

# Prabuddha Bharata

उत्तिष्ठत जायत



प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

*Katha Upa. I. III. 14.*

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

—SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

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## UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

III

*(To a Madrasi Disciple)*

HYDERABAD,

The 21st Feb., 1893.

Your friend the young graduate came to receive me at the station, so also a Bengali gentleman. At present I am living with the Bengali gentleman; to-morrow I go to live with your young friend for a few days, and then I see the different sights here, and in a few days you may expect me at Madras. For I am very sorry to tell you that I cannot go back at present to Rajputana. It is so very dreadfully hot here already. I do not know how hot it would be at Rajputana and I cannot bear heat at all. So the next thing I would do would be to go back to Bangalore and then to Ootacamund to pass the summer there. My brain boils in heat.

So all my plans have been dashed to the ground. That is why I wanted to hurry off from Madras early. In that case I would have left months in my hands to seek out for somebody to send me over to America amongst our northern princes.

But alas, it is now too late. First, I cannot wander about in this heat,—I would die. Secondly, my fast friends in Rajputana would keep me bound down to their sides if they get hold of me and would not let me go over to Europe. So my plan was to get hold of some new person without my friends' knowledge. But this delay at Madras has dashed all my hopes to the ground, and with a deep sigh I give it up and the Lord's will be done! However, you may be almost sure that I shall see you in a few days for a day or two in Madras and then go to Bangalore and thence to Ootacamund to see "if" the M—— Maharajah sends me up. "If"—because you see I cannot be sure of any promise of a D—— Raja. They are not Rajputs. A Rajput would rather die than break his promise. However, man learns as he lives and experience is the greatest teacher in the world.

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, for Thine is the glory and the kingdom for ever and ever." My compliments to you all.

Yours etc.,  
SACCHIDANANDA.\*

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## AS WE KNOW HER

BY THE EDITOR

(Continued from the last issue)

The invasion of India by the West not only disorganised India's economic system, but had also its repercussion on her social system. It could not be otherwise. For the social and economic systems are interrelated in every country. We have often dealt with the socio-economic implications of the caste system. The present idea of the caste system, mostly held by Westerners and their apt Indian disciples, is extremely crude and meaningless. It is generally represented as a machine of tyranny invented by the upper classes, and especially the Brahmins, to perpetuate their authority on the masses. Nothing can be more erroneous than this. Any serious student of Indian history will find that caste has always been very mobile. Brahmins have often been made out of lower castes. Tyranny no doubt there has been. But as to that,

\* Swamiji used to call himself such in those days.

what social system has ever been able to eliminate the exploitation of one class by another? Human nature will remain the same under all systems and we are yet to know of a system which is invulnerable to the wickednesses of human nature.

The caste system was originated with the best of intentions. It has served wonderfully the manifold purpose for which it came into being. And even now it has not lost its utility. Caste divisions were necessary for several reasons. Wherever necessaries of life are locally produced, elimination of undue competition becomes necessary. This leads to divisions of labour. This in its turn leads to economic caste system. But such divisions become urgent when many races with varied grades of culture and traditions become incorporated into a single society. When that society has the goodness and sanity to recognise that the different races in whatever degrees of evolution, represent really new and invaluable aspects of humanity, without which humanity will be a poor uniformity, caste system tending to conserve the specialities of the constituent races becomes still urgently necessary. But its necessity becomes almost absolute when the society has as its predominant aim the spiritualisation of its life in all its aspects ; for the competition for earthly riches then proves almost a menace. Which race or nation ever gained cultural or spiritual refinement without sufficient leisure to contemplate mental and spiritual realities ?

How did people fare under this system? Was it that they lost efficiency and moral vigour and became slavish? Were the masses degraded and discontented? Our past history surely does not reply in the affirmative. India's material prosperity her great achievements in various arts and crafts, her manhood, all are well-known. If the caste system were indeed such a vicious thing, how were all the past glories of India possible? It is often forgotten that there is in the caste system itself a spirit and a provision for the gradual promotion of lower castes to higher and higher grades. The caste system is not a dead machine. It is extremely mobile. It provides for admixture of castes, for intermarriage, for granting greater and greater privileges. India's social history is extremely chequered. Which country has shown such amazing powers of assimilation as India? Caste system is not all conservatism, it is also liberalism. These two opposing forces are equally operative in the Hindu society and steering it along the correct course. If we study the history of social evolution in India from the pre-Vedic period down to the present day, we shall be amazed by

the variety of changes through which it has passed. Our critics do not care to remember that our present social system is not as old as "four thousand years." It has undergone changes with the changes of conditions in India. S. T. observes: "If you believe that four thousand years ago your inspired countrymen established the most perfect possible social system, you will not work to obtain a better system—rather you will resist the idea that any improvement can be found. Fixity—finality—satisfaction with the old and already established—a supreme and immovable conservatism: this is the real answer to the Hindu social problem." We Indians however do not recognise India in this characterisation. It may serve the purpose of a foreign critic but not of truth. For this criticism is ignorant. We would ask such critics to point out another country where the social system has undergone as much change as in India. Does the modern West differ fundamentally from the medieval? What are those cataclysmic changes? It may be said that fundamental changes were not necessary in Western society because there was no caste system there. True. But that does not mean that caste system was wrong or unnatural. Each society seeks to serve an ulterior purpose through its social institutions. India had her own purpose to serve. And that could be best served through the caste system. The problem that India was faced with and had to solve appeared also before some of the Western nations: the problem of foreign races and cultures. What has the West done? She has ruthlessly exterminated them wherever possible, and antagonised them where she has failed to destroy. Compared with this brutal attitude, the caste system, with all its inevitable defects, was a much better and more honourable and humane solution. So the caste system was necessary. But it was never fixed. It underwent tremendous changes with the passing of ages and it will undergo yet more changes to accommodate itself to the requirements of the present age.

To us, looking from the outside, the much-vaunted Western society appears to have more blemishes than our own. But we have the good sense to feel that an outside view of such an intimate thing as society can at best be partial. We do not rush in like some proverbial creatures. But we regret to observe that we have often found in foreign critics of our institutions an amazing self-complaisance. One cannot truly understand our social system unless one views it as one belonging to it. How does the caste system appear to a Hindu? Or rather how did it appear to him?—For we are no longer ourselves now, we are

confused. It is not the limitations and rigours that appeared prominent to him. It was the inner purpose that they served that filled his mind and actuated him. He did not feel that the caste system was *imposed* on him by the wicked Brahmins. He felt that it was as much his as a Brahmin's. He felt that the whole of life and duty was meant for the realisation of an eternal end, to reach which was in the power of every one. The duty that was allotted to his caste was enough for his purpose. The social disabilities there of course were. It is true the higher castes often felt the pride of position. These were the defects of this system. There were also the outcasts. But good was overwhelmingly more in it than evil. No social system can ever be perfect. India can proudly claim that she did not make wealth the standard of social superiority. Despite all these defects, the average Hindu's mind thrived comfortably within this system. The Hindu proved as much efficient materially and intellectually as any other race, showing that the caste system did not cramp the capacities of men as is sometimes supposed. As to spirituality, we have already shown how much India has achieved in this line,—even her common children. Every Hindu felt himself a co-operator in a system which was designed to serve as a means of elevation of every race, man and woman to the position of Brahmanahood. This Brahmanahood did not in his view consist in birth or social position, but in knowledge, culture and spiritual wisdom. And in the achievement of this end, no caste or race was ever idle. Every section of people strove unceasingly to acquire greater and greater refinement of mind and spirit. That is how so many religious sects arose among all classes of people. And it will be noted how each of these creeds taught its votaries not only highly metaphysical views of God, life and the world, but also refinement in behaviour, in food, marriage and domestic relations. Thus lower castes reached higher levels of culture. And such castes were in a subsequent period actually incorporated into higher castes by being granted the privileges of interdining and intermarriage between them. It is unhistorical and ignorant to maintain that castes were fixed and their rigours unrelenting. So the Hindu did not trouble himself about the negative aspects of his society but lived his life pursuing the high ideals of religion and culture and saw his caste eventually promoted to higher ranks.

Before the new Western industrialism came into India, there was no social confusion as in the present days. In fact the present social unrest is pre-eminently the effect of India's

economic ruin. We do not deny that even before that there were causes for social unrest and even if the British had not come into India, social changes would have been inevitable. But there are ways to bring about those changes. In the past ages also such social transformations were brought about, but in peaceful ways. The present social unrest is suicidal in many respects. To-day, non-Brahmins will have nothing to do with Brahmins, their holy books, their Sanskrit language and their religious views. In the past they would have sought to approximate the Brahmins in their excellences and thus achieved social upliftment. This suicidal element in the present-day social movements is not only hampering the progress of reform but is also weakening society and nullifying its beneficial inheritances.

When people found that their caste occupations were gone, and even agriculture did not pay enough, they no longer cared to observe the niceties of their caste duties. Money was wanted, and it must be found anyhow. Castes began to usurp each other's opportunities and no longer could competition be held in check. We have observed before that the elimination of earthly competition was necessary for the cultural and spiritual growth of the people. It was obligatory therefore that no caste should encroach upon another caste-profession. To-day we consider this restraint as a sign of snobbery. We grow eloquent over the Western concept of the dignity of labour, as if our people ever shirked a work when it was their duty. True dignity of labour really existed among our people. For we were taught that *whatever* the nature of our duty, however low in appearance, when done in the required spirit, as an act of *dharma*, it was the highest action possible, as uplifting as the service in the temple. That indeed is dignity of labour and not taking to anything for the noble purpose of earning money. We are eager to teach our higher castes dignity of labour. It may be necessary under the present circumstances to do away with the restrictions of occupations. But if a Brahmin or a Kshatriya does not to-day take up the profession of a Sudra, let us not call it snobbery. It is the ancient instinct of caste *dharma*. Let us not call a noble thing by a bad name.

The elimination of caste limitations did not however create opportunities of earning for the people. Avenues of earning were blocked by the ruthless competition and exploitation of the Western merchants. If people could somehow hold on to their ancestral professions, there would have been better chances of fighting the Western invasion. But that was not

possible. Thus it is that India to-day presents the woeful picture of a nation of economical and social vagrants. When people found no opportunity of earning, their despair and wrath fell on their own law-givers.—It was their ugly social system that was responsible for their present disabilities! Our Western Gurus came and lectured us on the crudities of our religion, morality and social customs. We swallowed whatever they said without a grain of salt. And the internecine quarrels began. Let us break the wicked social laws and we shall be saved! Unfortunately salvation is yet far off, farther than before; and the consequence has been that our social solidarity is gone. We are now unconscious of our social purpose, we have lost faith in our past, the good that was in it is no longer at our service, and we are at the mercy of all sorts of wild fancies. This social disruption is directly the consequence of the Western economic and cultural impact on India. But our critics do not care to know what we were in pre-British days, how we fared under the caste system, and that the evils were not its only features. They do not feel the constructive and positive spirit that lay behind the limitations. They look at the dry bed of the river and is struck by its high banks, but have not the imagination to feel that once there flowed along and between them a mighty current leading directly to the sea. And they grow eloquent over the social consequences of *Mayavada*!

And our treatment of our women!—How atrocious! This is a puzzle to our critics. They are ashamed to own us as a civilised race because of our infamous treatment of our women. But if our women had been what their sisters in the West at present are, surely they and we would have been acclaimed as quite civilized. But unfortunately, civilization is a word which has no fixed connotation. We in India find much in the modern Western woman, which we scarcely admire and would never wish our mothers and sisters to imitate. All that glitters is not gold. The modern Western woman is not such a happy and perfect being as is usually imagined. A tree is known by its fruit. If the characteristics of the modern Western woman are so desirable, why is it that marriage in the West is becoming daily a mere verbal affair, losing its sanctity and depth? How is it that divorces are becoming more and more numerous? How has it been possible for Judge Lindsey to reveal such horrible conditions of young school-girls? Why is chastity becoming a byword of ridicule? Why is the happy home getting rarer every day? Why are women becoming more

and more frivolous? We by no means indict the entire womanhood of the West. What we mean is that much of the so-called modernism of the Western woman is of questionable merit,—it has yet to justify itself, and that so far as our present knowledge goes, it has proved on the whole harmful. Sane minds are increasingly realising that the old-world idea of woman, as the chaste, faithful wife, dignified mistress of the home and affectionate mother of children, is more fruitful and real than the present-day masculine and frivolous aspect of womanhood. When the 'civilized' nations are finding their experience of the modern woman so distasteful, 'uncivilized'. India may well be justified in not condemning the present position of her womanhood. Surely there is much room for improvement in it, but not perhaps in the fundamentals.

The purity, dignity and nobility of our womanhood can stand comparison with those of the womanhood of any other country. Even our severest critics (of course the truthful ones) will admit this. It is not so much the faults of our women as our men's treatment of our women, that they condemn. Let us see how much truth there is in that condemnation. First of all, there is the charge of child and early marriage. Most Indians feel apologetic before this charge. But is it, or rather was it, such a bad custom after all? One argument against early marriage is that it assumes that all women must marry. Hinduism does hold that most women, and of course most men, must marry. It must be always remembered that Hinduism considers chastity as the very basis of moral and spiritual life and takes the utmost care to have it well established in the life of individuals and society. It will not allow any practice and custom to exist which will in any way militate against this central motive. Hinduism therefore does not encourage celibate life within the society itself, unless the celibates earnestly devote themselves to some noble, altruistic, moral and spiritual ideal, and even in such cases, they are expected to live a super-social life. The underlying idea is obvious. A celibate who will live the ordinary, worldly, life and yet will not marry, will more often than not go sexually astray. It is idle to deny that this observation is fundamentally true, for the sex instinct is indeed very strong in the ordinary man and woman and cannot often rest without satisfaction. Worldly celibates therefore are bound to prove injurious to the morals of the society. Of course, a society which does not lay such importance on chastity can afford to be mild in its restriction of celibacy within society. But India cannot. For her



foundation and goal being spirituality, she cannot afford to be lax about chastity which is an essential condition of spiritual growth.

So India has made it a general rule that all men and women should marry. Those who would not marry must go out of society in the name of religion or similar high ideals. Of course such a general rule cannot but prove harmful to a few. But social laws, and for the matter of that, all laws of collective life, suffer always from such defects. It is true this custom tells more heavily on the women than on the men, because men marry at a later age than women and they develop by that time a sense of responsibility which helps them to choose themselves whether they should marry or go out of the world.

The second argument against early marriage is that it ruins the health of the girls by too early consummation of marriage and deteriorates the manhood of the nation. These charges are quite true, so far as they are real. We have to admit that in the present days these evils have become more rampant than in the pre-British days,—that is to say, in so far as early marriage exists. We have mentioned previously how in our early boyhood, we have seen the older generations of our village men and women possessing well-grown physiques, free from weakness and disease. Early marriage was the rule in those days. Yet, how is it that there was no deterioration of the body? One obvious reason was of course that there was then joy in life and plenty of nourishing food available. But the more real reason was that consummation of marriage was delayed to a much later age. This restriction was possible because of the joint family system and social cohesiveness. We are here speaking of Bengal. In Bengal, the little girl when she was married was not always allowed to live in her parental home, but was brought to her husband's, more truly, to her father-in-law's place where she was daily taught, directly and indirectly, the ways and customs and the responsibilities of her new home. This marriage was not so much a relation contracted between the husband and the wife as that the girl changed her parental home for the home of her father-in-law. Here she was never allowed to know her husband unless and until she was considered by the family to be fit for it. Thus the apparent evils of early marriage were carefully obviated.

It is pertinent to ask, why was early marriage at all necessary if consummation of marriage was duly delayed?

The answer lies in the constitution of the family in those days—the joint family system. A Westerner will scarcely be able to understand the complex forces that work in such a family and the responsibilities the women of the family have to bear. Their first duty is of course to carefully and smoothly serve the multifarious interests of such a big family ;—all must be satisfied and yet no abnormalities should be allowed to develop. Their second and more important duty is to hold the entire family in trust and love. Human mind is the same everywhere. The Hindu also has selfishness, jealousy, anger, distrust and all the evils that man is heir to. Any of these can easily devastate a family in no time. It can be easily guessed what tremendous responsibilities lie on the shoulders of the ladies of the family, for it is they and not the men, who hold together and look after the family. The women have to be very tolerant, very patient and understanding, absolutely unselfish and supremely loving. And it is to the glorious credit of Hindu women that they often rose equal to their duty. Such women necessarily enjoyed the respect due to a queen and a goddess in the family and society.

Now, such goddesses cannot be made easily. Why do we love our sisters always? Why sisters always love their brothers easily, however ugly and bad they might be? It is because in our early years, our mind is more generous and unselfish and can love more easily and that love becomes more permanent. With adolescence we develop idiosyncrasies, are particular about our choice, have more pronounced likes and dislikes, and cannot love so disinterestedly and lastingly. That is why grown-up girls could not be expected to enter a new family and thoroughly assimilate herself into it. She could not be expected to love either her husband or his people so wholeheartedly. She would often prove a foreign, unassimilated element in the family, causing conflict and disruption. She would not also so thoroughly assimilate the ways of the new family, the associations of her father's home having been too deeply impressed on her mind. These psychological reasons made it urgent that the bride should be of young age and undeveloped mind and easily assimilable. Hence the system of early marriage. Family life in India was supremely happy in those days, and succeeded in producing many great women whose piety, unselfishness, service and wisdom still exist as sacred traditions in every village.

The joint family system is disappearing with the coming of the British to India. The reason is often economic. Money is

scarce. We have become much too poor and have become more selfish. Early marriage is now harmful, because the counterbalancing influences of the joint family system exist no longer. This as also various other reasons have compelled the marriageable age of girls to be raised considerably. Even without the efforts of Indian social reformers, the changed socio-economic and cultural conditions would have abolished early marriage,—not because it was such an evil and shameful thing, but because it does not suit the present conditions. In the ancient ages, early marriage was unknown. In course of time, circumstances necessitated the origin and growth of this institution, changed conditions have again annulled it.

The essential pre-requisite of early marriage is the joint family system which is also its proper atmosphere and safeguard. The joint family system is rapidly decaying under the new economic conditions. The new economic necessities are driving men out of their ancestral homes and villages to distant towns and cities. The village industries are mostly dead now. People are compelled to look for "service" for their livelihood. So when the men go to towns, their wives and children also have to follow them there. The joint families are automatically breaking to pieces. Those members of the family, who can earn hard cash in Government services or as lawyers are alone the principal support of the family. Those who are not fortunate enough to have acquired sufficient literary education, have to rely on their more affluent relatives for the support of themselves and their wives and children. When the village industries were alive, such parasitism was not necessary, because all members could find more or less employment in their family professions themselves. When living is so dear, it cannot be expected that brothers will forever bear the burden of their less fortunate brothers. They have to separate ; and brides require to be educated and grown in age so that they may take immediate charge of their husbands' households. That is how early marriage is getting out of vogue more and more quickly with the passing of years.

Foreigners cannot be expected to go so deeply into our social motives and purposes. Our own people also have unfortunately forgotten them and hang their heads in shame when they can legitimately hold their heads high before all world.

It is our opinion that the true secret of the laws and customs pertaining to the inter-sexual relations in India can be found easily, if we bear in mind that chastity is always

considered by Hindus as the most precious of life's possessions. In a joint family, or in any family, the open association of man and wife is always considered bad form. India never denied the fact that sex-consciousness is most pernicious and has its gross as well as subtle forms, that the attraction of men and women, even of the highest type, has at its base some form of sexual consciousness (except, of course, when they recognise each other as only spirit). It is therefore considered bad form that any association of men and women, which has reference to sex instinct, should be done publicly. Such an exhibition is bound to have adverse effect on young minds whose first training in life has always been considered in India to be Brahmacharya (continence). The husband and wife must never meet in the day-time. The wife shall go to her husband only after the whole house has retired and must return from him before the family has awoke. In fact, in a typical Hindu home, even the slightest expression of sex-attraction is carefully avoided. We well remember the horror of the villagers in the early days when a bride was ever proposed to be sent to live with her husband who perhaps had been working away from home. This open association with husband and the implied neglect of the responsibilities of the family home were considered scandalous. Now things are totally changed. Now it is the rule that wives live with their husbands. There are many anomalies in our present conditions. We have not yet settled down to any new plan. We are yet on transition. What form the family or the conjugal relations will finally take in conformity with the Indian genius, is yet to be seen.

Chastity, again, in our opinion, seems to be at least partly at the basis of the *purda* system. This *purda* system is the second great charge against the Hindus. No doubt it is bad. It affects health. But we must not forget that too much freedom also often results in a hysterical life for the modern woman. How *purda* came to originate and be established in India has not yet been fully ascertained. Some hold Mussalmans responsible for it. There is undoubtedly some truth in it. Others consider it to have been originated as a sign of respectability and aristocracy. But there are evidences that from very ancient times, Hindus have formed the habit of allocating separate jurisdictions for women, separate scopes of social and family activities, and separate portions in the home to reside in. Women used veils in ancient times. Besides the very genius of the Hindu race was directed to the conservation of sexual purity. All these, we think, resulted in

too much accentuating the differences of men and women. We must also remember in this connection that Hindu women did not often require to go out of their homes in discharge of their duties. Most of their duties were located within the home itself. This also evidently contributed to the growth of the *purda* system.

Anyhow, it must be admitted that the *purda* system had some adverse effect on our women. But it will be a great mistake to take it at its face value, that is to say, as an imprisonment of their women by Indians. The custom grew without any conscious effort of the men themselves. And women enjoyed the utmost freedom within the limits. An inside view is the only true view. Once the limitations of the *purda* are recognised, the rest is all freedom. Most Hindus will emphatically assert that their mothers were the queens of their homes, enjoying the respect of all the members of the family. The *purda* is not what the foreigner thinks it to be. He is also apt to conceive the *purda* and the position of women in all Oriental countries to be the same. This is a great mistake. This at least is certain that if the ideas that are associated in the average Western mind with the *purda* have any actual basis, it does not exist in India.

The third charge is about our treatment of our widows. Our foreign critics fail at the outset to understand the significance of widowhood in India, and that is partly because they do not understand the significance of Hindu marriage. Here also the secret lies in chastity. It will be apposite to quote here what we wrote on other occasions regarding the Hindu marriage :

“The significance of Hindu wifedom often proves a puzzle to many. The glorification of Sati-dharma apparently indicates that the position of the wife is in itself well-recognised and honourable. Yet every wife considers her position truly honourable only when she has become a mother. From yet another standpoint, that marriage is looked upon as the highest in which the husband and wife do not know each other physically and live a life of unbroken continence. Marriage from that point of view is a concession to human weakness which fears to stand alone and seeks the companionship and service of another, and thus falls short of the ultimate ideal—Sannyasa. These three aspects of a wife’s position may seem unrelated and mutually contradictory. For it may be quite plausibly argued that if we look upon marriage as a necessary evil,

woman's position either as mother or wife has a stigma attached to it. And again, if motherhood is the higher ideal, surely the honour of wifedom suffers. This apparent puzzle is easily solved if we remember the idea underlying all these three viewpoints,—the idea of chastity. Yes, wifedom is glorious if it is instinct with the noble ideal of Sati-dharma or a similar spiritual ideal, for it then becomes a means to higher realisations. Such spiritual idealism presupposes a high degree of sex-control and is therefore much better than vagrancy and debasing sentimentalism. But a woman should emancipate herself from even the restricted sexuality which wifedom implies by bearing one or two children,—motherhood implies sublimation of love-emotions and greatly helps the elimination of sexuality from life—and refusing thereafter to have any carnal relations with her husband. Motherhood therefore indicates a greater realisation of chastity. But it is of course best to maintain absolute continence even though married. Even that however falls short of the highest ideal, for even in it sex-consciousness is not totally absent. The very highest is therefore the monastic ideal. . . . That life is the highest which implies the greatest amount of chastity.”

“What is Sati-dharma? It is one aspect of the Hindu ideal of the spiritualisation and deification of every being. The ultimate object of Sati-dharma is purely spiritual. The wife seeks constantly to look upon and realise her husband as the Divine himself. Her daily ministrations to her husband and his family are sacramental to her. Her life is a continued act of worship. This is why when the husband dies, she does not set up his picture on the altar of worship. The worship of the eternal God, which while the husband was living was being done through him, becomes now direct and immediate. She gives herself to purely spiritual life, to contemplation, meditation and worship of her chosen Divine Ideal. She does not feel any break between the life of the wife and of the widow.”

It will be seen from the above that widowhood is not a life of mourning at foundation, but a release into a higher spiritual freedom. The life of the spirit that she developed as the wife now becomes more pronounced in her widowhood. We need not, therefore, shed too many tears on her fancied miseries. Miseries she has, but these are more economical than psychological. When the joint family system flourished, the economic position of the widow was always more or less ensured, either in her husband's or in her parents' home. She had also ample scope then of living a disinterested, serviceful and religious

life. The disruption of society has greatly circumscribed those opportunities, and she has now to look for other scopes for the career of her soul's life. Her economic position also has become precarious. That also requires to be improved. Swami Vivekananda often used to suggest that the village education of India might profitably become the widows' special province.

All these difficulties there are. But the modern critic is more solicitous of the widow's sexual life than her economic or spiritual life. We are not unaware of the many falls of young widows. But no tree should be judged by the worm-eaten fruits that lie on the ground. The essential question is whether widowhood has always resulted in moral degradation. All honest people know that the reverse is the fact. We are not unmindful of many exceptions. These we impute to the disturbed social conditions and the consequent loss of morale by the people. We for ourselves will not judge Hindu widowhood by the present state of it. Offer the widows means of honest livelihood (that is quite possible without remarriage) and scope for altruistic activities and the present regrettable state of things will quickly disappear.

Regarding the remarriage of widows, Swami Vivekananda used to scornfully remark that<sup>s</sup> he did not know that the greatness of any nation depended on the number of husbands a widow got. He considered remarrying by a widow as a regrettable fall from the ideal. The argument, often put forward, that since men are allowed to remarry, women also should enjoy the same right, is not so convincing as it appears. First of all, some people must stand for the higher ideals in society; up till now, the higher ideals and nobler traditions of society have been in the keeping of our women. *Some* must be entrusted with the difficult task of their maintenance. Why should not women continue to be they? Such a clear division of duties is necessary in corporate life.—Everybody's business is nobody's business. Secondly, that there are psychological differences between men and women is being increasingly recognised. Woman is more idealistic in nature than man. It is more favourable to her nature to be faithful unto death. To contract conjugal relations with more than one man in life would be doing violence to her nature. Naturally, therefore, if idealism is to have place in social life, it will be better to leave it to women to maintain it than to men.

It would be idle to deny that such a task necessarily imposes great hardship on the widows. But we can scarcely

forget that if the social ideal is to be maintained on a high level, this imposition cannot be escaped. We must not be too soft-hearted. This world is a very imperfect world and we have to make the best of things. We may seek to alleviate the sufferings of the widows, but let us not do so through their remarriage. The beneficial influence the Hindu widowhood is exerting on the conjugal life of the people cannot be over-estimated. With the disappearance of the noble ideal of a widow's life, the ideal of married life itself will degenerate. The respect for motherhood will appreciably deteriorate. And above all, the extreme regard for chastity which is the very life-blood of the Hindu race, will become very much weakened. Can we afford to lose so much? If not, let our noble widows suffer for the nation. They have always received the homage of our heart and they shall receive it unto eternity.

From what we have said about our socio-economic system or about the position of our women, it does not follow that we want those conditions to be perpetuated or consider them to be perfect. We hold that till the beginning of the modern era, India did very well in all those respects and need not be ashamed of her achievements. We know that conditions have changed profoundly and therefore our customs and institutions also must change. And they have indeed been changing. Did not Swami Vivekananda exclaim in the surety of his unerring vision: "I see India is young, she is not old and effete"?

(To be concluded)

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## SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS DISCIPLES

(Continued from the last issue)

Sri Ramakrishna's high estimate of his great disciple, Swami Vivekananda, is well-known. To quote the words of Swami Ramakrishnananda (Sasi):

"Gurumaharaj in telling the story of Naren's (Swami Vivekananda's) first coming, said, 'When I saw this boy enter the room I thought, can such a boy come out of Calcutta where everyone is mad after money and pleasure—where everything is *Rajasika* (feverishly active)? I could see that his mind was three-fourths turned inward and only with the other fourth was he doing all these outer things. One corner of his shawl was dragging on the ground, his hair was a little dishevelled, as if he was careless about such things.' "



How the Master felt towards Naren is made plain by the following incident narrated by Yogin-ma :

“Once Naren had not come to the Temple for some time and Thakur (Ramakrishna) growing impatient to see him, came to Balaram’s house and sent for him. Naren came at his free hour. When it was nearly time for him to return to college, Thakur came to the ladies’ quarters and called me. ‘Naren must go back to college, can you not give him something to eat?’ he asked. Then he added, (and he had such an winning way, no one could resist him) ‘You have little boys who go to school, you must have simple curries for them. Can you not spare some for Naren? He is such a good boy.’ I took some rice and a few curries and carried them to Naren. When he had eaten, Thakur told me to pour water over his hands, repeating: ‘He is such a good boy.’ Then Naren went back to his college but he came again later in the day.” This was the first time Yogin-ma saw Naren.

Perhaps those were days when Naren was passing through hard times. In the words of Sasi: “Often he had to go without a meal. Once he had had no food for two days. He came that evening to the house of a friend where Gurumaharaj had also come. Gurumaharaj was eating, with Latu by his side. As he ate, Latu mixed some curry with rice, walked across and laughingly threw it into Naren’s mouth. Naren told me at once he felt his full, as if he had eaten a hearty meal. . . .

“From the outset Gurumaharaj’s love for Naren was unbounded. When Naren did not come to the Temple for a time, Gurumaharaj would grow so restless that he would weep even. Once when I was with him, he kept running first to the Ganges side, then to the road side, to see whether Naren was coming. At last he told me to bring a carriage. I ran two miles off to get one and together we drove to Naren’s house. We found him in his dingy room on the ground floor. ‘Why have you come?’ he asked with evident annoyance on seeing Gurumaharaj. ‘What will my family think when they see a *Sadhu* coming to see me like this?’ In reality, however, he was annoyed that Gurumaharaj should have paid him so much honor.

“Naren’s unselfishness and loving-kindness had no limit. . . There was no one more tolerant in the matter of mistakes. If any one committed a blunder he would say: ‘That is very good. How could we learn, if we did not commit blunders?’ He never condemned the man.

“Once when we were returning from Dakshineswar, Naren insisted on taking me home with him. His mother had saved

his supper for him, but without letting me know it, he gave this to me and went without food himself. When bed-time came, he put me on his cot under the mosquito curtain. I was very tired and fell asleep at once. In the morning when I woke, I found that Naren had spent the night on the bare floor at the other side of his room.

“He was very indifferent to his surroundings. In his own house he lived in a dark damp room on the ground floor. Books lay about everywhere. On the fire was always a pot of tea. Here he would sit and read, lost in his thoughts. When he grew tired or hungry he would drink a tumbler of the tea boiling hot and then go on with his study.

“While he was still attending college he used to study all day and spend the night in meditation. This constant use of the brain brought on severe pain in his head which kept him rolling on his bed for several days. Hearing of it Gurumaharaj came to the house of a devotee near by and sent for him. ‘But he cannot get up from his bed,’ some one explained. ‘Just tell him, he will come,’ Gurumaharaj replied. Naren came and as he sat down by Gurumaharaj, the latter ran his hand lovingly through his hair saying: ‘Why, my boy, what is the matter? You have headache have you?’ Naren said that at once all the pain left him.

“Once a drama by Keshab was to be performed and to Naren was assigned the part of a *Sannyasin* (monk) Gurumaharaj expressed great satisfaction when he heard of it and insisted on being taken to see the performance. Naren acquitted himself most creditably of his task and after the play was over Gurumaharaj had him brought out in the hall that he might again see him in the orange cloth. It seemed to give him the greatest pleasure to have him dressed as a *Sannyasin*.

“While we were living with Gurumaharaj at the Cossipore Garden House, there was a period when Naren spent all his time in meditation or in making *Japam* (repeating the Lord’s name) until his eyes were red and he did not even come to serve Gurumaharaj. His longing to realize God was so intense that he declared: ‘If by taking a handful of filth and swallowing it, I could realize God, I would do it.’ One evening when I went to call him to his meal, he was sitting in meditation; and just as an expression of affection, I ran my hand over his back. It was at once stained with blood. I looked and saw that his whole back was covered with mosquitoes and was bleeding. He was completely unconscious of it.”

Said Yogin-ma: "The night on which Naren took *Mantram* (received initiation) from Thakur he was like a mad man. It was at Cossipore Garden and all night he walked excitedly round and round the house. Finally he went to Thakur and said, 'Give me peace.' Thakur said to him: 'How little you can bear! This fire that is lighted in your heart I bore in mine for twelve years and you cannot bear it for one night, but come crying for peace. . . .'"

Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) who had come to the Master before Naren, was like his own son. He slept in the same room with him, sometimes in the same bed, and he dared to show a greater familiarity with him than any of the other disciples. When Sri Ramakrishna would be sitting on the floor, he would come up behind him, put his arms round his neck and rock him back and forth. Rakhal had no lack of reverence. To Sri Ramakrishna he was always a little boy. Sometimes Sri Ramakrishna would feed him from his own plate.

Despite his tender intimacy now and then a shadow of doubt fell across Sri Ramakrishna's mind. Did Rakhal look upon him as a real father? One night he had the proof. Rakhal was sleeping in his room. Sri Ramakrishna was thirsty and asked the boy to bring him some water. Rakhal gave a grunt of refusal, turned over on his mat and went to sleep. Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed with delight: "I see now that he really thinks of me as his own father;" and he went about telling everyone of the incident.

Whenever Sri Ramakrishna was asked how a man would act who had gone beyond the three *Gunas* (that is, had transcended material bondage) he always replied "Like Rakhal."

How the disciples passed their days is told in these words by the disciple Sasi: "It was only on Sunday that there was a crowd at the Temple; on other days Gurumaharaj was left alone with his few chosen ones. Not every one could stay with him, only those whom he chose to have. And why did he keep them? In order that in one night he might make them perfect. Just as a goldsmith gives shape to a lump of gold, so he would mould them so that their whole life would be changed and they could never forget the impression he had stamped on them.

"He possessed the peculiar power to discern at once whether a man was fit or not. Sometimes people would come and want to stay with him but he would see that they were not fit and he would tell them with child-like frankness, 'You would better go home.' When now and then there would be a feast and Gurumaharaj would be sitting with his disciples, a man would

sometimes come who was not really good but who by sitting with him wanted to appear as good ; at once Gurumaharaj would make him out and would say : 'Here is a man who is not pure. He will spoil my children.' Without hesitation he would send him away.

"When he was alone with his special disciples, they would sing and talk and play together. If a visitor came, he would tell him : 'Go and have a bath, eat something and rest awhile.' Then about two o'clock he would begin to talk and he would go on teaching for five or six hours continuously. He would not know when to stop.

"Sometimes Gurumaharaj would wake at four in the morning and he would call the disciples who were sleeping in his room saying : 'What are you all doing? Snoring? Get up, sit on your mat and meditate.' Sometimes he would wake up at midnight, call them and make them spend the whole night singing and praising the name of the Lord."

When Sri Ramakrishna's wife, Saradamani Devi, or Holy Mother as she is called by Sri Ramakrishna's children, first came to Dakshineswar, she was quite young and she had to live in the small ground-floor room of the Concert House. Often she had to live alone. "Only through one little opening," said the Holy Mother, "could I see the outside world and I would watch there all day and night just to catch one glimpse of Thakur, but when he passed he would draw his cloth across his face. Thus days went by without my seeing him."

She fell ill some time later. "One of the *Bhaktas* (devotees) of Thakur said I must move to another house, so he gave two large trunks of trees, costing five hundred Rupees, to build one. These were brought up the Ganges, and I told Hriday that he must tie them to the shore, otherwise the tide would come up and float them off. But Hriday tied only the outer one, and in the night the tide rose and floated the other one away and they had much difficulty in recovering it. In the morning Hriday began to scold me saying : 'It is your lack of faith that caused all this trouble.' But Thakur said : 'Why are you scolding her? It is because you neglected to tie the log that it has got away.' The logs were sawed up and a little house built for me in the village near the Temple. There I lived with Lakshmi and a maid-servant to care for me.

"Hriday's wife who was stopping in the village near the Temple chanced to be ill at one time. She had a maid-servant

with her, but I also went to nurse her, while Hriday remained with Thakur. It was the rainy season and he was not well. As Hriday had all the worship in the Temple besides serving and cooking for Thakur, I was anxious lest Thakur would not receive proper care ; so my thought was constantly with him and I found it very hard to stay with Hriday's wife. Suddenly there appeared at Hriday's house a Brahmin lady who said : 'Why should you stay here? Your heart is all the time at the Temple. This servant can do what is needful here. Come back to Thakur.' So she took me back to the Temple and together we would nurse Thakur at night.

"I was always so shy when I came to him that I drew my veil down to my chin. He would ask me why I veiled myself and tell me to lift it. But I could not draw it up beyond my nose. One night, however, I remember he talked the whole night of the Lord and I became, as it were, mad. When dawn broke I found myself standing before him with my veil thrown entirely back from my face and lost in what he was saying. The daylight suddenly recalled me to myself. I drew my veil quickly and ran to the Concert House.

"Once I asked Thakur with what name I should make *Japam*. He looked up at me so searchingly that I was frightened and blushed. He replied : 'Take any name you like. Only believe that all power lies in the name you choose and it will surely save you.'

"I spent much time in my village also ; . . . During his last illness I asked to come and be near him and he allowed me to do so. Then when I would bring his noonday meal, I would sit by him for an hour, fanning and serving him."

These Saradamani Devi's own words give glimpses of her life at the Temple. Her days passed in loving, self-forgetting service, but some looked with questioning eyes on her presence there. "There was a *Bhakta* by the name of Yogin who spent much time with Gurumaharaj. One day the maid-servant, Brinda, said to him : 'Your *Paramahamsa* is a fraud. He pretends to be very pious all the day, but when night comes and every one is sleeping, he slips away and spends his time with his wife.' This implanted a doubt in Yogin's mind and he determined to remain for a night at Dakshineswar and see for himself what happened. Just at midnight he saw Gurumaharaj's door open, while in the bright moonlight he could see Holy Mother sitting in meditation on the upper verandah of the Concert House. Gurumaharaj walked toward

it, passed quickly by and went on down to the *Panchavati* to meditate.

“Overpowered by a sense of the unworthy suspicion of which he had been guilty, Yogin followed the Master and threw himself at his feet, begging his pardon. Gurumaharaj smilingly assured him, then added: ‘It would do no good to go to Mother. She is not in this world. Her soul has gone far above it. Did you not see as you passed?’ ”

Sarada Devi never complained of her wifely lot, nor did she feel it a hard one. She lived for many years in the home of her parents and it seemed often as if her husband had forgotten her. But when at rare intervals she saw him in his mother’s house at Kamarpukur or in her father’s house at Jayramvati, he was always gently mindful of her welfare and tried never to cast any shadow over her young heart. Holy Mother later when speaking of this narrated the following incident :

“Once I and one of the ladies of my family were eager to go to see the performance of some strolling players, but Thakur would not let us go. When he saw how disappointed we were, he was greatly concerned to console us. He himself acted out a play he had once seen, giving the words, the music, the songs, everything, although he had heard it only once. We were so carried away by his performance that we forgot all about the one we had missed.”

Sri Ramakrishna often said to her: “When one has earthly children sometimes they are bad and disobedient, but the children I have brought to you (*i.e.* his disciples) are good and pure and will never cause you trouble.”

The story of perhaps the greatest of Sri Ramakrishna’s women disciples, Gopaler Ma, has been often told. The following incident, as narrated by Swami Ramakrishnananda, was characteristic of her. “One day after Sri Ramakrishna had passed away, some of his disciples went to see her and found her room full of mosquitoes and other troublesome creatures. Although she did not appear to mind them and kept on repeating the name of the Lord, it distressed them to see her in such discomfort, so next day one of the disciples carried her a mosquito curtain. That night when she sat down to repeat the Name, she found her mind constantly wandering to the curtain, thinking whether a cockroach or a rat might not be eating off a corner of it.

“Seeing this, she said: ‘What! This wretched curtain thus to take my mind away from my Gopala!’ And without

ado she made it up into a bundle and sat down again to her devotions with the mosquitoes all about her.

“The next morning we were just getting up at the *Math* (monastery) when Gopaler Ma appeared. She had walked all the way (at least five miles) and must have started at three o'clock. She laid the bundle down. ‘What is it?’ some one asked. ‘It is the curtain you gave me yesterday. It takes my mind away from God. I don't want it,’ was her answer ; and nothing could persuade her to take it back.”

Yogin-ma said that when they (lady devotees) would catch the first glimpse of the dome of the Dakshineswar Temple from the river, they would grow so impatient to arrive and see the Master that they would feel as if they wanted to jump down from the boat and run over the water. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell them they could come in a boat, but he did not like them to return by the river after nightfall, so, often they would walk the long way back, reaching home at ten or eleven o'clock.

(To be concluded)

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## PROGRESS OF RELIGION DURING THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS\*

[WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA]

BY SWAMI NIKHILANANDA

ओं सह नावतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सह वीर्यं करवावहै । तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ॥ ओं शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

“Progress” which means “going forward” does not apply, in the strict sense of the term, to the historical religions, as their reformers simply reinstate, during periods of decadence, the fundamental principles of their respective religions in their pristine excellence. Christianity, Buddhism and Islam are founded on the lives and teachings of Christ, Buddha and Muhammad and their teachings no subsequent reformer transcended. The word “Progress” however, may be used loosely with reference to such periods of decadence when the

\* Read at the Convention of All Religions held on the occasion of the Centenary of the Brahma Samaj last August.

activities of the reformers help religion to regain its former purity. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the Sanatana Dharma of the Hindus. Neither founded by any man nor based upon the authority of a book, Hinduism rests upon some Eternal Laws which have been revealed in the pure heart of the Seers, called Rishis. This supersensuous knowledge, perceived only through the subtle power of Yoga, has been recorded in its entirety and purest form in the Knowledge portion of the Vedas. The real significance of these Eternal Laws is eclipsed, now and then, on account of various causes, and Krishna, Sankara, Chaitanya who are called prophets or Incarnations only re-established the true meaning of the Vedas in varying measures.

After Sri Gouranga, Hinduism passed through such a period of darkness during the eighteenth century. It was perhaps the darkest period of our national life during the last few centuries. The beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed some ripples which were only the harbinger of a coming tidal wave. A momentous revolution has always its precursors. Historically speaking, two factors might be said to be at work in the progress of Hinduism in the eighteenth century. The first and the more important factor is the expression of the inherent life-principle which lay dormant during its period of decline. The second and the indirect factor was an adventitious one, namely, the contact of India with Britain which accelerated this work of rejuvenation.

The characteristic feature of the nineteenth century is an awakening of the reflective spirit, a quickening of criticism, a revolt against authority and tradition, a demand for freedom in thought, feeling and action. The notion begins to prevail that truth is not something to be handed down by authority, but something to be achieved, to be won by free and impartial enquiry. A truculent spirit is noticed everywhere. The Christian Missionaries of Serampore who came to the country closely following the flag of the English rulers aided materially in quickening the spirit of protest against the religious ideals and time-honoured customs of the Hindus. Coming as evangelists of a new faith and apostles of a new culture, they made a profound impression upon the mind of young Bengal. The College of Fort William, started in 1800, accelerated the speed of cultural conquest. A group of anglicised Bengalees, under the leadership of free thinkers like D'Rozzio, relentlessly attacked the religion of the Hindus and took malicious delight in their open disavowal of Hindu social



customs. The teachings of the Sruti and Smriti were relegated to the scrap-heap. A decided leaning was shown to the Christian religion and to the conventions of the alien society. It was but the inevitable concomittance of the then existing state of Hinduism. The pages of the religious history of that period are blackened with internecine and shameless struggles between different sects. Vaishnavism, the religion of pure love, and Tantrikism, the cult of Mother-worship, became bywords for sensuality and corruption. Social vulgarities exposed themselves everywhere in their horrid nakedness. It is no wonder, therefore, that Christian Missionaries made a clean sweep of everything before them.

The outstanding reformer of the time was Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He handled almost all the problems of the day, social, educational and religious, and left everywhere the impress of his great intellect. He gave a rational interpretation of the Vedanta Philosophy which justified the wisdom of the Hindu Seers, and thereby checked for the time being the proselytising activities of Christian Missionaries. He attempted a reconciliation of the fighting Hindu sects from the higher standpoint of Vedanta, in explaining which he generally followed Sankara, though he did not accept monasticism as the highest spiritual ideal. He was a close student of the Bible which he considered superior to the Hindu Scriptures as regards the sanction and basis of morality. He denounced the image-worship of the Hindus as utterly inconsistent with the highest religious ideal. The Raja, through his theistic interpretation of the Vedanta, preached the unity of God. The new religion, known at his time as Vedânta-Pratipâdya-Satya-Dharma (the True Religion as propounded by the Vedanta), was influenced, to some extent, by the monotheism of Islam and by the ethics of Christianity. The Raja had a very poor opinion of the Hindu Puranas and failed to find therein the evolution of the grand ideal of Bhakti. With the zeal of an apostle and the self-denial of a martyr, he vindicated the unity of God. He was the first Hindu to attempt a rapprochement of the ideals of the East and the West and to conceive the ideal of a synthetic religion.

The orthodox reaction of the Hindus under the leadership of Sir Radhakanta Dev went against the liberal policy of Ram Mohan Roy. The Christian Missionaries also became more vigorous in their activities after the passing away of the Raja. The mantle of Ram Mohan fell upon Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore, who was more of a devotee and a

poet than a polemical philosopher. His views against image-worship were more pronounced than those of Ram Mohan. He changed the new religion to some extent, and named it "Brahmoism." The monotheistic religion of the Raja was modified by Devendra Nath into intuitional dualistic theism. The Maharshi was greatly influenced by the Upanishads and felt little attraction for the Bible. But in his later life he repudiated the claim of the Vedas to infallibility and laid greater stress upon intuition and reason.

Even during the life-time of Devendra Nath, Brahmananda Keshab Chandra Sen became a noted leader of the Brahmo Religion. At his time the Brahmo Samaj became the most powerful platform for the dissemination of the religious ideas. He soon became the leader of the more forward section of the Brahmos and founded the Bharatvarshiya Brahmo Samaj. Pratap Chandra Majumdar, Bejoy Krishna Goswami and Sivanath Sastri were among his able lieutenants. Unlike his two great predecessors, Kesab did not know Sanskrit. He held Christ and Christianity in greater veneration than did Ram Mohan and Devendra Nath. A momentous event in the life of Keshab was his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar in the March of 1875. Since then a profound change was noticed in the religious convictions of Keshab. We shall come to this point later on.

The Brahmo movement of the second and third quarters of the century helped to make Hinduism dynamic and liberal and saved it from the bigotry of the orthodox school. It is true that it could not touch the masses. But its activities extended to the other parts of the country, and everywhere it has made the way easy for a broader and more catholic conception of religion. It has enfranchised the mind of young Bengal and made it alive to the consciousness of a new ideal. It tried to bring about a harmony of religions through eclecticism. The greater part of its activities was devoted to social reform, the influence of which upon the Hindu Society cannot be gainsaid.

Like the counter-reformation movement in the Roman Catholic Church, orthodox Hinduism also raised its voice against the protestant Brahmoism. Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachudamani and Sri Krishna Prasanna Sen became popular interpreters of orthodox Hindu Philosophy. Bankim Chandra Chatterji gave a rational explanation of Hinduism, especially with regard to the life of Sri Krishna. Bhudev Chandra Mukherji wanted the Hindus to follow their time-honoured rites. Vaishnavism

and Tantrikism revived under Sisir Kumar Ghosh and Siva Chandra Vidyarnava. The Yogic practices also began to attract the attention of a section of the people. The reaction against the Brahma ideal went so far as to give an esoteric and dogmatic interpretation of and to justify many Hindu rites and ceremonies. Theosophy did a signal service to the cause of Hinduism by stemming the tide of Christianity, particularly in Madras. Like the Arya Samaj in the Punjab it appealed to the educated section of the Hindu community. It gave a mystic explanation of the Hindu conception of heavenly planes and the hierarchy of Hindu Gods and Rishis, etc. It has also stimulated a desire among Indians to study their sacred books, especially the Gita and the Upanishads. Swami Dayananda, the founder of the Arya Samaj, gave a theistic interpretation of the Vedas, and enjoined upon his followers to perform the five obligatory sacrifices of the householder. He believed in the Divine origin of the Vedas and laid the greatest emphasis upon its study. The Arya Samaj denounced image-worship and the Sraddha ceremony and adopted a vigorous attitude in the matter of social reform. Hinduism thus passed through the travails of a new birth by the action and reaction of the orthodox and the heterodox ideals. The real meaning of Hindu religion was not yet clearly comprehended.

During the second and third quarters of the century various reforms were suggested and some of them partially carried out. But it was a piecemeal reformation of Hinduism. The different sects took up different facets of Hindu religion. The conservatives fought for the husk whereas the radicals clung to the polished grain. But none of them thought that neither the husk nor the grain could help the growth of the plant. The grain requires the protection of the husk for its germination. Without any loss or damage to its own integrity, the evolved instinct of the race required a healthy assimilation into itself of the new ideas and ideals which came into the country in the wake of foreign contact. Besides, the supreme necessity of the time demanded a synthesis which, while realising the eternal principles of the Sanatana Dharma, would recognise the value of its rituals and mythologies for the evolution of a complete spiritual life—a synthesis which would not only weld into a homogeneous whole the heterogeneous ideas of Hinduism, but would also justify its claim as the eternal religion by demonstrating its all-inclusive character as comprehending the other living religions of the world. This demand of the time was fulfilled in Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna was a unique product of Hinduism. An embodiment of purity and renunciation, he directed his entire heart and soul, even in his boyhood, to the realisation of That by knowing which everything else in the world is known. His soul-enthraling prayer, sincere devotion and child-like eagerness for the vision of the Divine Mother were the means by which he realised this desired goal. He observed the rituals while on his way to the goal but discarded them when he reached it. He demonstrated that formalities of religion have a great efficacy for the aspirants but a Siddha Purusha does not stand in need of them. He practised Sadhana through various disciplines of Hinduism. He followed the principles and observed the formalities of Christianity and Islam, and at the conclusion of each Sadhana realised the same truth culminating in the Monism of Vedanta. Thus he justified the wisdom of the Vedic Seers, "The Truth is one but the Sages call it by various names." The cardinal features of his realisations may be summed up as follows. Dualism, Qualified Monism and Monism are but three stages in the unfoldment of spiritual life through which every sincere Sadhaka must pass. Monism is the last stage when the perfect soul realises his oneness with God. Religion can be transmitted to others by the will and the touch of great teachers. In the Sanatana Dharma of the Vedanta are to be found the eternal laws of all other religions of the world. Every one must stick to his own religious ideal and think that other religions also proclaim the same truth through different ways. If one religion is true then all other religions must be so. All religions alike have produced their saints and seers. Not new to the Hindus, these truths have been repeatedly declared in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita. Without Sri Ramakrishna they would have been equally authentic. But without him they would have lost in the modern age the stamp of authority that only comes from the direct realisation of God. They would have remained subjects of the obscure disputes of the Pundits.

Sri Ramakrishna reasserted in the modern age of science and reason the great Truth of Hinduism and also of all religions, that God is the most real thing in the world and all else is false. The condition of his realisation is the utter renunciation of "Lust and Gold." Sri Ramakrishna wonderfully reconciled the bellicose ideals of Jnana, Bhakti, Karma and Yoga and could offer this grand synthesis because he stood at that point of equation in which the great conflicts of religions neutralise one another.

A flower in full blossom cannot but attract bees from all quarters. Keshab met him and was profoundly struck by his spirituality. Keshab enriched his ideas about the Motherhood of God from Sri Ramakrishna who also broadened his conception about the harmony of religions. This found partial expression in the Navabidhan, the name by which Keshab's party came to be known after some of his co-workers had separated themselves from him and founded the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. The Navabidhan aimed at founding a Universal Religion. Its creed was eclectic in nature, being derived from Hinduism and largely supplemented by the Bible and influenced by the thoughts of Hamilton and Reid of the Scottish School of Philosophy as well as some of the theistic thinkers of the West. An eclectic religion select the best things out of several religions and seeks to fuse them into a unity—a unity which perhaps is not perfect, being neither natural nor living. Hence it cannot be synonymous with Universal Religion.

And soon a new wave of Hindu revival passed all over the country. By coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna, a number of Hindus who had discarded, according to the prevailing fashion, their sacred threads, again accepted them. Bejoy Krishna Goswami who later on became an apostle of Vaishnavism, was greatly influenced by Sri Ramakrishna. Hirananda of Sindh, a close follower of Keshab, was much drawn to Sri Ramakrishna and spread his ideas in his native province.

The task of spreading the message of harmony and toleration as preached by his Master, fell upon Swami Vivekananda who infused a new life into the dead bones of Hinduism. He carried its banner to the New Continent and stood there as the representative of the oldest religion of which Buddhism is a rebel child and Christianity a distant echo. He preached there a religion to which other religions of the world were only a travelling, a coming up of different men and women through various conditions and circumstances to the same goal. He proclaimed the unity of God and the unity of man to the world. He gave out through the Parliament of Religions, held at Chicago, the great truths of Hinduism. Man does not travel from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from truth that is lower to truth that is higher. He denounced the theory of sin and laid the greatest emphasis on the inherent Divinity of man. Brooding over sin does not make a man virtuous. He broadened the outlook of the world regarding the Sanatana

Dharma which, rightly understood, is not a religion among religions, but Religion itself, the Absolute Religion. From the highest flight of the Vedanta Philosophy of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the lowest idea of idolatry with its multifarious mythologies, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, the atheism of the Jains, each and all have place in Hinduism. And of this Hindu religion the distinctive feature is that of the *Ista Devata*, the right of each soul to choose its own path and to seek God in its own way. He justified image-worship as suitable for particular persons all over the world. Though the ultimate Truth is beyond name and form, yet It is sought to be realised by different religions through different symbols such as the Cross or the Caaba, the Church and the Mosque, the Book or the Image, the Chest and the Dove. Denunciation by some of the image-worship prevailing in certain climes and ages does not deprive it of its spiritual value. Further it cannot be gainsaid that apart from its symbolic character the image has a spiritual reality of inestimable value to its own votaries. The liberal reformers of Bengal of the nineteenth century, who thought the principles of Hinduism to be the cause of social evils, directed their activities to reform Hinduism. But Swami Vivekananda prescribed remedies of social evils by keeping intact the eternal principles of the Sanatana Dharma.

Swami Vivekananda gave a wider interpretation of Karma Yoga suited to the modern age, and boldly asserted that if Jnana and Bhakti are ways for the realisation of God, then Karma Yoga, the service of man knowing him as the veritable manifestation of God, is equally efficacious for the attainment of the Highest Truth. If the one and the many be indeed the same reality, then it is not the recognised modes of worship alone, but all modes of struggle, all modes of creative activity are paths to realisation. To labour is to pray. "To him," in the words of Sister Nivedita, "the worship, the study, the farm-yard, the field are as true and as fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple." "Arts, Sciences and Religion," said the Swamijee, "are but three different ways of experiencing a single Truth. But in order to understand this we must have the theory of Advaita "

The twentieth century has dawned upon the history of the world with a new hope, aspiration, faith and outlook. In the course of two decades India has traversed the track of centuries. Bigotry has given place to catholicity. The Bahais,

the Ahamadiyas, the followers of H. H. the Aga Khan, like the Sufis of old, have liberalised the conception of Islam. The creeds of Buddhism are being made popular in the land of its birth. The intransigent Christianity of the last century has become more accommodating to the cherished ideals of the people. Sikhism, especially in its reformed character, has become a force in the Punjab to reckon with. The old cry of truculent protest against the Sanatana Dharma has given place to the new slogan, "Back to Hinduism." In place of blind imitation of Western ideas, we find a healthy acceptance of the wisdom of the Aryan Seers assimilating into it the researches of modern science and philosophy. Religion which was banished from society and which hid itself in the forest and worm-eaten books, is swiftly occupying its legitimate place in the scheme of life. It has supplied the Jacob's Ladder joining the earth with heaven. Renunciation and purity are being recognised as the acid test for leadership in all spheres of work. The conviction is daily gaining ground that religion does not depend so much upon formalities and conventions as on the attitude of life towards the world. Realisation of ideals and its accompanying transformation of character are being recognised as the criteria of spirituality. The ideal of monasticism has captured the imagination of a cultured section of the people. The necessity for supersensuous perceptions is being felt by the contemporary philosophers for solving their many outstanding problems. One growing tendency among religious aspirants is to discard the hereditary preceptors and receive instructions from those who have dedicated their lives to the acquisition of spirituality. Thus religion has caused a new ferment in the individual as well as collective life.

What is the trend of modern religious thought? The world asks: "Is there not a unity of Spirit? Is there not a Universal God?" Shall people go on asking, "To which God shall we offer our oblations?" Every religion is demanding to be recognised as the Universal Religion. But what are the conditions of a Universal Religion? Such a religion cannot be a historical religion solely based upon the life of a man or the authority of a Book. It must recognise rituals, mythology and philosophy as suitable for different grades of evolution. It must acknowledge Karma, Jnana, Bhakti and Yoga as equally efficacious for the attainment of the Highest Truth. While recognising the empirical reality of the universe, it must soar into the ineffable realm of the Absolute which is the only basis of a stable philosophy. It must recognise the

inherent Divinity of man and therefore must be a cult of hope, faith, strength and fearlessness. It must be broad as the sky and deep as the ocean, accommodating infinite varieties of thoughts, innumerable creeds and dogmas and recognising all religions with their kernals and husks as leading to the same goal. Thoughtful men have begun to recognise in the Vedanta the expression of the Universal Religion. Vedanta has already glided into society with gentle footsteps. Like gentle dew drops, again it is proclaiming the arrival of a radiant dawn. It will alone lead us to the broadest conception of the Summum Bonum, the liberation of Self which goes with the service of humanity.

Let this Convention proclaim the New Message : "Peace and goodwill to all ; malice and hate to none."

ओं पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात् पूर्णमुदच्यते ।  
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥

ओं शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

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## THE WAY TO FREEDOM

[A story]

BY GITA DEVI

Through the heavy torrents of the monsoon rain a small cottage could be seen, lit up by the flashes of bright lightning ; and from its windows flickered a dim light.

Inside there sat a small group of men and a boy of about seventeen. They were silhouetted against the red light of a wood fire. They were talking of many things,—one began telling his friends of his pilgrimage across the great snows to Kailash, the dwelling place of Siva and Uma.

The boy listened eagerly and also asked many questions about the route ; for he was determined to make a pilgrimage to this Holy Place.

A few months later, Sivaprasad walked along the hot dusty road. He did not notice the slow-moving bullock carts, the mango trees or the sparkling streamlets. He had come many miles on the pilgrimage and now he was returning from the Holy Place. His face was sad for he was disappointed. He had found no God, the gap in his heart was still empty for something he knew not what. He was thinking : "Is there a



God? What is religion? I have read many books and have seen many Sadhus, yet they have not helped me." He was thus returning to his mother disappointed.

Thinking these sad thoughts he caught up with an old Sadhu. Out of habit he saluted the old father. "How child? why such a sad face returning from God's own dwelling?" "God?" said Sivaprasad, "Where is God? I have not found Him although I have read the Holy Books, performed various sacred rites and gone on pilgrimage."

The Sadhu looked quietly at him. "Is it so, my son? Art thou heart-sick? Religion is within. God is within. Until thou findest Him there thou canst not find Him without. Come, let us travel together and let me beguile thy sorrow with a story.

"In the olden days there lived an old *banya*, named Ram Saran, in a little village on the banks of the Ganges. He was a very devout Hindu, so after his daily bath in the Ganges he would sit and chant 'Toolsidas' *Ramayana*. He had a small green parrot with a red ring round its neck, called Mitoo, who would sit with his head on one side listening attentively to his master's reading.

"Ram Saran was very fond of his parrot. He talked much to Mitoo, and taught him to utter the name of Rama, at which he became very expert.

"One day a Sadhu came to the village and happened to pass Ram Saran's house. Seeing the Sadhu, Ram Saran wished to pay him a visit, so after observing his daily duties to his Lord he set out. Just as he was leaving Mitoo called him and said, 'You are going to the Sadhu, pray ask His Holiness why I am not yet released from bondage. The Holy Books say that whosoever takes the name of Rama will be freed from his bondage; here I am always taking His name, yet I am not freed.'

"Ram Saran was a little surprised to hear his parrot say such things, but he remembered his request and told the Sadhu what had passed between them.

"The Sadhu hearing the story, sat very quiet and still, without replying. When Ram Saran came home for his dinner, Mitoo at once asked him what answer he had brought. So what could poor Ram Saran do but say that he had no answer and that His Holiness only sat quiet without replying.

"The next morning the parrot was found dead in its cage, and his unhappy master was very sad when he carefully took him out and put him under a tree near-by. No sooner had he

done so than Mitoo suddenly came to life and flew on to one of the boughs. Ram Saran was half pleased and half amazed, and said, 'Ah, Mitoo, Mitoo, why did you deceive me? How, being dead, did you come to life?' Mitoo replied, 'My beloved master, you yourself brought me the secret. You said that in reply to my question the Sadhu had sat silent and still. I understood that he meant that I could not gain my freedom by merely repeating Rama's name, and that I should control my sense-organs and absorb them in Prana. The Prana, I must dissolve in the mind, and with the mind thus concentrated I should take His name; then only would His name help me to gain my freedom. I did so, and you thinking I was dead opened my cage and set me free.'

"Hearing the parrot's words it struck Ram Saran that he himself after reading the Scriptures and observing all the rites of his religion, had not yet attained *his* freedom. So he went back to the holy man begging him for his help."

After telling his story the old father did not speak. He was watching his young companion's face which had lit up with a great understanding.

Many years later, in a monastery at Benares, a much loved monk attained the Everlasting Peace. It was the young boy who had walked alone to Siva's dwelling in search of the Great One.

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## THE MODERN EDUCATION OF THE ORIENTAL WOMAN

BY SISTER NIVEDITA

It is clear that if the modern mind, with its scientific severity and its accurate sense of time and place, is to find any Oriental expression, the school will have to become as much a part of life to the Eastern girl as to the Eastern boy. Severe intellectual discipline and anxious knowledge of facts must be added to the delicate grace and deep mother-wisdom of the Oriental woman. Truth must be carried from the mythological into the scientific setting. The passion for knowledge must no longer be reserved for the religious, but must also be awakened, on what we commonly distinguish as the secular, side of life. Strong personal refinement will no longer appear as guide sufficient in facing the problem of life. Warm affection will no longer be thought the only desirable qualification

for the sick-bed nurse. And the information and training, necessary to such offices, will have to be sought by a girl as eagerly as was ever the knowledge of cooking, or the skill to offer household worship.

But the school and the home, while thus equally necessary, must in the ideal education act and react upon one another. They must not represent different and antagonistic worlds, but separate elements in a single complex whole. The one must illuminate and explain the other. That which at the hearth-side forms a vague but beloved dream, must be brought by education into clearness and understanding. That life is foredoomed to failure in which school and house seek to thwart and baffle one another. Thus, the heroic literature which in the family is a haunting inspiration, becomes in school and college an ever-widening field of joy and knowledge. The gentle dictates of the mother are heard again, with more impersonal authority, from the lips of the teacher. The growing intellectual vision makes increasingly precious all that the love and faithfulness of parents and forbears have built up for us, through the patient ages of the past. Life moves onward, into wider and wider reaches of thought and expression, without sacrificing anything of its old integrity and coherence.

We cannot foresee a time when the school will cease to be a necessity. After the great transition is accomplished, when the whole of the modern consciousness has found its way into every Oriental language, the school will still be needed, to initiate the education of each rising generation on a level not lower than that to which the preceding was born. The perplexity of the present for Eastern peoples is much more profound. There is still before each one of them a long period of constructive adjustment, when the very materials have to be brought together, out of which the future of education is to be built. At all times, but more especially during such periods, it may be said that, important as are the methods of education, its aims and motives are even more so. What is the conscious purpose which Oriental nations ought to put before themselves, in this task of working out new conceptions of womanly training? Oriental countries are theocratic in type. With them, the nation constitutes a church, and each act of public and domestic life a sacrament. Without loss of this passionate reverence, they have now to turn about to the creating of a great secularity. Ideas, hitherto only Western and seemingly new-fangled, have now deliberately to be ranked as high as any in the heritage of the Faith. Self-organisation and indus-

trial co-operation, the civic spirit and the good of all the people, have now to take their place beside scripture and ceremony as obligations in no sense less sacred and less binding. The thrill given to the Greek by restrained expression, by nakedness of fact, by definition of limit, is now to be felt by all mankind. Orientals certainly must learn it, if they are in any sense to be modernised and made efficient for the struggle of the world,—for out of it was science born. Learning has now, in the East as in the West, to take on its largest relationships of space and time. Henceforth it is not enough to understand the structure of a plant. Its geographical distribution and the historical significance of that distribution have also to be grasped. No fact, no custom, no word, but to the modern mind has its far-stretching meanings and relativities. The depth and patience of mediæval culture would seem to be banished for a while, but only because the human mind is in the throes of taking on new superficial dimensions of an extent hitherto undreamed of.

If we are to avoid mimicry and parasitism, however, we must understand that these aims have in every case to be approached through the familiar. Botany, for instance, must be studied by one from one's immediate surroundings, from the rice in the rice-fields and the green growths about one's door. History must be a sense developed in every people from their own surroundings, used in the elucidation of their own past. Geography must start from the house itself, and focus itself on the homeland. Language must be concentrated in the mother-tongue.

What vast labours of scholars and prophets will be necessary before such education can be placed on its feet in Eastern countries! And how self-effacing must the workers be! Men who might be famous and powerful if they uttered their voices in European tongues, will have to bury their glory, for the sake of the poor and oppressed, in their vernacular languages. Sons of the saints, apprehending afresh the highest ideals of humanity, must devote burning ethical energy to the interpretation of orthodox duties as enshrining these. Even failure in the humble task of aiding the homeland and mother-kindred will have to be recognised by the whole Eastern community as infinitely nobler than victory in any other field of effort. Such is the spirit that shall make it possible for the Oriental countries to bridge the perplexities that lie before them. Such is the communal striving that shall enable the Eastern woman of the future to sum up in her own person more than the glories of all the past.

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## WHAT WE ALL BELIEVE

By S. T.

“One test of truth is that people proceeding by different routes, arrive at the same destination.” Another test may be that one person pursuing a line of inquiry along several different avenues, by means of each arrives at the same conclusion. According to the orthodox Christians, this truth is: that God, the ultimate power and Cause of this universe, is a *Person*. Jesus Christ is His only Son and Incarnation. All the misery in the world comes through violation of the will of God, which is sin. Salvation, and the solution of life’s problems, comes with forgiveness of sins through the sufferings and Atonement of Christ—through the individual’s recognizing Christ as his Saviour, and in turn following Christ’s path of self-sacrifice and self-denial.

The Christian Scientist and New Thought groups, on the other hand, smile at these “old-fashioned ideas” of sin and atonement. They say that God is *Mind*. The creative power behind all things is thought. Misery comes through wrong thinking, salvation through right thinking. The problem of life is solved by the individual through his right thinking, creating, or “demonstrating,” desirable instead of undesirable experiences.

Then come the Hindus who tell us that God is *Absolute Existence*. Misery comes through the illusion of relative existence and separate individuality. Therefore salvation is not in demonstrating any individual experience, but in the renunciation of such experience—in non-attachment and non-desire for the things of the relative world, and coming into consciousness of the Absolute.

And again, come the Theosophists and the psychic group, whose whole philosophy is built round the development—spiritual, mental, and emotional—of the individual ego. They say that God is a great *cosmic Being*, who has delegated other beings—Masters, guides and supermen—to direct our spiritual evolution through a series of worlds. And the solution of life’s problems is to maintain close and harmonious contact with these spiritual directors, to serve and obey them; and to progress under their guidance into states now completely beyond our comprehension.

You will notice that each of these theories apparently flatly contradicts the other ; and it is not strange that people seeking spiritual light from one to the other of these religious organizations, become confused and bewildered, and often end in worse case than when they started.

To me it seems that there is truth in each of these statements—but a complete and final truth in none. Many problems *would* be solved if men would practise the principles of love and selflessness taught by Christ—and by other great teachers. Thought *is* a creative force ; we are using it, and should use it constructively and intelligently. Egoistic attachment and desire do make for misery in relative life—which as we know it now, *is* a life of limitations and bondage. And it is reasonable to suppose that beings in other states of existence are influencing and affecting us, as our life in turn is affecting the animal and plant worlds.

But what of the other half of these statements of “absolute truth” ?

Who really knows either that God is a Person, or a Divine Mind, or Absolute Consciousness, or a Cosmic Being with benevolent intentions toward us ? Men rationally feel that the power that creates life is a beneficent power—certainly not a power inimical to the individual lives to which it gives rise. Therefore they clothe that power with the most benevolent image *they* know, and declare that God is an all-good Father, or an all-wise and loving Mind. They feel a natural reciprocity between the universal life and their individual life, and that the natural relation between these two is one of harmony and joy, rather than of hostility or mechanical indifference. Therefore they take the most tender and joyous relations of their human experience, and say that the relation between God and man is that of father and child, or of fond guardian teacher and pupil. On the basis of certain facts they do know, they erect an elaborate superstructure of assumption—things they don't know and can't know.

I believe that we shall never have a dependable and satisfying religion until we cast from us as a deadly plague this habit of half truth and easy assumption. That there will never be a sound spiritual life until that life is founded on an honest basis. And the first hard fact that the honest group or the honest individual has to face, is that *absolute* truth can never be perceived through the faculties of relative beings.

Truth as we know it, is a progressive revelation—a certain

reading of what does exist. We perceive the universe through the instruments we have developed. We can frame no final statements about the nature of the world, God, the soul, matter, energy—because these instruments are not final. The world we know through the instrument of the human brain, is very different from the world known to the animal through his special instruments of scent, sight and hearing. The brain developed—and the jaw degenerated—when primitive men released energy by the cessation of wholesale fighting. When the men of to-day or the men of the future shall release still further energy by ceasing to fight altogether, we have no idea what instruments will be forthcoming, how the world will appear, or what will be known as truth, to beings with more extensive avenues of perception.

This is the answer to both religious and scientific finalists. Thousands of people who scorn the absolutism of religion, stand transfixed before the absolutism, the final “findings” of science. They are no more final than the findings of religion. They represent simply the most we know, through the instruments at present developed. Our business is to free energy, and develop finer instruments that may reveal a bigger section of the Picture.

Meanwhile let us frankly acknowledge: we have no absolute truth. We shall only know what the Infinite is when we shall have expanded into the Infinite, and are human beings no longer.\* But there is a relative truth for our own relative life, that we can legitimately expect to know. There is a truth and a law for each state or kingdom as it evolves; and by taking that truth and following that law where we are, we shall work on honestly and naturally to the next state and to wider revelation.

The great failing of organized religion—of every religious organization I know anything about—is its persistent claim to *exclusive* possession of a *final* truth. It takes a certain aspect of truth for this time—the beauty of Christ’s character, the law of right thinking, the noble principles of brotherhood and detachment—and calls that the whole of truth for all time. This is the basic blunder, the central weak spot, from which all subsequent weakness, bitterness and hostility proceed. A group of men set up a part of truth, and call it the whole. And because it is not the whole—because there was another

\* Is this not exactly the Hindu position?—Ed., P. B.

great soul or another great law—another group rises and sets up another part. And so on—sects, denominations, divisions and subdivisions: part against part, all loudly proclaiming *unity* and *love* to a world that they have kept in an uproar down the centuries, with their own quarrels, persecutions and dissensions.

The trouble to-day is that we have outgrown the old time type of religious organization, and have not yet evolved a new type in keeping with our present spiritual needs. So long as man is conscious of a higher state of existence to be attained, and is endeavouring to attain to it, so long will there be what is known as the spiritual life—and natural centers, congregating places, for the study and pursuit of that life. But the religious centers of the future can never be based on separative creeds; for the spirit of man has progressed beyond them. And it is this spirit of man, not the prestige of any objective organization or the triumph of any one set of people over any other—that the religion of the future will have to serve. A true spiritual center must *be* a center—not simply for the sayings and experiences of one great man at one period, but for every form of light and life we can lay hold on that does nourish and expand the human spirit.

Science expands the spirit. Psychology expands it. And metaphysics, and sociology, poetry and art and music—and, perhaps most of all—silence, and meditation: the common lifting of the heart to the same high goal. The religious center of the future must furnish all these helps—must sift out *the best* from every department of life; collect, interpret and relate the knowledge and inspiration available from all these different sources—instead of holding them mutually antagonistic, as in the past. It must be intellectually honest, spiritually generous and hospitable. . . .

When one turns from religious organizations to the teachings of the great prophets and founders of religion themselves, he finds instead of the bitter differences of their followers, a surprising similarity. Escaping from the heated tussle of sectarian dispute into the serene security of these spacious minds, is like coming from the mad *pêle-mêle* of a subway labyrinth into the calm peace of an open field. The direct study of these Masters frees and does not perplex and confuse the spirit, because their spirits and outlook were free. They were not attempting to prove the supremacy of an organization or cultural system. They simply give a principle, and say “try it—it works.”



It was in a Mohammedan newspaper that I recently read: "If the *true* representatives of every religion could be brought together, it would be difficult to distinguish between them."

Do I hear a chorus of shocked protest from returned tourists against comparing their true Christianity with such "degenerate, negative religions" as the Taoism they saw in China, the Buddhism and Hinduism they saw in the temples and the ignorant beggar-monks of India and Ceylon? Well, I have heard as disillusioned protests from Hindus, Chinese and Ceylonese, who saw the "Christian" civilization of the late War, and whose students in our midst have the benefit of living in the Christian scheme of things that includes lynchings, murders, hold-ups, drug-rings, police corruption, and altogether the worst crime record in the modern world.

"But," I am indignantly reminded, "those things are not Christian. They are the very opposite of what Christ taught. If Christianity were truly followed—"

Exactly. And the things you saw in China and India were the very opposite of what the Buddha and the Lord Krishna and the Chinese sages taught. Read the noble scriptures of those Masters as carefully, as conscientiously as you read your own; read the "Bhagavad Gita" of the Hindus, the "Tao Teh King" of the Chinese, the "Gospel of Buddha" and the "Precepts of Confucius"—and show me where you find one line of corruption or degeneracy, or anything but the highest and most sublime philosophy.

Child marriage, the burning of widows, corrupt beggars or corrupt police said to be the outcome of following the religion of Krishna, Buddha and Christ! It is not the following of a religion but the failure to follow it, that leads—in every country—to abuse and degeneracy.

People talk knowingly about "those negative Oriental religions." Yet how many people have actually studied them—first hand—not through the biased books or lectures of some Christian professor or theologian, but going to the original sources and to the teachers themselves?

Said the Buddha, "It is true, Simha, that I denounce activities—but only the activities that lead to the evil in words, thought or deeds. It is true, Simha, that I preach extinction, but only the extinction of pride, lust, evil thought and ignorance; not that of forgiveness, love, charity and truth."

Nirvana, often translated "annihilation," is defined by the Buddha himself as the state of perfect peace or "no-passion"—literally, "no-flame" of selfish desire. "Good-will without

measure toward the whole world, above, below, around, unstinted, unmixed with any feeling of making distinctions or showing preferences. This state of heart is best in the world," said the Buddha, "it is Nirvana!"

Similarly with the "wu wei" of the Tao Teh King. "Oh, Lao-tsze—he taught 'wu wei,' *not striving*—is the usual comment on the philosophy of the Chinese seer. 'Wu wei' actually means '*striving through the power of the inner life.*' And where reference is made to 'the negation of the self,' the Chinese character used for Negation is that of 'a bird flying upward and not coming down again'—the soul forgetting the self with all its hampering disabilities, and flying on the wings of faith to its home in the heavenly kingdom. What a futile word is negation, to express this problem of self-adjustment!" (Mears.)

Their followers of to-day may have over-emphasized the negative aspect of Oriental philosophy, but the more I study the original teachings of the great Masters themselves, the more vividly I am impressed with the injustice of this charge against them of negation, with the vigor and earnestness with which they exhort to action, and with the amazing identity of the principles they all preached.

"Practise the truth that thy brother is the same as thou. Let a man overcome anger by love, let him overcome evil by good. Do no injury to any living being, but be full of love and kindness." This is not Christ, but the Buddha speaking.

"Let heavenly love fill you and overflow in you. He who loves, bears fruit unceasingly. The great shall be small, the many shall be few, evil shall be recompensed with goodness." This is not Christ, but the Tao.

"Knowing Truth, thy heart no more will ache with error, for the Truth shall show all things subdued to thee, as thou to Me. There is no purifier like thereto in all this world, and he who seeketh it shall find it." This is not Christ, but the Hindu Krishna.

In a comparative reading of these scriptures, you find that each religion had its Pharisees, its Judas, its simple saints, its arrogant ecclesiastics. You find that the spiritual experiences of the various Lords were surprisingly the same—their temptation and illumination; their ethics, their Path or Way, their highest philosophy.

The religion of the Buddha is contained in a single sentence: "*Self is death, truth is life.*" The Christ's: "If any man would come after me, let him *deny himself*, and take up

his cross, and follow me." The Tao: "*Retire thyself*—this is heavenly Tao." ("Tao" meaning *Way*, or stream, of *Life*.)

The Buddha's philosophy is usually epitomized in the Four Noble Truths (the existence of suffering, cause of suffering, cessation of suffering, means to cessation of suffering); and the Eightfold Path which constitutes the means—Right Comprehension, Right Resolutions, Right Speech, Right Acts, Right Way to Earn a Livelihood, Right Efforts, Right Thoughts, Right State of Peaceful Mind. Do any of these sound negative and inactive? And the Buddha's own summary of his religion was: "Do no evil, do good, *purify the mind*. This is the religion of all Buddhas (Enlightened Ones)."

"*The pure in heart shall see God.*" The two Great Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the fourteenth to seventeenth chapters of St. John, are generally considered to summarize Christ's philosophy. But of only one category of the Blessed did he say that they should reach the highest realization and actually "see" God: that is, the pure in heart.

"*Purify the channels of deep perception,*" says the Tao—whose philosophy centers round an Inner Kingdom corresponding with the Kingdom of Heaven of Christ, and insists on the same quality—lowliness—the lowliness of water, instead of the lowliness of the little child, as the sole means of entering therein.

While the Yoga of the Hindus means *the purification of the heart and mind of the sense of egoism*, so that union of the individual spirit with the Supreme Spirit may take place.

For again, the final goal and supreme experience in all religions is the same—namely, "That they may be made perfect in One." "Bring soul and spirit into Unity," says Tao. "The world is overcome, aye, even here, by such as fix their faith on Unity," says the Hindu Gita. "To see one changeless Life in all the lives, and in the separate One Inseparable!"

And thus, through constant effort, unremitting self-discipline, the cry of final victory—final fusion with the Highest, on which the aspiring soul is wholly concentrated, to which it is wholly devoted. "I and the Father are One," says Christ. "I am Absolute Truth," says the Buddha. "I am Brahman," says the Hindu. "I am the I Am," says the Egyptian. Says the Mohammedan Sufi poet: "I am He!"

Oneness—Selflessness—Love—Truth: the purification of the mind and heart of self-interest and self-seeking; losing this small and mean self-consciousness, coming into the consciousness

of a perfect and all-comprehending One. This is the religion taught by all great souls. It is also the religion of atheist and agnostic, of materialist as well as spiritualist, of scientist as well as metaphysician ; of Oriental and Occidental, Jew and Gentile, American, Asiatic, African, European. We hunt everywhere for a religion, and we *have* a religion ! Selflessness, purity of character, oneness with God (the highest and purest being we can conceive of), a consuming and all-comprehending love for man : this is the universal religion and ideal of every one of us. This is the religion of the human family.\*

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## THE WORK OF SWAMI TRIGUNATITA IN THE WEST

[Personal Reminiscences]

BY HIS WESTERN DISCIPLES

PANAMA-PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION

In the year 1915 one of the most wonderful expositions the world has ever seen was held in San Francisco—the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. It so happened that the Exposition Committee, after considering a number of available sites, finally decided upon a large piece of vacant land now called the Marina, lying on the shore of San Francisco bay, just inside the Golden Gate and only three blocks from the Temple. From the Temple roof a full view was obtainable of all the operations from the beginning of laying out the grounds and putting up the many buildings.

In the preceding year, in preparation for the great event, Swami purchased numbers of all the national flags to be displayed on the various National days observed at the Exposition. He also installed a new system of electric lights which made the Temple look like fairyland at night and which could easily be seen from the Exposition itself.

Swami applied for and received permission to build a garden around the Temple. As the sidewalk extended clear up to the Temple walls, the garden could not be made without infringing on the sidewalk which was ordinarily required to have a width of ten feet. The city authorities, who held Swami in great respect cheerfully granted this permission.

\* Extracted from *The Century Magazine*, New York.

Swami built a concrete wall around the street sides of the Temple running from the front steps on Webster street to the auditorium entrance on Filbert street. The wall was three feet high and three feet out from the Temple walls. The space between was filled with earth and with the assistance of a friendly gardener, the garden was stocked with plants and flowering shrubs, giving an atmosphere of beauty and refinement. An ornamental iron lattice fence above the wall protected the plants and flowers from passers-by. Statues and other decorative features made the garden one of the attractions of the neighbourhood.

The garden, the flags and other decorations were to serve a twofold purpose. The first was in common with other citizens and the business community—to honor the great Exposition—and the second was to attract a portion of the many thousands of visitors who would attend the Exposition. But, like Moses in view of the promised land, Swami was not to reap the fruits of his labors, for he did not live to see the opening of the Exposition.

#### BEGINNING OF THE END

In the same year of 1914, preceding the opening of the Exposition, the physical ailments of Swami had increased to such an extent that it was a marvel to those who understood, how he kept the body at all. One of the disciples questioned him on this point.

Swami replied: "A number of times during moments of excruciating pain, I would think, 'Let the body go, and end it all.' But I could not do it—the thought would come that the Mother's work must go on and I set my will to force the body to carry on. This body has become a mere shell and may go to pieces at any time. For three years now I have held the body together by sheer force of will."

So resolute and determined was that will that only a few knew the true conditions. His many activities continued unabated, but unmistakable signs began to appear that the body was yielding gradually to the heavy burdens imposed upon it. In the spring of 1914, Swami asked one of the students to criticize his lectures from the standpoints of diction, style and delivery. The student noticed an increasing quiver in his speech, which was attributed at first to an effort to give emotional effect to the principal points of the lecture. In that day's report on the lecture this point was noticed and criticised. Swami thereupon said that he would endeavour to eliminate

the quiver. The tremulousness appeared intermittently however, notwithstanding his efforts to control it, sometimes more, sometimes less, giving the student the impression that it must be from physical causes.

When it was again brought to Swami's attention in the month of December, 1914, he replied: "I have tried my utmost to control it so that it would not be noticeable to the audience, but always now, just as I go on to the platform, my Divine Mother appears to me and fills me full of such feelings of love that it is sometimes difficult for me to articulate. When by great effort I bring the voice under control, the quiver remains, as the result of the effort to control, together with the impossibility of entirely controlling these feelings, as they are growing stronger."

This was in the middle of December, when all were looking forward to the coming celebration of the day which perpetuates the birth of the Son of Man—the Messenger of Galilee. Christmas Day that year occurred on Friday and during the week preceding, unusual preparations were made for the occasion. The decorations were especially beautiful. All the pictures were decorated, that of Jesus being specially illuminated in honor of his birthday.

It was to be an all-day service, 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., and, on the day previous, Swami assisted in the preparations, putting on finishing touches here and there, also getting himself in readiness for the lectures and the long program. It was 2 o'clock in the morning before the various tasks he had in hand were completed, so, as he would again rise at 4 a.m. he did not retire at all, simply resting, with no sleep to sustain him for the 15-hour service.

On the morning of the preceding day, Swami called a young man disciple and said to him: "I want you to promise me that if anything should happen to me in the near future that you will see to it that after my death my brain is removed and presented to a scientific institution to be preserved in alcohol for analysis."

On the morning of Christmas Day he repeated this request. Was this because he had a premonition of the end, given him by his Divine Mother? It was his belief that the brain of a Yogi would be found to differ in size and microscopically from that of a worldly person and that when this was demonstrated the scientific world would be compelled to acknowledge it. Thus he planned that even, in death his body might serve the truth.

At 5-30 a.m. on Christmas Day the auditorium doors were opened and the devotees began to arrive. At 6 o'clock the service began with organ music, followed by a chant by Swami.

The beautiful decorations, the odorous breath of incense, the devotional songs and instrumental music, the chanting and reading from the sacred Scriptures and above all, the holy presence of Swami, a radiating force of divine purity and love, created an atmosphere irresistible in its appeal to every higher aspiration, in which every heart was uplifted and filled with holy impulses and before which all materialistic thought was softened and all unholy thoughts and impulses melted away like the snow before the burning rays of the sun.

As on other occasions, Swami did not leave the platform even for a moment during the whole day. How he mastered his physical ailments and made the pain-racked body endure during the fifteen hours, only he could say.

Apart from the three lectures at 11 a.m., 3 p.m. and 8 p.m., the time from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. was devoted to chants and songs and the reading and explanation of the Scriptures until the closing chant and benediction.

What a divine experience for those privileged to be present on that day when the coming to earth of the Son of Man was celebrated by one of the direct disciples of another Incarnation of God! The celebration came to an end but in the hearts and lives of many people its influence will be felt forever.

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## NEWS AND REPORTS

### R. K. Mission, Barisal

The report for the year 1927 of this institution is to hand. The Centre has been in existence for the last 17 years and has been doing useful work which can be conceived under three heads: Missionary, Charitable and Educational. Two weekly sittings are held to explain to people the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and various scriptures. Volunteers of the Centre are deputed to nurse the sick at their houses, to pick up the helpless from the streets and send them to hospitals and to make all arrangements for their nursing etc., whenever required. Help in cash or kind is also done in necessary cases.

Towards educational service, the Centre started a Students' Home in July, 1927 in a rented house, accommodating 7 students, of whom only 2 are paying. The Centre requires a house of its own for all its different purposes as also for its Students' Home. The estimated cost is Rs. 30,000, of which Rs. 10,000 have been collected. All help may be kindly sent to *Secy., R. K. Mission, Barisal, Bengal.*

**R. K. Mission Ashrama, Baranagore**

We have received the Ashrama's report for the year 1927 and an appeal for funds. The Ashrama has been in existence for the last 16 years with the special object of sheltering and educating orphans, of which there were 19 last year. It also serves the neighbourhood in various ways.

It has lately acquired 8 *bighas* of land by the main road, on which it has started to build its own house. The estimated cost of the various buildings is Rs. 35,000, but it has only about Rs. 5,000 in hand. We earnestly appeal to the generous public to render unstinted help to the Ashrama. All help may be sent to the *Secretary, R. K. Mission Ashrama, Baranagore, 24-Perganas, Bengal.*

**Balurghat and Bankura Famine Relief.**

The Secretary R. K. Mission writes :—

The situation in Balurghat continues to be the same. There is no chance of any improvement in the condition of the people till the next harvest time.

The Marwari Relief Committee has closed its work in Balurghat and in consequence we have been compelled to open a new centre at Agradukun, a village 6 miles from Balurghat. Another new centre was started at Nischintapur in the Union No. IV of the Poursha Thana. At present we have altogether three centres in Balurghat covering an area of 172 villages.

It is now five months and a half that we started relief work in Bankura. As the autumn crops have grown well at Koalpara centre, we have closed our work there. At present we have three centres in Bankura—at Barjora, Baharkuliya, and at Maliara. More than 1600 recipients belonging to 106 villages are getting weekly doles of rice amounting to 84 mds. The total amount of rice distributed till now in Bankura and Balurghat is 1720 mds. In the district of Bankura we have distributed nearly 1200 pieces of new clothes besides old ones and 392 patients have been treated by us.

We have to continue our relief work in Balurghat and Bankura till the 2nd week of November. For the completion of the work we require proper financial support from the public, as we are hard pressed for money.

All contribution, however small, in cash or kind, should be sent to the following addresses and will be thankfully acknowledged by the Treasurer, R. K. Mission.

- (1) President, Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, P.O. Howrah.
  - (2) Manager, Udbodhan Office, 1, Mukherjee Lane, Baghbazar, Calcutta.
  - (3) Manager, Advaita Ashram, 182A, Muktaram Babu Street, Calcutta.
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