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Cover :

*Reflections of Mounts Shwetwana, Thailu,
Sudarsan in a lake in Tapovan ground, Central
Himalayas.*

Courtesy: Reliable Calendar Co.

Prabuddha Bharata

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No. 10

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

SRI RAMAKRISHNA REMINISCES

'I learnt Vedanta from Nangta¹: "Brahman alone is real; the world is illusory." The magician performs his magic. He produces a mango-tree which even bears mangoes. But this is all sleight of hand. The magician alone is real.'

*

'The formless God is real, and equally real is God with form. Nangta used to instruct me about the nature of Satchidananda Brahman. He would say that It is like an infinite ocean—water everywhere, to the right, left, above, and below. Water enveloped in water. It is the Water of the Great Cause, motionless. Waves spring up when It becomes active. Its activities are creation, preservation, and destruction.

'Again, he used to say that Brahman is where reason comes to a stop. There is the instance of camphor. Nothing remains after it is burnt—not even a trace of ash.'

*

'Nangta used to say, "The world exists in mind alone and disappears in mind alone." But as long as "I-consciousness" exists, one should assume the servant-and-master relationship with God.'

*

'Nangta told the story of the tigress and the herd of goats. Once a tigress attacked a herd of goats. A hunter saw her from a distance and killed her. The tigress was pregnant and gave birth to a cub as she expired. The cub began to grow in the company of the goats. At first its was nursed by the she-goats, and later on, as it grew bigger, it began to eat grass and bleat like the goats. Gradually the cub became a big tiger; but still it ate grass and bleated. When attacked by other animals, it would run away, like the goats. One day a fierce-looking tiger attacked the herd. It was amazed to see a tiger in the herd eating grass and running away with the goats at its approach. It left the goats and caught hold of the grass-eating tiger, which began to bleat and tried to run away. But the fierce tiger dragged it to the water and said: "Now look at your

¹ Nangta: (lit., the Naked One), the name by which Sri Ramakrishna referred to Totapuri, the sannyasi who initiated him into monastic life and who went about naked. Because of his great reverence for his guru, Sri Ramakrishna rarely referred to him by name.

face in the water. You see, you have the pot-face of a tiger ; it is exactly like mine." Next it pressed a piece of meat into its mouth. At first the grass-eating tiger refused to eat the meat. Then it got the taste of the meat and relished it. At last the fierce tiger said to the grass-eater : "What a disgrace ! You lived with the goats and ate grass like them !" And the other was really ashamed of itself.'

*

'Nangta used to say that a brass pot must be polished every day ; otherwise it gets stained. One should constantly live in the company of holy men.'

'Nangta used to tell me how a jnani meditates ; everywhere is water, all the regions above and below are filled with water ; man, like a fish, is swimming joyously in that water. In real meditation you will actually see all this.'

'Nangta used to say that the mind merges in the buddhi, and the buddhi in Bodha, Consciousness.'

*

'Nangta used to teach me thus : What you get by repeating the word "Gita" ten times is the essence of the book. In other words, if you repeat "Gita" ten times it is reversed into "tagi", which indicates renunciation.'

*

'It is very troublesome to possess occult powers, Nangta taught me this by a story. A man who had acquired occult powers was sitting on the seashore when a storm arose. It caused him great discomfort ; so he said, "Let the storm stop". His words could not remain unfulfilled. At that moment a ship was going full sail before the wind. When the storm ceased abruptly the ship capsized and sank. The passengers perished and the sin of causing their death fell to the man. And because of that sin he lost his occult powers and went to hell.'

*

'Once I sang for Nangta at the Panchavati : "To arms ! O man ! Death storms your house in battle array." I sang another : "O Mother, I have no one else to blame : Alas ! I sink in the well these very hands have dug."

'Nangta, the Vedantist, was a man of profound knowledge. The song moved him to tears though he didn't understand its meaning. Padmalochan also wept when I sang the songs of Ramprasad about the Divine Mother. And he was truly a great pundit.'

*

Once I fell into the clutches of a jnani, who made me listen to Vedanta for eleven months. But he couldn't altogether destroy the seed of bhakti in me. No matter where my mind wandered, it would come back to the Divine Mother. Whenever I sang of Her, Nangta would weep and say, "Ah ! What is this?" You see, he was such a great jnani and still he wept.'

ONWARD FOR EVER!

What we call inspiration is the development of reason. The way to intuition is through reason. Instinctive movements of your body do not oppose reason. As you cross a street, how instinctively you move your body to save yourself from the cars. Does your mind tell you it was foolish to save your body that way? It does not. Similarly, no genuine inspiration ever contradicts reason. Where it does it is no inspiration. Secondly, inspiration must be for the good of one and all, and not for name or fame, or personal gain. It should always be for the good of the world, and perfectly unselfish. When these tests are fulfilled, you are quite safe to take it as inspiration. You must remember that there is not one in a million that is inspired, in the present state of the world. I hope their number will increase. We are now only playing with religion. With inspiration we shall begin to have religion. Just as St. Paul says, 'For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face.' But in the present state of the world, they are few and far between who attain to that state; yet perhaps at no other period were such false claims made to inspiration, as now. . . . You had better die as an unbeliever than be played upon by cheats and jugglers. The power of reasoning was given you for use. Show then that you have used it properly. Doing so, you will be able to take care of higher things.

Tricknaman

ON THE TRAIL OF THE INNER TREASURE-TROVE

EDITORIAL

I

The mythology of practically every race and civilization contains stories of hidden treasures, in search of which many brave and heroic men set out. Usually these treasures are guarded by fierce dragons or demons, who keep vigilant watch over them. The adventures of such treasure-hunters are always thrilling. While hundreds of them return disappointed and many more get killed, here and there an exceptionally brave, skilful and fortunate man succeeds in the end. Such myths, however, are not mere folklore with entertainment value only. They adumbrate a deep philosophical truth: that man is in eternal search for an immense treasure, deeply hidden within himself, which can be acquired only after arduous struggle and overcoming heavy odds.

Furthermore, we know that human beings are by nature greedy and acquisitive. Human greed knows no limit: it impels a man to face the most formidable difficulties and trials in its fulfilment; it makes him reckless and ruthless. Historical accounts of 'gold rushes', for instance, speak of hordes of prospectors and fortune-seekers who stampede to river basins or other areas where gold is discovered, in hope of instant wealth. In such groups we witness the manifestations of the less noble side of man's nature. Deceit, violence, slavery, exploitation, and many other savage modes of behaviour come into full play. In recent years, according to newspaper reports, the Tapajos river basin in the Amazonian jungles has become such a 'gold rush' area, with all the ugly features of old—even including murders.

However, a deeper study of man's greed and acquisitive instinct, hints at an innate but misdirected longing for acquiring some-

thing which is limitless and everlasting. This, of course, can never be anything material. As great thinkers and teachers of all great religions have pointed out, this is the hunger of the soul in man for the infinite 'wealth' of God or the Supreme Spirit. But this wealth of God is to be prospected for—not anywhere outside—within one's own heart.

Here is a charming story to this point :

A rabbi dreamed a number of times that he must leave his own small house in the ghetto of Cracow, and travel to Prague : for there on the bridge leading to the castle he would find a treasure. Finally he decided to obey the dream-commands and started for Prague. Arriving there and going to the bridge, he found it guarded. So he waited for a long while. At last the captain of the bridge, noticing the old man hanging about, spoke to him kindly, asking what he was waiting for. The rabbi being good to the point of ingenuousness, told him. The captain, however, remained helpful, indeed breaking into laughter and becoming confidential. 'Why,' he told the poor old pilgrim, 'I myself had a dream of just the same nonsensical sort ; but, as you might say, it was even more upside down ! My dream told me to go to the home of an old rabbi in Cracow in the ghetto there—and behind his stove I would find a treasure ! You see what nonsense dreams are ! And you and I know that the last place in the world to find a treasure—this bridge would be better—would be in the dwelling of a starving rabbi in the Cracow ghetto.' The rabbi bowed and said nothing more—for he had forgotten to tell his friend where he had come from. He returned back straightway to his home. He dug behind the stove and found a buried bag of gold coins.

Like the poor rabbi in this story, man at first goes zealously in search of treasures in the outside world. But sooner or later he

becomes disillusioned. This disillusionment however, teaches him an invaluable lesson—that it is grievous and futile to search for any treasure outside. He then listens to the eternally counselling voices of the holy books and prophets—or to the inner Voice with which they can be regarded as one—and directs his attention and energies to the treasures of the world within, in his own heart. If he thus strives hard and long enough, and if he receives the grace of his teacher and of God, he succeeds in his quest and becomes eternally blessed.

II

The *Chāndogya-upaniṣad* teaches that Brahman or the Supreme Reality, by the attainment of which there remains nothing unattained, is to be sought in the cavern of one's own heart.¹ It goes on to say that the indwelling Reality is like a hidden golden treasure in a field : though people often walk over it, they yet remain unaware of the buried treasure :

'As people who do not know the spot where a treasure of gold has been hidden somewhere in the earth, walk over it again and again without finding it, so all these creatures go day after day into the World of Brahman and yet do not find It, because they are carried away by untruth'²

The World of Brahman spoken of here is to be understood as the 'heart's cave' where in deep sleep, according to the Upaniṣadic sages, the individual soul enters and comes in 'contact' with Brahman. This contact, we must remember, is experienced in a very vague way owing to the thick layers of beginningless *avidyā* or ignorance veiling the soul. Still the experience of bliss in deep sleep, though in utter unawareness, is an indication of this contact with Brah-

¹ *vide* VIII. i-iv.

² VIII. iii. 2.

man. In fact, the individual soul is ever rooted in and in contact with this Reality which pervades the dreaming and waking states as well. But in the latter states of consciousness, the feeling of contact is further blurred by the 'intervention' of the endless projections of *māyā*, beginning with the sense of ego, and thence to the ever-rising train of thought-waves. The soul is, as it were, continuously drawn out and remains in perpetual identification with the ego and its various involvements in the external world. Thus, as long as they remain in ignorance, man and all other creatures experience the three states of consciousness—waking, dream, deep sleep—without becoming consciously aware of Brahman, the infinite Reality, which is the undeniable ground of all phenomena, both internal and external. While summarizing his commentary on this text, Śaṅkara remarks compassionately, 'The import is—What a pity it is, hence, that though already possessing Brahman, still the creatures are not able to attain It !'³

In the ancient Hindu lore, again, we read about one well-known branch of knowledge called *nidhi-sāstra* or the 'science of treasure-troves'. It was claimed that with the help of certain astrological calculations and occult procedures, hidden treasures could be precisely located, the guardian demons vanquished, and the treasures acquired. The Hindu tradition says that such experts in 'thesaurology'—to coin a word for this 'science'—have lived and helped many poor people to become wealthy. Similarly, we may say, a seeker of the eternal treasure of Brahman should resort to a teacher who is a *brahmajñānī* (knower of Brahman), and search for the

inner treasure according to his instruction and guidance. The need of such competent guidance and its unreserved acceptance are implied in the above teaching of the *Chāndogya-upaniṣad*.

III

Śaṅkara in his *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi* employs the simile of a concealed treasure and its acquisition — in considerable detail — as analogy to the attainment of the knowledge of the Reality, hidden deep in the manifestations of Its own *māyā*. He says :

'As a treasure, hidden underground requires (for its extraction) competent instruction, the removal of stones, etc., lying above it, and (finally) grasping, but never comes out by being (merely) called out by name, so the transparent Truth of the Self, which is hidden by *Māyā* and its effects, is to be attained through the instructions of a knower of Brahman, followed by reflection, meditation, and so forth, but not through perverted arguments.'⁴

Here Śaṅkara specifically emphasizes the need of instruction and guidance from a knower of Brahman, for one who intently seeks the treasure of the reality of his own spiritual being. That is, because the knower of Brahman has himself attained that treasure after incessant and concentrated struggle, and so knows every inch of the way to it. Instructions from books, however holy or ancient, and guidance from any other persons, however scholarly or clever, are unavailing, as these can at best provide second-hand information.

Corresponding to rocks, earth, etc., covering the buried treasure, continues Śaṅkara, are *māyā* and its effects which hide the effulgent inner treasure of the Ātman. The digging operation which helps in the attainment of the underground treasure is com-

³ अतः कष्टमिदं वर्तते जन्तूनां यत् स्वायत्तमपि ब्रह्म न लभ्यते इत्यभिप्रायः ।

⁴ *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi*, 165.

pared here to 'reflection and meditation' which lead to the realization of the Ātman. Reflection is deep thinking on the instructions of the teacher, which imprints on one's mind the mortal, transitory, and illusory nature of the external and internal worlds. Meditation on the one hand makes the mind and intellect discriminative, pure, and one-pointed, and on the other, reveals the truth of the Ātman's infinite and immortal glory. Perfection in meditation brings *samādhi* or superconscious experience in which identity with the Ātman is realized. This knowledge of identity, attained in *samādhi* is never eclipsed or affected in any other way by *māyā* and its various manifestations. This, then, must be said to be the true attainment of the inner treasure.

Rightly, again, does Śaṅkara warn spiritual treasure-seekers against the hollowness of intellectualism and argumentation. These are no substitute for *sādhana* (spiritual practice), consisting of discrimination, reflection, and meditation. Resorting to them to realize the Ātman will be as futile as calling out to a buried treasure: 'O treasure, please come up! You know I am poor and miserable, and am very eager to possess you!' Fine words butter no parsnips, nor do they dig any treasures. In fact, intellectualism and argumentation make the situation worse, by piling up, as it were, more layers of *māyā* and its effects on the already deeply obscured reality of the Self.

One of the most formidable of these effects of *māyā* is *ahaṅkāra* or egoism. If any spiritual aspirant succeeds in conquering it, he conquers *māyā* and obtains the knowledge of God. All great spiritual teachers have stressed this fact. In the *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi* Śaṅkara also focuses our attention on the theme of ego conquest. In one beautiful stanza he says that the 'treasure of the Bliss of Brahman is coiled

round by the mighty and dreadful serpent of egoism.'⁵ This serpent, he says, has three hoods consisting of the three *guṇas*, namely, *sattva* (serenity and poise), *rajas* (activity and restlessness), and *tamas* (inertia and darkness). A *dhīra* or man of discrimination can destroy this serpent by cutting off its three heads with the shining sword of realization, and seize and enjoy the treasure of infinite bliss. Śaṅkara gives here a very useful hint for the conquest of egoism. It is achieved by purification and transcendence of the three *guṇas*, through which *māyā* and its activities manifest.

IV

For illustrating his teaching on spiritual practice and through that the attainment of God-vision, Sri Ramakrishna at least once used the comparison of hidden treasure and its acquirement after digging:

'Through the practice of spiritual discipline one attains perfection, by the grace of God. But one must also labour a little. Then one sees God and enjoys bliss. If a man hears that a jar filled with gold is buried at a certain place, he rushes there and begins to dig. He sweats as he goes on digging. After much digging he feels the spade strike something. Then he throws away the spade and looks for the jar. At the sight of the jar he dances for joy. Then he takes up the jar and pours out the gold coins. He takes them into his hand, counts them, and feels the ecstasy of joy. Vision—touch—enjoyment.'⁶

Though Sri Ramakrishna thus says that one attains perfection by the grace of God, he certainly also emphasizes self-effort. And in this regard he very appropriately uses the metaphor of the buried treasure. Self-effort in the form of spiritual practice

⁵ *ibid.*, 302.

⁶ 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1947), p. 309.

is like the digging process. The lucky discovery of the gold jar after much digging, hints at divine grace. Divine grace generally will come at last, as a sequel to the relentless effort of the spiritual aspirant. Only strenuous digging brings the hidden trove to view and then to one's grasp. Again, even the most strenuous digging for treasure in the outside world may prove utterly fruitless. But struggles to realize the hidden spiritual treasure within, can never ultimately be in vain, for divinity is inherent in all living beings.

Ordinarily, *sādhana* or spiritual practice is considered to be a joyless venture. Naturally so, as what we generally mean by joy is contact with agreeable sense-objects. But spiritual practice implies sense-withdrawal and self-denial. As a result, *sādhana* may seem at first joyless and even painful. But this need not be so if we understand that the real source of joy for us is the Ātman, the spiritual Self, and the joy of sense-contacts is only a pale reflection of that inner joy. Through self-denial and mental purification, the natural joy of the Ātman spontaneously fills the aspirant's mind. This phenomenon is not always felt in the early stages of *sādhana*; but in higher stages, it is never far away. This is hinted by Sri Ramakrishna when he says about the treasure-digger, that at the sight of the jar 'he dances for joy'. At the higher stages of *sādhana* the aspirant feels a proxi-

mity to God—not usually felt at the earlier stages—, and that divine proximity gives him a non-sensual, unlimited joy.

Finally, Sri Ramakrishna's description of the behaviour of the treasure-hunter when he actually grasps the jar of gold coins, hints at what a man of God would do after fully realizing God. The scriptures call such a man *brahmavid-variṣṭha*, the greatest among the knowers of Brahman. Sri Ramakrishna used to refer to such a one as a *vijñānī*, one whose knowledge of God is supremely intimate. Just as the treasure-finder 'pours out the gold coins', 'counts them and feels the ecstasy of joy', so the intimate knower of God sees Him everywhere, talks to Him, and communes with Him in the depths of his soul. As the Upaniṣads say, he 'sports with the Ātman' (*ātma-kṛīḍah*) and 'delights in the Ātman' (*ātma-ratih*). Sri Ramakrishna's description of the characteristics of *vijñāna* can fittingly become the conclusion of this essay:

'What is vijnana? It is knowing God in a special way. The awareness and conviction that fire exists in wood is jnana, knowledge. But to cook rice on that fire, eat the rice, and get nourishment from it is vijnana. To know by one's inner experience that God exists is jnana. But to talk to Him, to enjoy Him as Child, as Friend, as Master, as Beloved, is vijnana. The realization that God alone has become the universe and all living beings is vijnana.'

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 229.

Children, ye shall not seek after great science. Simply enter into your own inward principle, and learn to know what you yourselves are, spiritually and naturally.

—Tauler.

LETTERS OF A SAINT
SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA THE REFUGE

Calcutta,
15 Āśvin 1323¹

Dear—,

I have duly received yours of 11th Āśvin as well as the weekly and monthly reports of the famine relief work. The cloths you had sent have also reached me, carried by someone. The cloths are nice. Nevertheless, regarding them I have to say this : you are short of money ; over and above this, it was not right to have sent so many cloths as a gift. In future you don't repeat it. At most send just one pair. I shall give one each of them to Sri Maharaj [Brahmananda] and Baburam Maharaj [Premananda].

You did well in distributing the surplus rice, etc. of the famine relief to the stricken people. . . .

I do not like the discontinuance of any work which is already planned and begun. But if you do not get students for the school and there is dearth of patients in the home of service, in that case there is no need to continue that work—it was from this point of view that I had asked you to vacate the school premises. But if you find that the number of students is increasing in the school and the patients visiting the service home feel benefited, then why should you wind up the work? This is also sometimes seen : we understand that a certain work cannot go on any more ; but being bound by attachment we feel we have to keep it up by force. In such cases, true heroism and duty consist in giving up that work. We are free, we are a part of the Lord and we are His children ; why should we court the bondage of actions?—with such an attitude you should work always : not like the enslaved worldly souls. Therefore as long as you see that the school and the home of service can continue to function usefully, so long try to keep them up. In this regard I am not unfavourable.

Accept the Holy Mother's blessings for all of you as well as our good wishes.

Ever your well-wisher,
SRI SARADANANDA

SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA THE REFUGE

Calcutta
17/4/25

My dear—,

I have received your letter. After coming here my health is not bad. I spend half of the week at the Belur Math and the other half at the Baghbazar Math [that is, the Udbodhan Office at Baghbazar, Calcutta]. My going to any other place has not yet been decided, . . . Give my love and blessings to all those who are at the Ashrama.

¹ Āśvin : the sixth month of the Bengali year, coinciding with parts of September-October. 1323 (B.E.) here falls in A.D. 1916.

I have indeed told you before that you should do the work of the Sevashrama thinking that it is your own work. In that way, apart from doing your own allocated duty, you will be inclined to lend a helping hand in the duties of other workers. I am not speaking of the routine duties of other workers ; know that I am only speaking of the brunt of important works which falls on them occasionally.

Brahman and Its Śakti (Power) are one and non-different, as fire and its burning power. In the scriptures this Brahman has been described as Virāṭ-Puruṣa [Cosmic Person] and the Śakti which is united with Him, as the Mother of the universe. In the *sandhyā*² ceremony, etc., prescribed by the Veda, it has been said that *gāyatrī*³ is to be meditated upon in the form of a Devī [goddess]. Because this vast universe has emerged from the play of Brahman's Śakti. In some places the presiding deity of the *gāyatrī* [mantra] has been described as the Virāṭ-Puruṣa and elsewhere as the Śakti of the Virāṭ-Puruṣa, the Divine Mother. Therefore [that is, since Puruṣa and His Power are ultimately one] there is no contradiction in this kind of dual conception.

Accept my blessings.

Ever your well-wisher,
SRI SARADANANDA

SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA THE REFUGE

Calcutta
15/11/25

My dear—,

I have received yours of 28 Kārttik.⁴ Know that you have my blessings always. I am well.

You have written that, when you sit for meditation, the thoughts of [your] work often come to mind. It is the same fate with everyone's mind. Even if you give up work and go to the forest, you cannot escape from its hands. But then if through the grace of God this thought—'This world is impermanent', becomes firmly imprinted on the mind ; and if this attitude—'He is my only refuge', becomes established in the heart ; then at the time of meditation that kind of mental fickleness becomes greatly reduced. Feeling intense attraction towards God and the rising of the cry of distress in the heart that I have not been able to attain Him—these are dependent on His mercy. Pray to Him for them with yearning.

If the body does not get the optimum amount of sleep, drowsiness will come during meditation. Therefore it is good to meditate and contemplate at the time when you do not feel drowsy. Rising at dawn, first finish a few of the Ashrama

² Devotions or ritualistic worship performed by Hindus of the upper castes daily at stated periods.

³ Sacred verse of the Vedas recited daily by Hindus of the three upper castes after they have been invested with the sacred thread ; also, the presiding deity of the *gāyatrī*.

⁴ The month following Asvin in Bengali year (this coincides with parts of October-November).

duties, and then sit for meditation and contemplation. In that case I feel you will not get drowsiness. If this is not very inconvenient, you may give it a trial.

Give my blessings to all the members of both the Ashramas. Cold is beginning now ; and therefore be a little careful. Otherwise, becoming exposed to cold, you may suffer from fever again and again.

Ever your well-wisher,
SRI SARADANANDA.

SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA THE REFUGE

Calcutta
1/11/25

My dear—,

I have received your letter. My body is well ; off and on I bathe in the Ganga and take walks. . . . All residents of the boarding house are well. I hope that R— has now become healthy and strong again. Know that my blessings are always on both of you.

It is indeed true that the mind becomes distracted if you eat the left-overs of people belonging to another caste or of foreigners. That, apart, this [distraction of the mind] happens for many other causes also. For a few days you all daily partake of the *prasāda* ceremonially offered to Lord Jagannātha [of Puri]. Moreover, after taking your seat for meditation and prayer, first think thus : 'Like the ever-pure ocean of indivisible Sat-cit-ānanda [Existence-knowledge-bliss], my Iṣṭa (Chosen Deity) exists pervading all places, and I am dwelling in Him always. He is within and without me, and everywhere.' Thinking of this idea for a few moments with undivided mind, do meditation and *japa* (repetition of the Lord's name or mantra) as you have been doing. In that event, the distractions of the mind will disappear.

All well here. Now and then give us the news of your welfare. Convey my blessings to Sriman N—.

Ever your well-wisher,
SRI SARADANANDA.

AT THE FEET OF SWAMI AKHANDANANDA —XV

BY 'A DEVOTEE'

1 January 1937 :

Two American woman devotees, Bhakti and Annapurna (Miss Helen F. Rubel and Mrs. Anna Worcester) had informed Swami Akhandananda from Calcutta by letter and telegram that they would be spending the

New Year's Day with him at Sargachi. Early in the morning, two saloon cars were seen on the siding of the Sargachi Railway Station. Bābā¹ at once sent some Ashra-

¹The name by which Swami Akhandananda was called by most of his disciples and devotees.

mites to receive them there. In the meantime he busied himself with giving a finishing touch to the arrangements for their reception at the Ashram.

The two devotees were accompanied by some Swamis as well. Bābā received them with garlands and bouquets. Then they sat for tea in the hall where a table was spread. The ladies had brought some presents for Bābā—a sofa chair, a wheelchair, some woollen garments, and so on. Bābā also had gotten ready for each of them a silk sari—a Murshidabad² speciality.

After tea and exchange of greetings and gifts, all set out to see the Ashrama. At lunch-time a devotee was asked to read to the group a translation of Bābā's 'Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna'. It was heard with rapt attention by all.

The party went back by the evening train. Bābā was feeling very tired and was preparing for rest; he spoke a few words about the happenings of the day and concluded, 'The first of January is an auspicious day for us also. Our Master became the Kalpataru³ on this day at Cossipore.'

3 January 1937 :

The principal of Berhampur College had come; there was some talk on education. There was discussion particularly about the role of Botany in village life, as well as co-education. At the end, Bābā remarked: 'Teaching good, respectful behaviour to the boys and girls is the most important part of education. Pay respect to others, even if you are not yourself respected—*amāninā mānadena* (as Śrī Caitanya said). You be the first to give respect, then you will be respected.'

²The chief town of the district in which Sargachi is located.

³The 'wish-fulfilling tree'—usually refers to God. On January 1, 1886, Sri Ramakrishna's grace was bestowed on many, in the mood of Kalpataru.

The next day was to be the birthday of the Holy Mother. It was past nine o'clock p.m. After finishing the day's service in the shrine-room, the monastic in charge of worship came to Bābā and asked him, 'How shall I perform the worship tomorrow?' In a reverential tone Bābā replied :

'Mother, take whatever I am offering. Mother, take this food, this cloth, and everything.' This is pūja (worship). What, again, are Sanskrit mantras, etc.? While worshipping the Divine Mother, the Master had not so much need of such mantras. But you must speak to the Mother from the depths of your heart: 'O Mother, take this—I am offering your things to you. Today in many places your devotees are offering many good things to you. I have brought whatever I could procure. O Mother, take them, please.' Say all this with tears and think that the Mother is very pleased and is accepting all the things, one by one.

Lastly, proceed to *homa* (fire-sacrifice). Think that you are offering everything you feel to be your own, into the Fire which is a symbol of the Mother. Take *vilva* leaves, offer them into the Fire with the name of the Holy Mother (Sarada Devi). This is pūja in its simple form. Otherwise, it will go on from morning till afternoon, and Mother's children (that is, the devotees) will go away without food. The devotees are to become hungry, waiting many hours, and yet the offered food not yet brought down from the Shrine? Our Mother did not at all like that. Do you understand this spirit behind worship?

4 January 1937 :

Early in the morning, *Maṅgalārati*⁴ was done in the shrine, and some hymns were sung. Then the inmates hurried out to

⁴Waving of lights, etc., before the Deity, at dawn.

Bābā at Binod Kutir⁵ and all sat near him. One of them started a hymn about Śiva—namely the *Sivapañcākṣara-stotra*.⁶ After some other songs, Bābā requested that a song be sung about the Mother.

When the sun was already a little up in the winter sky, Bābā came out in his new wheelchair, which was stopped near the shrine. Then he saluted with folded hands, the shrine, which was in the upper floor, and in a melodious voice full of devotion recited the *Ardha-nārīśvara-stotra* by *Śaṅkarācārya*. In this hymn, Śiva the Supreme Deity, is described as being half man and half woman (His consort Pārvati). Every stanza ends with the refrain, '*namaḥ śivāyai ca namaḥ śivāya*.'⁷ After the recital, Bābā touched his joined palms to his forehead and remained in that state of salutation for a long time.

Then a little later, he enquired about the special items being prepared in the kitchen for offering that day, and then returned to the Binod Kutir for morning-tea. By now his room was full of devotees. After tea he said to the attendants near by : 'It is the Holy Mother's birthday. Her thoughts are coming up in the mind. I would like to tell you something about her.' Then, looking at the devotees he said, 'Come and remind me of this at 11 o'clock.'

Accordingly, about 11 a.m. many devotees gathered in Bābā's room. But, lying on his bed, he said : 'I am not feeling well. So no talk.' The devotees seemed very much disappointed, and so Bābā got up and began to speak :

No long story to tell. At Cossipore, after Sri Ramakrishna's passing, his body was

⁵ The Swami's residence at the Sargachi Ashrama.

⁶ A hymn on Śiva, with five stanzas, ascribed to Śrī Sankaracarya.

⁷ 'Salutation to Siva (Consort of Siva) and Salutation to Śiva.'

still there in the room where he had been ailing. The Holy Mother came and fell at his feet, and began to cry aloud, 'O Mother, where hast thou gone, unto whose care hast thou left me behind?'

You see, she looked upon Sri Ramakrishna as the Divine Mother, just as he had looked upon her as the Divine Mother. This idea is to be marked here. But after this, we never saw her again lament in this way. This was the only occasion when we saw her so much upset in grief, and in view of all. We had seldom even seen her coming out of her room [during the months she was there]. Many people did not know even that she had been there and doing the most important service of preparing meals for the Master.

*

After the evening *ārati*, the inmates came one by one to pay their respects to Bābā, who was seated in a reclining chair in the hall. The talk veered round to his travels in the Himalayas ; and Bābā said :

Once in a very solitary place I found a neat little hut to live in, a fine place for meditation, with a mountain stream flowing down below. But the shepherd boys of the neighbourhood argued, 'The water is far below ; moreover the place is infested with wild animals'—and thus persuaded me to go to their village. There they accommodated me in a room with fires surrounding. Then I began to think : 'What lack of faith ! Let me see what happens if I go out.' So again I went to the place of my choice, under the tree. Nothing untoward happened. Rather I had a deep meditation that night. After a long time I felt the Master standing behind me and showing me the 'living' Himalayas, the Spirit of the Himalayas—the dance of the Mother Kālī on Śiva's bosom. The Master was singing:

'O Mad Woman, step off and dance,
Or it will hurt the breast of Śiva and

break his bones ;
He is not dead ; He is in a state of
trance.
Of deep meditation.⁸

Then Bābā asked for more songs about
the Divine Mother, and a devotee began to
sing :

‘Come and see the dance of Light
Down at the feet of the dark-coloured
girl ! . . .’

‘Where, O Kālī, wilt Thou conceal
Thy beauty which over-fills the
universe? . . .’

‘In dense darkness, O Mother,
Thy formless beauty sparkles. . . .’

After these songs, Bābā himself began to
sing :

‘O Tree, please tell me :
Expecting whom are you standing day
and night?
Grieved by whose absence are you shed-
ding tears of dew?
In whose remembrance are you tremb-
ling with joy—
And your hairs of leaves and thorns
standing on end?’

Then with a sudden change of mood,
Bābā started to sing a song of the Bauls :

‘No more can I row the boat. . . .’
‘O, I fail to row the boat any more ! . . .’

Recasting the words of the song in this
manner, he sang for a long time. Then he
asked someone :

Don’t you know some songs of Rām-
prasād? Each one of his songs is like a
flower, a *jabā* (hibiscus)—the favourite
flower of Kālī. This was his *sādhanā*
(spiritual practice); this was his *siddhi*
(perfection) as well. His songs were very
dear to our Master. These songs, indeed,
reflect ideas of the Master. We cannot
afford to forget these. O, pick up, get by
heart, carry on these songs to the next

generation. Nowadays they sing with books
open before them. In our times, it was not
so. At a stretch one could sing ten songs,
from memory. We never knew of singing
songs with open book.

At this point a brahmacārin (monastic
novice) said, ‘It is ten o’clock !’ The impli-
cation was that it was getting late, so let
us disperse for sleep. But Bābā said to him
with all emphasis :

What if it is ten o’clock? Is there any
time limit for calling on the Mother? The
clocks and bells are meaningless. Will this
day come back again soon? Today is the
Mother’s Day—only one day in the whole
year !

Then Bābā began to reminisce :

In our travel days at Bhagalpur in Bihar,
Swamiji (Vivekananda) once was singing
with the *tānpurā* (a stringed instrument)
[a song on the yearning of Rādhā for meet-
ing Kṛṣṇa] :

‘Śyām (Kṛṣṇa) has not yet come to me :
I am waiting for Him !
Night is passing and He has not yet
come to me ;
I am still waiting for Him !’

Swamiji became merged in the feeling
of Rādhā. The music went on from even-
ing till midnight. There was no sign of an
end. The elite of the town had gathered ;
not one could get up. The dinner was a
long while ready and getting cold. At last
Swamiji was called again and again, and
thus his ecstasy was broken.

Sometimes, at the Math, Swamiji would
start a discussion, for example, about re-
incarnation, which, with his encouragement,
might go on up to two a.m. Then we would
go to sleep. But at 4 o’clock once, Swamiji
asked me to ring the rising bell ; and when
the others shouted sleepy protests, he
smilingly said, ‘What ! gone to bed at two,
so you will get up at eight? You have
become Sadhus for sleeping, or for medita-
ting on God?’ Later on, he would add,

⁸The idea is : the Himalayas are the very
symbol of Siva lying in deep ecstasy—their peaks
and valleys have been caused by the dance of
Kālī, the Eternal Universal Nature, the dynamic
counterpart of ‘static’ Śiva, the Sat-cit-ānanda.

'If we are not strict now, what will happen when we are gone?' Then Bābā continued :

You see, how right he was ! At ten o'clock, these are dozing off to sleep ! Tonight I thought there would be singing of some songs on the Mother. Now do you see the state of affairs? Eating and sleeping—have you all come for these only?

Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) would say, 'A yogī sleeps for four hours, a *bhogī* (one seeking enjoyment) for six or more.' You are yogīs : you want God. How can you sleep—He that *wants* God cannot sleep until he realizes Him. At intervals, his heart cries out, 'Oh, I have not yet realized Him.' He sees darkness all around. He has no taste for anything else but God.

Is there any fixed time and place for taking the name of God? Throw away the clocks ; break them. They are a kind of obstacle. It is from the sun that we get the idea of time. Think of a state where there is no sun. Now go on with the songs.

The *brahmacārin* who had announced that it was ten o'clock, now took up the harmonium and began to sing a song composed by Swamiji—the Hymn of Samādhi :

'Lo ! The sun is not, nor the comely moon,
All light extinct ; in the great void of space
Floats shadow-like the image-universe'

Hereupon, Bābā could not remain still. He took up the *tabla* (drums) and, while playing, began to sing in his inimitable voice, that same song, continuing for a very long time.

After a little pause, he sang another Bengali song of Swamiji's : The Hymn of Creation. Then, he went on to sing a third song by Swamiji :

'Śiva is dancing step by step, forgetful of the world and creation ;
He is striking both his cheeks, and they resound. *Ba-ba-bom !*'

For a long time in an intoxicated mood, he sang these lines only. Then, yet another song on Siva :

Siva the forgetful is dancing,
With his hands upraised, and swinging them to and fro.'

As he was singing this song very softly, his face lit up with a sweet smile ; and as he rocked his head to and fro, the tufts of his hair, very similar to that of Siva, were playing on his forehead ; his eyes half-closed, he seemed intoxicated, like Śiva Himself. At intervals he was still repeating the lines of the song. What a beautiful divine person to look at !

Suddenly then, he shook his head and began to sing Swamiji's song on Siva, again, and asked everyone to sing. He became silent as the others started. For a long time the song went on, everyone participating in a kind of ecstasy.

After a spell of silence finally, Bābā started again another song :

How shall I open my heart, O friend?
It is forbidden me to speak.
I am about to die, for lack of a kindred soul
To understand my misery.'

Again :

'Who has offered the red hibiscus at
Your Feet?
O Mother, give me one or two ;
I shall put them on my head.'

At last Bābā began again to talk :

O, we have passed many nights, singing these songs. Sleep has made man forgetful of his real nature. Sleep has made man unconscious. If you want to become a 'man', a real man, you must conquer sleep. Pray to the Master (Sri Ramakrishna) thus, 'Please minimize my sleep so that I can call on you more and more.' The Master used to call on God the whole night under the mosquito curtain. He would not sleep—always awake, always in union with God. Those that went to him, also 'put sleep to sleep'.

What about me? I am quite insignificant in comparison to them; yet even I cannot sleep more than two hours. If some day I happen to sleep a little more, I feel ashamed! What, sleeping in the early hours while in the bed!

At the Math, I felt very much ashamed to be in the bed after *mangalārati*. 'The Master is up, and I am lying down! Shame upon me!'—with this thought I would get up. But then, just as food is necessary for the body, so is sleep. Since you have come to us—the children (disciples) of the Master—to us that 'put sleep to sleep', what have you learnt from us? Learn a little, at least

It is a little late in the night [it was already 1:30 a.m.]; and you are all eager to go to bed. I, an old man with an ailing body and without food—am sitting up all the while for your sake: I am hearing songs, singing songs myself, talking to you all sometimes; yet I do not feel much tired for all that; I am not dozing. Do you think I shall be sleeping tonight? You will go and start snoring up to seven o'clock! But I will ask the boys to ring the bell at five. Just see the power of the Master being shown through these old bones, even now!

A little later, Bābā began to speak, quoting the lines of a song:

'Once for all, this time, I have thoroughly understood:
From One⁹ who knows it well, I have learnt the secret of *bhāva* (ecstasy);
A man has come to me from a country where there is no night. . . .'

Just listen: you have come for attaining Infinity—why should you look at the clock? the clock shows finite time; that is relative. You have got to remove these ideas from

your mind, if you aspire after Infinity. Days and nights, minutes and hours—how far do they go? To the limits of the earth; or at the most, to the limits of the solar system. That is not very far off! In this limitless universe there are so many millions of suns; and many of these (stars) are much greater than the sun. They are arranged in (spiral) layers in the galactic system. There are nebulae from which many future suns will be born. Is there any idea of time there. Time also is not yet born there.

I used to meditate thus: I am, as it were, going away from the earth. I can see the earth itself receding further and further away. And I? Whichever way I turn, I see myriads of stars—sparks of light. I go in one direction with the velocity of light, then to the opposite direction with the same speed—only to find no limit in any direction. No peace, no satisfaction. It is all the same everywhere. There is some sort of change, no doubt—but that too is periodic, repeated at immeasurable intervals. What then? Calm, quiet, and without any motion or vibration.

There is no limit to the infinite cosmos. So far about the macrocosm; then come to the microcosm—to the atomic world. Even within that, millions of systems similar to the solar system, are rotating as if in play. While thinking thus, the mind automatically tends to become calm and quiet—stops, as it were. Reckoning of time vanishes; time itself stops—at least for the person in meditation.

If you are calculative, you cannot experience Infinity, or realize God. As long as there is calculation, there will be time and space. That is the realm of *māyā*. Truth is far away from that. 'It is ten o'clock, so I must sleep'—this was never our idea.

Actually it was now two o'clock a.m.; and one by one, all the inmates left. Only

⁹ God, whom the poet worshipped as the Divine Mother.

two attendants remained to help Bābā to bed : they raised him from the chair and laid him down on the bed.

Thereupon Bābā spoke : 'So long there was no pain in the body ; now I am feeling the pain. I was quite well so long, without any pain anywhere in the body.'

The attendants arranged the mosquito curtains, put out the light, came out of the

room, and went to their respective quarters—all the time remembering the wonderful words and songs of Bābā, which had filled their hearts to the brim.

The half-moon was well up in the winter sky and shedding its mild light mingled with divine peace over the sleeping earth ; and the Ashrama seemed to be surcharged with spirituality.

ESSAY ON APPLIED RELIGION

ATTAINMENT OF PEACE

SWAMI BUDHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

IV

Some of us, however, may not find ourselves competent to take the strenuous kind of care of ourselves which we have seen to be needed for the psychological approach to attainment of peace. Indeed, the very thought of trying to go through such a process may rob us of whatever peace of mind we may happen to have now !

Is there then no hope for such among us, relatively simple people, to gain peace of mind? Are there no simple methods? We want to be told to do this and not do that ; then we may hope to find peace of mind. We cannot go so deep into the intricacies of the mind. Our heads reel at the thought ; we get confused.

Certainly there are simpler methods. But the underlying psychology will remain the same—only we shall not have to bother our heads with thinking about it. We, however, should have no illusion that simpler methods will demand less of self-application. Peace

of mind is more precious than any amount of wealth, learning, fame, pleasure, or any other thing or achievement in life. We cannot get it without paying the full price. Still, this is not at all to say that do-this and do-not-do-this methods of approach are not there, for gaining peace of mind.

In this approach, which may be said to be the religious approach—as distinguished from the psychological—, the first thing to do is to learn to accept certain inevitables of life. Many of us lose our peace by obstinately quarrelling with these inevitables, refusing to admit that they *are* inevitable. Sooner or later, of course, we are bound to accept these facts ; but it will require many blows if we remain obstinate. Yet, it is absolutely unnecessary to take these blows. It will be wisdom productive of peace to accept the inevitables, as soon as we become aware of the problem of peace of mind.

What are these inevitables of life? Basically they are five :

First, youth will leave us some day, and old age will come upon us. And we cannot avoid this.

Second, disease will come upon us some day, and we cannot avoid it.

Third, death will come upon us some day, and we cannot avoid it.

Fourth, all things we hold dear are subject to change, decay and separation, and we cannot avoid these.

Fifth, the outcome—the fruits—of our own thoughts and actions, good or bad, will have to be reaped by ourselves, and we cannot avoid this.¹

As soon as we accept these five inevitables of life and their implications, we have a basis for working for peace of mind.

Then on this basis, we should practice five positive and five negative precepts. Then we shall be approaching peace.

What are the positive precepts?

First, we must live an ethical life. An immoral and characterless person cannot have peace, unless and until he changes. No debate on ethics is necessary. One must live up to one's concept of right and wrong.

Second, we must give our very best to all situations of life, without doing which one cannot live an ethical life. We must fully discharge our responsibilities to our families, our employers or superiors, our society and country—even to all humanity—conscientiously and with love. One who fails to do this will not have peace of mind: his conscience will be continuously nagging at him. The concept of duty should, of course, not be exaggerated; but neither should our own selfish little 'rights' be allowed to override the concept of duty.

Third, we must cherish a noble ideal for our lives, which we can love with our whole

heart and soul, and in which we may find inner fulfilment. A person who has no ideal to live for, will not know where to keep his mind when there is leisure. He will be perpetually restless. When life is attuned to a worthy ideal, the mind will never be at a loss for noble thoughts.

Fourth, we must bear and forbear, with courage and unshakable faith in ourselves, in our fellow human beings and in God. We must excuse others' faults by the hundreds, knowing that others are doing the same all the time for us—what to speak of God! And we must have an abiding faith in the inherent goodness of all beings, even if our superficial 'experiences' seem to tell us the contrary.

Fifth, we must stop all wastage of mind. There is the familiar story of a sick wife whose husband took her to a psychiatrist. 'Her mind is completely gone', said the doctor to the husband, after due consideration. 'I am not surprised at that', replied the husband. 'She has been giving away a piece of her mind every day, all these twenty years now.' Many of us are doing the same. Through utterly useless fantasies, senseless talks, concern with things which are none of our business, emotional kite-flying, day-dreaming, night-waking—and in how many various other ways!—we are throwing away our precious mental energy. A mind which is drained of its precious energy cannot be a strong mind. A weak mind is a sick mind. A sick mind cannot have peace. Therefore we must stop all wastage of the mind. Strength of mind is, finally, synonymous with peace of mind.

These then are the five positive precepts. What are the five negative ones?

First, if we want peace of mind, we must not think that it is unjust that we suffer so much. Neither should we imagine that everything is perfect when things are happening in accordance with our will.

¹ Adapted from the Buddha's teachings in *Anguttara-Nikaya*. Vide: Sudhakar Dikshit: *Sermons and Sayings of the Buddha* (Pub., Chetana, Bombay).

Second, we must not think that the temptations, trials, tribulations, and sorrows of life are coming to us from a power which is anti-God. No, as the mystics teach us, they are really the gifts of God's compassion.

Third, we must never make rash judgments about the behaviour of others, nor interfere in others' business unless our opinion is sought.

Fourth, we must neither think that we are special favourites of God, nor have exaggerated notions of our weakness or wickedness. All strength is potentially within us—within everybody. Yet each must take his own time and pace to manifest these potentialities. This is what makes the differences between one person and another. We therefore should neither be over-ambitious, however great our manifest qualities, nor unenterprising and diffident, always doubtful about our capacities.

Fifth, we must not find fault with others, but rather see our own faults. And we must not consider anyone as a stranger as the Holy Mother has taught.

If we accept the above-mentioned five inevitables, and fulfil the five positive and five negative precepts in our lives, we shall surely soon have peace of mind.

V

Still, some of us may feel that we will never be able to practice so many things for getting peace of mind : that we would rather do only one thing—or let peace go ! Is there any chance, then, of such a person's gaining peace?

Yes, he too, has a chance.

What is that one thing he should do to get peace of mind?

Let him not do anything else, but only love and seek God, with all his heart and mind and strength : then he will gain peace

of mind. In fact, he will prove wiser than all those who confine themselves only to ethical disciplines for gaining peace. For while these others will be working for relative peace, the one who can really do this one thing will be working for absolute peace. Genuine love of God will establish a person in the unshakable faith that whatever God dispenses is for one's good, and that God will always save. Thus he becomes free from all anxieties and worries : he attains that peace which changing situations in life can never disturb.

True, in most cases, our immediate need is some sort of relative peace. We can begin working on that level alone. Yet, ultimately it is the absolute peace, the peace that passeth understanding, that we are in fact seeking. We can never remain fully satisfied with anything less. Moreover, even for relative peace, our heart must be consciously or unconsciously set on absolute peace. As the *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad* says in startling language, 'Only when men shall roll up space, as if it were a piece of hide, will there be an end of miseries without realizing God.'² Again, the *Katha-upaniṣad* says :

'There is One who is the eternal Reality among non-eternal objects, the one truly conscious entity among conscious objects, and who, though non-dual, fulfils the desires of many. Eternal peace belongs to the wise, who perceive Him within themselves, unto none else, unto none else.'³

Permeating this fleeting phenomenal world and transcending it, there is this unchanging reality, *Sat-cit-ānanda*, Existence-knowledge-bliss absolute. 'And That thou art.' When one knows this fact by his own experience, absolute peace becomes eternally his, no matter what happens to the world.

² VI. 20

³ II. ii. 13.

If the secret of relative peace can be found simply through control of the mind, the secret of eternal peace lies only in the realization of the Ātman, the knowledge of God, having which one goes beyond all ignorance and misery.

Many have attained eternal peace and many more, relative peace. Given the necessary efforts, we can also attain not only relative, but absolute peace.

VI

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* we have most authoritative, invaluable teachings on how to attain absolute peace. Here in Srī Kṛṣṇa's teachings, both the psychological and religious methods of attaining peace are so blended that the one cannot be separated wholly from the other. According to these teachings, the reality of God is the central fact of man's very existence; and peace, absolute peace, depends on being aware of and established in this fact through actual experience. All the yogas and spiritual disciplines have this one ultimate end in view—realization of God, or attainment of spiritual illumination through experiencing the identity of the Ātman with the Supreme Spirit. Attainment of absolute peace is the spontaneous outcome of this experience.

When the truth about attaining absolute peace is told as barely as this, many may be left unenthused, on the assumption that this seems to be meant only for the near-perfect few, and not for common fold who may have a record of sins and other real difficulties. But the most inspiring thing about the *Gītā* is that Srī Kṛṣṇa excludes none, no matter what his past record, from the possibility of attaining peace, if only the seeker be sincerely prepared to turn away from evil ways and worship the Lord with single-minded devotion. He teaches:

'Even the most sinful man, if he worships Me with unswerving devotion, must be regarded as righteous; for he has

formed the right resolution. He soon becomes righteous and attains eternal peace. Proclaim it boldly, O son of Kuntī, that My devotee never perishes.'⁴

Surely this unqualified divine assurance will encourage every doubting or faltering aspirant.

All divine incarnations have held out the assurance that sinners were welcome to receive their abundant mercy and eventually peace, if only they were sincerely repentant and not hypocrites.

Further, anticipating that all seekers will not have a high degree of preparedness or excellence in practice of disciplines. Srī Kṛṣṇa enjoins a graded course of discipline which will be found suited to aspirants of different degrees of fitness:

Fix your mind on Me alone, rest your thought on Me alone, and in Me alone you will live hereafter! Of this there is no doubt.

If you are unable to fix your mind steadily on Me, O Dhananjaya, then seek to reach Me by the yoga of constant practice.

'If you are incapable of constant practice, then devote yourself to My service. For even by rendering service to Me, you will attain perfection.

'If you are unable to do even this, then be self-controlled, surrender the fruit of all action, and take refuge in Me.

'Knowledge is better than practice, and meditation is better than knowledge. Renunciation of the fruit of action is better than meditation; peace immediately follows such renunciation.'⁵

It is to be understood that this 'renunciation of the fruit of action' is here extolled because the path of action is here being taught. The renunciation of desires brings peace immediately to the ignorant person engaged in work, as to the enlightened aspirant steadily devoted to meditation. Thus such renunciation is a common factor in the

⁴ *Gītā*, IX. 30-1.

⁵ *ibid.*, XII. 8-12.

attainment of peace for both types of seekers, and as such is extolled by Śrī Kṛṣṇa.⁶

Here we find one of many examples of the *Gītā*'s special message for men of action. It is not a gospel exclusively meant for world-shunning recluses, who are especially privileged to live away from the demanding and distracting world, devoting themselves to contemplation alone. Few, if any other scriptures of the world specialize so effectively in teaching how men constantly engaged in the workaday world can forge ahead to the attainment of the highest spiritual excellences and peace.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa teaches :

'Only with the body, the mind, the understanding, and the senses do the yogis act, without attachment, for the purification of the heart.

'A selfless man who has renounced the fruit of his action attains peace, born of steadfastness. But the man who is not selfless and who is led by desire is attached to the fruit and therefore bound.'⁷

Work can become an instrument for attaining the liberation of the spirit and attainment of absolute peace or a cause of bondage and agony—depending on whether it is performed as Yoga, or not. According to Śrī Kṛṣṇa's teachings, it is open to everyone—as none can be without work—to become a yogī by choosing to do work according to liberating methods instead of the usual degenerating ones. The (Karma) yogīs are those who are devoted to work, but free from egotism in all their acts. They work with the firm faith that they perform all their actions for the sake of the Lord, and without attachment to any fruits of

their labour. Thus ever steady and devoted to their ideal, they attain peace.

But along with selfless work and devotion, the *Gītā* always stresses the importance of meditation, for those who want to attain peace. Śrī Kṛṣṇa teaches :

'The man whose mind is not under his control has no Self-knowledge and no contemplation either. Without contemplation he can have no peace ; and without peace, how can he have happiness?''⁸

Commenting on this verse, Sri Saṅkarācārya wrote :

'To the unsteady, to the man who cannot fix the mind in contemplation, there can be no wisdom, no knowledge of the nature of the Self. To the unsteady, there can be no meditation, no intense devotion to Self-knowledge. Besides, to him who is not devoted to Self-knowledge there can be no peace, nor tranquillity. Verily, happiness consists in the turning away of the senses from thirst for sensual enjoyment, not in the thirst for objects. This last is mere misery indeed. Where there is thirst there can be no trace of happiness ; we cannot so much even as smell it.'

It is not that one has to stop moving in the world, or make the absurd attempt to remove all objects of desire from this world, for attaining peace. The secret is that one has to work within oneself to steady the mind so that nothing outside can ruffle it. About the state of such a *sthita-prajña* (man of steady wisdom) Śrī Kṛṣṇa teaches :

'Not the desirer of desires attains peace, but he into whom all desires enter as the waters enter the ocean, which is full to the brim and grounded in stillness. That man who lives completely free from desires, without longing, devoid of the sense of "I" and "mine", attains peace.'⁹

⁶ Vide, *The Bhagavad Gīta* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Published by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York, 17 E. 94 St., New York City, 1969), p. 278—commentary on Chap. XII. 12.

⁷ *ibid.*, V. 11-12.

⁸ II. 66.

⁹ II. 70-71.

And about the methods of meditation which culminate in such attainment :

‘Completely serene and fearless, steadfast in the vow of a *brahmachārin*, disciplined in mind, and ever thinking on Me, he should sit in yoga, regarding Me as his Supreme Goal.

‘Keeping himself ever steadfast in this manner, the yogī of subdued mind attains the Peace abiding in Me—the Peace that culminates in Nirvāna.’¹⁰

Again, for those trying to perform all actions in a spirit of sacrifice, and aiming at the same Goal, Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the fourth chapter of the *Gītā* describes the various kinds of sacrifices, and concludes :

‘The Knowledge Sacrifice is superior to all material sacrifices, O scorcher of foes; for all works, without exception, culminate in Knowledge.

‘Learn it by prostration, by inquiry, and by service. The wise, who have seen the Truth, will teach you that Knowledge.

‘When you have known it, O Pāṇḍava, you will not again fall into delusion; and through it you will see all beings in your Self and also in Me.

‘Even if you are the most sinful of sinners, yet by the raft of Knowledge alone will you be borne over all sin.

‘Verily, there exists no purifier on earth equal to Knowledge. A man who becomes perfect in Yoga finds it within himself in course of time.’¹¹

Yet who can attain this knowledge, and how is it related to our search on hand—namely, attainment of absolute peace? Śrī Kṛṣṇa says :

‘He who is full of faith and zeal and has subdued his senses, obtains Knowledge;

having obtained Knowledge, he soon attains the Supreme Peace.’¹²

Of course, there are those who may be unable for various reasons to fully observe any of the disciplines so far dealt with, leading to the attainment of absolute peace. Have they then any chance of ever attain it through any other means? Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s special invitation to such aspirants comes with an abundance of grace in the following verses of the *Gītā* which occur towards the end :

‘The Lord, O Arjuna, dwells in the hearts of all beings, and by His *māyā* causes them to revolve as though mounted on a machine.

‘Take refuge in Him alone with all your soul, O Bhārata. By His grace will you gain Supreme Peace and the Everlasting Abode.’¹³

Thus we see that according to the teachings of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, this supreme peace is attainable by all—if they will only try. He has also taught such methods of attaining it as will be found suitable by seekers of different temperaments and competency. All those who have clarity of understanding about the meaning of life on earth, have grounds courageously to aim at attaining this supreme peace. Even a theoretical grasp of this possibility will greatly help us in attaining abundant relative peace, and enhance the quality of our very existence. But the clear indication of all teachings on peace in the scriptures is that man—endowed as he is with divine possibilities—should by all means aim at attaining Absolute Peace, knowing that it is really his own nature.

(Concluded)

¹⁰ VI. 14-15.

¹¹ IV. 33, 35, 36, 38.

¹² IV. 39.

¹³ XVIII. 61-62.



ILLUMINATING DIALOGUES FROM INDIAN LORE

BHĪSMA'S SUPREME SACRIFICE

In the great war of Kuruksetra, the Pāṇḍavas, with Kṛṣṇa as their mentor (and serving as Arjuna's charioteer), represented the cause of justice and dharma; the Kauravas, though their blood-relatives, had fallen into evil ways and Kṛṣṇa saw that their defeat was necessary and right. Yet after days of bloody battle, it became evident that Bhīṣma, the 'grandsire'¹ of Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas alike, was likely to overwhelm the Pāṇḍava army. Indeed, on the morning of the ninth day of battle, the 'grandsire' went so far as to say to Arjuna before beginning the fight: 'Today I shall fight

¹ Bhīṣma : son of King Śantanu, by the goddess Gangā, and youngest of the eight Vasus (group of deities). After Gangā's return to heaven, Śantanu desired to marry a beautiful damsel, but her parents refused unless her sons were allowed to succeed to the throne. Since Bhīṣma was the heir by all law, he vowed never to accept the kingdom nor to marry or beget children, and thus his father attained his desire. By this 'terrible' vow, the name 'Bhīṣma' came to be given him. Later he installed Śantanu's next son, Vicitravīrya, as king, secured proper marriages for him, and became the revered guardian of the sons and grandsons, who, constituted the Kaurava and Pāṇḍava families. Though himself equally devoted to both, still on account of the shelter and consideration he had received, from Dhṛtarāṣṭra (eldest son of Vicitravīrya and father of the Kauravas), Bhīṣma felt obligated to fight on his side in the war of Kurukṣetra.

in such a way that, seeing your helpless condition, Śrī Kṛṣṇa will be compelled to go back on his vow² and take up weapons in your defence. If not, I will no longer be called 'Bhīṣma'³, the son of Śantanu (a great king).'

And this pledge he carried out promptly. Though Arjuna's arrows fell on him so rapidly that they darkened the sky, none could injure him, while he with the Kauravas inflicted terrible damage on the Pāṇḍava forces. Towards the end of the day, even Arjuna's heroic spirit began to sink; and seeing this, Śrī Kṛṣṇa at last seemed to grow angry. He thought, 'Though I have promised not to take up a bow (or any weapons) in this conflict, still if I now refrain, the Pāṇḍavas are surely going to be

² When the great war had threatened, both Duryodhana (eldest of the Kauravas) and Arjuna hastened to seek the aid of Śrī Kṛṣṇa; and as it happened, both reached Him almost simultaneously. Acknowledging that each had equal claims on Him, Kṛṣṇa promised that He would give his large and powerful army to one side, and himself join the other, but without armour and without doing any actual fighting. Faced with such a choice, Arjuna unhesitatingly chose Śrī Kṛṣṇa alone; Duryodhana was overjoyed to get the army and scornful of what he thought (Arjuna's ridiculous preference.

³ As per footnote 1, the name referred to a 'terrible' vow.

defeated.' At this, Bhīṣma, catching the Lord's very thought, began shooting arrows at Kṛṣṇa Himself. So Kṛṣṇa leaped from the chariot, with his discus, and advanced on Bhīṣma, as if a lion were advancing on an elephant. The very earth began trembling at His footsteps!

How wonderful then, was the effect on Bhīṣma! Overjoyed at the very thought of meeting death at the hands of the Lord Himself, he remained calmly seated in his chariot, not touching his bow or other armament, and began praising Kṛṣṇa thus:

'The Lord of the worlds is coming to kill me. Come quickly, for that purpose, O Lord Kṛṣṇa. By Your grace I shall cross this ocean of worldly existence. If I be killed by You I surely shall go to heaven; I will be honoured in the three worlds. So now You attack me in any way You want: I am Your servant.'

But at this sight, Arjuna had leaped from his chariot and, running after Kṛṣṇa, caught hold of Him before he had taken ten steps towards Bhīṣma, and prayed to Him: 'O Lord of the three worlds, please restrain Your anger. You have promised that You will not fight in this battle; now if You act thus, people will call You a liar. On me rests the whole responsibility of winning the battle: I myself will kill Bhīṣma. I swear by my bow, by Truth, and by my good deeds that I am going to completely destroy the enemy and to fell Bhīṣma this very day. You will be my witness.'

At these words, Srī Kṛṣṇa returned to the chariot-seat, and Arjuna again took up his bow. Yet when that day's carnage was ended, Arjuna seemed as far as ever from carrying out his vow. Finally, Yudhiṣṭhira, eldest of the Pāṇdavas, approached Kṛṣṇa and spoke:

'See, nine days of battle have passed, and within no time all our men are going to be killed by Bhīṣma. As fire flares up with help of a wind, so the Kauravas are gathe-

ring strength from the enthusiasm of Bhīṣma: we are about to be destroyed helplessly, as flies in a blaze. So, I see nothing further to be gained by this struggle: please allow me to return to the forest and resume austerities (as the Pāṇdava brothers had done for the past many years).'

But Kṛṣṇa rejoined: 'Why do you adopt such a defeatist attitude, O Yudhiṣṭhira? See—this very Bhīṣma who is invincible in battle as long as he has a will to fight, is yet soon to be killed by your brother Arjuna in the battlefield in front of the whole Kaurava army.'

Still unconvinced, Yudhiṣṭhira said: 'I don't see how it will be possible. Though I know that in the three worlds there is nothing impossible for You, yet; You have promised not at all to take up weapons. So where is the way out?'

Kṛṣṇa: 'Let us go and ask Bhīṣma himself about how he can be killed! He is satyavādi—one who always speaks truth—, surely he will tell us the answer.'

Accordingly Kṛṣṇa and the five Pāṇdava brothers went to Bhīṣma's tent.⁴ No sooner had the latter heard of their arrival than he came out and saluted Kṛṣṇa, touching His feet. Then the five brothers prostrated before Bhīṣma, their revered grand-uncle, and he blessed them with the worlds, 'May you be victorious in battle by killing your enemies!' Having given them all appropriate seats, he asked Yudhiṣṭhira, 'What brings you here at this hour of night? Whatever is possible to me, I will do for you.' Again saluting Bhīṣma, Yudhiṣṭhira began:

'Hear my sorrows. I asked for only five villages from the Kauravas⁵ but they did

⁴ According to the code of warfare of those great days, sunset ended the fighting of each day, and thereafter the warriors were free to mix freely. Since in this battle, so many of them were old friends and kinsmen, such visits were not at all unusual.

⁵ Among the Kauravas' machinations to oust

not allow us even one; thus this great war was started by them without listening to any advice. Now, see: nine days have passed, yet still I find no sign of victory. Many men have been killed by you; and no one has any idea how you can be killed and the battle won. So if you have any little affection for us, please tell us how you yourself can be killed.'

Bhīṣma replied: 'Where there is righteousness, there is God; and victory is with the righteous, as the Vedas say. If a hundred Bhīṣmas are arrayed against righteousness, still there will be no victory for them.'

Yudhisthira: 'Just so. And if such is the case, please tell me how it is to be accomplished.'

Bhīṣma:

'So long as I remain on the battlefield with my weapons, none can kill me. Even if Indra, king of heaven, or any other god, or demon, comes to battle, they cannot overcome me. Therefore I shall myself tell you the secret of how I can be killed. With a low-caste man I will not fight, nor with a weak man, nor one poorly armed, nor one who is exhausted or who is fleeing.⁷ With a woman I would never fight, nor even a man

having a woman's name. If I perceive any inauspicious sign, then I will not fight. For instance, there is a son of Drupada, named Sikhandin,⁸ who was previously a woman but has been transformed into a man and a great warrior; yet I can never fight with 'him'. Now, if he stands before Arjuna's chariot, and Arjuna shoots his arrows from behind, I will be unable to take up arms; thus you can kill me and enjoy the fame thereof. Accordingly you act tomorrow.'

Saluting Bhīṣma, and marvelling at his selflessness, the Pāṇdavas with Kṛṣṇa returned to their tents. Then addressing Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, thoughtfully said:

'Tomorrow, thus, I will have to kill Bhīṣma who is the very head of our family. In youth, we lost our father who had brought us up with so much love and affection. When we then used to get soiled with dust and mud, Bhīṣma would take us in his lap and wash away the dirt with his own cloth—such a grand-uncle I have to kill! Alas there is none so cruel-hearted as I am!'

the Pāṇdavas was a series of games at dice, in which their 'expert', Śakuni, repeatedly defeated Yudhisthira, who had a fateful attraction for the game. The last wager brought the thirteen-year exile of the brothers. After enduring this, and successfully completing the last of the years in disguise and unrecognized, when the Pāṇdavas returned to claim their kingdom, the insatiable Duryodhana flatly refused. When Yudhisthira agreed to a compromise settlement for only five villages', Duryodhana scornfully refused: '... not even so much earth as is covered by a needle-point!'

⁶ Bhīṣma's grateful father, after the former's 'terrible' vow which ensured the Father's re-marriage, had granted him the boon that he would not die until he himself chose to die.

⁷ These restrictions were, to be sure, in the high code of a kṣatriya; but Bhīṣma carried them out to the full, both in letter and spirit.

⁸ Sikhandin: In order to obtain suitable brides for Vicitravīrya (footnote 1), Bhīṣma had gone to a *swayamvara* (ceremony of princesses' choosing husbands) and carried off all the three princesses. One of these, Ambā, had set her heart on another prince, whom Bhīṣma had also defeated in the fray; and when she reproached Bhīṣma with great courage, he agreed to her returning home. However, her beloved, feeling disgraced by his defeat, sent her back to Bhīṣma, who thus requested Vicitravīrya to accept her as wife; but he too, refused, since her heart was set on another. She finally asked Bhīṣma himself to marry her; but he could not break his great vow. So, after years of bitter suffering and disappointments, she developed an all-consuming hatred for Bhīṣma as the 'cause' of all this; she went to the Himalayas and practised severe austerities to obtain the boon from Śiva that in her next birth she would slay Bhīṣma. And impatient for this, she entered a funeral-pyre and gave up that body. Born next as daughter of Drupada (king of Pancala) she again performed great austerities and became transformed into a male, taking the name of Sikhandin.

But Kṛṣṇa reminded him :

'O Arjuna, why do you now forget your promise that you will kill Bhīṣma in this battle? Being a Kṣatriya, how can you go back on your word? This hero, now intoxicated with pride of success in battle, indeed ought to be killed. And unless you act so, you cannot win the battle. The gods already know how Bhīṣma will die. Let that higher Law now be fulfilled; do not act against it. Excepting you, none else will be able to carry it out. Even Indra with his thunderbolts will not be able to kill the grandsire who is like unto Death himself. Know that, long ago, the supremely intelligent Bhrhaspati, preceptor of the gods, told Indra, "You should kill anyone who attacks you, whether he be elderly, or possessed of good qualities, or not!" O Dhanañjaya (that is, Arjuna), this is the code of the Kṣatriya, that without any malice he should protect the just, and withal aspire to know everything that should be known.'

From the start of the next day's battle, Bhīṣma as before began wreaking havoc with the Pāṇḍava army, killing even their elephants with arrows! At last Arjuna, finding no other recourse, called Śikhandin (one of his own warriors) and stationed him in front of his chariot. When Sikhandin's arrows began piercing him, Bhīṣma smiling said, 'O Sikhṇḍin, whether or not you shoot arrows at me, I am not going to fight with you. The Creator has made you neither man nor woman; and you have remained like that'

Angered, Sikhandin replied: 'O Bhīṣma, you are famed as the killer of all enemies: even the gods are in fear of you. Yet now I am going to finish you, in the full view of all.' Still Bhīṣma, unmoved, said, 'Even though I may be cut to pieces, yet seeing your inauspicious from, I cannot fight with you.'

4

Then Arjuna instructed Śikhandin about what kind of arrows to shoot, in which directions, whereupon the latter pierced Bhīṣma's body with a thousand arrows. Even that was not yet enough; and at length Arjuna was forced to take up his own bow. With many thousands of arrows he pierced Bhīṣma's every pore, as it were. At last, shivering like a cow when dew-drops fall on her, Bhīṣma fell from his chariot, his head toward the east. But the myriad arrow-tips supported his body entirely above the earth. Abandoning all fighting, the warriors of both sides came to see the tallen grandsire, and began recounting his many noble deeds.

Then the hero said :

'As long as the sun is journeying toward the south⁹ I will not die: I will retain my Prāṇas (vital energies) while giving up attachment to the sense-organs. As soon as the sun turns toward the north, I shall give up the body. Till then, I shall keep this body on this bed of arrows. Still, there is one difficulty: as the body is thus held off the ground, the head hangs down unsupported.'

At this, Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kaurava brothers, hurried to bring some pillows for the sufferer. But seeing this, Bhīṣma laughed and said: 'Though a Kṣatriya, you do not seem to understand the situation. These pillows do not befit the warrior's couch on which I lie.' Then looking at Arjuna, he continued: 'Dear son Pārtha (lit., son of Prthā or Kunti), you are the best of archers, you know the

⁹The scriptures explained the inauspiciousness of death during the six months of the sun's 'journeying towards the south'—i.e., from June solistice till December's. As stated in *Bhagavad-gītā*, VIII. 25, these months are associated with the 'path of the manes' which ends with reirth, whereas the other six are associated with the path of the gods' leading to Brahman.

Kshatriya dharma, and you are intelligent. Therefore, give me a suitable support.'

Arjuna, knowing his desire, then shot three arrows *through* the grandsire's head into the ground! Bhīṣma seemed now content; and only asked Duryodhana to bring water, which was promptly done using a golden pitcher. However, Bhīṣma only looked again toward Arjuna, intently; and he, understanding, shot this time one arrow into the earth. To the wonder of all, from that spot came a rush of Ganges-water which fell just into Bhīṣma's mouth! Having thus quenched his thirst, Bhīṣma addressed Duryodhana :

'No more should you quarrel with the Pāṇḍava brothers! Can you not learn from

what you have just seen? Who else than Arjuna could have brought me water in such a fashion? Make some settlement with these brothers now, so they may have their just share of the kingdom. Victory is with righteousness, and Nārāyaṇa (Kṛṣṇa) is with the righteous.'

Yet Duryodhana, implacable, repeated his original ultimatum : 'I will not give even so much territory as is covered by a needle-point, without fighting.' Bhīṣma resigned himself to this grim manifestation of Divine Will, and gradually the warriors departed to their tents after having built a suitable shelter around the grandsire's bed of arrows, and leaving proper attendants for him.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND BENODINI DASI

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

Regarding Benodini Dasi, the master dramatist Girishchandra Ghosh once declared :

'I must frankly confess that I am . . . indebted to her all-round talent. The extraordinary appreciation by the public of my dramas *Chaitanyalila*, *Buddhadeva*, *Vilwamangal*, *Nala-Damayanti*, etc., is partially due to the chief role in the respective dramas played by Srimati Binodini and her masterly treatment of those characters.'

This unreserved eulogy is about a woman who, in the Hindu social hierarchy of the late nineteenth century, was on one of its lowest rungs. In those days, no woman of respectable family could have been expected to appear on the stage. In fact, professional actresses were then regarded as no better than prostitutes. But this remarkable woman, Binodini, had met Sri Rama-

krishna and received his grace. Scorned and downtrodden as she was, she received the grace as a boon direct from God the All-Merciful. Her life-story vindicates a notable utterance of Swami Vivekananda, regarding his Master, 'He [Sri Ramakrishna] was the Saviour of women, Saviour of the masses, Saviour of all, high and low.'

Born in 1863 in a poor household at 145 Cornwallis Street, Calcutta, Benodini was brought up in a family which had to struggle hard for its bare subsistence. The family, besides Benodini, consisted of her mother—who could not even tell who the father was—, brother and maternal grandmother. The grandmother betrothed the five-year-old brother to a motherless girl aged two years and a half, and earned some gold ornaments which helped the family stave off starvation for some time. But that bro-

ther died early. Some time later, the maternal mother-in-law persuaded the little bride to leave Benodini's family, despite the remonstrances of Benodini's mother.

Nevertheless, as early as the age of nine, Benodini began to learn songs from 'Gangamani', who had come to live in that poor locality, and who later earned fame at the Star Theatre. When only eleven or twelve years old, Benodini displayed remarkable ingenuity in her maiden role as a servant-maid of Draupadi in the drama *Satru-samhar* (based on an episode from the *Mahabharata*), on the stage of the Great National Theatre. Even before this, she had had some education in a primary school and had picked up working knowledge of spoken English along with Bengali. And soon, Girish Ghosh recognized her talent, eagerness, devotion, and ability. He took upon himself the responsibility of training her in the art and science of drama. Nonetheless, as he later generously said :

'Benodini. . . . has mentioned quite respectfully her training under my care. But I should admit frankly that Benodini's brilliance on the stage is more due to her own ingenuity than my training.'¹

She served the Great National Theatre, the Bengal Theatre, the National Theatre, and the Star Theatre (which is specially associated with the name of Girish), till her early retirement in 1886. In those twelve years, she played in as many as sixty roles, in fifty dramas. Contemporary papers hailed her as the 'Flower of the native stage', 'Prima Donna of the Bengali stage', 'Moon of the Star Company', etc. In the beginning, it may be that she had exhibited nothing but the 'wit of the parrot'; but after she began training with Saratchandra

Ghosh of the Bengal Theatre, and Girish, she began to show her native abilities as well as capacity to learn. Her mind seemed to take on instantly the colour of each character which she played, and she had a genius for portraying vividly the moods and attitudes of each. Regarding this training, she wrote in her memoirs :

'Girishchandra used to give me instruction with much care and affection. His method of teaching was quite novel. First he used to give the significance of a particular part, then I was asked to commit it to memory; after that at leisure he would train me up. . . . Babu Amritalal Mitra and Amritalal Bose, too, used to come to our house and used to tell me about the writing of Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, and Pope, and stories about the celebrated actresses of the various English schools. Sometimes, Girish Babu used to explain passages from different English dramas and poems and give me lessons about move- of the body and different postures. On account of such careful training I began to apply myself to histrionic culture.'²

Thus, with very little to eat but much to hope for, Benodini steadily rose to fame in the Bengali stage. In later days her master Girish wrote her in a letter :

'Your life's achievements are great indeed. Your acting has gladdened the hearts of hundreds of persons. Your success in developing the characters in many a drama by your rare talent is no ordinary achievement. Your acting in the role of Chaitanya in my *Chaitanyalila* flooded the hearts of a great many spectators with devotion and you have earned the blessings of many Vaishnavas. No ordinary person could have made such attainments.'³

Prominent men of the day, like Edwin Arnold, Fr. Lafont of Xavier's College, Col.

¹ Benodini Dasi : *Amar Katha O Anyanya Rachana* (Edited by Soumitra Chatterjee and Nirmalya Acharya), p. 16 (Introduction).

² Hemendranath Dasgupta : *The Indian Stage* (Girish Centenary Edition), Vol. III, pp. 13-14.

³ *Girish Rachanavali* (Sahitya Samsad), Vol. III, p. 828.

Olcott, Sisir Kumar Ghosh, Pandit Mathuranath Padaratna, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, etc., paid tributes to her acting. Vijaykrishna Goswami, on seeing her performance, danced as if in ecstasy.

*

Yet these records of success are as nothing in comparison to the crowning blessing, which no other actress is known to have attained. She herself considered her acting in the role of Chaitanya as her greatest achievement, since it brought the highest blessings from Sri Ramakrishna, which opened up a new realm of fulfilment in her life. Quite justifiably she spoke of this as the greatest event of her life. She used to say later : 'For this reason I consider the body fortunate. Even if the whole world should scoff at me, I would not mind it. For I am aware that the highly respected Ramakrishna Paramahansa has blessed me.'⁴

Actor-playwright Girishchandra had written the drama *Chaitanyalila*, basing it on Vrindabandas's *Chaitanya-Bhagavat*.⁵ The launching of this play on the stage was an event in the history of the Bengali stage particularly significant at that time when the educated youth were victims of a dangerous erosion of Hindu values. Hemendranath Dasgupta, a noted writer of Bengal, observed :

'*Chaitanyalila* also acted as a [force for] renaissance of Hindu religion and culture at that critical time in the national history of Bengal, when young Bengal, England-returned anglicized Babus and the Brahmos predominated in the educated society. The religious faith of the whole Hindu community was greatly revived by the religious sentiments so incorporated in the drama. . . . *Chaitanyalila*—which practically electrified the whole country—was the chief topic

of the day. By this time Bankim Chandra by his *Anushilan* was drawing the attention of the educated Bengal. . . . [to] religion and culture. . . . Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachudamani and Swami Krishnananda were delivering impressive lectures on Hinduism, the Adi Brahma Samaj was also giving lessons on Upanishads, and just at this hour Girish surcharged the whole atmosphere of the stage with deep religious emotions that roused an unprecedented religious fervour among the people. Thus to a very great degree *Chaitanyalila* contributed to the Hindu awakening and Hindu revival.'⁶

This drama clearly had a significant bearing also on the life-story of Girish. He himself said : 'This *Chaitanyalila* is my everything. This led to my receiving the grace of the Guru.'⁷

Benodini appeared in the role of Sri Chaitanya, in this drama, first on 2 August, 1884. While she was preparing for this, Sisir Kumar Ghosh, Editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (a prominent Calcutta daily), advised her : 'You must constantly remember the holy feet of Sri Chaitanya. He is the saviour of the lowly, protector of the degraded ones : his kindness on the low-born is infinite.' Benodini reminisced later :

'Remembering his suggestions, I used to think of the holy feet of Sri Chaitanya in all fear. I got very apprehensive as to how I shall cross this ocean of difficulties. Silently I used to pray. "Oh Saviour of the lowly, please grant your blessings on this person, downtrodden as I am." The night before the first performance of the *Chaitanyalila*, I passed almost sleepless. I felt deeply tense. Early next morning I took my bath in the Ganga, wrote the holy name of Sri Durga ([the Divine Mother] 108 times, and prayed fervently : "Oh, Mahaprabhu (Sri Chaitanya) must save me from this. May I receive his grace !"'⁸

⁶ *The Indian Stage*, pp. 57-60.

⁷ *Tattvamanjari* (Bengali), Vol. XX, No. 5, p. 157.

⁸ *Amar Katha*, pp. 44-5.

⁴ Indra Mitra : *Sajghar*, p. 226.

⁵ Asutosh Bhattacharya : *Bangla Natyasahityer Itihas*, p. 701.

And grace she surely received : for, some weeks later, on 21 September, 1884, Sri Ramakrishna came to see the drama at the Star Theatre. A standard history of the Indian stage considers this to be 'a red-letter day for the Bengali stage, that it was favoured and blessed by so saintly a person' as Sri Ramakrishna.

Meanwhile, as Benodini recorded in her autobiography, *Amar Katha* :

'While acting, I felt the grace of God. When in the role of Nimai [Chaitanya] as a boy I was singing, "I have none but Radha ; I blow the name of Radha on my flute" and moved forward on the stage, a powerful light engulfed my heart. When accepting a garland from Mohini I asked, "What do you see in me, Mohini?". I completely lost sight of the external world and looked into my inner being. I could see nothing outside. I visualized, as it were, the glorious lotus feet of Sri Chaitanya. I felt that it was Gauranga [Chaitanya] or Gourhari, who was speaking. I was attentively listening to him and was repeating his words through my lips. My body shuddered ; my hair stood on end ; my surroundings appeared hazy.'⁹

From Binodini's memoirs we can quote further an interesting experience showing the depth of her feelings in this role of Chaitanya.

'After being admitted [as Chaitanya] into the order of *sannyasins*, I bade farewell to my mother Sachidevi with the words :

"Oh mother, weep in the name of Krishna ;

Do not weep for Nimai :

You will have everything if you weep for Krishna ;

If you weep for Nimai

You will lose Nimai but will not find Krishna either."

The scene melted the hearts of many women in the audience and some of them wailed so loudly that it reverberated in my heart. Again, the heart-

rending moaning of Sachidevi, my own excitement, and the earnestness of the audience used to move me so much that I would be overpowered by my own tears. After *sannyasa*, I would sing, "Oh Hari, where have You hidden Yourself after stealing my heart? Alone am I in the world ; please show Yourself unto me ; Dear Friend, grant me shelter." I cannot describe my feelings of those moments. I sincerely felt that I was truly alone, there was really none who was my own. My heart rushed out to find a shelter at the feet of Lord Hari. At that time I used to dance frantically and some days I could not bear the strain of my emotions and fainted away.'¹⁰

Girish himself wrote : 'While acting, Benodini got absorbed, and forgetting her own existence she was filled with an inexplicable holy thought, and in those moments her acting did not appear to be mere acting on the stage but was felt as a tangible reality. . . .'¹¹ And so, although in later days, others, of course, played in the role of Sri Chaitanya, none proved able to surpass the achievement of Benodini.

Sri Ramakrishna, though an almost unlettered brahmana, was a remarkable saint who, with his sensitive and sympathetic disposition, attractive smile and charming voice, had cast the spell of his personality over many and varied people of Calcutta, the then capital of India. His simple spontaneous utterances revealed profound spiri-

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 45-6.

¹¹ *Girish Rachanavali*, loc-cit., p. 22. In this connection the observations of H. S. Olcott of the Theosophical Society are relevant: 'The poor girl who played Chaitanya may belong to the class of the unfortunates, but while on the scene she throws herself into her role so ardently that one only sees the Vaishnava saint before him. . . . So thoroughly does the Star actress feel the emotions of the saint she personates, so intensely arouses in her bosom the religious ecstasy of Bhakti Yoga, that she fainted dead away between the acts, the evening I was there.' (*The Indian Stage*, p. 55).

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 45.

tual truths, and exercised an intangible but powerful influence on his listeners, as no other man of his time had done.

On the day Sri Ramakrishna was to go to Calcutta to see *Chaitanyalila*, some devotees had mentioned that public women were playing in the roles of Chaitanya, Nityananda, and others. But Sri Ramakrishna had told them: 'I shall look upon them as the Blissful Mother Herself. What if one of them acts the part of Chaitanya? An imitation custard-apple reminds one of the real fruit.'¹² So, about half-past eight that evening, the carriage with Sri Ramakrishna and devotees drew up in front of the Star Theatre at 62 Beadon Street. Among those with the Master were Mahendranath Gupta ('M', the author of *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*), Baburam (later Swami Premananda), and Mahendra Mukherjee. Girish, as manager of the theatre, cordially received Sri Ramakrishna and conducted him to one of the boxes, where a man had been placed to fan him. Though Girish had seen the Master once or twice before, he had not yet become the devotee, which he was soon to be. The brilliantly-lighted hall filled with spectators gladdened Sri Ramakrishna, since such sights always aroused his God-consciousness. As the curtain rose, all talking was hushed; the attention of the audience was fixed on the stage.

The different scenes depicting the early life of Sri Chaitanya threw Sri Ramakrishna into many spiritual moods. Often he was overpowered with divine ecstasy and sometimes he went into *samadhi*. Again, because of intense emotion, tears ran down his cheeks. The acting of Chaitanya in particular, impressed him greatly. In one scene, where Srivas—a companion of Chaitanya—

comes to visit Nimai, the latter clings to Srivas's feet and says, with eyes full of tears :

'Ah me ! Revered sir, I have not yet attained devotion to Krishna. Futile is this wretched life ! Tell me, sir, where is Krishna? Where shall I find Krishna? Give me the dust of your feet with your blessings, that I may realize the Blue One with the garland of wild flowers hanging about his neck.'

Watching this scene, Sri Ramakrishna 'was eager to say something but he could not. His voice was choked with emotion; the tears ran down his cheeks; with unmoving eyes he watched Nimai clinging to Srivas's feet and saying, "Sir, I have not yet attained devotion to Krishna."¹³

When at last the drama was over, the Master was shown into the office room of the theatre. As he expressed it a little later on leaving the theatre, he had 'found the representation the same as the real'.¹⁴ Soon the actors and actresses came to salute him. Writes Benodini of her own experience :

'In a dancing posture Sri Ramakrishna said, "Mother, say 'Hari Guru, Guru Hari' ". He then purified my unholy body by placing both of his palms on my head. He blessed me saying, "May you be blessed with spiritual awakening !"'

This, Benodini could hardly have even dreamt ! She was overwhelmed; she could not speak. Recollecting this event, she writes in her memoirs :

'His beautiful placid form, eager to pardon all my sins, and his compassionate look upon a lowly person like me, are still vivid in my memory. Standing in front of me, the Saviour of sinners, the Redeemer of the downtrodden, bestowed upon me freedom from fear. But alas ! I am very unfortunate. I could not recognize his worth fully.'¹⁵

¹² 'M' : *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1947), p. 508.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 516.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 518.

¹⁵ *Amar Katha*, p. 47.

From circumstantial evidence it seems almost certain that Benodini worshipped the feet of Sri Ramakrishna while he was in an ecstatic mood at the end of this play.¹⁶ According to another source, twelve actresses who were there made their obeisance to Sri Ramakrishna, who in an absorbed mood began singing songs on Mother Kali. Benodini, while saluting Sri Ramakrishna was overwhelmed and lost her consciousness.¹⁷

Later on, Sri Ramakrishna saw Benodini's acting in different roles in the dramas of *Dakshayajna*, *Prahlada-charit*, *Dhruva-charit*, and *Brishaketu*. On some of these occasions she again met the Master. From her very first meeting she had looked on him as God himself.¹⁸ In the meantime, Sri Ramakrishna's influence was becoming more and more evident in her life. Finally, When the Master was lying seriously ill in a garden-house at Shyampukur, Calcutta, and visitors were strictly limited on doctor's orders, Benodini one day gained entrance into his room in the disguise of a European gentleman. The Master, however, immediately recognized her, and laughing at the successful impersonation, received her cordially with the words, 'Mother, you are welcome, please take your seat.' This was perhaps the last meeting between them; and on this occasion too we find that the Master was 'pleased with her faith and devotion,

¹⁶ Swami Saradananda : *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, (Madras Math, 1970), p. 867. Though Benodini's name is not mentioned in this passage, there is detailed description of 'the actress who acted the leading part' in a religious drama in Girish's theatre, and who later impersonated a European gentleman in order to see the Master in his last illness. This, in comparison with the similar account given in *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Almora, U.P., 1964, p. 566), leaves small room for doubt, about this episode.

¹⁷ Akshay Kumar Sen : *Sri-Sri-Ramakrishna-Punthi*, 5th Edition, p. 467.

he praised her courage, strategy, and reverence. He gave her a little spiritual instruction, that she might have faith in and reliance on God, and bade good-bye to her soon afterwards. She shed tears of joy and repentance, touched adoringly his holy feet with her head; and went away. . . .¹⁹

*

Benodini had, as we have seen, risen to fame from a very humble situation. Yet at the peak of her career, and when she was barely twenty-three years old, she quite suddenly retired, in the year 1886. As her skill in acting had already become almost a legend, her retirement from the stage naturally created a sensation. But it is to us evident that since her meeting with Sri Ramakrishna there had come a great change in her. Her repentance, self-analysis, and above all her religious endeavour, had brought about a transformation which is clearly evident from her memoirs. Her last appearance was in the role of Rangini in *Bellik Bazar*, on 25 December, 1886. Sri Ramakrishna had left this mortal world on 16 August, 1886, and some hint at a close link between these two events.²⁰

Outside the arena of the stage, Benodini lived another fifty-five years (till February 1942), of which we know little except that she spent much time in spiritual practices. Hemendranath Dasgupta recorded, 'Now Benodini surrendering herself fully at the feet of Gopala [Sri Krishna] is serving Him devotedly.'²¹ We also know that she

¹⁸ *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 566.

¹⁹ Swami Saradananda : *op. cit.*, p. 867.

²⁰ *Amar Katha*, p. 25 (Introduction). The editors of this volume, after considerable research work, had arrived at a belief in the 'link' between these two events. They specially stressed the notable change in Binodini's attitude after the staging of *Nimai Sannyasa*, and the close temporal sequence between the Master's death and her retirement from the stage.

²¹ *loc. cit.*

kept in touch with the Belur Math (headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission) and introduced other actresses like Tarasundari to the monastic disciples of the Master there. Besides, her native literary ability kept her engaged for quite a bit of these years. Of her works, mention may be made of *Basana* (an anthology of her poems), *Kanak and Nandini* (a novel in verse), and her autobiography. These certainly deserve appreciation.

Though Benodini definitely stands in the front rank of those, like Girish, Ardhendusekhar, Nagendranath Banerjee and Amritalal Bose—but for whose untiring efforts the Bengali stage could not have achieved the glory of which it is proud—, still her grand transformation following her contact with Sri Ramakrishna is perhaps the more significant fact in her life. Weary and heartsick as she had become, the Master's influence redeemed her from a life of worldliness, helped her overcome her shortcomings,

lifted her into a life of culture and spirituality. Indeed her own life-drama stands out as a striking illustration of the way in which the ever-merciful Master helped the poor and neglected—for whom he had divine compassion—and placed them on the path leading to purity and bliss. As Girishchandra wrote in an introduction to her autobiography :

'Suddenly I remember that the . . . life of this girl bears the testimony of a great lesson. People often whisper that she was low, that she was to be hated; but the Saviour of the neglected ones does not hate them, but redeems them from sin and damnation. Benodini's life is a living illustration of this. Benodini succeeded in finding a permanent shelter at the holy feet of Sri Sri Paramahamsadeva [Ramakrishna]—the culmination of the four aims of the human life, which one fails to achieve even through a whole life's penance.'²²

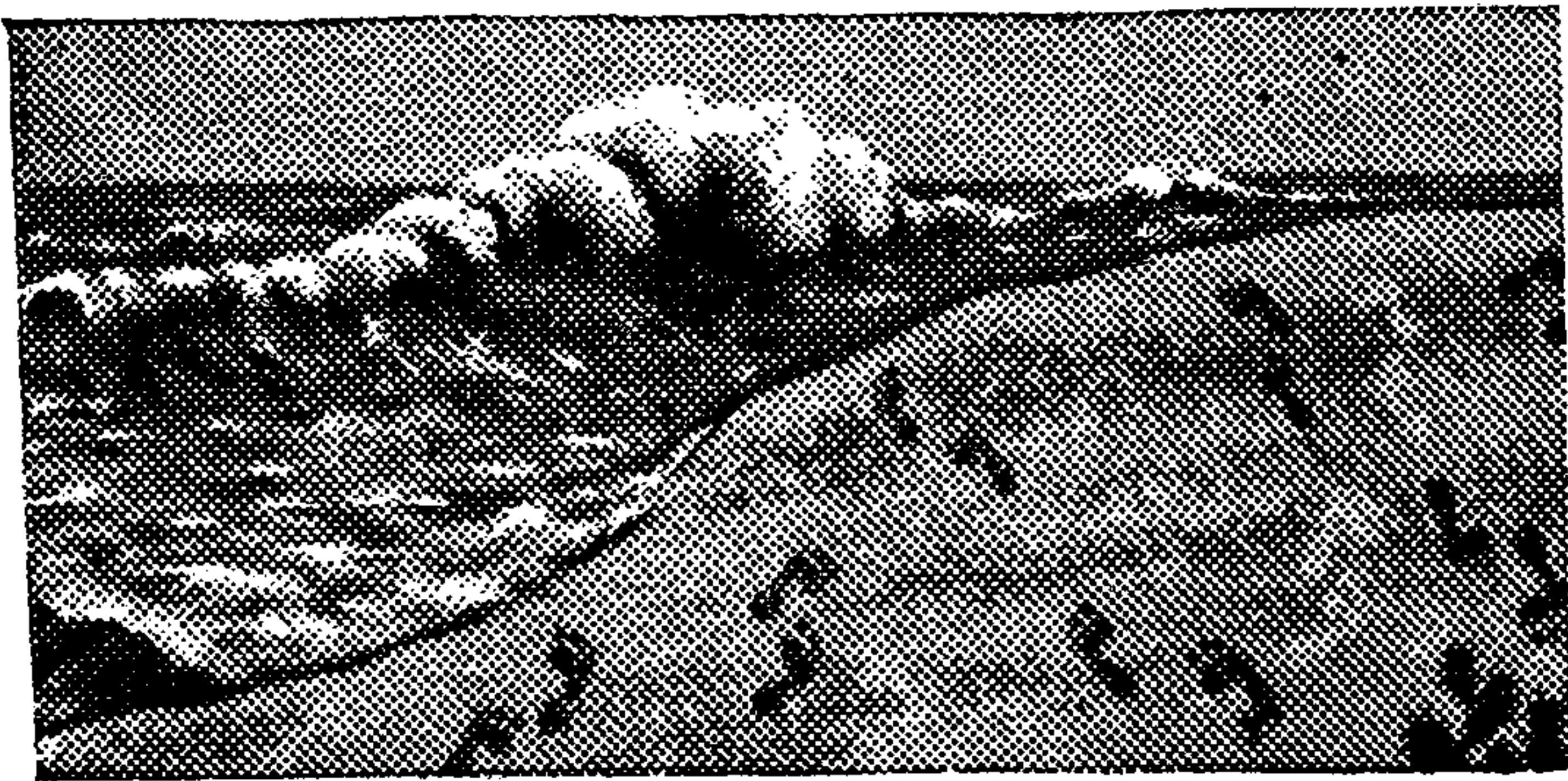
²² Girishchandra Ghosh : *Banga Rangalaye Sri-mati Benodini*—in *Amar Katha*, p. 142.

Grace is necessary to salvation, free will equally so—but grace in order to give salvation, free will in order to receive it. Therefore, we should not attribute part of the good work to grace and part to free will; it is performed in its entirety by the common and inseparable action of both, entirely by grace, entirely by free will, but springing from the first in the second.

— St. Bernard

For He standeth all aloof and abideth us sorrowfully and mournfully till when we come, and hath haste to have us to Him. For we are His joy and His delight, and He is our slave and our life.

— Julian of Norwich



HUMAN TRENDS

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI TODAY

I

A small group of people, in its centre a middle-aged man on a stretcher, is wending its way slowly along the sunny mountain-slopes of central Italy. After spending twenty strenuous years wandering up and down his beloved native country, Francis is now worn out, and it is clear that death cannot be far off. The physicians have tried to save his eyesight, but to no avail. Now the mortally sick and blind Francis is being carried back to his native town, Assisi, from where as a young ascetic he had begun his pilgrimage. Armed guards have been sent from Assisi to protect him. The dignitaries of the little town fear attacks from rival towns each one of which would like to gain for itself the honour and grace of being the last resting place of the beloved Saint. Francis' body has thus become a 'relic' while he is still alive! In Assisi he is accommodated in the Bishop's Palace where many of his disciples have gathered to listen to his last counsels. But his earthly mission is still not complete: Francis hears of a quarrel between the bishop and the *podesta* (magistrate) of the town. Full of sorrow, he adds another line to his *Canticle of the Sun*—which has been hailed as one

of the most beautiful of the Middle Ages—'Praised be my Lord for all those who pardon one another for His love's sake...'. He sends some of his brethren to the ecclesiastical and worldly lords of the town with the order to sing the hymn including the new line. Once again Francis has sowed peace—not by arguments and negotiations but through love.

Pain grows intense, but the Saint, having arrived at the final test of his strength, remains joyful as ever before. A compassionate brother asks him, 'Father, why do you not beg God, with whom you are so intimately united, to relieve you from your excruciating pain?' Francis rises from his bed and flings himself on the bare ground, crying: 'Never can I ask my Lord to relieve me from pain. I will rather pray that I shall forever fulfil his most holy will!'¹

¹ Devotees of Sri Ramakrishna will recall a very similar incident near the end of his life: When asked, 'Sir, you are a great Yogi. Why do you not put your mind a little on your body and cure your disease?' the Master replied, '... My friend, I thought you were a sage, but you talk like other men of the world. This mind has been given to the Lord. Do you mean to say that I should take it back and put it upon the body which is but a mere cage of the soul?' (Quoted by Swami Vivekananda, in his lecture, 'My Master').

Whenever Francis feels a little better, the bishop's palace resounds with his songs. He composes one final line for his Canticle, in praise of death: 'Be praised, Lord, for our Sister the Death of the body, whom no man may escape...', and sings it unceasingly. Another disciple feels that the people outside the palace may be scandalized: shouldn't a saint await his death in fear and trembling? Such was the sombre notion of the Middle Ages when people were fascinated by the fact of death and revelled in fantasies of hellfire and other such atrocious punishments. Yet Francis, in many respects very much the child of his times, does not conform to this popular opinion about facing death.

'Let everyone be permitted to die his *own* death'—is the line of a modern German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke. The joyous Saint, whose life has been a sweet poem of love of God, also dies joyously and singing. He asks to be carried to the hermitage of Portiuncula, a few miles from Assisi. Here he had begun his religious life. In that little hut and in the adjacent chapel the fervent prayers and severe austerities of his early ascetic life had been said and performed. Here he desires to lie also. Midway between Assisi and Portiuncula, he asks his carriers to put him on the ground, and his blind eyes turned towards his native town, he takes leave of it and blesses it. At Portiuncula, he is placed on the bare ground and stripped of his clothing—at his own request. Thus he wishes to die, with nothing to call his own. Poverty, which he has loved so dearly and followed so uncompromisingly in life—to demonstrate the irrelevance of matter—must necessarily be his companion in death. It is the final victory of the ever-living Spirit over matter.

Death comes on 3 October 1226—that is, 750 years ago this month.

II

But, soon, alas, a serious quarrel arose between different factions of Francis' disciples. He had founded a new religious order, the Brothers Minor—which came commonly to be called the Franciscans, and given them a Rule to live by. This Rule was unusually strict, particularly concerning the observance of poverty. Despite Francis' express interdiction, his disciples began to interpret the Rule in different ways and, accordingly, to adopt different modes of living. The so-called "Spirituals" desired to observe the Rule in its original strictness, among them many of the most intimate companions of the Saint. But the Church and the rest of the order persecuted them bitterly and severely for their obedience. Conflict was latent already during Francis' lifetime, and many deviations from the path he had showed, have been recorded. But after his death, the struggle continued openly. Francis' first disciple, Bernard of Quintaville, was "hunted like a wild beast"², and had to hide in the forest. "The other first companions who did not succeed in flight had to undergo the severest usage. In the March of Ancona, the home of the Spirituals, the victorious party used a terrible violence"³, and one friar, Caesar of Speyer, actually died of violence from the hands of another monk. The Church persecuted the Spirituals as heretics, and the Inquisition further decimated them; even then, they continued to survive, outside the Church, as long as 1466. How terribly the message of love and peace had been betrayed!

The rest of the order, further, split up into different groups, namely into the liberal "Conventuals" who accepted possessions,

² Paul Sabatier: *Life of St. Francis of Assisi* (London, 1930), p. 337.

³ *Ibid.*

and the "Observants" who remained without possessions but did accept some of the relaxations of the Rule imposed upon them by the popes. Finally, the two groups consolidated themselves as separate orders; later, a further split created the Capuchins, leaving the Franciscan Family thoroughly divided.

Indeed, the 'Franciscan Rule' could hardly be observed in letter by many: they could occasionally be realized by individuals, but rarely if ever groups, what to speak of an entire Order. A religious order which brings together men or women of diverse temperaments and religious talents cannot possibly live by a Rule which considers 'holy perfection' the norm. And already in the founder's lifetime the Franciscans were a powerful order of several thousand members—within their first ten years the number had already reached 5,000, such was the unprecedented influence of Francis and his disciples! And Francis had enjoined them to 'possess nothing but the clothes you wear'; he wanted them to lead a homeless, wandering life. Moving from place to place, he asked them to live by begging or by doing manual work: they should never touch money. They should be ready to live in the utter solitude of a hermitage for some time, and then with the same naturalness and joy, go from village to village preaching to the people; that is to say, they should be equally well fitted for the contemplative and for the active life. Such a life indeed Jesus Christ had lived; and St. Francis had followed his example most perfectly. But was it one which could be led by an Order as a whole? The more ancient Rule of St. Benedict has often been praised for its moderation, its circumspection, and its insight into the weaknesses of man. The result is that Benedict's Rule is still even today followed, with certain variations and mitigations, by a large 'family' of

orders; whereas Francis' Rule has, properly speaking, never been followed, and is today approximated even less than ever before. This 'impracticality' of Francis has often been mentioned. It seems to have induced him to lay down the direction of his Order several years before his death. Francis was not an organizer nor a 'practical' thinker. Did not Sri Ramakrishna say to Keshab Chandra Sen: 'With the increase of love of God, you won't be able to keep your organization [the Brahma Samaj] together'? Francis must surely have felt the truth of this tendency.

And yet, if few followed the Rule, thousands of devout people have ever since been inspired by the personality of Francis. This was the true Rule. Francis is an ideal *bhakta* (devotee of God) and his life is full of the sweetest and most appealing legends of how his overflowing heart expressed its love to God and to men. As was the case with the followers of other great teachers of devotion, love of God—Śrī Caitanya for example—, Francis' followers have always been in danger of becoming sentimentalists. Yet the Saint himself was never sentimental. His life was too harshly ascetic and difficult to allow shallow emotionalism. We all tend naturally to prefer the 'soft' side of the saints, which we distil from a handful of anecdotes and legends, while forgetting their hard *sādhanās* (spiritual struggles). Thus, all too often, Francis was to his admirers nothing but the man who preached to the birds and did other such wondrous things, rather than he who suffered the tortures of Christ's crucifixion when he received the stigmata at the Mount of Alverna.

III

In many essential details, Francis' conception of the wandering life resembles that of the wandering *sannyāsins* (monks) of India. That is one reason why Francis has become

so well known in India, perhaps the most so of all Christian saints. We ought, however, to note some of the inevitable differences, along with these resemblances. Francis, following the traditions of Western Christianity, founded an Order, whereas the monks of India are free to roam at will and independently. And even when living in an Ashrama or Math (monastery), their daily routines are traditionally not so rigidly tied to prescribed rules: their lives remain relatively flexible. It gives them a freedom which may be dangerous to some, but is beneficial to many. This freedom allows the individual monk to rise above the average, without being hampered or bent towards mediocrity by the brotherhood's influence. But by the same token, the weak will have relatively little to lean upon. Yet only by facing such risks can the ideal of the wandering monk's life be realized at all. It cannot long endure when organized and subjected to a rule: the wandering life is *per se* spontaneous, irregular, unpredictable, and open to creative experiments. It was apparently Francis' miscalculation, to have believed that he could perpetuate Christ's life-style and firmly implant it in the consciousness of the Church by formulating a Rule and making it binding on his followers. It must be added, too, that though there have been wandering monks and preachers from early Christianity—Christ's apostles themselves being the first—such a life has never been typical. The rigours of the colder climates in most of the lands to which Christianity has spread do not favour such a life-style. Further, since Rome early displaced Israel as centre of the Faith, the Latin genius for organization constantly tended towards various more-or-less defined social forms, rather than strictly individualistic ones. Thus, people who did manage to mould their own lives to high

ideals, sooner or later gathered disciples around them, consolidated their way of life, and tried to preserve it for posterity. So, today it is perhaps only in India that Francis' life-style is still current and influential. As the Indian tradition of wandering monks goes back to pre-Buddhistic times, naturally these monks do not accept Francis as their particular ideal; still, by coincidence, it seems, his life and theirs are very similar. Is it really a coincidence? There is ample evidence that on their highest levels, all religions come together and speak with one voice. We have the strong feeling that the spontaneous, independent life of the wandering monk, depending only on God, is the highest form of religious life—its highest life-style—; or in other words, that the noblest spirit in any religion expresses itself most, in such a wandering life. Thus we may regard this seeming coincidence as being no coincidence in fact, but a spiritual law.

In Western countries indeed, such a life-style has become virtually impossible nowadays, due to the tremendously mechanized life which society has condemned itself to adopt. Almost every attempt at a spontaneous and unrestrained life is smothered by the demands of society and especially the finely-structured governmental machinery. Yet we must not forget the striking trends among young people there, since the Second World War. There has been a strong tendency among them to extricate themselves from the so-called Establishment, no matter how great the risk. Many of them have preferred poverty—to live without a steady job, or else choose work ranking much below their qualifications but which benefited poor or underprivileged people. Some of them have led virtual mendicant lives, overcoming many administrative and social hurdles, at least for some time. They wanted and needed such freedom, to 'find

themselves', to find their own answers to the Eternal Questions, and to live the answers which they found as honestly as possible. Certainly these young people are a distant echo of Francis' life—of this romantic and at the same time spiritual yearning for a free life, a poor life, a spontaneous life. Naturally numbers of them are attracted to India although again their image here is far from ideal. It is a counter-blast to the constraints and anonymity of the modern crowd-oriented society. Spontaneity of action is a basic need of man: he desires to act not according to a fixed pattern but freely, creatively; and he desires to see the effects of his actions before his eyes, rather than losing track of them in the faceless crowd of fellow beings.

IV

We hasten to complement this gloomy picture with the observation that saintliness can assert itself—and has asserted itself—in any social environment whatever. So, saints have not been wanting in Western countries also: they live even today, though most of them not as revered gurus, but anonymously and hidden from public gaze. And there are, even today, true followers of St Francis. We shall give only one example here. Purposely we do not mention those few Western aspirants who have come to India and lived as wandering monks in this country. Their names and lives may be quite well known: they are remarkable for their complete acceptance of the Indian tradition. So instead, we shall give an example from a Christian environment. The well-known poet and priest, Ernesto Cardenal, of Nicaragua, has in an interview related his experience with a young man with the makings of a saint, who visited him on the little island Solentiname, where Cardenal lives as the head of a small monastic community.

'...He called himself Brother Juan, and came from the U.S.A....He is well known all over Latin America because he has an unforgettable personality. Other . . . [young people] who on their journeys had come to meet us here, had already told us about him, how well-known he is and how many friends he has. Brother Juan really lives in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, and he travels with the vow of poverty. In the first years of his pilgrimage, he had also made the vow never to beg for anything, but to accept only what was given to him, voluntarily. Later he felt free to beg, and thus he travelled through the whole of Latin America—even by ship and by plane.

'He also came here to Solentiname. He had a great influence on all people, on account of his personality, his appearance, and his flute-playing. He wore a sort of priestly cassock, he had beautiful, long and curly hair, and the appearance of Jesus as depicted in many traditional paintings. He told everybody about love. He preached love wherever he went. He addressed all people as "brother" or "sister" or "dear little brother"...Actually he resembled both Jesus and St. Francis. The people who hear him generally invite him to their home for a meal and to spend the night, and they pay him the expenses of his travels. Sometimes Brother Juan simply enters a bus and tells the driver about his vow of poverty and requests him to take him without paying. Usually the driver allows him to sit next to him and makes him talk about his life until the journey is over.

'When he came to Managua, a beggar showed him around the whole town with its churches and monuments. They become friends.

In Columbia somebody had offered him a trip to St. Andres. There he heard of Solentiname, went to the bishop and asked

him for the fare—the fare for his pilgrimage to Solentiname. The bishop knew nither of Solentiname nor of Ernesto Cardenal, and yet he gave him the money. Later Brother Juan went to Costa Rica to take a ship to India.⁴

DR. MARTIN KAMPCHEN

⁴Translated by the author from : 'Von der Heiligkeit der Revelation—Ein Gesprach mit Ernesto Cardenal in Solentiname', *Jugenddienst Verlag*, Wuppertal (West Germany), 1972.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

IN THIS NUMBER

Reminiscences are taken from : 'M' : *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 600004, 1947). References : No. 1, p. 240 ; No. 2, p. 304 ; No. 3, p. 952 ; No. 4, pp. 305-6 ; No. 5, p. 670 ; No. 6, p. 904 ; No. 7, p. 381 ; No. 8, p. 439 (bott.) ; No. 9, p. 508 ; No. 10, p. 302 ; No. 11, p. 760 ; No. 12, p. 796.

The ward For Ever' are from *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV (1962), pp. 58-9.

Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to 'treasure hid in a field'. And a person who finds it, he said, hides the treasure, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field'. And how truly does this describe the behaviour of all those sincere seekers of God who, becoming firmly convinced that God alone is the everlasting 'treasure' which should be sought, turn away from everything worldly and fix their gaze on Him only ! The Editorial this month is a musing on the implications of this treasure-simile as found in the teachings of the Hindu sages and saints.

In the second and concluding instalment of 'Attainment of Peace', Swami Budhananda discusses the religious approach to this subject, concluding with a synoptical summary of the main *Gītā* teachings in this regard.

The first part of his Essay on Applied Religion, dealing mainly with the psychological approach, was published in our September issue.

Of the galaxy of ageless characters depicted by Vyāsa in the Mahābhārata, Bhīṣma stands out unparalleled in heroic sacrifice, sagely wisdom, and, above all, devotion to God. It was a fitting tribute to his valour that on the eve of the Kurukṣetra war—though he was then a ripe old man—he was made the Kaurava generalissimo by Duryodhana. The 'Śānti' and the 'Anuśāsana-parvans' of the *Mahābhārata* mirror gloriously the vastness and depth of his wisdom. His devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who was God Incarnate, shines through many incidents in his life, especially the one during the War, in which he succeeds in making Kṛṣṇa break his vow of non-fighting participation. Again, every stanza of the hymn to Kṛṣṇa which Bhīṣma is said to have composed on his bed of arrows, drips with divine love and devotion. The 'Illuminating Dialogue' this month while revealing Bhīṣma's personality, inculcates the spirit of sacrifice and devoted self-surrender to the divine will.

The great incarnations of God like the Buddha, Jesus, and Caitanya pour out their love and saving grace on humanity, never stopping to judge anyone's merit. Sri Ramakrishna, who belongs to that select group

of divine personalities, showered his grace similarly on the rich and the poor, good and wicked, scholars and illiterates. Benodini Dasi (1863-1942), an outstanding actress of the Bengali stage in the late nineteenth century, received such mercy and grace from Sri Ramakrishna and was spiritually transformed. 'Sri Ramakrishna and Benodini Dasi' by Swami Prabhananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, retells in salient details the captivating story of this spiritual rebirth of the pioneering actress of Bengal, through whose influence other actresses were drawn to the divine fountain of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings.

In Christian hagiology, St. Francis of Assisi is a shining figure. The lapse of

seven and a half centuries since his death has not at all dimmed his glory. His Christo-centric life, radiating humility, actual love of poverty, joyous religious fervour; and unselfish love for all living beings, inspires humanity everywhere, even today. 'St. Francis of Assisi Today', in our Human Trends column this month, highlights the enduring influence—overt and covert—of this great saint on the succeeding generations, down to the present younger generation in the West.

Dr. Martin Kampchen is at present teaching German language at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta. He did his doctorate in German literature at the University of Vienna.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

SISTER NIVEDITA'S LECTURES AND WRITINGS: Published by Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 5 Nivedita Lane, Calcutta 700003, 1975, pp. ix+427, Price Rs. 25/-.

Margaret Elizabeth Noble—better known as Sister Nivedita—, the famous Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda, needs no introduction to any Indian reader, and very little anywhere. The work under review is a collection of her hitherto-unpublished speeches and writings. These—totalling 120—are very appropriately classified under the following headings: Education, Hindu Life, Thought and Religion; Political, Economic and Social Problems; Biographical Sketches and Reviews; Newspaper Reports of Speeches and Interviews; and Miscellaneous Articles written before meeting Swami Vivekananda. It is thus clear that the volume is a valuable supplement to *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* although many of her letters remain still unpublished.

These speeches and writings show Sister Nivedita's infinite love for India, the Indian people and Indian culture, as well as her mission to serve this land of her adoption with rare dedication, and finally that deep spirituality which alone can be the true remedy for the ills afflicting our age. A study of this work is a *must* if one wants to understand, not only Sister Nivedita's mind, but also our Indian culture,

society, and political condition in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

We recommend this important work to the reading public as a very useful addition to our store of knowledge.

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BENGALI

TAVA KATHAMRITAM: BY SWAMI LOKESWARANANDA, Published by Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta, 700029, pp. 96, Price Rs. 1.25.

The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is fast becoming well known as a reliable, intelligible and practical scripture among earnest spiritual seekers, the world over. It contains the faithfully recorded sayings and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, and has been translated into many languages. In its original Bengali, entitled *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, it radiates a natural elevating aura and exerts a forceful spiritual influence upon the mind and the heart of the reader or listener.

The learned author of the book under review, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order and head of the Institute of Culture from which the book is published, has been conducting weekly lectures on the *Kathamrita*, attended by large audiences. By popular demand, in order to let the public at large benefit from these most informative and

instructive lectures, the Publishers have done a great service to Bengali-knowing readers by bringing out in a handy booklet five of these lectures under an appropriate title. Rational and yet deeply devotional, the author has an inimitable and captivating way of expounding the *Kathamrita* in depth, quoting from various sources and drawing ample parallels to illustrate the ideal of universality and harmony that Sri Ramakrishna lived and taught. We heartily recommend this small book, which is the first in a series—as well as those that are to follow—to all those who can read or understand Bengali, including those who have already read the *Kathamrita* in the original, so that none may miss the author's scintillating explanations and anecdotes.

NEWS AND REPORTS

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION ASHRAMA— CHANDIGARH

REPORT : APRIL 1972—MARCH 1974

Started in 1956, and moved to its own present premises in 1958, this Ashrama remains the only accredited branch of the Ramakrishna Mission in the region comprising Chandigarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and the Punjab. Its services, rendered without distinction of caste, class or creed, may be outlined as follows :

SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL : Maintenance of a *Shrine*, for meditation and prayer, as well as regular worship-services. Conducting of fortnightly *Rama-nama-sankirtan*; of special worship on the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swamiji; and of special observances for the birthdays of Sri Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and Guru Nanak.

Lectures and Classes, conducted by the Secretary and other monastic members, included weekly Guided Meditation and Class on the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Saturday evenings); Sunday evening Lectures, in English; and on Sunday mornings, Musical Expositions (Hindi) of the Tulasidas's *Ramayana*, by devoted scholars. Further, weekly sessions were conducted for particular groups of devotees. The Secretary, again, addressed meetings of several educational and cultural institutions in Chandigarh, on invitation, as also public meetings and groups at places outside Chandigarh, including Bangalore, Delhi, Kalka, Nangal, Patiala, Simla, and Srinagar.

Combined Public Celebrations of the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda, were held during the month of March. The programme each year included lectures in English, Hindi and Punjabi, discourses on the Tulasidas's *Ramayana*, and devotional music. The general theme for the meetings in 1973 was 'The Complete Man—the Ideal and the Achievement'; and in 1974, 'The Ideal of Service—Its Right Understanding and Fruitful Current Implementation'. Naturally, these were taken up especially in the light of the lives and teachings

of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swamiji. The list of eminent speakers is unusually impressive. As part of 'Narayana Seva', fruits, biscuits, and recreational equipment were offered to children at 'Saket', a home for handicapped children. As in the past, these celebrations attracted enthusiastic audiences numbering more than all available accommodations.

Mofussil Groups : Earnest devotees at Simla and Nangal conducted weekly Satsangs (religious gatherings) and arranged special meetings in which the Secretary and other Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order took part.

Personal Interviews were given to many people interested in spiritual life.

Library : Continuing its home-lending service for members, the library issued 333 books in the first year, and 481 in the second under review; total number of books 1607 by end of the second year.

Book-Sales Section continued to provide the publications of the Ramakrishna Order in English, Sanskrit, Hindi, and Punjabi.

MEDICAL : The *Free Homoeopathic Dispensary* continued its humble service, treating within the two-year period, 2482 new cases and 7825 re-visits.

EDUCATIONAL : The *Vivekananda Students' Home*, for College Boys, continued as since 1960 to provide wholesome accommodation and living conditions for students of Chandigarh Colleges. Accommodation is presently available for 40 students, and the calm environment with the personal care of the supervising Swamis has made the hostel attractive to earnest students. The graduates have greatly appreciated the clean atmosphere free from political, communal or social narrowness, and the opportunities for study and character development.

Contributions to the work of the Ashrama will be gratefully acknowledged, and are exempted from Income Tax. They should be sent to : Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sector 15-B, Chandigarh 160-017.