledge is used as synonymous with the "witness, the perceiver,"—"**साक्षी चेता**" ( **श्वेतः उपः ६-११** ). Its absence cannot be called ignorance as it is eternal and therefore can never be associated with a state of negation. Secondly, a particular function of mind is termed as knowledge, as in the passage, "**विज्ञानेन वा ऋग्वेदं विजानाति**" ( **छाः उपः ७-७-१** )—"Through *understanding* one understands the Rigveda." But here knowledge is used only in an indirect sense. No mental function can illumine an object unless it has Self at its back. The eyes, ears, etc. perform their conscious functions because they draw their Consciousness from 'the Self. Comp. "**सर्वं तत्प्रज्ञानेन प्रज्ञाने प्रतिष्ठितं प्रज्ञानेनो लोकः प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठा प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म**" ( **ऐतः उपः ५-३** )—"All this is guided by Consciousness ( **प्रज्ञा** ) and is supported by Consciousness; this universe has Consciousness for its guide, Consciousness is its base; Consciousness is Brahman." Hence under no circumstances this knowledge can exist in a negative state. Thirdly, knowledge may be understood, as the Vaishesikas say, as an attribute of Self. Even in this case ignorance cannot be said to consist of the negation of knowledge, particular or general. Because when a man makes a statement as, "I am ignorant; I do not know anything", even then he does not lose all sense of perception. Though he may not perceive one object, yet he perceives another. Again there cannot be any negation of general knowledge as without it knowledge of a particular object becomes impossible. Therefore it stands to reason that Knowledge which is eternal, ever-existent and positive can never be connected or associated with negation. But when ignorance is said to be **भावरूप**, it does not denote an absolute substance which is only Brahman. Had it been so, there would not have been any liberation. Therefore this term is used to denote a state of absence of negation. Ignorance is different from Reality and unreality, as neuter is different from male and female. Really this ignorance can never be properly explained. It has found a place in the Vedanta Philosophy in order to explain the otherwise inexplicable production of the unreal world. It is absurd to seek for its proof. It cannot be proved by our reasoning because human reasoning can never be free from **अज्ञान**. To prove it by reasoning is like seeing darkness with the help of darkness. Nor can it be proved by Knowledge, as at the awakening of Knowledge there cannot remain any trace of ignorance. To prove ignorance by Knowledge is like seeing darkness by a blazing light. Comp. "**अविद्याया अविद्यात्वमिदमेव तु लक्षणम् । यत् प्रमाणासहिष्णुत्वमन्यथा वस्तु सा भवेत् ॥**" ( **बृहः उपः भाष्यवार्तिकम्, १४१** )—"The characteristic mark of ignorance is its very unintelligibility. It cannot bear any proof or it will be a real thing." "**सेयं भ्रान्तिर्निरालम्बा सवन्यायविरोधिनी । सहते विचारं सा तमो**



यद्दुर्विवाकरम् ॥” ( नैष्कर्म्यासिद्धिः ३-६६ ) —“This illusion is without support and contradictory to all reasonings. It cannot bear any reasoning just as darkness cannot bear the rays of the sun.” Therefore like fanciful imagination of the sun by one who is blind by the day, the sages named ignorance as indescribable, as it is neither real nor unreal, nor real-unreal, neither with parts nor without parts, and neither separable from Knowledge nor inseparable from It.

7 *I am etc.*—This experience illustrates the भावरूप of ignorance. This experience shows that even illusion has something positive for its Substratum. Illusion of silver in the nacre is based upon ignorance which therefore cannot be a negation. Hence from such experience as “I am ignorant” we can infer that ignorance is भावरूप or something positive. See note *ante*.

8 *Such etc.*—Comp. “अज्ञानेनावृतं ज्ञानं तेन मुह्यन्ति जंतवः” (गीता ५-१५) —“Knowledge is enveloped by ignorance, hence the creatures are deluded.” “नाहं प्रकाशः सर्वस्य योगमायासमावृतः” (गीता ७-२५)—“Veiled by this illusion owing to the association of Gunas, I am not manifest to all.”]

(To be continued)

## THE PASSING OF THE FIRST MILESTONE

BY NINA MACDONALD

Again have we met to celebrate the birthday of our Master, Sri Ramakrishna.

With flowers and incense, with music and earnest, heartfelt words have we sought to express, in a measure at least, something of the understanding, the inspiration, the soul-growth that have come to us as students of Vedantā, under the teaching and guidance of His messenger to us, our beloved Swami Prabhavananda.

The Vedanta Society in Portland, Oregon, U. S. A., is but little more than a year old. One could almost measure its actual age by reckoning from the celebration of Master's birthday in 1926, inasmuch as much of the work done previous to that date was necessarily devoted to getting the activities of the Society thoroughly organized; hence at this time of writing it seems very fitting to give a summary of the year's work.

The Portland Society was organized during the latter part of October, 1925. The dedication and formal opening took place on the evening of November 6th. Swami Prakashananda came all the way from San Francisco to dedicate the new Center. No one who was present on that memorable occasion will ever forget the smallest detail of the services, so beautiful in their impressive simplicity.



In a few simple but moving words the revered Swami, whose very presence was a benediction, dedicated the new Society to the Master's work. Then, with all the sweetness of his great tender heart vibrant in his voice, he spoke to us of the Universal Religion, of the Divine Love, Peace and Joy that were ours for the seeking.

Our hearts are very sad and the tears of personal loss flow as we think of him who, in the flesh, will come to us no more; but the blessed memory of his teachings, his love and his wisdom is ours as a priceless treasure. From beyond the veil we hear his gentle voice, we feel his abounding love.

The enthusiasm with which Swami Prabhavananda was greeted on his arrival in Portland and with which the Center was started has never for a moment flagged. On the contrary, the interest has grown keener week by week and month by month as we have come to realize more adequately the all-inclusive heights and depths, the divine beauty and the far-flung significance of the Vedanta philosophy.

Starting with a goodly number of members, now after the lapse of only one year's time the hall is beginning to seem small and there is much talk among members of more commodious quarters—of a Temple to be the Society's very own.

Swami Prabhavananda, whose zeal in his beloved Master's work is verily untiring, has included in his labors during the year three trips north from Portland, lecturing in Seattle and Tacoma in the State of Washington. He has also given a week of special lectures in Portland which brought several new members into the Society.

During the winter he delivered a course of eight lectures on the Gospel of St. John in the Christian Bible. These lectures were especially interesting and illuminating and he has been urged to issue them in book form, that a much wider circle may be afforded an opportunity to profit by their helpful and enlightening teaching.

In Tacoma and Seattle there has been expressed a great desire for the opening of a Center with a Swami in charge. "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few." There is crying need in the West for the pure teachings of Vedanta. Many souls are hungering and thirsting for the Truth. Most earnestly are we praying the Divine Mother to send to this country more Swamis to spread farther afield the message of the Master.

Christmas and Swami Vivekananda's birthday were both fittingly celebrated in season.

A series of lectures and lessons is being conducted at the present time (March, 1927) by Swami Prabhavananda on the Apocalypse of St. John the Divine in the Christian Bible. These lectures—for members only—are of intense interest and great helpfulness because they show clearly and logically that the same eternal, kosmic truths so wonderfully set forth in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita are also behind the veils of the Apocalypse—one of the most mystically obscure books in the world today.

Beside the many activities already mentioned, the Swami has held two evening classes each week during the year, as well as giving



private lessons to students who come to him at other hours. Many non-members also come to him—some as simple enquirers, others seeking advice, sympathy and the loving counsel which he is always ready and glad to give to any who desire it.

And so, all through the months has the Master's work gone on, and as we pass this first milestone we pause for a few moments to take this "backward glance o'er traveled roads," as Walt Whitman expressed it. There have been days of discouragement, days when clouds circumscribed our vision, when the path looked very steep, rugged and dreary. But always there has been Swami to cheer us on with his unshakable courage and wider overlook, to dissipate the clouds with his clear reasoning, to lend us a strong loving hand up the Hill of Difficulty and—best of all—there has been the growing joy within our own hearts over our increasing apperception of the Truths of the Spirit.

The celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday on the 5th of March has been the occasion of much happy planning on the part of the students, for Swami had asked that the morning service be wholly theirs.

The morning of the blessed day found the little hall, or Temple, as it is lovingly called, transformed from its usually sober appearance by a mass of woods things and flowers. The glossy vari-coloured leaves of our beautiful Oregon grape and huckleberry formed a lovely background for stately tulips, golden daffodils and a mass of exquisite roses.

The Master's picture had been placed on a dais on the platform and softly draped. The Oregon grape combined with tender trailing vines were banked before the picture, while tulips, their gay heads bending gracefully as though they too, had entered into the spirit of the day and were doing the Master homage, were placed close to His pictured feet. The aromatic fragrance of incense and sweet scented flowers blending with the more pungent odors of the woods, combined to create an atmosphere most fitting the sacred occasion.

Swami opened the exercises with chant and prayer, after which a group of students sang the "Hymn To Divine Mother," the words of which have been adapted from the prayer of Sri Ramakrishna. A poem written especially for the day by an out-of-town student was read and then, one after another, the students gave briefly in thoughtful well chosen words, their conceptions of the life and teaching of the Master.

All were worth hearing, and the spirit of harmony that prevailed was so inspiring that it is in my heart to wish that the children of Ramakrishna all over the world could have been with us.

Music and song followed the talks and Swami again invoked the Master's blessing. We were then dismissed for a few hours, to meet later in the afternoon as dinner-guests of one of the students. . . .

At eight of o'clock we again gathered to hear Swami speak of the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

Our pianist, who is a musician of rare ability, played softly—meditatively—and we, sitting there in the little Temple, fragrant with flower and incense, our beloved Master's picture before us, were filled



with an almost overwhelming desire that our hearts and souls should be attuned spontaneous to His will.

As the strains of music softly died on the air Swami came on to the platform from the little inner room. Never have the solemnly chanted words and the tender prayer that follows, seemed more holy. It was as though the Master Himself had spoken to us. In spirit we sat at His blessed feet as Swami told us of His life here on earth. First, he told us of the little everyday things—His simple tastes and His love for fun; then of His tenderness and great humanity and how He had come again as Gita said He would—to help the world in its great need. On and on swept the message, holding us spellbound as we tried to comprehend from the pictures spread before us, the grandeur of the wonderful life of self-sacrificing love and purity, that God, become man, had lived on this earth so short a time ago.

For more than an hour Swami spoke to us and it seemed but moments had passed when he ceased. As we bowed our heads and the stately music of the chanting filled the little Temple with its impressive beauty I am sure that in every heart the presence of the Master was felt, bringing an abiding joy and the peace that passeth understanding.

Until the last milestone on our earthly journey is passed may we be blessed by the spirit of our beloved Swami's invocation to Sri Ramakrishna which concluded this never-to-be-forgotten service :

“Birthless and deathless art Thou, yet Thou art born and assumest human form to show the ideal life and example for humanity.

“The light of all lights art Thou. Thy true blissful form is realizable only in the highest state of consciousness.

“Beginningless and endless, Thou great purifier, make us pure and selfless.”

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## NEWS AND REPORTS

### Swami Sharvananda at Simla

We had occasion to notice before the immense success the Vedantic propaganda of Swami Sharvananda is meeting with in different parts of India. His lectures at Mysore, Nagpur and Bombay and the extension lectures at the Universities of those places were highly appreciated. The Swami only recently founded a centre of the Ramakrishna Order at Delhi where his lectures on the various aspects of Vedanta were listened to with the deepest attention by thousands. The Swami from there went to Simla where he stayed for nearly two months. There also he delivered several lectures in English and Bengali to very large audiences, on such subjects as “The Message of the Universal Religion,” “God, Soul and Matter,” “Mayavada,” “God—Personal and Impersonal,” “Law of Karma,” “Transmigration of Soul,” “Secret of Worship,” etc. The Swami's teachings evoked great enthusiasm among the public.



### A Conference of Village Ashramas

A conference of about twenty village Seva-samitis and Ashramas established under the direct or indirect guidance of the Ramakrishna Order was held during the last week of May at Kalma, a village in the Dacca district of Bengal, under the presidency of Swami Suddhananda of the Belur Math. An industrial and agricultural exhibition was also held during the conference. The conference lasted three days and was very well attended. The ideals of the organisations were discussed; and three resolutions were passed, proposing to establish a central superintending body to bring all those village institutions under one organisations requesting the authorities of the R. K. Mission to devise means for bringing these village works into close touch with the Mission and expressing the desire to hold such a conference every three years.

The conference was a move in the right direction and is bound to prove very helpful.

### A New Centre at Ponnampet

A new centre of the Sri Ramakrishna Order was opened at Ponnampet, South Coorg, on Friday the 10th of June. The idea of having an Ashram in Coorg had been in the minds of the local workers ever since the formation of the Vedanta Society in 1924; it took practical shape, however, when Swami Nirmalanandaji laid its foundation stone on the 6th of February last; and the enthusiasm of the people coupled with the earnestness of the workers all contributed to have the Ashram ready for opening in the course of four months.

The proceedings of the day began in the morning with the installation of the portrait of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna in the worship room. There was Bhajana, and after that was over, the devotees met and carried in procession a portrait of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna through the streets, and everywhere the people gathered to do honour to the Prophet of the age. After the procession had returned, more than a thousand people were fed, all, rich and poor, sitting together.

In the evening, a public meeting was held; speeches were made in English, Canarese and Malayalam explaining to the villagers the life and teachings of the Great Master. The Committee in charge of the building formally handed over the charge of the Ashram to Swami Nirmalanandaji who accepted it and made an inspiring speech on the occasion invoking the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna on the people of the place and praying that a spark of the fire of spirituality which had its origin at Dakshineswar might find its way to Ponnampet and that the Ashram might be a centre from where true spirituality would radiate in all directions. With a "Harikatha-Kalakshepam" the proceedings of the day came to an end.

The Ashram is an eloquent tribute to the earnestness of the people of the locality who have been working for it and it is needless to mention that it supplies a real want.



**R. K. Ashram, Patna, an Appeal**

The Sri Ramakrishna Ashram of Patna, Behar, was started in June 1922. To fulfil its objects, the Ashram has been serving Behar by interpreting religious books on rational lines through regular classes, occasional public lectures and special discourses, by supplementing the incomplete school education of boys by a healthy, moral, physical, æsthetic and intellectual training, by relieving distress during floods, famines and pestilences, and by nursing the sick, rendering medical aid to the needy and feeding the poor on special occasions. The Ashram also publishes an English weekly, called the *Morning Star* to spread the religion of Vedanta in all its aspects. The Ashram has amply justified its existence and occupies an honourable position in the civic life of Patna.

It now sends out an appeal for Rs. 35,000 in order to secure a permanent residence of its own on a suitable site, at least 3 *bighas* in area, which may accommodate a monastery, a lecture hall, a home for poor students, a charitable dispensary, a library, and a playground and a gymnasium for boys. We do hope the public will render enthusiastic help to the Ashram. All contributions may be sent to Swami Avyaktananda, Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Bankipur, Patna, Behar.

**R. K. Tapovan, Dharchula, an Appeal**

Swami Anubhavananda, Sri Ramkrishna Tapovan, P.O. Dharchula, Via Pithoragarh, Dt. Almora, U. P., sends out an appeal for Rs. 5000 in order to erect two buildings in the Ashram, one for the accommodation of workers and students and another for the school which the Ashram has been conducting for some time. The Tapovan is situated in the very heart of the Himalayas, far away from civilisation, on the way to Mt. Kailash in Thibet. The Swami in charge has been serving the people there by giving them medicine and providing primary education for some boys. The Swami's desire is to develop his present school to the Middle English standard with arrangements for residence of the boys in the Ashram.

Work among the backward hill people is urgently needed, and any help sent to the Swami will be of benefit to them.

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