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“उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।”

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

PERFECTION OF CHARACTER—THE IDEAL OF BELUR MATH

BY SWAMI PREMANANDA

India the land of renunciation—Character, the abiding value—Dispassion and peace—Sri Ramakrishna the ideal mould—Mind, a laundered cloth—Belur Math is the university to train ideal men—Steadiness essential for realization.

(Place : Belur Monastery. Time : Saturday, 18 March 1916)

Swami Premananda is suffering from slight fever. Today also he feels feverish. He lives on milk and popped rice only. Towards evening he came to the bank of the Ganges, and sat on the embankment. With him were some Sadhus and Brahmacharis, who sat on the grass by his side.

Swami Premananda : ‘ India is the land of austerities, of renunciation. Shiva the lord of Yogis is the national deity of India. He, whose son is Ganesha the fulfiller of all desires, whose friend is Kubera the Lord of wealth, and through whose wish the Himavan is protecting the nation from all calamities, that Mahesha renouncing every comfort, is doing perpetual Tapasya in the cremation ground for the welfare of Hindustan. From far, far ancient days the people of India are worshipping this lord, this symbol of renunciation.

‘ With the force of the Aswin tempest¹ you all should flood your minds with the spirit of renunciation. Destroy from your mind all traces of Kama-kanchana, root and branch. Just as in the Aswin tempest birds fly away in fear seeing their shelter-trees fall, so too in the tempest of Vairagya let all birds of selfishness, anger, and jealousy, and egotism fly off from your mind. And as the nature becomes calm and serene after the tempest, so too let all of you have that calmness and dispassion after the heavy storm of Vairagya. After forming such a character, any place where you may go and live, whether under trees or in the open lawn, will turn up to be the Ashrama of the Master ;

¹ In the year 1867 September-October, there occurred a terrible tempest in Bengal (Aswin, 1274 B. E.) which is now known as ‘ Aswin tempest. ’

and people will come to you in crowds. But without character, by simply giving lectures, nothing will happen.

'Our Master was the living symbol of renunciation. Take him as the ideal and mould your character. When the goldsmith melts gold he makes his feet, hands and mouth one-pointed: with the feet he holds the furnace, with his hands the bellows, and blowing through the mouth he makes the gold melt swiftly. When it melts, he pours it into the mould and then sitting quietly enjoys his pipe. Similarly you should all try to humble your egoism by all means and fill the mind with the thoughts of the Lord—get mad with these thoughts, get melted, get immersed. As long as you have not moulded your character or made an imperishable impression on your mind, keep burning this fire of Vairagya stronger and still stronger. "Everything in this world produces fear, Vairagya is the only refuge where there is no fear."

'After getting old, it is very difficult to get the mind controlled. It will not bend then according as one wills. The Master used to say "the mind is like a packet of mustard seeds, if it falls into worldly thought it is not possible to collect them together." If a burnt-up mud-pot is broken that cannot be joined again. Just so, if the mind is burnt in worldly thoughts it cannot be taken up and remoulded in the thoughts of God. Once the mind is coloured with other thoughts, it cannot be easily dyed with the thoughts of God. Hence, whatever spiritual practices you want to do, do it while you are young. At this period the senses are uncontrollably strong indeed, but the mind too is powerful enough; but this strength of the mind may vanish with the advance of age. Man is bound by his own mind and becomes free through his own mind. "The mind is the real cause of the freedom and bondage of men." You can dye white cloth with any colour but a dyed cloth won't take any other hue. When the mind is

tender and free from all taints, then it should be dyed with love and devotion. Saints are the washermen. You have to give at times your mind to the washermen for cleaning and dyeing—you have to live with saints at times. The mind will naturally get dirty in the world.'

Saying this he began to sing in his melodious voice:

Shyama, let me throw you into the mould of my mind
And bring out that idol of my desire.

My mind is dirt-filled and you are not kind,
Mother, have mercy and melt my mind in Thy fire.

'Here dirt means egoism, haughtiness, selfishness etc.; and that should be melted in the furnace of Vairagya.'

* * *

Swami Premananda said to the monks collected there about the ideal of the Belur Math:

'Swamiji has established this Math to bring out men of ideal character. In India there is no paucity of Maths and temples. And it is not to increase the number of already existing Maths that Swami Vivekananda founded this Math. Just as the universities send out thousands of graduates every year, so too from this Math will go out to the world men filled with idealism of universal brotherhood and they will make the world from end to end resound with the bugle sound of love and concord—the life and teachings of the Master. The Master did not come to form a sect or to create a faction.

'He used to say, "party forming is a stranglehold leading to death." He had lived and worked to give an impetus, an inspiration, a new life to all people of all religions and sects—Hindu and Mussalman, Christian and Shakta, Shaiva and Vaishnava. For that purpose Swamiji created this Math—which is to be the central force to spread these ideas of universalism and to prepare youths of character, renunciation, and selfless spirit.

'You have all taken refuge in the Master, and if you cannot infuse that spirit into your lives, then fie upon you all! What else

can be your purpose—you have come giving up hearth and home, plunging your parents into deep grief? Doing a little work, and a little meditation and wasting all life through laziness or by wandering here and there aimlessly—is this called life, is it an ideal?

‘Instead of wandering here and there, those who staying at a place do the Lord’s work and plunge deep into spiritual practices, progress more surely. The Master has said, “Catch hold of the mast and be steady.”

‘Once a bird was perching on the mast of a ship. When the ship moved to the mid-ocean the bird unable to espy any vegetation or other birds, became frightened and flew off straight to the north. But finding no land anywhere it returned to the mast. A little later it flew southward and there too, unable to reach the coast, it came back to the mast. Like this it flew to east and west, but when it could not find any land it came back and sat silently on the mast—and thought of no more flights, but held fast to the mast

and sat there. In due course the ship reached land and seeing trees on the shores it flew towards it with great joy.’

Saying this the Swami began to sing :

O mind, why goest thou to Kashi in vain
When at Mother’s feet thou gettest peace?
In the lotus of thy heart shines in bliss
The four-armed Mother with dishevelled hair.
Says Ramprasad, meditate thou there,
And the eternal Kashi do thou gain.

‘Always remember that the whole world is looking at you. Let your actions speak and not words. It was the injunction of Swamiji that this Math should in no way be reduced to a *Babajikhana*, which may do good only to a few. But the aim of this Math is the happiness of the entire world. This is not a place to dance and while away one’s life; perfection of character through Jnana, Bhakti, selfless work, or through Yoga is the ideal of this Math. The universities have produced clerks, but the Belur Math will have to produce perfect characters.’

DO WE NEED GOD ?

BY THE EDITOR

You may see stars at night in the sky but find them not when the sun rises; can you say that there are no stars in the heaven of the day? So O man, because you behold not God in the days of your ignorance, say not that there is no God.

—Sri Ramakrishna

I

It seems as if this is an age of growing scepticism about the existence of God or the necessity of any religion based upon the conception of God. One can understand the communist mentality which will do away with all ideas of God, for theirs is a frankly materialistic philosophy and they are fighting against an equally materialistic philosophy—that of capitalism which is based on the profit motive. It is a fight between the Haves and Have-nots, for the possession and enjoyment of worldly goods and power.

The capitalists of all times have welcomed the idea of God as a buttress for their way of life. From the beginning of human history the kingly power was wedded to the priestly and both helped each other in maintaining their privileges and sway over the rest of the people. If the leaders become accustomed to special privileges and sway over the rest of the people they tend to cling tenaciously to them even when the basis of those advantages, namely service of the people and the guarding of their interests, are neglected by them in the interest of their selfish enjoy-

ments. When such a state is reached they tend to keep down the people in all ways possible by physical forces, by economic exploitation, and by threatening to bring down the wrath of God upon a believing populace. The fear of the supernatural is an abiding fear in the hearts of most men, and leaders in Church and State have exploited this fear not a little for their own selfish ends. In course of time when the priestly power lost its privileges in the fight for equal status if not a superior one, with the State, the latter did not destroy the former but used it as a convenient tool for keeping the masses in their proper place. The priests became in most countries, part and parcel of the political structure and were literally provided for by the State either by fixed grants of pay or by frequent liberal donations; for even though the secular power had overpowered the priestly, still it was not itself completely free from the fear of the supernatural and could not dispense with the promises of reward in heaven or ignore the threats of pains in hell which the priestly power could still invoke. That the power of the priest over the masses is a real thing is recognized even in modern times when nations are priding themselves upon their enlightenment, for do we not find statesmen harping upon a Christian civilization and the introduction of Christian standards throughout the world, though it is difficult to believe that these very statesmen had any faith in Christianity as such? What is more strange, a Christian government in India did give money to pagodas, temples and mosques for Pujas and prayers to be held for the success of the allies in the late War.

No wonder, then, that the opponents of capitalists have called religion the opiate of the people and consider it a vice to be rooted out. Extremity of oppression breeds revolt and revolution. With growing riches on the one hand and increasing poverty on the other, the Haves and Have-nots are drifting further and further away from each other. Indivi-

dually the Have-nots have no hopes of improving their lot. In collective work, in organization they find their loop-hole of safety, of escape from an intolerable situation. The new leaders of the masses find that they have to overcome not only the fear of the masses of the political power of the entrenched Haves, but they have also to uproot the fear of the supernatural from the hearts of the masses, before they can become useful instruments for recovery of power for the proletariat. Hence this terrible outcry from the leftist press against religion and God. They are at great pains to prove that religion and God are all mere concoctions of the privileged classes to dullen the sensibilities of the vast masses on whose labour they feed fast, and thus prevent them from rising and realizing their rights as members of the body politic and claiming their rightful share in the wealth and power of the land in which they live.

II

Religion has to face not only the disconcerting and demoralizing support of the Haves, it has not only to meet the formidable frontal attack by the communists and others of their sort, but it has to face the wavering faith even in the ranks of those who somehow realized the significance and necessity of religion but are unable to reconcile the ideas of God with an imperfect universe in which misery and death seem to dog man at every footstep.

It is a herculean task to convince the richer classes that it is wrong of them to debase religion by prostituting it for their selfish and nefarious ends. 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven,' said Christ. The rich man prefers the heaven he can make of this world to a hypothetical one after death. Land, wealth, horses, or motor-cars or aeroplanes, servants, friends, women and pleasures—all these he can command with his money even in this world; so why should he risk the bird in the hand

for two in the bush? The rich man can be persuaded to part with his riches only for the sake of name or honour in the world; or at the most he might consent to give gifts to the church and the priests as a sort of insurance against losing a possible seat in a probable heaven.

It is equally difficult to convince the rank materialist at the other end, the communist, of the reality of religion and God. To him the stark reality is the poverty, ignorance, disease, and misery in which the vast masses are suffering. He believes these can be removed if only the masses are made to see that things happen not because of any divine fiat, but because of self-effort on the part of individuals and groups. The masses can rise only by giving up their superstitions, by improving their economic status and by capturing political power which enables the acquiring and maintaining of a higher economic position. While the priests under the patronage of the princes preached universal love and toleration and a placid satisfaction with one's lot in life thus minimizing the difficulties of government for the princes, the communists, the new priests of atheism and materialism, are preaching the opposite; they are deliberately inculcating hatred and class war as the means of rise to power in a capitalist-controlled world. The richer classes ordered the preaching of love and peaceful and orderly relations in society, because they knew that it was dangerous to their own interests to rouse feeling of hatred and strife in the vast masses, though in their hearts they had nothing but contempt and hostility for the plebeian masses. The communists, out of their love for the masses, are preaching hatred of the richer classes and are clamouring for their subordination and even elimination through drastic purges. But intrinsically both the capitalistic world and the communist world are built upon the shifting sands of self-love and hatred of others. No such society can ever be secure. Such a society carries within it the germs of internal

dissensions and fear of external aggression. It is irreligious and is a negation of the unity of the world.

The capitalist needs religion and God to keep the masses quiet, or to make them fight *his* battles. The communist does not need religion and God because it keeps the masses inactive and contented with their miserable lot as hewers of wood and drawers of water, and because it makes them willing cannon fodder in the wars of the capitalists, and thus are but obstacles in the destruction of his enemy, the capitalist.

There is, however, another class which is neither capitalist nor communist, but stands midway between them—the middle class or *bourgeoisie* of all countries. Free from the grinding and thought-killing poverty of the masses as well as from the demoralizing and debilitating luxury of the richer classes the middle class has always clung to religion and God as a necessary part of the scheme of things. They want God to save them from the wretchedness of poverty and to keep them secure in the enjoyment of a peaceful and cultured life. It is a class with tolerable leisure and enough intelligence and energy to think seriously about the problems of life and death, and it is in them that religion at present has its greatest hold. While they appreciate the enjoyments of the pleasures of the world, their thinking minds also note its temporary nature, and they want to rise to some more permanent values and in religion and the ideas of God they find this satisfaction which the world cannot and does not give.

But in an increasing number of even the middle class people the faith in God or even the need for Him is severely shaken in the deeper crisis of life when things and persons we held dear, when time-honoured institutions so dear to the heart of the man of traditional culture, are all swept away or seriously threatened with extinction at the hands of vandal forces. Then he is tempted to cry out: 'Where is my God on whom I

relied? Does he forsake me now in my hour of need? Then away with Him! I will have nothing more to do with Him.'

That such is the attitude of the common man with a sort of faith in God is well illustrated by a letter received from a reader of this magazine. The gentleman is the headmaster of a high school in the province of Bombay and he feels greatly upset at our call for trust in God, in spite of all appearances of His being cruel and all that, which we made in the editorial of last April. We give below the relevant portions from his letter:

We all know that our country is passing through stress and turmoil; the destruction of life and property is going on on a large scale throughout the length and breadth of the country; loot, arson, and mass conversions of the unfortunate Hindus on a large scale are going on before our eyes in Noakhali, the Punjab, and the N. W. F. Province, in spite of all our efforts. . . . The wide and extensive killing of innocent people, the destruction of life and property by the majority community in those provinces are an eye-opener to the Hindus. Enough of that nonsense that you are preaching from the housetops, in season and out of season, about the justice of God and his impartiality to his creatures; when hundreds and thousands of people are butchered in the name of religion, when innocent people are out to the sword, when women and children of the Hindu community are murdered in broad day light, before the very eyes of the guardians of law and order, our faith in the wisdom and justice of God vanishes like vapour in thin air.

The history of our country is full of such treacherous episodes where dishonesty and bigotry are the key-notes of our opponents' actions; there was no tolerance of any kind, the religious persecutions, loot and arson, the destruction of the temples and such other religious places are a common sight everywhere, the riots in the country are pre-arranged and well-planned but we people do not know them or we try to connive at them. And you people try to befool the people every now and then, and it is the common men in the street who feel the pinch to face the troubles and disasters and there is nobody to console them; what you preach is no consolation for them, they are not satisfied with your sweet and smooth oily words. The people who have suffered will never be satisfied with your eccentric and unconvincing arguments that it is the will of God, and the disasters were due to our past Karma! Lord Sri Krishna has given us sound advice in his memorable words, 'Fight to the last, follow me!' You will please

enlighten me on this point and try to clear my doubts in the present unfortunate circumstances in our country.

In all countries there is plenty of misery and cruelty in the world. But in the midst of our sorrows we must not forget that life is not all misery. If that were so the human race would have ended its existence by committing suicide. Because there is misery and cruelty and what not in this world, the religious leaders have been prescribing a remedy, namely the pursuit of a high ideal like God-realization whereby they claim it is possible for man to transcend misery. In spite of all the horrible atrocities committed in the name of religion, it is still true that only the real and widespread practice of the principles of universal love and tolerance will help mankind to live in comparative peace and safety. Absolute peace and security are impossible in this world by the very nature of things. Those who think that this world will become a paradise are living already in a paradise of their own. People are making too much of the struggles going on in the world. They will continue always; they will not cease at any time. No sooner the immediate end has been gained, the present phase of the struggle passes away and a new one opens. Restlessness and want of peace arise not so much from these external struggles as from our own internal hankering for and clinging to the things of the world.

True religion says, 'Give up the desires of the world, if you desire the world of God. But almost all of us want a God who will feed and clothe us and look after all our physical comforts, and grant us our desires, even our slightest. Otherwise what is the use of God? If God cannot become our servant and use his infinite power to make us happy in all ways, we have no use for such a God. The child should not believe in God because he does not get his toys or his sweetmeats; the young boy does not believe in God, because He does not come and help him to do his mathematical home task or does

not help him in passing his examinations. The youth curses God because he finds his love unrequited or the road of his ambition blocked. The middle-aged curse God because they are burdened with the cares of family life and can no longer enjoy life as vigorously as in the days of youth. The old man curses God because he is feeble and infirm and yet his thirst for enjoyment is still unsatisfied. Hindus are cursing God for creating Mussalmans. The weak are cursing God because He has created the strong who devour them. And so on the complaints rise unending and eternal. We suppose the patience of God must have been exhausted and so He has left the world to stew in its own juice.

Now the fact is that the greater portions of our life must of necessity be filled with evils, however much we may resist, however much we may fret and fume. Mankind has been struggling to remedy this since the beginning of time and yet everything remains almost the same. No sooner we overcome one set of difficulties than we are beset by subtler evils. Therefore it is, as Swami Vivekananda says, that all religions propose a God as the one and only way of escaping these difficulties once for all.

The opponents of religion want us to take the world as it is, like practical people. They say, 'Don't worry yourselves with such nonsense as religion and God. Leave that to weak, imbecile, and demented peoples. This may be a bad world, but live here and make the best of it.'

But religion says, 'You cannot find abiding happiness, which is the object of your soul, in a changing universe. Even if all the people of the world were to become all Christian, or all Mohammedan or all Hindu, still the causes of strife will be there. Now we, Hindus, are crying out against the brutalities committed by Mohammedans. But do we not find similar incidents in all parts of the world? Ours is not an isolated instance. How to get out of this mess and

put things right?

Some say, 'Fight bravely and kill and exterminate the Mohammedans.' This is the time-honoured principle—killing your enemies and rewarding your friends. Those who have stakes will and should certainly resort to this method. To kill your enemies, to protect your hearth and home is the primary duty of every human being. Even animals do it, and base indeed would be that man who will do less than animals. If society is to be saved lawlessness and wickedness from whatever quarter must be put down ruthlessly. No sane man ever advises people to die tamely like rats at the hands of their enemies.

But what religion has been saying is that this method is only a temporary expedient. Not unless you change your enemy into a friend can you ever feel safe. This can be done only on a higher plane, not on the plane of rival interests.

Christianity and Mohammedanism have been trying to solve the problem by the method of religious conversions, on the assumption, proved false in practice, that people of the same religion will not fight. Hinduism and Buddhism have been trying to do this by changing the heart of the enemy, by making him lose his feeling of enmity, by truly civilizing him. Hinduism must be aggressive in this sense. Hindu preachers, like all good preachers of other religions, must carry the message of love, goodwill, and brotherliness to non-Hindus and make them truly godly by their precept and example. For Hinduism has a more comforting and satisfying message for the human soul than any other. The roots of fanaticism and bigotry are inherent in the theologies of Christianity and Mohammedanism and religious bigotry is far more horrible than any other form of it. If Hindus struggle hard to remove these dangers by sending their missionaries into the midst of the bigots' camp and win them over by truth, love, and non-violence, then they will find far easier to overcome the bigots of politics or economics

from whom also they may suffer.

Still when all is said and done, the fact remains that so long as we cling to the things of this world, there will be misery and strife. Religion says that only by following up the idea of God can we go beyond this world. This life in the five senses, this life in the material world is not all; it is only a small portion and merely superficial. 'Behind and beyond is the infinite in which there is no more evil. Some people call it God, some Allah, some Jehovah, some love and so on. The Vedantin calls it Brahman.' Just as nobody can explain how radiation can congeal into all this material

universe, as the modern scientist says, similarly it is impossible to understand how God has become this world or has created this world which appears to our intellects sometimes as imperfect and limited, and sometimes as infinite. As Swami Vivekananda says :

They grope in darkness who worship this ignorant world that is produced out of ignorance, thinking of it as Existence; and those who live their whole lives in this world, and never find anything better or higher, are groping in greater darkness. But he who knows the secret of nature, seeing That which is beyond nature through the help of nature—he crosses death, and through the help of That which is beyond death he enjoys eternal bliss.

ONE GOOD HINDU AND ONE GOOD MOHAMMEDAN

BY A WANDERER

When Mahatma Gandhi went to the riot-affected areas in East Bengal, he said repeatedly that he wanted one good Hindu and one good Mohammedan in each village to bring about communal amity amongst the people. The statement seemed surprising, if not amusing. He did not speak of any big scheme, any peace committee composed of members representing various sections or interests; he did not talk of police or military arrangements or any other precautionary measures; he asked for a very simple thing—one good Hindu and one good Mohammedan. The Mahatma believed that with these two men he could establish sure and lasting peace. Many times he seems to be an enigma. Herein also he seemed to be one. But who knows he might be right. Evil has an easy and immediate victory but the forces of good work slowly but surely. So the influence of two men might be sufficient to break through the wall of fear and suspicion, tension and ill-feeling that have been raised by the acts of violence on the part of the hooligans, ruffians, and goondas. Who knows!

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I left Calcutta by the end of April last. At that time the communal disturbances in the city had continued for more than a month. I lived in an area where the curfew was in force for such a long period. Just at seven in the evening I had to be indoors. It was not safe to wait for the clock to strike seven even. Sometimes the police and the military might come and catch you earlier if their watch happened to keep a different time. So one felt panicky. Even in the free hours one did not dare go out without anxiety. Who knew if there would be no stabbing or acid throwing! The sound of the explosion of country bombs or the bursting of crackers could be heard at any time of the day unexpectedly—in the evening and at night regularly. Now and then one would see the military or police lorry running past, or the fire-engine moving at a hectic speed. The situation was tense. Life became miserable if not unbearable. The restrictions of movements and so many limitations on life turned one into a typically 'introvert case.' Constant brooding over the situation roused one's resentment and raised it to a high degree,

till one began to think that every Mohammedan was an enemy of the Hindus, every Mussalman was a goonda in the guise of a gentleman, every mosque was a place where knives and lethal weapons were stored and kept ready. As a matter of fact, a Hindu would be avoiding the area where there was a mosque, if he could help it. What the Mohammedans were thinking of the Hindus I cannot say. But the Hindus and the Mohammedans represented two warring camps, as it were, and it seemed there was nothing to be done to bridge the gulf. As time passed the difference was only accentuated.

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I left for a place in the U. P. by a railway train. Fortunately in my compartment there was not a single Mohammedan. But one might expect a hooligan to stop the train by pulling the alarm-chain and do some mischief? That was not altogether an uncommon thing! The main topic of conversation in the train was communalism. All sorts of things with respect to the Hindu-Muslim problem or tension was discussed, as if immediate action was going to be taken; the relative utility of violence and non-violence was debated, the deeds or misdeeds of Mahatma Gandhi were stated in all earnestness and solemnity.

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My first halt was at Benares. I read in the paper that some days back there was a 24-hour curfew in the holy city. In such a case how could one go to one's destination from the railway station! One of my friends had narrowly escaped such a contingency. He arrived at Benares station at seven in the morning and a 24-hour curfew was passed at nine. He went on a pilgrimage to Benares from a distant place in South India. His stay in Benares had to be short. Poor soul, he could hardly see the sacred places in the city and had to return somewhat disappointed. Luckily I arrived at Benares at a time when the curfew order was relaxed, and it was restricted to a particular area which

did not affect the pilgrims. So I could move very freely. But the tension was, nevertheless, great everywhere. People were talking more of communal 'incidents' than of holy things, which were pushed to the background. I had my bath in the sacred Ganges and I visited the important temples, but I frankly confess that I lived mentally in a plane of acute communalism.

* * *

I passed through Bareilly, where I heard that the communal trouble had flared up and stringent measures had been taken by the U. P. Government. Passengers in the train were talking about incidents in connection with that. There was a gentleman in my compartment, who looked sedate and sober with a Congress cap on his head; and another who though an Indian was dressed in European style. Both of them were discussing politics—I mean communal politics—one with an English and the other with a Hindi paper in the hand. I was silent, listening to their talks. The gentleman with European dress was foreseeing a civil war, if things were not set right even at that stage. But was there any chance of the things being set right?

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I arrived at my destination—a city in the U. P. where the Mohammedan population preponderated. Naturally, I expected communal tension, if not an actual communal trouble. But strange to say, the atmosphere was free from such things. People moved about freely—Hindus and Mohammedans—without any fear and anxiety. I could instinctively feel that I had come to a safe zone.

In the evening I went out in a *tonga*. Before I had gone far, I found a motor-car following me and from that a hand was beckoning to me. I stopped my *tonga* and saw that a friend had come to meet me. He hailed from the Punjab—a place which had suffered tragically from the communal frenzy—and he was a Hindu. He was accompanied

by a Mohammedan gentleman. When we met, this Mohammedan gentleman also talked with me in a way as if we were close friends. I was not ready to give him so much liberty nor did I think it proper to give vent to my inner feelings. I was just indifferent. My friend took me in his car to his home where I was to stay for the night. The Mohammedan gentleman also was with us and he was talking with me more and more familiarly. I was a bit surprised. I thought it was so unusual. But afterwards I found that my friend and the Mohammedan gentleman stayed in the same building and they were close friends. It was therefore that the Mohammedan gentleman treated me from the very beginning as if I was their common guest. When I was alone, my friend told me that this gentleman was an exceptionally good man and gave me some concrete instances of his goodness. But I cannot say I was even then off my guard and suspicion. Have we not heard of many stories how certain Mohammedans befriended the Hindus and afterwards betrayed them most treacherously at the critical hour? So I thought it was better to be at a safe distance from such people. But this gentleman's behaviour was so cordial, sincere, and guileless that he overpowered my suspicion, and tiding over my inner difficulties I began gradually to be free with him.

He was a Moulvi, about fifty years of age but looking much older, wearing spotlessly white clothes from his cap on the head down to his *pyjama*, looking dignified but not stylish or foppish. He commanded respect but disarmed fear. He was the pink of courtesy in his talks and behaviour—and it was so spontaneous that even a stranger would at once feel at ease in his presence. In spite of the fact that my host was all attention to me, on his own initiative this gentleman saw to it that nothing was left undone about my comfort and convenience; so much so that I was almost embarrassed and did not know how to thank him

sufficiently.

Now it was the time for his *namaj* and he took leave of me. At night when we had finished our dinner, he again came to me and we discussed many things. By now I completely got over my suspicion of this man and I could freely join in the conversation with him.

After some time when the gentleman went away, I sat alone in the veranda looking at the wide open space in front over the top of the rows of buildings, some ancient, some new, some half-dilapidated. It was a moonlit night, and an atmosphere of peace enveloped the area. This was a Mohammedan area. But what is it?—I see a long spire in a building with an emblem which indicated that it was a Shiva temple. A Shiva temple in such a congested Mohammedan area! In great wonder I enquired of my friend what that building was. He said that it was a Shiva temple, but the Mohammedans honoured it as much as the Hindus of the locality respected the religious sentiments of the Mohammedans. The Hindus, though very small in number, lived here very safe and without any fear and anxiety. The relation between the two communities was very amicable and it was not surprising that the temple stood there at a short distance from a mosque. I breathed a sigh of relief. I only wished that such a state of affairs could continue for long.

* * *

I slept in the open under the canopy of the starry sky and with the moon gazing at me. For a long time in the past I had not experienced such peace. In Calcutta I lived in an atmosphere which acted on one's nerves. Amidst the jumbled up sounds of a noisy city like Calcutta very often I would seem to hear the cry of *Allah ho Akbar* or its counter reply, *Jai Hind*; and though it might be a radio song at a distance I would hear in it the cry of the two communities fighting each other. In such an atmosphere one was not free from subconscious anxiety even while on one's bed

at night. But here it was everything still and calm. It was a unique experience for me.

In the morning I found some servants carrying something from the neighbouring quarters to our room. That was some food for breakfast sent by the Mohammedan gentleman—food that was judiciously selected so that it might not go against the caste prejudices of any Hindu. Some children came to see me. They were the little son and the daughter of the kindly Moulvi.

When we had finished our breakfast, the Mohammedan gentleman came, apologized that he could not come earlier and enquired if I was quite comfortable. My host soon went to his own work and I was left alone with the new-comer. Now the conversation became more free on both sides and soon it warmed up. He was talking in Hindustani and I in broken Hindi. In his talks there was a good mixture of Urdu words, which at times I found very difficult to follow. But he was talking such wise things that I strained myself to the utmost to catch and understand every word that he uttered. It was at this time that I knew that he was a Moulvi and a deeply religious man. Of his own accord he began to say:

‘Man is born and dies. But everybody wants to cling to his personal possessions. Few men are there who are not selfish. Every one wants to be happy and enjoy the world. But few succeed. The foolish man forgets that the only way to become happy is to try to make others happy; the only way to enjoy the world is to serve others, and that wholeheartedly. We acquire wealth, but it is not for our personal enjoyment, it is for distribution. We get power, but it is not for oppressing others or feeding our vanity, it is for serving others. The rich and the powerful should look after the poor and the weak, just as God—the richest and the most powerful being—protects the rich and the powerful in the world. The more the advantages the greater the responsibilities. We forget this

simple fact, consequently there is so much trouble in the world. The rich want more riches and the powerful men want more power. Hence there ensue fight and quarrel between man and man, between nation and nation, till civilization is on the verge of destruction and the world has turned into chaos.’

‘After all,’ the Moulvi Saheb continued, ‘what does a rich man get from his riches? Rather he is worse because of his riches. He gets plenty of things to eat, the result is he gets stomach troubles and dyspepsia. Whereas the poor man has not much to eat but whatever he eats he enjoys, digests, and assimilates and he becomes healthy and strong. The rich man has got a comfortable bed to lie on, but he gets no sleep. The poor man works hard throughout the day and sleeps soundly, wherever he lies down—sometimes on the bare earth, sometimes on a wooden plank. Who is happier? The poor man, because of his physical labour, develops muscles and strength, he can stand the strain of life. The rich man becomes a weakling and suffers as long as he is on earth. So the rich man has ultimately no real advantage. On the contrary if he can forget himself in the service of others he will become really happy.’

The gentleman continued, developing his theme and emphasizing his idea. I found how wonderfully he was giving the solution of the problem which communism is trying to solve through hard and sometimes bloody struggles. And it must be noted that he was not in touch with modern thoughts or the trend of world events.

The Moulvi Saheb gave an instance from the life of Hajrat Mohammed illustrating how the services to others bear wonderful fruit. There came a guest to the house of Mohammed. Though the Prophet had many attendants and followers, he himself looked after the guest—serving his meal, spreading his bed and so on. When his followers remonstrated and tried to take

away the works from him, the Prophet said that because the stranger was his guest, he must personally serve him. Enjoying the hospitality of the great Prophet, the guest ate so much that at night he made his bed unclean. And for fear that he might be found out in the morning, he fled away before it was dawn. But in a hurry he forgot to take his purse which contained a pretty big sum. So he had to return risking all trouble and embarrassment. When he came back what did he find but the Prophet himself washing his bed! The guest was so very much impressed and moved that he embraced Islam and became a staunch follower of the Prophet.

‘This episode pointedly indicates how love and service pay. And that is the ideal which one should follow,’ the Moulvi Saheb said.

He was talking many other things in this connection which I could not exactly follow. But I wondered what wise words were pouring forth from his lips. I felt serious and was struck with the depth of his thought, though this man did not seem to have any modern education. I could guess that these good thoughts he had gathered from Arabic literature coupled with the experiences of his good and conscientious life.

His words made me bold. Especially as I saw that he had no trace of communalism in him, I asked what he thought of the Hindu-Muslim trouble in the country. Till now very carefully I avoided this topic. When I found that this man was absolutely above any communal spirit, I felt curious to know what his opinion was in the matter. To my query the Moulvi Saheb at once replied: ‘This Hindu-Muslim trouble is the creation of British diplomacy in India. The British have created this problem to serve their own interest and we fools—both Hindus and Mohammedans—have fallen into the trap. And, after all, how much do the so-called leaders feel for the poor and the masses! It is the latter who suffer from the communal disturbance while the leaders live in their

citadel of safety.’ And he illustrated how the poor were intensely suffering in some places. In the course of conversation he expressed his strong resentment at the ghastly things that had been happening in the country.

It was time for me to make arrangement for my departure. So the Moulvi Saheb took leave of me. But he left me not without showing much concern for my needs and requirements. And he was so genuine in his feelings! After a long time I found myself in an atmosphere and in the presence of a man that made me feel, ‘I am not a Hindu, you are not a Mohammedan. We are all men—fellow-beings—to help one another in this journey of life and then to go to Him who has no communal label.’ Literally I forgot that I was before a Mohammedan, the misdeeds of whose community had given rise to so much resentment in me. And I found myself in an atmosphere in which I could see things from a right perspective and free from all personal prejudices.

I am grateful to this man, whom by a mere chance I met. I bade him goodbye and parted from him, but his words are ringing in my ears and his figure in white dress comes now and then before my mind’s eye.

* * *

The problem still remains: what to do with the countrywide communal disturbance? How to tackle it? There may be a good Hindu or a good Mohammedan whose character is ideal, who is above communal feeling, who can radiate peace, but will the influence of such men be able to counteract the frenzy that is sweeping the country from one end to another? The Moulvi Saheb I had met was perfectly right when he dismissed the whole problem by saying in his clear and unsophisticated words that it was a political question. Political questions can be solved only on the political platform and not on any religious understanding. It is indeed true that the religious sentiment in man, rather in the masses, is very powerful.

When roused it can do wonders or work havoc as the case may be. But religious maxims will avail nothing when political forces are at work. For religious maxims can be put fully into practice only by a few—very few. Buddha talked of love, Christ talked of charity, but the world is witnessing war after war, accompanied by inhuman acts of brutality. Incarnations have come, prophets have proclaimed their messages, saints have shown exemplary lives, but still there are large numbers of people in every country, society, and community whose criminal instinct necessitates the existence of law-courts, the police, and even the military. No use denying facts. The world is a hard reality. One must face this reality.

So if the communal question is the by-product of the bigger question, viz. the

political problem, that must be solved first. Some said that a Noakhali and a Tipperah were symptoms of the disease that had been injected into the body politic of India by interested parties in England. So the problem can be solved only there.

But that is an issue which is outside my sphere and which I am not competent to discuss. In the meantime it is a great solace and satisfaction to me that humanity has not altogether been shorn of moral virtues and high idealism. Even at a time when the communal tension has gone very high, I can come across a man whose innate sense of the true relationship between man and man puts to shame my communal rancour and soothes my heart lacerated with communal resentment.

The Himalayas, 1947

RAMAKRISHNA, THE HOPE OF THE MODERN WORLD

BY B. K. PATEL, I.C.S.

About one hundred and eleven years back Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna was born in a remote small village in Bengal. It is interesting to note that when he had finished his religious practices signs were visible throughout the country of the revival of Hindu culture. In 1875 Arya Samaj was founded in Bombay by Swami Dayananda and flourished in Northern India. The Theosophical Society was established in New York and shortly after in Southern India and Brahma Samaj was gathering strength in Eastern India. At that time Hindu culture and life was being disrupted by the several forces released by Western education, political domination, and commercial contact. The youth of the country educated in Christian Missionary schools was overwhelmed by the writings of rationalist thinkers of the West and Christian theologians. The Western influence shook the ideals of Hinduism to their very found-

ation. A tidal wave of atheism and materialistic findings of the nineteenth century scientists and nihilistic thoughts from the West swept over the country and stormed the citadel of Hindu faith. A large number of Hindu intellectuals surrendered to these influences and openly avowed the vassalage of materialistic realism. It was under such circumstances when Indian culture was about to lose itself that the vitality that was lying dormant deep in the heart of the nation was braced up and marshalled against the new influences. The movements of Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj and other socio-religious reformers sprang up one after another in the last quarter of the nineteenth century to resuscitate the hoary ancient culture and religious life of India and stemmed the tide. The reformers rightly saw and felt that the vast orthodox masses of Hindus had stuck fast to the age-old beliefs of traditional orthodox Hinduism and were unwilling to forgo orthodox ideas

and ideals and to conform to the intellectual demands of the age. They felt that Hinduism as a living religion with its vast conglomeration of ideas and ideals was doomed to disintegration and dissolution under the explosive discharges of modern thoughts.

It was when such a danger was impending that a phenomenon of paramount importance took place in the eastern part of the country to infuse strength and vitality to the entire range of Hindu convictions and to bring about a renaissance of the Hindu culture and religion. This phenomenon was the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

This great saint lived and taught in tune with the whole tenor of Hindu thoughts and aspirations and harmonized them with the lives and teachings of the sages, seers, and prophets of the past. He reconciled the apparent conflicts behind the various groups and religious creeds and demonstrated the fundamental underlying unity behind all of them. The life and teachings of Ramakrishna were later on explained lucidly and logically by his eminent pupil and dynamic counter-part Swami Vivekananda who gave complete synthesis to all religious dogmas, creeds, and invested them with a rationale that could stand the scrutiny of reason and hold its ground against the whole criticism of modern sciences and thoughts.

The teachings of Ramakrishna are inseparable from his life. His life lacks the wealth of events, sensational achievements commonly associated with the lives of great men. He was not a public man, was neither an orator nor a writer, nor played the role of a social reformer. He was barely literate and had no school or college education. His message and teachings are to be gathered from his discourses with his pupils and devotees and yet the intellectuals of his day who had received highest education in Western thoughts and literature sat at his feet and derived inspiration from him. It was his life based upon the bed-rock of realization which

gave inspiration, conviction, and force to his message and teachings. His life did not draw all its materials from the sense world and hence a bare record of its contacts with the world cannot bring his entire life into relief. The grandeur, power, and significance of his life belonged to a region beyond the ken of an ordinary biographer. The majesty of his life, his thoughts, and feelings welled up from the supersensuous depths of his mind and made his whole personality resplendent with a divine glow of beatitude. His entire being was a web of spiritual ecstasy and realization and was not easily comprehensible to any one who was not endowed with spiritual insight and intuition. Before one can grasp the import of his life thoroughly, one has to solve the mysteries of the universe and realize the eternal truths of existence. To quote the words of Mahatma Gandhi :

The story of Sri Ramakrishna's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna is a living embodiment of Godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man, but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations from his own experiences. They, therefore, leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women, who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light.

It is but natural that such a life got hold of the orthodox Hindu mind, intellectuals and radicals, and gave colour and effect of spirituality to the Hindu religion. This is how the enlightened section of modern Hindu society is being led gradually to recognize Sri Ramakrishna as the redeemer of Hindu faith and culture and the usherer of a new era of Hindu renaissance. Ramakrishna gave a highly rational meaning of religion defining it as manifestation of the divinity that is already in man. According to him religion is a growth from within till one reaches the last stage of human evolution when the individual realizes within his own Self all his dreams of perfection and absolute

freedom and discovers the kingdom of heaven that has been lying all the time within the heart. According to him when a man conquers his inner nature, he becomes perfect and finds God as essence of his own being. It is only when one attains such a state that he is considered to be religious. He preached that religion was neither in books nor in intellectual consent nor in reasoning. Reason, theories, doctrines, books, religious ceremonies are all helps to religion, but religion itself consists in realization. He taught that each soul is potentially divine and the goal was to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature external and internal. This could be done either by Karma, Bhakti, Raja, or Jnana Yoga, by one or other or all of these and absolute freedom is achieved. According to him this was the whole of all religions. He taught that religion as defined by him was a natural and normal element of human life and was not supernatural in any sense of revelation or superstitious in any sense of fraud or fiction, but was simply an experience of human nature in the higher ranges of its activities and was a universal phenomenon of human life. He observed that craving for perfection, for infinite life, bliss and knowledge is a deep-rooted instinct of man. Man is impelled by his very nature to strive ceaselessly for freedom from all forms of bondage. Man's inner nature does not permit him to remain permanently blind to the vanity of the world and its ephemeral contents and compels him to visualize the unreality of material nature and to find everlasting infinite bliss and existence which is none other than God.

It was such a religion which Sri Ramakrishna preached and practised. In order to verify the truth of all religions, he underwent practices of all religions and all creeds and arrived at the same Truth in all. Thus realizing the unity of all religions he presented a synthesis of all doctrines and prepared the ground for a universal religion preached subsequently by his eminent pupil Swami

Vivekananda.

Ramakrishna made it clear that all religions lead to one goal, i.e. God; and the conflicts and quarrels among different religions arose from ignorance, selfishness, and over-emphasis on secondary details.

He drew attention of all to the fact that the great religions of the world were of one opinion, so far as belief in the existence of God, potential divinity of the soul, and possibility of salvation through transcendental experience of God were concerned. All great religions derive their origin and validity from the realization of one or more seers of outstanding personality and are essentially alike in substance though different in form. He demonstrated that all the differences between the religions of the world were one of expression and not of substance.

He thus explained the fundamental aim and scope of all religions and the unity underlying them and the unimportance of the formal differences between them in the fields of mythology, rituals, traditions, and customs. He taught the world how to eschew sectarian views of religion and dissensions. In these days of religious conflicts teachings of the great saint of Dakshineswar are of supreme importance and should pave the way for religious tolerance and harmony. His teachings, based on the realization of all practices of all religions, should lead all right thinking men towards complete religious tolerance and harmony.

Ramakrishna was extremely catholic in his outlook. He by his practices and realization reconciled and harmonized the apparent differences between Saguna and Nirguna Brahman which has been the subject of controversy between pundits of various sects in this country. He stated that God was both with form and without form and there was no real conflict between the personal and impersonal God. He stated and satisfied the intellectuals who came to him that the relative and the absolute existence were only the transcendent and immanent

aspects of the same Brahman and there was no difference or conflict in the said aspects. He harmonized the teachings of the various schools of Jnana, Bhakti, Yoga, Karma and went a great way in putting an end to their polemic discussions. He discovered by realization the truth behind the transcendent and the immanent aspects of divinity. According to him truth was one with different aspects and there was no room for difference or conflict between them. There was no reason or justification for one creed or religion to disparage or hate another creed or religion.

Firm in such conviction, he declared with all the emphasis at his command that it was up to any one to pursue in right earnest any path of practical religion and realize the truth behind the statements of all the great spiritual seers of all religions.

It was thus that Ramakrishna's advent marked a new era in the evolution of a universal religion enabling all sects and communities to transcend the limitations of narrow sectarian outlook and pave the path of universal brotherhood.

Ramakrishna though firmly seated in the realization of the absolute and in the beatitude of Nirvikalpa Samadhi did not lose sight of the necessity for the uplift of the masses. He was moved by the sufferings of humanity and he strenuously exhorted his followers to ameliorate the sufferings of the masses. He asked his disciples to see God and divinity in all men and achieve spiritual progress through the medium of the service of suffering humanity. It was with this purpose that he commanded Swami Vivekananda to serve humanity and not to selfishly seek his own well being. It was at his instance the great order of the monks was founded by his disciple Swami Vivekananda. The monks of this order have carried the message of the great Master far and wide and devoted their lives to the service of humanity and to pass on the message to other yearning souls all over the world. It is this order founded by Swami Vivekananda which has

carried the message of his life and the truth of the Vedas through the four corners of the world and inspired all countries with the truth and grandeur of Hindu civilization and culture and helped to remove the erroneous impression about Hinduism in the countries of the West. Filled with the fervour of service of humanity Swami Vivekananda preached and worked constantly for the betterment and service of masses and openly stated that he did not care for his own salvation so long as a single human being remained in ignorance.

He always laid utmost emphasis on the moral virtues and purity of heart. He said that morality was the back-bone of religion and unless there was purity of heart, no one can make any progress in the field of true religion. He condemned in unreserved terms all thoughts and desires of lust and greed. He could not bear even the touch of money or gold as is authentically narrated by his disciples. This complete celibacy for life and looking upon all women as manifestations of Divine Mother are too well known to require repetition. He constantly exhorted all persons who came to him to give up all desires for lust and greed if they wanted to make any progress. He emphatically preached that if one can conquer weakness of flesh and rise superior to the desires of lust and greed the realization of God was an easy matter.

The world is in the melting pot. Political, social, economic, and religious orders of the world are struggling for existence. Leaders of thought have felt that all the progress of science and mechanism have not added to the sum total of human happiness. The two great wars have shaken the foundations of age-old institutions. The human race is crying, more than ever, for peace, light, and happiness. Humanity is groping through the present darkness and chaos for a new order and a new age. It is at this juncture and the psychological moment in human history that the life and teachings of the great Master are most likely to serve as a beacon light to the

distracted and tormented humanity, to lead it on to the path of spiritual progress, and once more to prove that spiritual awakening of a society is invariably accompanied by a

revival and progress in arts, letters, sciences and by a vigorous display of energy in every phase of life.

SRI ALASINGA PERUMAL

BY M. G. SRINIVASAN

The name of Alasinga Perumal, familiarly known as 'Alasinga,' may not be widely known today as one of the pioneers of the Indian renaissance movement in South India. But those who are closely acquainted with the events of the illustrious life of the great Swami Vivekananda, especially his Parivrajaka days in South India, and the early history of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement (in South India) cannot but have become aware of the remarkable personality of Alasinga Perumal. Though very little is known about his pure and noble life owing to non-availability of sufficient recorded biographical material, he was undoubtedly one of the greatest and most devoted followers of Swami Vivekananda.

Alasinga was born of humble but respectable Sri Vaishnava brahmin parents in 1865 in Chickmagalur in Mysore State. His father, Narasimhachariar, hailing originally from Mandya village in Mysore State, was a clerk in the local Municipal Office. Later he took employment in Madras where Alasinga came to be educated. Alasinga had his education first in the Madras Presidency College and then in the Madras Christian College where he was one of the best and dearest pupils of the then well-known educationist Dr William Miller. After graduating in science in 1884, Alasinga joined the Law College where he studied only for a short time. Unexpected circumstances compelled him to leave the Law College before

completing the course and seek employment at an early age. Among the few careers open to university educated men even so late as the nineties of the last century was teaching. Alasinga first became a teacher in a private school at Kumbhakonam. As it was not a permanent post he soon gave it up and, in 1887 joined the staff of Pachiappa's School at Chidambaram, as science teacher. In three years' time, in view of his efficiency, he was appointed Head Master of Pachiappa's High School at Madras, which post he successfully held for a long time almost to the end of his short life. He was appointed on the staff of the college department in Physics in the Pachiappa's College a short time before his death. He loyally served the Pachiappa's Trust to the end of his life, and won the regard and love of his students as well as colleagues.

But it was not in the field of secular education that Alasinga accomplished his most enduring achievement. Nor did he choose to appear in the role of a political hero. He did much more than that. Being a true son of Mother India, he had realized, early in life, where her real greatness lay. He decided to dedicate his life to a higher cause—for striving to resuscitate the essential spiritual values in life. He felt extremely dissatisfied at the rate at which spiritual degeneration was increasing all round—the educated becoming votaries of Western 'scientific' materialism, and the uneducated becoming

victims of priestcraft and superstition. Western education was tending to impart an antinational bias to the outlook of the educated Hindus many of whom started imitating Western modes of life and conduct and looked upon their ancient national religion and culture with ridicule and disregard. Misrepresentation of the Hindu religion by the less scrupulous among the Christian missionaries from the West served to augment this drift of Indians away from the moorings of their national cultural heritage. The excrescences and shibboleths which had crept into the complex fabric of Hindu society were adhered to with unthinking ignorance so as to make Hinduism degenerate into a bundle of unspiritual and often meaningless forms and observances. The situation demanded a new spirit and a new light to rid Hinduism of its dead wood, to restore to their true place of primacy its vital spiritual truths, and to reiterate India's message for the world at large. Young Alasinga's sensitive soul was quick enough to perceive this need of the hour and he threw himself heart and soul into his self-chosen mission in life. But his course was by no means smooth. Considering the obstacles and ridicule he had to face and the scanty resources he could command in working for the realization of his ideal, one cannot but deeply admire his marvellous achievement.

When Alasinga was in his teens he little knew that another great soul, also in his teens, destined to kindle the fire in Alasinga's heart and guide him through life, was passing through a period of intense Sadhana in distant Bengal. This was no other than Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The divine hand of the Master which prepared the way for the fulfilment of the Swami's mission brought the two kindred souls into intimate contact. In the course of his wanderings as a Parivrajaka, from north to south, Swami Vivekananda (then actually known as Swami Sachchidananda) came to Madras in 1892.

After his historic visit to and divine experience at Cape Comorin, the Swami arrived at Tiruvanandapuram. It was here that he met the late Prof Rao Bahadur M. Rangacharya, a Sanskrit scholar of repute of those days. Prof Rangacharya was a close relative (the brother-in-law) of Alasinga. This occasioned the meeting between the great master and the great disciple—Alasinga met Swami Vivekananda—an event full of significance for India in the years that followed.

The news that a great Parliament of Religions was meeting at Chicago in the United States in the latter part of the year 1893 came to be known in India. Dr Barrows, one of the leading organizers of the Parliament, had written to Dr William Miller about the Parliament of Religions. Yogi Parthasarathi Iyengar, Alasinga's uncle and a great Vaishnava scholar, connected with the Hindu League of America, coming to know of the Parliament of Religions going to be held at Chicago, informed Alasinga about it. Even an event of such great significance going to take place in distant America would arouse little interest or enthusiasm among Indians, in those days, with the exception of a few scholars most of whom contented themselves with sending written contributions only. But Alasinga realized the importance of this international convention of all religions and strongly felt that it was a fine opportunity for sending a worthy representative of India to represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions. He requested Prof M. Rangacharya to go to Chicago and attend the Parliament of Religions. But Prof M. Rangacharya did not agree. Alasinga felt very much disappointed, but did not lose hope. He was determined to do his best to persuade some eminent person or other to agree to represent Vedanta at the Chicago Parliament. Meanwhile Alasinga learnt one day from his younger brother M. C. Krishnamachar that a young Sanyasin, well versed in English and in the Hindu Shastras, had arrived at the house of Manmathanath Bhattacharya,

Assistant to the Accountant-General of Madras. Alasinga felt curious to know who this English-knowing Sanyasi might be and went to meet him, accompanied by G. G. Narasimhachar, R. A. Krishnamachar, and some others. At the very first meeting Alasinga instinctively felt that here was the person for whom he was seeking. There arose in him an irresistible urge to love and revere the 'unknown' young Swami as his spiritual Master. The Swami's magnetic personality, spiritual greatness, and intellectual brilliance made a deep and lasting impression on every one of that small band of young men who accompanied Alasinga. The light that shone from the eyes of the Swami cast a spell on Alasinga. The charm of the Swami's words transformed him. Alasinga became a devoted follower of Swami Vivekananda and remained ever steadfast to him to the end of his life.

Unlike others around him, Alasinga quickly discerned the supreme spiritual and intellectual attainments of the Swami and realized that he was no ordinary person. Alasinga was immensely glad he had come into intimate association with an extraordinary genius whom he could persuade to proceed to America to represent India at the Parliament of Religions. With all the sincerity and earnestness characteristic of him, Alasinga approached the Swami and asked him the momentous question, 'Why not go to Chicago, Swami?' 'Why not, indeed!' the Swami thought over. It had not occurred to any one before. The few who had known of the Parliament of Religions to be held in Chicago never for a moment thought it possible for an Indian representative to be sent to Chicago. But Alasinga was unlike the others. He proposed to the Swami that he should attend the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago.

At first the Swami did not give his consent to this proposal. But the sincerity and earnestness with which Alasinga began to persuade him to go to Chicago made the

Swami think more seriously about it. Alasinga who used to frequent the house of S. J. Bhattacharya in Mylapore where the Swami was putting up took every opportunity constantly to put into the Swami's mind this idea of the Parliament of Religions. Alasinga had felt that in the Swami's visit to Chicago lay India's only chance of representing her Sanatana Dharma before the World Parliament of Religions. Alasinga's pure desire did not remain unfulfilled. It was the Shivaratri night in the year 1893. Throughout the day and night the Swami spoke little, and was immersed in deep meditation. It was on this holy night that the Swami finally decided to go to America. Alasinga's joy knew no bounds.

It was not easy to find the money for the Swami's passage and other expenses. Alasinga, an ordinary schoolmaster, and his friends were of moderate means and could subscribe only a small fraction of the money required for the Swami's passage fare to America. The major portion of the money had to be collected from the public through subscriptions. Alasinga lost no time in applying himself to this difficult task of collecting funds. He shouldered the entire responsibility and with the assistance of some young men under him he took up the task of raising subscriptions for the Swami's passage money to America. At one time a zemindar assured Alasinga that he would contribute the entire sum needed for the purpose. Alasinga naturally trusted him and had slackened his efforts to find subscriptions. But only two months before the Swami's departure this zemindar suddenly changed his mind and gave only a small part of the money. Alasinga, though somewhat disappointed at this, did not feel disheartened in the least. With redoubled effort and with his characteristic perseverance and devotion to duty, Alasinga literally went begging from door to door, approaching mostly the members of the middle classes. This was in accordance with the wishes of the Swami who

had expressed, 'If it is the Mother's will that I go, then let me receive the money from the people! Because it is for the people of India that I am going to the West—for the people and the poor.' Alasinga and his friends went out of Madras city, even as far as Ramnad and Hyderabad for subscriptions, and they received the full co-operation of the Swami's disciples and admirers in those places. Thus a sum of nearly Rs. 3,000 was collected within three or four days! Alasinga went to Bombay and himself deposited the amount with Thomas Cook and Sons as passage fare for the Swami's forthcoming voyage to the United States. He now felt greatly satisfied that all arrangements were complete for the Swami's departure. Finally the sailing date arrived—31st May 1893. Alasinga came from Madras to Bombay to bid farewell to the Swami. The Swami's heart was consumed with various emotions. Alasinga accompanied the Swami up the gangway and remained with him till the very last moment. When the time for parting came, Swami Vivekananda, with tears in his eyes, warmly embraced Alasinga. Alasinga took leave of the Swami after prostrating at his feet. Simple Alasinga was hardly aware of the great significance of the step he had so unobtrusively persuaded the Swami to take. At this distance of time it is evident that it was no small service that Alasinga had rendered to the country and to humanity at large.

The World's Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in September 1893, was undoubtedly one of the greatest events in the history of the world. India learnt amidst American applause of Swami Vivekananda's brilliant and unparalleled success at the Parliament of Religions. There was great jubilation throughout the country and Alasinga's joy was beyond description. Though he felt elated that his object in persuading the Swami to go to America had been fulfilled, yet he took no credit for anything that he had done. He silently prayed

that the Swami's work in America be crowned with greater success. Soon after the Parliament of Religions Swami Vivekananda commenced his real task of expounding the Vedanta to the Westerners through writings, lectures, class talks, and conversations. As part of his preaching work the Swami started Vedanta centres in the United States of America. Reports in greater detail of the activities of the Swami in America were regularly reaching India through his Gurbhais and disciples in Madras and Calcutta who received communications from the Swami himself and others in America. In Madras and Calcutta cities large meetings were held in which distinguished citizens took part. Addresses were sent to the Swami applauding his noble work in the cause of Hinduism in America. The Swami took due notice of these appreciations and sent suitable replies, the most notable of which is his stirring 'Reply to the Madras Address.' Ever since the Swami commenced his work in America, Alasinga keenly felt the need for starting an English periodical in which he could bring out the valuable lectures and writings of Swami Vivekananda on Vedanta delivered in America for the benefit of Indian readers. Also he wanted to make the journal a medium through which the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and other saints as well as the essence of the Upanishads and other scriptures could be propagated in the English language. In his efforts in this direction Alasinga received valuable help and encouragement from the Swami. After Swami Vivekananda started systematic preaching work in America he constantly urged his disciples in Madras, through stirring and stimulating letters, mostly addressed to Alasinga, to launch a magazine on Vedantic lines. He even helped them with funds from the proceeds of his lectures in America to carry out this project. The Swami expressed his great confidence in Alasinga's capability and charged him with the task of conducting the proposed monthly

journal. Accordingly Alasinga started the *Brahmavadin*, an English monthly, with himself as the Editor, in the year 1895. He threw himself heart and soul into this work of editing and managing the *Brahmavadin*, and carried it on bravely and ably until his death. He spared no pains to make the journal a complete success, and won the admiration of one and all for the devotion and perseverance with which he undertook the work. In one of his letters to Alasinga, Swami Vivekananda wrote: '... entire devotion to the cause, knowing that your *salvation* depends upon making the *Brahmavadin* a success. Let this paper be your *Ishtadevata* and then you will see how success comes. . . .' Alasinga followed the Swami's directions with perfect obedience and actually looked upon the *Brahmavadin* as his 'Ishtadevata.' His connection with *Brahmavadin* may be said to be his life work. He kept it up at a high level and in perfect order notwithstanding his preoccupations with college work and family difficulties. For the first two years his talented brother-in-law, Prof M. Rangacharya contributed articles regularly to the *Brahmavadin*. During the next ten years his cousins G. G. Narasimhachar and R. A. Krishnamachar, and some others helped Alasinga in the work of conducting and contributing to the *Brahmavadin*. After this, for four years, till his death in 1909, he conducted the journal single-handed. After Alasinga's passing, his sons carried on the *Brahmavadin* for a period of five years till 1914 when it ceased publication.

The *Brahmavadin* was the first and foremost Indian monthly journal in English in its days. At a time when Western secular and scientific education had completely enslaved the minds of Indians and made them fight shy of their ancient religion and culture, it needed no small effort on the part of Alasinga to popularize and find subscribers and readers for a religious and highly philosophical magazine like the *Brahmavadin*. Alasinga succeeded in fulfilling the trust placed in him

by Swami Vivekananda. This success was mostly due to two factors, viz. the Swami's guiding hand as expressed through his inspiring and illuminating letters to Alasinga which had almost the same value as his presence; and secondly, Alasinga's sincerity of purpose, selfless sacrifice, and intense devotion to the Swami. Even today a perusal of the back numbers of the *Brahmavadin* bears ample testimony to the labour of love so characteristic of its worthy editor. Swami Vivekananda repeatedly gave directions to Alasinga concerning the ideals for which the *Brahmavadin* should stand and the policy and procedure for its conduct. The *Brahmavadin* had made its influence felt in the field of Indian journalism as a constructive force in neo-Hindu renaissance. In his Editorials, Alasinga always adhered to what the Swami specially stressed in his own lectures and writings, viz. not nationalism only but internationalism, not Hinduism only but Vedanta, the universal religion. In addition to contributed writings, the *Brahmavadin* regularly recorded the progress and activities of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement in various parts of India and the Western world. Whenever the Swami found anything published in the *Brahmavadin* that smacked of sectarianism or propaganda he immediately warned his disciples. Once he wrote to Alasinga: '... I have been smelling something since last few issues of the *Brahmavadin*. . . . No hypocrisy with me. . . . I shall have one man only to follow me, but he must be true and faithful unto death. . . . I must keep my movement *pure* or I will have none. . . . I am very decided on this point. The *Brahmavadin* is for preaching Vedanta and not—.'

The *Prabuddha Bharata* also owes its origin to Alasinga. It was he who first proposed that as the *Brahmavadin* was of a more advanced standard generally suitable to Vedantic scholars and elderly persons, another journal in English should be started for the benefit of youths and less educated

persons containing simpler and less scholarly contributions. It was Alasinga who selected B. R. Rajam Iyer as the first Editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata* which was started in the year 1896 through the joint efforts of Alasinga, Dr Nanjunda Rao, and G. G. Narasimhachar. Alasinga's literary capacity was of a high order, though he has not been known to be an author. In addition to his close connection with *Brahmavadin* and *Prabuddha Bharata*, he was directly or indirectly associated with many other journals such as *India*, *Weekly Review*, and *Native State*. His intensely active life left him very little leisure to do any literary work of a permanent nature. His language was chaste, simple, and clear. His writings clearly revealed the depth of his inner convictions and the living faith he cherished in the spiritual destiny of mankind.

A striking feature in Alasinga's life is his unique relation with Swami Vivekananda. The Guru bestowed the greatest amount of affection and care on the disciple, and the disciple, in his turn, completely surrendered himself at the Guru's feet. Of the band of young men who were drawn to Swami Vivekananda during his first visit to Madras, Alasinga was the first to be kindled by the touch of the Swami's fire. From the first meeting till the last Alasinga remained the favourite lay disciple of the Swami from among his Madras disciples purely by dint of his extraordinary merit and devotion (Guru-bhakti). Swami Vivekananda's gospel of man-making and character-building, his ideals of renunciation and service, found ready response and practical expression in Alasinga. Swami Vivekananda spoke very highly of his dear Alasinga and admired him for his sincerity of character and unselfishness. When the Swami left the shores of India for the Parliament of Religions he kept on writing inspiring letters to Alasinga, giving him all possible guidance and encouragement in order to be able to carry on the work at Madras and also conduct the journals

Brahmavadin and *Prabuddha Bharata*. In one of his earlier letters, the Swami wrote: 'Now organize a little society. . . . You will have to take charge of the whole movement, not as a *leader*, but as a *servant*. . . . So far you have done well, indeed, my brave boy. All strength shall be given to you. . . .' ' . . . Have faith that you are all, my brave lads, born to do great things!' In another letter from the United States he wrote: ' . . . Take heart and work. Let me see what you can do. . . . Be true to your mission. Thus far you promise well, so go on, and do better and better still. . . .' Referring to the *Brahmavadin* the Swami once wrote to Alasinga: ' . . . The journal must not be flippant but steady, calm and high-toned. . . . Be perfectly unselfish, be steady and work on. We will do great things, do not fear. One thing more. Be the servant of all, . . . go on. You have worked wonderfully well. We will work it out, my boy; be self-reliant, faithful, and patient. . . .' In a remarkable letter to Alasinga from London, the Swami wrote: ' . . . My child, what I want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel inside which dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made. Strength, manhood, Kshatra-Virya and Brahma-Teja. . . .' In the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* and in the separately published *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* can be found a number of such letters addressed to Alasinga by Swami Vivekananda. These inspiring and elevating words produced the desired effect in the disciple. आश्रयो वक्ता कुशलाऽस्य लब्धा आश्रयो ज्ञाता कुशलानुशिष्ट ।

Alasinga was intensely earnest and sincere in thought, word, and deed, whenever he set his heart on anything. He exhibited an abundance of healthy wisdom and a capacity to get things done smoothly and speedily. He was unostentatious and full of self-abnegation. He never pushed himself forward to the exclusion of others, nor did he seek any credit for any act of his. Like

fire hidden under ashes or a fruit shaded beneath leaves he lived a silent unobtrusive life. He was an ideal Karma Yogi and a great Bhakta. He was ever ready to be taken out of his house in the midst of his work in order to render some help to somebody. Throughout his life he lived for others and felt he was duty bound to serve others without expecting any return. His innumerable, little acts of kindness in relieving individual distress even at the risk of his own discomfort had earned for him the gratitude of one and all.

His affable and obliging disposition served to create for him a large circle of friends of all classes and communities. He had great influence with the rich and the poor, the high and the low, officials and non-officials alike, all of whom cherished great regard for Alasinga. He was a worthy champion of every good cause however insignificant it might be. His co-operation was sought after even by the leading men of his day because he would work sincerely, keeping himself in the background. He never harboured ill will against any person and uttered nothing but godspeed to every one whether he agreed with him or not. He was intensely national in outlook and deeply loved the motherland thereby setting an example of how a man could love his country. He held liberal and progressive views on social and political matters, and it is no exaggeration to say that he was far in advance of the times he was born in. Though he was never directly connected with politics, his spirit of true nationalism flowed in various other channels. He was intimately associated with Mrs Annie Besant and the Young Men's Indian Association of Madras. The patriot-poet Subrahmanya Bharati of Tamilnad was one of Alasinga's good friends. Poet Bharati has paid a glowing tribute to the memory of Alasinga, and has acknowledged that he had received immense help from Alasinga as occasions arose. Alasinga was not looked upon as a mere schoolmaster only. He was considered an authority on many subjects

on account of his ripe experience and deeply religious life. Once Poet Subrahmanya Bharati asked Sister Nivedita, 'There are in Madras no patriot leaders old enough to supervise and guide youths like us; what are we to do?' Sister Nivedita replied, 'Alasinga is there. If you have doubts regarding public affairs you may have them cleared by him.'

Though never above want, Alasinga remained self-satisfied with what little he earned himself. Love of money and power was foreign to his nature. Once a rich American disciple of Swami Vivekananda, sympathizing with Alasinga in his pecuniary difficulties, expressed to Sister Nivedita his intention of making a gift of a lakh of rupees to Alasinga so that he may be placed above want. When Alasinga was informed of this by Sister Nivedita, he thought for a while and replied to her thanking the gentleman for his generous offer but regretting his inability to accept the money. Later he told his friends that he was unwilling to sacrifice his independence for a little personal gain. Alasinga was a perfect product of Indian Vedantic thought. Though he had done nothing during his lifetime with a view to perpetuating his memory, his life's work will go down to history as the worthy contribution of those rare souls who have sincerely striven to serve mankind with no selfish motive in them. He carried the conviction of the grandeur of Indian philosophic thought in his daily life which was a practical application of the ideal of Karma Yoga as taught in the Bhagavad Gita. Alasinga has left a memory which is cherished with loving regard by every one of his numerous friends. None returned from him without being better for the visit. His premature death on the 11th May, 1909, at the age of 44, after a protracted illness, was a loss not only to those who knew him but also to the country as a whole. If the end had not come so early, the world would certainly have witnessed greater manifestation of the divinity that lay

enshrined in the person of Alasinga Perumal. Though living in the world as a householder, he was not of the world. Alasinga Perumal lived an exemplary life worthy of emulation by every Indian youth who is fired with the determination to 'Arise, Awake, and stop not till the goal is reached!'

There can be no better tribute to Alasinga Perumal's memory as a fitting conclusion to this life-sketch than the following description of him by Swami Vivekananda. (When Swami Vivekananda reached Madras on his way to the West for the second time, Alasinga travelled with the Swami from Madras to Colombo on board the ship with the intention of consulting the Swami about the *Brahmavadin* and the Madras work):

'... Alasinga, Editor, *Brahmavadin*, who is a Mysore brahmin of the Ramanuja sect, having a fondness for "Rasam" (pungent and sour *dal* soup), with shaven head and forehead overspread with the caste-mark of

the Tengale sect, has brought with him with great care, as his provision for the voyage, two bundles in one of which there is fried flattened rice, and in another popped rice and fried peas! His idea is to live upon these during the voyage to Ceylon, so that his caste may remain intact. Alasinga had been to Ceylon once before, at which his caste-people tried to put him into trouble, without success. . . . A Madrasi by birth, with his head shaven so as to leave a tuft in the centre, barefooted, and wearing the *dhoti*, he got into the first class; he was strolling now and then on the deck and when hungry, was chewing some of the popped rice and peas! . . . *However, one rarely finds men like our Alasinga in this world—one so unselfish, so hard-working, and devoted to his Guru, and such an obedient disciple is indeed very rare on earth.*' (Italics ours.) (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VII, pp. 315-16).

SHANKARA AND THE CHARACTER OF HIS GREATNESS *

BY SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

We have gathered here this evening to celebrate the birthday of Sri Shankaracharya. I do not propose to dwell at length on the life of Shankara except in so far as it helps to illustrate the main theme of my speech—the character of his greatness. As for that, the life of Shankara, in its merely outward bodily incident, may be told in a paragraph. But the quantity and quality of thought and achievement that he packed into the short span of his life of thirty-two years have earned for him a place among the world's immortals. Today our minds are staggered

at the thought that so much could be achieved by one single individual in so short a time. It speaks volumes for the burning motives within him moving him to work incessantly for human betterment and welfare.

Conscious of a great message that he was to deliver and the mission that he was to fulfil in this country, we find Shankara, while yet a boy, leaving his home with a firm resolve to bend all his energies and resources towards that end. If we are to appreciate his work we have to capture an understanding of the climate of thought in which he lived and functioned. He is a remarkable specimen of Indian humanity of those times. If we

* Report of a speech at the Shankara Jayanti Celebrations at the Ramakrishna Math, Karachi.

can get a close view of these two things—the environment and the personality—we shall be able to assess the type of work done by him and see whether we have any lesson to learn from his life and work. Possessed of extraordinary powers, this young boy, highly intelligent and deeply conscious of his mission, has worked wonders in the cultural and religious field of India.

We can know and appreciate better the great work that Shankara has done by a consideration of the background of contemporary historical conditions. At that time, in India, there were various conflicting systems of thought, and the condition that prevailed can be best characterized as nebulous. Politically as well as socially, philosophically as well as religiously, there was no central rallying point from which men could view the entire panorama of Indian thought and say, 'Here is the unity of India!' The several systems of thought were narrow and self-sufficient and had nothing to do with each other. That is why I said that our thought and religious life then were nebulous. The country was divided into various sects and creeds and they only paid lip allegiance to the Vedas; even this was thoughtless and uncritical. Politically, as it has happened so often in the history of India, and let us hope it will not happen in future, the country was divided into a congeries of little states. On the death of the last Buddhist sovereign, Harsha, who had brought about some sort of political unity of India by bringing these states under his empire, the political equilibrium was disturbed, and Hindustan again became divided into small states fighting with each other without any common loyalty to unite them. Thus politically, culturally, and religiously there was no central rallying point. It was at such a time that the mastermind of Shankara set to work to produce unity in the field of religion, culture, and philosophy, leaving the political aspect of it to be worked out by future generations. But even what

he had undertaken was a gigantic task for a single individual.

We find clearly from a study of Shankara's career that his purpose was to reduce to unity and harmony, under the hegemony of Vedanta, the multiplicity of conflicting thought systems, without destroying the integrity of the prevalent faiths. He could have brought everything to a dead dull level of uniformity; but he did not do that; for it militated against his idea of the richness of diversity in the world of faiths. Unity was his aim and not uniformity—unity in diversity. Diversity connotes richness. But diversity, when it destroys the central unifying cord, becomes chaotic and an enemy of all progress and well-being of a community. Therefore, the purpose of all the great thinkers in this country has been, and is, to preserve the variety and to subordinate it to an over-riding unity. The operation of this idea has created harmony out of all the diverse thoughts and faiths in this land instead of reducing everything to a single uniform faith at the point of the sword, as has happened in some other countries. It is a federation of faiths that Shankara established through a struggle based on reason and free discussion designed to appeal to the heart and mind of the people. As such, he fully deserved the title of 'Shanmatastha-panacharya' conferred on him by a grateful people. This is what we get out of the work of Shankara. There were myriads of faiths justifying themselves through appeals to varying shades of logic and revelation, but there was no loyalty to a fundamental principle which could be considered to be a mediating element between sect and sect and party and party. Shankara tried to introduce this mediating element between these and he found it in the great philosophy of Vedanta which proclaimed as Ultimate Reality a principle that is personal as well as impersonal, Immanent as well as transcendent.

In Shankara we find that intense sympathy, a desire to understand other points

of view, and a patient effort at critical appreciation of thoughts and things. With an iron resolve attuned to a deep affection and loyalty for the people and the culture of the country, and with a strong conviction that he was born to strengthen the one and enhance the other, we find him taking up this problem with a firm determination to produce cosmos out of chaos in the world of culture and in the mind of man in India. And a sustained struggle of a lifetime brings to India a measure of unity, harmony and order in religion, thought and culture which is a record unparalleled in the history of man.

There have been great men who have fought for great causes. All over the world there have been great heroes. In Mohammed Bin Kasim we have the example of a courageous youth possessing the heroic touch. There is something to be admired in a young lad of sixteen marching forth from his hometown in Arabia in quest of adventure and who conquers a province like Sind with the help of a few companions. We have again Napoleon who marched his army across the Alps and fought and defeated the Austrians in Italy. We have many such examples in our own history. But as contrasted with all these, stands the brilliant example of Shankara. A single individual, whose only companion was his vast intellect and deep sympathy, going the length and breadth of the country and conquering its mind and face is something unique in history—even in Indian history. He conquered both the intellects and the hearts of men. He established an empire of the spirit, of love and of lofty spiritual idealism. From the example of Shankara we can picture the greatness of a person who conquers the world in this manner. It is such type of conquerors that India, nay, the world, needs badly today.

The environment that obtained at the time of Shankara is of interest to us today. Those were times when men paid homage to intellect and character. Those were days

when men of culture and intellect and the rare ones with new ideas were respected all over the country. In a sense this has been so throughout our history. All fights were on the intellectual level, on the ideological level. When we think of those days we feel that we need today to recapture that idealism and learn again to settle our quarrels not by breaking heads but by discussion and argument. It speaks of the high culture of a society where problems are solved not by the sword but by discussion. It was this democratic attitude that prevailed at the time of Shankara. People were invited to hear the exposition of a new idea and the subsequent discussion saw the opposition of idea to idea and the meeting of argument by argument. We have, out of these clashes of ideas, the emergence of a rational philosophy. We find, at the time of Shankara, people's minds ever ready to capture new ideas; there was the intellectual curiosity to capture truth. This attitude and mood is the high water-mark of culture. We sadly miss that today. We try to impose an idea by the force of the sword and not by an appeal to the intellect and understanding. It is difficult to spread an idea in the latter way. But the former way—that of the sword—is unworthy of a cultured and civilized people—a way which, fortunately, has been rarely tried in India. Therefore most teachers and leaders in India have resorted to a third and easier way—an appeal to the emotions of the people. Their appeal was to the feeling and not to the understanding. This method we find very much popular among the political leaders today. At its best it no doubt produces fine loyalty and deep enthusiasm for a cause; but at its worst it expresses itself in fanaticism and mutual destruction. But the most enduring appeal is that which affects the intellect, the mind of a people, and which, through its inherent truth and beauty, gradually penetrates to the heart, producing deep convictions and rational faiths. This method has been tried by very few in the

world, and amongst those who have tried, and tried successfully, one is Shankara. Usually the masses can be appealed to through their emotions only. But Shankara is an exception to this general rule; though an intellectual of a rare order, he has appealed to both the heart and the intellect of men. We have in Shankara a great intellectual and at the same time one who commanded the emotional allegiance of the masses. Today in Hindustan if there is one teacher of the historic period who commands the allegiance of both the intellectuals and the masses it is Shankara. Yet most of his writings are very abstruse and cannot be easily understood. But his other writings consisting of soul-stirring devotional poems and praises are there. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, referring in deep appreciation to this striking aspect of Shankara's work, remarks:

Shankaracharya's record is a remarkable one. . . . The whole country is stirred up intellectually by Shankara's books and commentaries and arguments. Not only does he become the great leader of the Brahmin class, but he seems to catch the imagination of the masses. It is an unusual thing for a man to become a great leader chiefly because of his powerful intellect, and for such a person to impress himself on millions of people and on history. Great soldiers and conquerors seem to stand out in history. They become popular or are hated, and sometimes they mould history. Great religious leaders have moved millions and fired them with enthusiasm, but always this has been on the basis of faith. The emotions have been appealed to and have been touched.

It is difficult for an appeal to the mind and to the intellect to go far. Most people unfortunately do not think; they feel and act according to their feelings. Shankara's appeal was to the mind and intellect and to reason. It was not just the repetition of a dogma contained in an old book. Whether his argument was right or wrong is immaterial for the moment. What is interesting is his intellectual approach to religious problems, and even more so the success he gained in spite of this method of approach. This gives a glimpse into the mind of the ruling classes of those days. . . .

And the great success which met his campaign all over the country in a very short time also shows how intellectual and cultural currents travelled rapidly from one end of the country to another. (*Glimpses of World History*, Letter 44).

We are moved to admire the people of his time. One hundred and fifty years before Shankara, Huen Tsang came to India and he was struck by the intellectual curiosity of the people of this country, their eagerness for knowledge, readiness to accept new ideas and interest in education. Himself a great scholar, he came here to learn, to slake his thirst for intellectual and spiritual knowledge. That is the kind of atmosphere in which Shankara lived and worked, with nothing but his keen intellect and deep conviction to help him. Whenever such a personality appears in such a context we can expect to find the birth of a mighty ideology, capable of changing the thought and life patterns of a people.

Thus, within the course of a few years, we find this man travelling the length and breadth of India to fulfil his mission. He was a traveller in the true sense of the term, ever in contact with nature and man. He was ever on the move, preaching and teaching and uplifting the people wherever he went. Having no desires of his own to satisfy—in the words of the great teacher Sri Krishna, whose able commentator he becomes, and who said that having nothing to gain for himself he yet worked so that good may come to society in the same spirit we see Shankara, having nothing to gain for himself, going from place to place in order to uplift the people, to enlighten them. His teacher had asked him to go to Benares first to bring harmony in the world of thought where there was disharmony. He defeats his opponents in argument at Benares and establishes the greatness of the Vedanta philosophy on firm rational foundations. From there he goes all over the country on foot. What must be the loftiness and intensity of the impulse in the heart of this noble person which could impel him to go from place to place in a vast continent like India, removing the doubts of people, discussing patiently with them on all aspects of philosophy and faith and bringing order

out of the chaotic and nebulous condition of the thought and faith of the country.

This is the greatness of this teacher. He gathered up the scattered cultural and spiritual energies of the people and raised their voltage tenfold. Being a man of intense practicality and possessed of rare organizing abilities Shankara took steps to ensure the continuity of his great work by organizing ten Orders of Monks and establishing four monastic centres at four corners of India and entrusted them to the care of monks noted for their intellect, character, and vision. The location of these centres—at Sringeri in the south, at Puri in the east, at Dwarka in the west, and at Badrinath in the north—reveals his far-seeing genius as also his vision of the geographical and cultural unity of India.

But mark the deep humility of this great man who, though outshining his Guru, Govindapada, in learning as well as achievement, yet always proclaimed himself in all his work as his disciple. In this he typifies the natural humility of the wise man of his philosophy. This subscription runs thus: 'Srimat-paramahansa-parivrajakacharya-Govindabhagavadpujyapada-sishya.' He would give the first place to his Guru. Paramahansas are a class of sanyasis who are never attached to the world and have nothing to gain for themselves; when they go about as peripatetic teachers they are called Parivrajaka Acharyas. This is the beautiful expression to describe a person who goes about uplifting society. His detachment makes him a universal man—above the limitations of caste, creed, and sect. With his sympathy unobstructed by physical or mental barriers, he functions as the lover and benefactor of man. The Paramahansas are free to move about everywhere. They are neither men nor women;

neither Hindu nor Muslim; neither Christian nor Vaishnava; neither Shaiva nor Shakta. They are all and above all. They remain uncontaminated, ever purifying others. They are the equal and the free. For, in the memorable words of the Gita, 'They with their minds resting on Equality have conquered relative existence in this very life since Brahman is perfect and equal: therefore they indeed rest in Brahman' (V. 19).

Shankara never remained at a place for long; he went about as a peripatetic teacher; as a result of his ceaseless striving we have the unity of Hinduism and Hindu culture of which we are so proud today. But after 1000 years, today, we are face to face with a more complex situation. To bring unity not only in Hinduism but in India as a whole, in which all religions and cultures can find a harmonious blending, is a task that remains for us to accomplish today. This is the challenge of the present age to the genius of India. The work of synthesis which we have successfully carried on in every epoch of history is there to inspire us, and Shankara's method and manner are there as a guide for us. He was a teacher of unity. His spirit was universal. His mind was inclusive and not exclusive. He taught not merely toleration, but also dynamic acceptance. Herein lies the value of his work to us: 'Wherever there is emphasis on unity there is knowledge whose fruit is concord and happiness and beneficence; and wherever there is emphasis on diversity it is ignorance and results in conflict and misery,' says Shankara. We need badly today the message of that unity based on understanding and leading to concord.

CREATION AND ANNIHILATION

By R. C. CHATTERJEE, B.A., TATVANIDHI

Some of the first questions that must have arisen in thoughtful minds must have been, 'Why is this creation?' or 'How all these came to be?' Science, by which term we include a part of philosophy, tries to answer the former kind, and Art the latter. An ordinary man takes the world around him as something intrinsically real, and naturally concludes that the reality must have flowed from the reality of something existing before. But to the searching mind, things present a different aspect. As he sees that everything he perceives, is subject to change, and finally to decay, he tries to understand whether the reality that appears is really abiding, and his inquiry proceeds accordingly.

'Why was this creation?'—A great man was asked the question. His reply was that, since before the creation there was none by the side of the Creator to advise Him, the only means for getting the correct reply was to approach Him. But the pity is that as, according to the path followed by different individuals, one approaches Him, the vision of duality is gone. Thus, when face to face with Him, the question that there has been a creation outside the Creator does not arise; and the question thus remains everlasting. But it is curious that the greatest of the modern scientists are also advocating the same view that the ultimate reality behind the created world is beyond human comprehension. Also, that as the senses carry but imperfect information, the percepts that are formed carry the colouring from mind.

Another question is frequently asked: If the Creator is perfect and full in Himself, why should He feel the desire for the creation? To the Vaishnava, it is the Leela, or the unknowable play of the Playful. Don't ask for anything more, He does only what is His nature. In a nutshell, Vishnu

has made Himself manifest in the created universe which has no real existence but in Him.

Let us hear what the Westerner says. Aristotle noticed that 'in nature there are some things which are not produced by generation. are not subject to decay and endure for ever, while other things come into being and perish.' The Vaisheshikas of our land also hold that what is created must be subject to decay and what is the result of some combination is for the purpose of something other than the components. But what is that ever-enduring substance that is not born and endures for ever? The French scientist Ampere says, 'the substance of things is unknowable.' We are reminded here about the 'Mritsamanya' (earth-in-itself) of the Vedantists. *Kena Upanishad* (I. i. 6) says the same thing. Jones, the Astronomer Royal, says, 'It is impossible for the human mind to comprehend. . . . Man's efforts shall stop this side of the creation of matter.'

Every Purana gives some account of the process of creation and annihilation. In *Srimad Bhagavata* (II. ix. 32) Brahma says, 'Before the creation there was none of the material, spiritual, and causal entities. Only I was pervading everywhere. After the creation also, I am the same, and shall remain the same after the Pralaya also.' Then, we hear of the three Gunas, their equilibrium, and some mysterious disturbances in that state giving rise to the tendency towards creation. Here we notice this 'disturbance or agitation' at the beginning of all creation. But how and why that came by is impossible to explain except by assuming it to be the will of God.

In the Bible (Gen. I. i) we find a description of how the creation began. A beginning is postulated here, but nobody is there to

answer, what preceded this beginning? Sir Harold Spencer Jones says, 'Talmud, I understand, explains Gen. I as creation *ex nihilo*'. But the Hindu analogy of a spider creating its web out of itself—its own matter—is a far better explanation, for it is extremely difficult to comprehend creation out of nothing.

The description and explanation of the famous Nasadiya Sukta of the *Rig Veda* are sublime. It is not that the creation came out of anything that had an existence, nor that it came out of something that had none. This means that the mystery must not be divulged to the unprepared mind because of its incapacity to hold the truth.

It has been stated above that the Puranas say that some unknown cause led to the disturbance in the equilibrium of the Gunas. This must be understood with reference to the conditions prevailing after a cyclic Pralaya, for if we once admit of a beginning, we fall into a *regressus ad infinitum*. That cause has been given different names by different schools of Indian thought,—Maya, Adrishta, Prakriti etc.

Modern science also, as we shall see later, postulates some unknown cause that gave the directive towards the creation. One difference, however, between the Eastern and the Western concepts is striking: the former accepts the created universe as nothing intrinsically different from its creator.

Eddington states that in the beginning of creation, atoms, numbering none more or less than ten raised to the power seventy nine were evenly distributed over infinite space. He does not explain what preceded those atoms or how the electrons and protons etc. that make up an atom came together to form them. Science can give no answer to the question as to how through the magic of that great Magician those isolated atoms came together, formed matter, and lastly created the vast universe, the galactic systems, the solar system, the planets and last of all our

dear mother earth. It gives no answer also to the question about the manifestation of life in the inanimate.

Sir Isaac Newton was asked as to what should happen to the atoms, evenly distributed as described above. He is reported to have said that in that case, gravitation should cause condensation at the centre. This might create suns etc. But looking at the universe, the arrangement of the giant celestial bodies that burn in each of the seventy-three million galactic systems that are within the range of our telescopes, and many million beyond, we can never find any central body as Sir Isaac would have. Still, this answer does not explain the spin or the rotation that is an inseparable function with each of the bodies. Thus, the conclusion that suggests is that even if the atoms were there, there is no good ground to postulate that they had been evenly distributed.

Sir Harold asks, 'What preceded this uniform distribution of matter? How did it come into existence?' He adds his own answer, 'To assert that the universe may have existed in this initial stage for countless ages, is only shelving the question, or to adopt the picture suggested by Sir James Jeans of the "finger of God agitating ether" is merely a confession of our ignorance.' He says further, 'Physics and astronomy can lead us through the past to the beginning of the things and show that there must have been a creation, but of the creation itself, science can give no account'. It is the same Puranic idea. He goes a step further, 'there is no ground for supposing that matter (or energy, which is the same as matter) existed before this in an inert condition and was galvanized into activity at a certain instant. . . . It is simpler to postulate creation *ex nihilo*, an operation of the Divine Will to constitute Nature from nothingness.

A book entitled '*Cosmic Ray Thus Far*' has recently been published for the use of lay readers. A passage occurs there to the effect

that ray, or radiation, visible or invisible, is the manifestation of some energy. The countless luminous bodies that we see burning in the sky, those more that have already ceased to burn and still many more that lie far beyond outside the range of the largest telescope ever built,—all are radiating their energies. An infinitesimal fraction of those energies reaches our mother earth. Now, much of their radiation that does not reach any solid body in the sky, goes on for ever. Where to? Are they to be lost? We get sufficient proof from the readings of our instruments that every instant we are receiving radiation of a million dead universes (not merely bodies). But what about those that go on for ever? It is stated that when that radiation, in course of its limitless journey through space, comes across the ruins of some other dead universe, hydrogen is probably formed. It is interesting, though curious, to note that out of those radiations, which are not matter, matter came into existence. ‘. . . In some way, matter, which had not previously existed, came, or was brought into being.

‘. . . The radiation of the wavelength just mentioned (1.3×10^{-13} cm) might conceivably crystallize into electrons and protons, and finally form atoms. If we want a concrete picture of such a creation, we may think of the finger of God agitating ether.’ (Jeans). If this position is maintained, then it will no longer be difficult to postulate the creation of other elements in nature by some similar process. Here also we meet with a similarity with the Puranic idea that something external, or foreign, must have been there to galvanize non-matter into matter.

Jeans asserts that he is certain that in between the heavenly bodies there must be many more bodies just of the nature of our mother earth in which life is quite possible. The same view has been expressed by Sir Harold recently in some of his lectures in connection with the last Indian Science Congress at New Delhi. Now, therefore, it will be quite safe to conclude that they may

be the Lokas with life and light about which we read in our Puranas.

From our foregoing discussions we gather that beginning with some unknown cause disturbing the original equilibrium, creation started. Last of all we come to bodies sufficiently cool for the production of vegetation and life. But how did life originate? The Evolution theory can suggest the subsequent general development of the species, but it does not explain how the inanimate was animated for the first time. The last conclusion is that it is only from the living that life can follow.

‘The Vedanta boldly asserts that life is latent even in what we call inorganic substance. There is no such thing as dead matter, says the Vedantist; the whole universe is one life, is one thought, is Brahman.

‘All honour, however, to our Dr Bose for the unique service he has rendered to modern science by demonstrating the Unity of life. A deep sense of awe is evoked in us when we think that it was reserved for an Indian to substantiate by experimental methods the bold assertion of our hoary forefathers of venerable antiquity that life is latent in all things.’

This fits in with what is asserted in the *Kena Upanishad* (III. iii) and *Mundaka Upanishad* (II. i. 3) that life is the outcome of Brahman.

What we would like to know is whether it originated as a result of still another amazing accident or succession of coincidences, or whether it is the normal event of inanimate matter to produce life in due course when the physical environment is suitable. . .

Is it the final climax towards which the whole creation moves, for which the millions of million years of transformation of matter in the uninhabited stars and nebulae and of the waste of radiation in the desert space have only been an incredibly extravagant preparation? Or, is it a mere accidental and, possibly, quite unimportant bye-product of natural processes which have some other and a more stupendous end in view? Or, must we regard it as something of the nature of a disease which affects matter in its old age when it has lost its high temperature and capacity for

generating radiation with which younger and more vigorous matter would at once destroy life? Or, throwing humility aside, shall we venture to imagine that it is the only reality which creates, instead of being created by, the colossal masses of the stars and nebula.

The last suggestion here has close affinity with the sense of the verse (II. 5) of the *Prashna Upanishad*: This life manifests itself as fire, sun, cloud, Indra etc. meaning thereby that Prana in its kinetic forms has manifested itself in all the created universe.

Astronomy tells us that at the present time all the heavenly bodies are running away from each other at terrific speeds. From this we can try to form a very hazy idea about the vastness of space. Again, science has come to the conclusion that at a time, this 'bubble will burst' and the bodies will again tend to come nearer and nearer. In *Jnana Yoga*, Swami Vivekananda also expressed this same idea, curious though it may have sounded fifty years ago. Thus the Hindu idea about the expansion and contraction of the universe is accepted by modern science.

We get also an idea that the integration and the opposite process are playing their parts simultaneously in nature. Thus, science does not foresee a total annihilation. While breaking up is going on in one region, creation goes on in another. This is also exactly what Swami Vivekananda stated in his *Jnana Yoga*.

As regards the idea of Pralaya (Annihilation) there is much in common between the theory advanced by modern science and what we gather from the Hindu scriptures. While the Hindu believes that our mother earth will one day (fortunately too far from now) be burnt up and get dissolved into finer primordial subtle elements, science believes the same to be the fate of all creation that has been or will be. Mother earth has the greatest fear from its creator, sun, turning into a Nova and swallowing her up.

Mr H. G. Wells says that 'Our universe

is not merely bankrupt, there remains no dividend at all: it is simply liquidated; it is going clean out of existence leaving not a wreck behind.' He arrives at this conclusion at the sight of events in human history and the growth of the human mind to the opposite direction. Science does not take such a defeatist view.

We have tried to see above that creation is broken up and is dissipated into subtle radiation, from that radiation also creation evolves. Jones says 'We need not think of any beginning or ending of such a universe.' Further, 'It is destined to undergo periodic rejuvenation and live its life over and over again.' But one wonders what may be the purpose of playing the same music over the same tune time after time.

Jeans tries to visualize time when all will be annihilated according to the theory of the running down of the universe. This may correspond to our conception of a cyclic Pralaya when Sri Krishna will gather unto Him all creation and sleep on his bed of Shesha on the Ocean of time. What next? Well, the same story over again. Either owing to His Tapasya, or Kama or Eekshana or Kala, Hiranyagarbha is born: Then follows the creation as ever before. The plan is unfolding on one side as it is being wound up on another.

Thus, we are coming to the conclusion. We cannot know through what process and from what this creation came into being. '... it implies a growing conviction that the ultimate realities of the universe are at present quite beyond the reach of science, and may be,—and probably are,—for ever beyond the comprehension of human minds.' (Jeans). Perhaps it is as it must be. Perhaps all creation is dancing to a tune of the Magician through the six stages of becoming, existing, growing, degenerating, decaying, and destroying in a perfect cyclic order, as it is destined to do for all time. The sum total of creation is the same for all time. (Jeans says that the total weight of the rarified fine matter

spread all through the universe is equal to the total weight of the created bodies). With the crushing load of centuries of scientific research, the West or East has not come near the famous proclamation of the Nasadiya Sukta of the *Rig Veda*.

'From what material cause this created universe has come into existence, that very self-same One might hold it, or maybe does not hold it. The Ultimate Master beyond, who is established in self-effulgence, may perhaps know or perhaps not, the how and why of it.' Perhaps the hint here is that as soon as one postulates one's knowledge of any other thing, both become separate entities, both circumscribed, or in other

words, finite. This is not the nature of the creation or the creator, both permeating through each other in a way that is not comprehensible.

He, who, out of His fullness, or joy, first thought that He would manifest Himself into many, wills millions of universes into existence or annihilation without any reason whatsoever, is going on with His play like this for all time. It is perhaps presumptuous on our part, like the salt doll that went to measure the depth of the ocean, to try to decipher the secrets of the created universe, with the limited power of our senses and mind.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

TO OUR READERS

Swami Premananda, one of the 'purest men', in course of conversations discusses the *Ideal of Belur Math* which, unlike other Maths or universities, strives to build and perfect the character of the youth. . . . The Editorial discusses some cogent points relating to the varying circumstances under which man feels the need for God and thereby removes some common misconceptions about man's relation to God. . . . A Wanderer, himself *One Good Hindu*, narrates his revealing experiences with *One Good Mohammedan* who sincerely endeavoured to follow the teachings of the Prophet. . . . In *Ramakrishna, the Hope of the Modern World*, Sri B. K. Patel, Commissioner of Bombay Municipality, emphasizes that a spiritual basis of life is the need of the hour. . . . Sri M. G. Srinivasan, grandson of *Sri Alasinga Perumal*, gives a lucid and comprehensive pen-picture of the life and work of Alasinga, a staunch disciple of Swami Vivekananda and Editor of the *Brahmavadin*, who was the leading

figure among the Swami's followers in South India. . . . *Shankara*, who has tackled the problem of unity with success, due to his great sympathy and firm determination, and evolved a cosmos out of chaos in the world of cultures and in the mind of men, is an example for the chaotic world of today to emulate. . . . Sri Chatterji examines some of the ancient Indian theories on *Creation and Annihilation*, and compares them with their modern counterpart.

AGGRESSIVE HINDUISM

In a previous issue we had given some excerpts from the Koran to show that it too, like all other true religions, only preaches and fosters love and brotherhood. Some doubt the above sentiments on the ground that the Koran often inculcates fanaticism and bigotry and enjoins its adherents to kill all *kafirs* as a sure way to heaven. We certainly cannot accept such an interpretation of the Koran, though, indeed, later convention and religious zeal of some followers might

have vitiated the holy teachings of that sacred book. In every religion we find such unhappy words, not so much as a religious injunction, but as a remnant of the historical evolution in socialization of religion, especially when it falls into the hands of the unscrupulous and the ambitious, rather than the pious and the religious. But that should in no way mar the intrinsic excellence of a religion. It is interesting to note here the remarks of Gandhiji on this word *kafir*. The *Hindusthan Standard* reports of a prayer meeting speech of Gandhiji thus:

A friend had sent him (Gandhiji) literature to prove that the Koran preached killing of *kafirs* i. e. non-believers. He had been in the midst of Muslims all his life. No one had ever suggested that he should be killed as a *kafir*. He had been in the midst of Moulvis in Noakhali. Learned Muslims had told him that the meaning of the particular verse of the Koran was that God would take to account the so-called nonbelievers. But that He would do to the Mussalmans also. He judges men by their deeds and not by their words. There was mention of terrible punishments in the *Bhagavat*, *Manusmriti*, and the Vedas. Yet the central teaching of Hindu religions was 'mercy or kindness is the essence of all religions.'

But even supposing that the Koran enjoins its followers to kill or convert all *kafirs*, is it meet for us too to despise them? We regulate our actions by referring to the Hindu scriptures and not to any other. It is most unreasonable, and certainly irreligious, to guide our actions by others' behaviour. On the other hand the more a man is degraded the better he deserves our sympathy. The Gita says, 'The learned man is he who sees a Brahmin and a Chandala with equal sight.' Any ordinary man can return the love that he gets. It is the greatness of Hindu religion to ask us to love those who hate us.

The degradation of Hinduism began with such exclusiveness and hatred of others who do not conform with our views. As Swami Vivekananda says, Hinduism began to disintegrate the moment it coined the word 'Mleccha'. Did not Hinduism absorb and assimilate hundreds of nomads and barbarian races, those who crossed our borders with

sword and fire, and destroyed hundreds of our places of worship? Even them we had fraternized, civilized, and slowly absorbed into our body politic. Compared to such, the Mussalmans do not present a greater problem. It is due to our own weakness—weakness through misunderstanding and misinterpreting Hinduism—that we failed to absorb the Muslims too. For many generations Hindus have been as 'men walking in dream, without manhood, without power to react freely against conditions, without even common sense.' Any one who wanted to preserve the energy of the Hindu race will at once admit that this hatred and suspicion should be eradicated and the way for fraternization paved. That is the 'true Hinduism that made men *work*, and not dream.'

Yet this exclusiveness, this grotesque docility, is the present condition of Hindu culture and it appears likely to remain so unless the Indian mind can deliberately discipline itself to the historic point of view. In the beginning of this century, Sister Nivedita had exhorted the Hindus:

Aggression is to be the dominant characteristic of the India that is today in schools and class-rooms—aggression and the thought and ideals of aggression. Instead of passivity, activity; for the standard of weakness, the standard of strength; in place of steadily-yielding defence, the ringing cheer of invading host. Merely to change the attitude of the mind in this way is already to accomplish a revolution.

It is through such training that the Western races have succeeded in conquering the whole world. We do not find a single Asian race strong or dominating. It is not, as some wish to imagine, due to the Asian's sense of equality or independence; it is more to his weakness, timidity, docility, and incapacity to unite. Writes Sister Nivedita:

From the time that a Western child steps out of the nursery, it is not quietness, docility, resignation, and obedience that his teachers and guardian strive to foster in him, so much as strength, initiative, sense of responsibility, and power of rebellion. Temper and self-will are regarded by Western educators as a very precious power, which must by no means be crushed

or destroyed, though they must undoubtedly be disciplined and subordinated to impersonal ends.

Let us then begin to reorient our outlook. We are not to look to Hinduism as the preserver of Hindu customs, but as the creator of Hindu character. We are, then, no more oppressed with jealousy or fear, when we notice encroachments on our religious rights. The very idea of encroachment has ceased, for our work is not now to protect ourselves, but to convert others.

Point by point we are determined not merely to keep what we had but to win what we never had before. The question is no longer of other people's attitude to us, but rather, of what we think of them. It is not how much we kept, but how much have we annexed. We cannot afford now to lose, because we are sworn to carry the battle far beyond our remotest frontiers. We no longer dream of submission, because struggle itself has become only the first step towards a distant victory to be won.

And the energy and strength will be forthcoming with the very thought of it. The trouble hitherto has been that the people were as passive to modern culture as to ancient. Spirituality is the only irresistible force that can conquer the world on surer and firmer foundations. Character is spirituality. Defeat and laziness are not renunciation. It means that conquest may be the highest form of Sanyasa. In short, Hinduism is to become aggressive, and that it 'calls all that is noble, all that is lovely, all that is strenuous and heroic amongst us, to a battle-field on which the bugles of retreat shall no more be heard.' What the time demands of us is that we should realize, translate into action, our national aspiration—our whole past shall be made a part of the world's life.

In the words of Sister Nivedita :

Realizing that life is a struggle we are now determined that our wrestling with the powers that are against us shall enable us to contribute to make adaptations from it. Our part henceforth is active and not passive. The indianizing of India, the organizing of our national thought, the laying out of our line of march, all this

is to be done by us, not by others on our behalf. We accept no more programmes. Henceforth are we become the makers of programmes. . . .

At each step, then, the conquest must be twofold. On this side something to be added to the world's knowledge, and on that, an utterance to be given for the first time, for India to herself. This is the battle that opens before the present generation. On our fighting a good fight, the very existence, it may be, of the next depends. Our national life is become, perforce, a national assault. As yet the very outworks of the besieged city are almost unstormed. Herewith, then, let us sound the charge. Sons of the Indian past, do you fear to sleep at nightfall on your shields? On, on, in the name of a new spirituality, to command the treasures of the modern world! On, on, soldiers of the Indian Motherland, seize ye the battlements and penetrate to the citadel. Place garrison and watch within the hard-won towers, or fall, that others may climb on your dead bodies, to the height ye strove to win.

'Strong as the thunderbolt, austere as Brahmacharya, great-hearted and selfless, such should be the Sanyasin who has taken the service of others as his Sanyas, and not less than this should be the son of a militant Hinduism.'

RELIGION AND SOCIETY

We hear some European scholars asking: If the Hindu philosophy is so much developed and soars high where distinctions of any sort do not appear but the feeling of Oneness, why then the Hindu is so absurd in his social life—with untouchability, with idol worship, with the stigma on women? What purpose will it serve in professing a philosophy which cannot be translated into everyday life? Is not the Hindu, then, a mere dreamer?

The Gita, which synthesizes the Hindu philosophy in a simple way and presents directly its teachings, calls such people 'Mithyacharis'—and on that test majority of the Hindus today have become Mithyacharis—hypocrites. To them religion means superstitions and dogmas—and confined itself to the cooking pots, as Swami Vivekananda says.

When even intellectual stalwarts of

unquestionable integrity preach and defend reactionary and superstitious trends, then it is time to examine what is passing under the trade-mark of religion. Indeed, it is high time that one should stop this aimless drift and pause to self-examine sternly and rigorously whether he is following the true religious life or some meaningless outworn usages. 'In the majority of cases,' writes Sri Kaliaana Swami in the *Modern Review*, 'such a stern self-review is shirked and persons under the grip of some traditional religion or other, allow their lives to drift under the sway of time-honoured and accustomed ways, irrespective of the conditions and reactions of the times in which they live.'

He continues :

In his path towards perfection man is seeking the help of various agencies, the chief among which is religion in some form or other. But it may be asserted . . . that only such a religion would be helpful which has the dynamic capacity to influence life to such an extent as to transform it to a higher and a better state, while the other religions would lead to a state of spiritual stagnation, by insisting on an unquestioning submission to meaningless and outworn usages. . . . The question of progress or decadence in matters spiritual or social never enters into their heads or hearts, and many a gross and monstrous atrocity is allowed to be perpetrated in the name of religion through their lives or the lives of those who are under their influence. Not only no question of progress arises in such cases but there is actual retrogression or decay. . . . When intellectual convictions do not keep pace with the practical work-a-day lives of individuals, ill-balanced and contradictory lives would result and they in no sense can be counted among those which are spiritually and socially progressive.

As Swami Vivekananda says, the difference between man and man, between animal and man, is not in kind but in degrees only. The whole creation belongs to one kingdom, representing various stages of development. The whole purport of Hindu social system is to accommodate all these diverse stages of people in its body politic, and help slowly in elevating and raising them to the position of the highest. It is this acceptance of the spiritual principle that is translated in the society as caste system, which unfortunately

—due to our lack of understanding the underlying principle—has degraded the society than elevating it. Such is the progress envisaged in the Gita 'from the lower to the higher values of life, where all that separates man from man is eschewed and humanity as a whole is viewed as equal in the eye of God. Here also the passing of man from caste and its inequalities and differentiations to a state of castelessness which stands for human brotherhood bereft of all distinctions of race, colour, creed, and country is envisaged in the Gita.' As Prof D. S. Sharma puts it, 'With us progress is the process of the perfection of Dharma. And the perfection of Dharma implies both the perfection of the individual and the perfection of society. In fact we cannot have the one without the other.'

To quote Sri Swami again :

True progress from a social point of view should consist subjectively of the recognition of the equality of all human beings as members of God's household and objectively, of the passage from caste to castelessness or human brotherhood. . . . Hence it is time that our learned and pious men, Pundits and philosophers, critics and commentators of scriptures, of whom our country is so full, had examined themselves by this touchstone of what genuine progress is or ought to be, and dislodge themselves from the fools' paradise in which they love to dwell. It is this divorce between their professions and practice—between their liberal expositions of spiritual truths and their conservative methods of life, bristling with all sorts of crude and primitive practices, taboos, exclusions, and complexes—that is the bane of our country and it is this that in a great measure accounts for its degraded condition.

And criticizing the 'hypocrites' who pass for religious men in our country today, Sir Radhakrishnan writes :

The truly religious man will have little sympathy with those who mistake religion for ritualism and assume that the existing social institutions are ordained by God. . . . If the custodians of religion with their cast-iron conservatism regard the present order with its inequalities as organized by religion, no wonder the critics complain about the futility of religion. Those religious men who, stiff with spiritual pride, quote scriptures in defence of the inequalities of caste and the horror of untouchability, show themselves to be woefully lacking in the spirit of religion.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

HANUMAN. BY SWAMI MAITHILYANANDA. *Published by Brindaban Dhar & Sons Ltd., Ashutosh Library, 3/8 Johnson Road, Dacca. Pp. 83. Price Re. 1-4.*

It was the desire of Swami Vivekananda that the people of India should be imbued with the ideals of continence, self-sacrifice, heroism, and devotion—so prominent in Hanuman. Specially in these days when Hinduism is facing a crisis, for want of the above qualities, this book is a reminder and an impetus to the youths on whom lies the great responsibility of steering the boat of Hinduism round to greatness.

This book, which appeared as a series of articles, deals first with the historicity of Hanuman, and then the personal traits and character of the great hero. The ancient epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* portray the Indian ideals of morality, social life, and civilization and presents many majestic and ideal characters. 'Hanuman illustrates the Indian ideal of a national hero and testifies to the fact that there cannot be true heroism unless there is a sound basis of spirituality behind.'

In presenting Hanuman in his various capacities of counsellor, orator, philosopher, prime minister, general, envoy, and ambassador, the author shows that the most prominent character of Hanuman which dominates over all others is his devotion to his master. In this he excels and he is regarded as one of the greatest devotees in the religious literature of India, and stands today for all that is great in discipleship. The historicity or otherwise of the character is immaterial. Hanuman has influenced in moulding the characters of the young and old of Hindustan from the very conception of this ideal to this present day.

Today it should be our endeavour to make the character of Mahavir our Ishta—perfect obedience to the leader and unflinching courage in action. That is the only way to reawaken the latent energy that lies dormant in each of us. We hope that this small book will inspire courage and self-reliance in all and mould the life of every one after the life of this great hero.

THE GREAT DAUGHTER OF INDIA. BY PROF. ABDUL MAJID KHAN. *Published by Indian Printing Works, Kacheri Road, Lahore. Pp. 266. Rs 5-8.*

A great son of India said that "With five hundred men the conquest of India might take fifty years: with as many women, not more than a few weeks." It is a happy sign that women are now fighting side by side with men for the cause of the country. Mrs (Vijayalakshmi) Pandit is one of those who have earned for themselves a place in the heart of India by their unique service, sacrifice, and sufferings. She has served

the country in different roles. She is a front-rank member of the Indian National Congress. She is one of the leaders of the Women's movement in India. She was the first woman minister in India, and she was a great success. She was taken to the Cabinet for second time. Her activities during the recent visit to America as the 'unofficial ambassador' of India elicited admiration from one and all. She succeeded in removing many misconceptions about India in America—the result of organized anti-Indian propaganda in that country. It is said that as many as 10,000 persons are engaged in America to do the work of slandering India. Mrs Pandit's service in counteracting that influence was invaluable. Her present appointment as India's Ambassador to the Soviet Union is a distinct recognition of her great ability.

The present book, as the author says, is an appreciative study of Mrs Pandit and her ideas in the background of the Nehru family's heroic struggle for the political emancipation of India. The book is a timely publication and very interesting. But at places one feels that the style of writing is such that it might be suitable for journalism but not for any serious literature. It is to be regretted that the book has been very carelessly printed and some of the illustrations mar the beauty rather than increase the value of the book.

CULTURAL FELLOWSHIP OF BENGAL. BY SISIR KUMAR MAITRA. *Published by the Culture Publishers, 63 College Street, Calcutta. Pp. 105. Price Rs 2-4.*

This is perhaps the first to give a readable account of the cultural achievements of the Bengali race. The account given by him is so comprehensive and comparative that it may be profitably read as an interesting chapter of India's cultural history. In order to trace the distinctive spirit of Bengali culture he has made patient investigation into the traditions and customs, religious practices and folk-lore current among the people. He has clearly shown how Bengali culture from the very dawn of its history has been evolving a marvellous synthesis through an ever-enlarging process.

The author points out that Bengal's creative soul has developed a cultural fellowship that distinguishes her from the rest of India and at the same time entitles her to uphold a unique specimen of India's cultural future. It should be remembered in this connection that Bengali culture is a part and parcel of Indian culture and what the country's culture as a whole would be in future has already been evolved in Bengal. The author presents not only a bright picture of Bengal's present culture but also makes noteworthy references to her glorious past. He mentions that Bengali culture exercised a potent

influence in Nepal, Burma, Ceylon and even Japan. There are certain inscriptions in Bengali characters in the temples at Nara and Horiyuji in Japan; and even today the Buddhist priests of Horiyuji temple write their scriptures in old Bengali script, though this alone will not prove the influence of Bengal in Japan, since old Bengali was more or less the same as the Buddhist language Pali. A wealth of such historical informations has endowed this unassuming volume with a worth that entitles it to be an important addition to the meagre literature on Indian culture.

S. J.

BENGALI

JYOTIRGAMAYA. BY PHALGUNI MUKHOPADHYAYA.

Published by Jyoti Prakashalaya, 206, Cornwallis Street, Calcutta. Pp. 284. Price Rs 4.

It is an attempt to teach philosophy and theology through the attractive garb of novel. The book impresses me most because it is a clear exposition of the doctrine of Karma. It shows how our desires, good or bad, are the greatest obstacles to our attaining real peace. It preaches complete submission to the will of God and dedication of all our actions and the fruits of actions to Him. The language of the author is simple, but as a novel it has no absorbing interest. The book fails to render the dry facts of philosophy into the interesting and enchanting language of the poet.

H. P. CHAKRAVARTY

NEWS AND REPORTS

SWAMI VIPULANANDA

It is with the deepest sorrow that we record the passing away of Swami Vipulananda in the early hours of the 20th July 1947 at Colombo. The Swami joined the Ramakrishna order in 1922 and became a disciple of Srimat Swami Shivanandaji, the Second President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

Under the Ramakrishna Mission he started a number of schools in Ceylon and worked for some time as their General Manager. For some years he was Editor of the English magazine *Vedanta Kesari* and the Tamil magazine *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*, both published from Ramakrishna Math, Madras. From January 1940 to December 1941 he was Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*. After this he was a member of the Working Committee of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission at their Belur Headquarters.

The Swami was an erudite Tamil scholar and as such was highly respected throughout Tamilnad. He was the author of some books in that language including a book on South Indian music in which subject he had a deep and practical interest. In university circles he was greatly esteemed. He was Professor of Tamil and Dean of Oriental Studies in the Annamalai University in its early years. And in the closing years of his life he was Professor of Tamil in the Ceylon University.

The Swami had been ailing for some time and was 55 years old at the time of his passing away. His body was taken to Kalladi Uppodai where it was interred in the compound of the school built by himself.

May his soul rest in peace!

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION HOME OF SERVICE, BENARES

REPORT FOR 1945

The fifty-fifth annual report shows the following activities of the Home:

1. *Indoor Work*: The most important of the indoor work was the general hospital, where out of 2129 cases admitted 1792 were cured, 7 relieved, 86 discharged otherwise, 131 died, and 113 remained under treatment at the end of the year. The total number of surgical cases was 328 of which 238 were major cases. Under the Lachmi Narayan Trust 11 paralytic cases were treated, and under the Chandri Bibi Dharmasala Fund 403 men and women were given food and shelter. Besides poor and invalids were also helped.

2. *Outdoor Work*: The total number of patients treated in the outdoor dispensary was 90,869 new and 2,12,746 repeated cases. The total surgical cases came to 1,324. 167 helpless men and women of respectable families received monthly relief, and 720 persons were given occasional help. During the Bengal Famine the poor who migrated to Benares were helped with rice, blanket, medicine, etc.

The total income under different funds was Rs 88,701-11-3, and total expenditure Rs 88,643-8-7.

Some of the needs of the Home are (1) Endowments for beds in the Indoor Hospital and the Invalid Homes; (2) Beddings and clothing; (3) A building for the outdoor dispensary, the estimated cost is Rs 40,000; (4) Septic surgical ward, estimated cost is Rs 40,000; and (5) General Fund of the Home.

All contributions will be received and acknowledged by the Hon. Asst. Secretary.

TO THE HINDUS IN EASTERN PAKISTAN AND WEST BENGAL

Hardly have the Hindus got over the shocks of Noakhali when they are again faced with what appears for the time being to be nothing short of a tragedy. The Hindus of East Bengal and the Surma Valley of Assam find themselves politically cut off from their natural moorings. And the fear has come to their hearts that legal, economic, cultural, social, moral and religious bonds, too, will similarly be rent asunder. The untoward incidents that are still rampant without any check do not augur well.

Moved as we are by these regrettable events, we cannot but warn our co-religionists in Eastern Pakistan against being panicky. A bad situation requires cool thinking and firm action. In the name of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and all that is great in our ancient religion, we implore our brothers in Pakistan not to lose heart in this hour of trial. They must assert themselves all the more and hold their ground with confidence and determination. Hinduism cannot die. As Sri Ramakrishna said, "The Hindu religion alone is the Sanatana Dharma. . . . It has always existed and will always exist." We are proud of Hinduism not only because we are Hindus, but also because Hinduism has in it some intrinsic and unique values which the world cannot afford to lose. Because of this inner strength Hinduism defied the cataclysms of the past, and it will survive the tragedies of the future. Here are the prophetic words of Swami Vivekananda: "Believe, believe, the decree has gone forth, the fiat of the Lord has gone forth—India must rise . . . Rejoice! The flood of spirituality has risen. I see it is rolling over the land resistless, boundless, all-absorbing."

In fact, the situation cannot be hopeless unless we make it so. In the past, smaller, nay, microscopic minorities not only protected their own, but even made history. Mere number is not the decisive factor. The more cogent factor is that dynamic spiritual force which can revitalise all social forms. In the words of Swamiji, "What we want are energy, love of independence, spirit of self-reliance, immovable fortitude, dexterity in action, bond of unity of purpose and thirst for improvement."

With this moral background the Pakistan Hindus should turn to their concrete problems. We are aware that many people are thinking of leaving their hearths and homes. It is natural that under present unsettled conditions men in isolated pockets should try to protect their children and the honour of their women by moving to safer places like district or sub-divisional towns. It is also reasonable and necessary to transfer surplus cash and valuables from rural areas to reliable banks in safer regions. But there can be no wholesale exodus. For movement on such a gigantic scale involving millions of people is beyond the competence of the mightiest Government. Besides, such a defeatist mentality will carry the Hindus nowhere. On the contrary, it will spell disaster. We also deprecate the partial migration of the upper ten thousand; for that will make the poorer people all the more helpless and expose them to exploitation and conversion. Moreover, it is cowardly.

The more reasonable method is to reorganise Hindu society and knit it into a compact whole, so that the Hindus may face the situation effectively. For this we have to uproot many social excrescences such as untouchability, caste privileges and social exclusiveness.

The services of priests as also barbers and washermen, for instance, should be available to all Hindus. Public temples, tanks, educational and other Hindu cultural and religious institutions should be thrown open to all Hindus. Restrictions about domestic servants on grounds of caste should be considerably relaxed. We should now judge the worth of a man not by his birth, but by his character and conduct.

The women of East Bengal must be more heroic than they have hitherto been. They should take all possible means in their power to defend their honour. Resistance under all circumstances shall be their watchword. They should behave in such a way that assailants will find it too dangerous to molest them.

We remind the Hindus of East Bengal that no Hindu will ever lose his or her religion by the mere fact of forced conversion, eating of prohibited food, abduction, etc., through the violence of miscreants. Such victims should be forthwith taken back into the fold and treated with greater respect.

Then the Pakistan Hindus must be self-reliant. The rest of the Hindu world will not forget them; rather it will help them. Nevertheless, the Pakistan Hindus must have their own constructive programmes. There are enough persons of light and leading among them for this. It will not do to depend entirely on others. Rather East Bengal Hindus should give the lead to the rest.

And we need not totally lose faith in the majority community from the very beginning. For the good of the State, if not for any other reason, Pakistan, faced with the task of running a Government, will have to conciliate such a big and influential minority as the Hindus. Besides, two communities whose lives interpenetrate at every turn, cannot remain inimical for a great length of time. There is also the moral factor to be considered. We believe that through the force of circumstances sense will soon return to the misguided fanatics, and they will behave more like rational beings. The moral, cultural and spiritual strength of the Hindus will also gradually influence the sister community. The leaders of Pakistan are awaking to the gravity of the situation.

So Pakistan Hindus should make a combined effort to maintain their legitimate rights. They cannot die so long as they are determined to live as Hindus without yielding to threat or enticement, and without causing internal disruption or unnecessary aggression.

To the Hindus of West Bengal we appeal in the name of the common heritage and ties of love that exist between the two halves. The strong affinity once unsettled a settled fact; and once again East Bengal must be made to realise that West Bengal has not left it in the lurch. The underlying unity must assert itself in various forms of monetary succour, protective help and spiritual encouragement. In fact, West Bengal must ever act as an elder brother to a younger.

Belur Math (Howrah)

26 July 1947

SWAMI MADHAVANANDA

General Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission