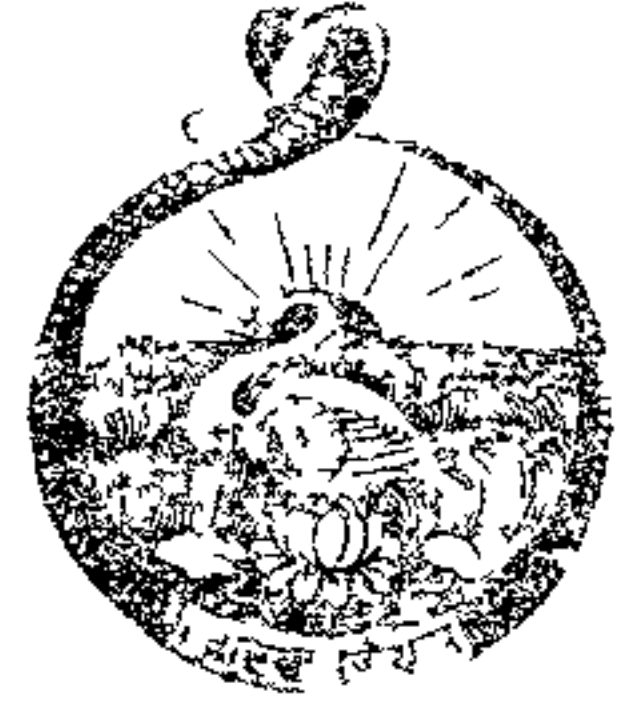


Brahmuddha Bharata

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THE HINDU'S LOVE FOR THE GANGES.*

BY SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

(Translated from Bengali)

Do you remember the Ganges at Hrishikesh? That clear bluish water—in which one can count the fins of fishes five yards below the surface,—that wonderfully sweet, ice-cold “charming water of the Ganges,” and that wonderful sound of “Hara, Hara” of the running water, and the echo of “Hara, Hara” from the neighbouring mountain-falls? Do you remember that life in the forest, the begging of *Madhukari*† alms, eating on small islands of rock in the bed of the Ganges, hearty drinking of that water with the palms, and the fearless wandering of fishes all around for crumbs of bread? You remember that love for Ganges water, that glory of the Ganges, the touch of its water that makes the mind

dispassionate, that Ganges flowing over the Himalayas, through Srinagar, Tehri, Uttarakasi, and Gangotri,—some of you have seen even the source of the Ganges! But there is a certain unforgettable fascination in our Ganges of Calcutta, muddy, and whitish—as if from contact with Shiva's body—and bearing a large number of ships on her bosom. Is it merely patriotism or the impressions of childhood?—Who knows? What wonderful relation is this between Mother Ganges and the Hindus? Is it merely superstition? May be. They spend their lives with the name of Ganga on their lips, they die immersed in the water of the Ganges, men from far-off places take away Ganges water with them, keep it carefully in copper vessels, and sip drops of it on holy festive occasions. Kings and princes keep it in jars, and at considerable ex-

*Written en route to the West to a fellow-disciple

† Meaning collected from door to door

pense take the water from Gangotri to pour it on the head of Shiva at Rameshwar? The Hindus visit foreign countries—Rangoon, Java, Honkong, Madagascar, Suez, Aden, Malta,—and they take with them Ganges water and the Gita. The Gita and the sacred water of the Ganges constitute the Hinduism of the Hindus. Last time I went to the West, I also took a little of it with me, fearing it might be needed, and whenever opportunities occurred I used to drink a few drops of it. And every time I drank, in the midst of the stream of humanity, amid that bustle of civilisation, that hurry

of frenzied footsteps of millions of men and women in the West, the mind at once became calm and still, as it were. That stream of men, that intense activity of the West, that clash and competition at every step, those seats of luxury and celestial opulence—Paris, London, New York, Berlin, Rome—all would disappear and I used to hear that wonderful sound of “Hara, Hara,” to see that lonely forest on the sides of the Himalayas, and feel the murmuring heavenly River coursing through the heart and brain and every artery of the body and thundering forth, “Hara, Hara, Hara”!

OCCASIONAL NOTES.

THE human aspect of the life of Sri Ramakrishna is a fitting commentary on the teachings of Vedanta which preaches an Impersonal-personal, a Transcendent-immanent Divinity. The ordinary misconception about Vedantic thought is that it detaches itself from all terrestrial interests and gives no truth-significance to the play of human life, its interests, and hopes, faculties and powers. To think that life, its activities, endeavours and ideals cannot ensoul the spirit of the Brahman, that the rays of Truth cannot play in and around them, uplifting their significance, is singularly to misunderstand the Vedanta and unnecessarily limit its potencies and possibilities. Whether we regard the enlightened life of the spiritual being as *vidya maya*, or as the manifestation in the particular and finite, of a time-less, and self-existent Absolute unaffected by the limitations of manifestation, it matters very little in the end, so far as the spirit-

ual possibilities of life are concerned. We may, following Sankara and his transcendent school, in the interests of maintaining the stainlessness and unchangeability of Brahman, say that the life of spiritual knowledge under creation is the nearest approach to the Absolute, or following the Saiva-Shakta Agama, say that in creation the Paramashiva remains unaffected by the limitations, the duality and change of manifested life,—it comes to pretty much the same effect in practical life. In both views it is maintained that the Absolute is true in its own truth, that it does not owe any of the truth of its being to manifestation and depend for its existence on the Universe. It is an Absolute, not in the making, but made, accomplished already, a *parinisthita vastu* and created manifestation is an aspect of the Reality, but an aspect which can be filled with the truth's own being, either in the view of its being the nearest step to the Absolute, *sannihita*, or as the

Absolute being stainless, *niranjana*, unaffected by ignorance or bondage. As there are infinite aspects of the Absolute looked at from the standpoint of manifestation, there are possible infinite approaches to it, and this furnishes the basis for the progress and the advance of the Spirit in life embodying more and more comprehensive aspects of the Spirit. Vedanta, rightly understood, does not destroy the life-movement but explains and uplifts it. The life-endeavour, its impulses, ideals and activities are accepted, but without their limitations, their bondage-producing effects, in their soul-expanding and truth-ensouling aspects.

In this life of Sri Ramakrishna we find no abnormality, no inhumanity, nothing which is alien to human hopes and aspirations or strange to its mentality. His outward life was in its interests and actions like an ordinary human being's, but with the light of Divinity playing in and around it. This eccentricity and abnormality develops in lives which are intoxicated or carried away by the transcendent aspect of the Brahman and cannot reconcile it with manifestation or cannot see the same Spirit underlying all the levels of being.

If the whole of human nature is of a piece, then one's *vyavahara* should melt easily into the *paramartha* and although the lower truth will be transcended in a higher, yet in descending to a lower level of being, the truth gathered in a higher realm, will broaden and universalise the former by the light of its greater truth, without denying the element of truth in it or displacing the reality that belongs to it in its own plane. As Swami Vivekananda said: "As one's instinct does not contradict reason, so true intuition cannot con-

tradict reason." Of course as a result of reaching the Spirit, the lower powers, faculties and reason, will be considerably broadened and extended, they will be filled with the spirit's significance of universality and unity. In passing from one level of being to another, one will not feel any incapacity of making it part of a total harmony. The change of the centre of being from one to another will not imply a strangeness or incapacity of moving in its midst. Sri Ramakrishna said: "The Supreme Bhakta accepts all the states, Jagrat, Svapna and Sushupti, and sees the presence of God in all of them." Thus we find in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, his outward state of mind melted easily into his inner mental state, *bhava avastha*, and his *bhava avastha* into his spiritual state, Samadhi. He moved among them as freely as going from one familiar room to another, and was alive and aware in all of them.

It is only when the transcendent-universal Self has not been made a part of the whole being, a habitual centre of activity, that the spiritual life betrays that disharmony and incompatibility in different grades of being. It is then that living in one plane brings an incapacity of living in another, with knowledge. Then, those eccentricities and abnormalities appear, which are in reality a sort of bulwark against the recapture of the new citadel of Self by the limitation and exclusive immersion in the lower being. But as Sri Ramakrishna would say, "A king's son can go up all the stories of the royal house and come down, but the lower officers only to the antechamber or the outer apartments, similarly a wise knower in the spiritual house." He moves through all with sovereign mastery

and is equally at home in all. He is master of all and has a powerful hold on all of them.

Therefore we find in the life of Sri Ramakrishna an awareness and aliveness on the physical plane and a vigorous grip on it. His physical perceptions were keen, his observation minute, but all enlightened by the knowledge of the universal Spirit in which he lived. Every physical fact, incident, object was estimated aright, was given its true value, found its right place and relation in the harmony of the whole. His visions did not displace the physical truth of things and facts in their own plane, but brought down from on high and added to it something which the evidences of the sense do not give us, but which included it in a higher order of truths and values, freed from their exclusive and partitive aspects. For example, the ordinary vision sees in physical objects, discrete, discontinuous objects separated from one another, while he saw them as embraced and held in a continuous ocean of consciousness. As he said: "I feel as if all the objects are floating in an ocean of consciousness, like pillows tossed on the waves." "As during the rainy season, the whole earth is saturated with water, so are all objects saturated with consciousness."

Again because he could know the truth of things directly in a *yogic* vision, it did not render him incapable of observing and using his reasoning faculties and discrimination in coming to a right conclusion about things and events in his more normal moods of mind. He was responsive to all the external signs and indications of physical objects, which the ordinary mind accepts through the gates of the

senses, to think and reflect on them in order to arrive at a rational understanding of them and construct ideas and systems. But because of his reaching a freer and more expansive and intense state of consciousness, he was aware of them in their own level with a greater precision and minuteness and his reasoning on them was free from the exclusiveness and partiality of the rationalistic mind, by being co-ordinated with the wider truths and relations which are seen behind the phenomena of life. For example, the rational mind observing the operation of forces in matter and life constructs the idea of a static and dynamic element, a positive and negative polarisation in their operation, but it is only in the abstract intelligence, outside of life, and has modifying influence on the inner consciousness, not a part and parcel of being. Sri Ramakrishna arrived at the very truth by the power of discrimination, but he saw it more intimately by re-viewing it in his inner vision as but the conjoint action of two, yet one, conscious principles, Shiva-Shakti, in the whole phenomena of this universe. There is thus no partition of truth, and what is a fact of the inner mental world is also one of the outer life, but there projected into a more limited and mechanical operation. As a result, it became a living truth of being, an operation and movement of the conscious being and not a mere mechanical law, explaining all phenomena, but outside of human life and experience. The gist is, that the spiritual life does not altogether negate one order of truth, but rescues it from limitations and makes it to be seen in the greater light of a higher order. It does not blunt our perceptions of physical things but makes them more responsive to all that they convey to the sense; it

does not diminish the strenuousness of thinking but broadens and ensouls it by the truth of a universal conscious being.

Similarly in the emotional being, we find in Sri Ramakrishna a great human and personal force of living, but rescued from its narrowing and binding effects by its being attuned to the universal life of Spirit. The realisation of the transcendent truth of Vedanta did not make him incapable of human love, by his regarding all human affections as the figments of *maya*, a bondage and snare to be avoided and trampled under. He loved intensely, far exceeding the power of personal attachment, but it brought no reaction of bondage, ignorance and delusion. Human life itself is a movement of the bliss of the soul, although now projected into a limited and clouded operation in the personal soul of man. When this is seen it is possible to give oneself up to an object, with all the tremendous force of the love of the universal Self, and even in personal love to live in unison with universal life. Then the universal principle is reached and personal love attaining that level brings no contracting and narrowing effect on life.

The life of Sri Ramakrishna as an embodiment of Vedanta therefore belies the charge that Vedanta gives no truth-significance to human life, its strivings and interests, faculties and powers, but by abstracting one from it as a total unreality produces a questionable, un-human, other-worldly perfection. It does not destroy the powers of being and life but ensouls them with truth. They are broadened and expanded, placed on the right foundation of the Spirit. Instead of initiating a limited and dubious action, they are taken for their truth which raises the

present crude life of humanity into the stature of a semi-divinity and uplifts the natural and raw life of man into the image of a powerful and universal spiritual living.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND SRI RAMAKRISHNA.

Their Spiritual Relation.

[RENDERED FROM SWAMI SARADANANDA'S
"LILAPRASANGA."]

Continued from page 56.

THE common people blindly following the established standards and opinions of society thus mistook Narendranath as of a haughty and Bohemian temperament, judging from the outsides of his actions, but Sri Ramakrishna never fell into the same mistaken judgment with regard to him. From their first meeting he understood that the appearance of hauteur and pride in him was but the external manifestation of his great faith in himself arising from the consciousness of the great and innate powers of his mind,—his unhesitating free dealings were but indicative of and based on his inner self-control, and his indifference to popular opinion was born of the bliss of a stainless conscience which his pure nature gave him. He understood that the incomparable character of Narendra would bloom like a full-blown lotus and be established in its own greatness and glory. Then coming in contact with the suffering and distressed mortals, the pride and hauteur of his character would melt into a mood of infinite compassion, his great faith in himself would be the means of re-establishing the lost faith and confidence in depressed hearts

and the freedom of his conduct established on an inner self-control would indicate itself to others as but a means and manifestation of the true freedom of the Self.

Thus we find that Sri Ramakrishna was wont to praise Narendranath highly before all. Even knowing that hearing such praise overtly before all, the weak mind of man might be puffed up with pride and might take him to ruin, Sri Ramakrishna departed from the rule in the case of Narendranath, because he felt sure that his mind was above all such petty weaknesses. From a few incidents illustrating this, the reader will understand.

One day Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in company with the famous Brahma leaders like the high-souled Keshab, Vijoy and others. The youthful Narendra was also sitting there. Sri Ramakrishna in an introspective mood looked with delight at Keshab and Vijoy. After a while looking at Narendranath the picture of the glorious future of his life was depicted in vivid colours before his mind and he compared it in his mind with the mature life of Keshab and others. When the assemblage broke up, he said: "I saw that Narendra had in full eighteen of the powers, by one of which Keshab has attained such eminence in the world. Again I saw that the flame of the light of knowledge was burning brightly in Keshab and Vijoy, but looking at Narendra I found as if the sun of knowledge was shining dispelling even the least trace of ignorance and delusion." Weak-minded people devoid of introspection would have swelled in pride at hearing such high praise from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna, but it produced an altogether different effect in the mind of Narendranath. His mind, endowed with penetrative inner vision, turned upon itself for self-exami-

nation and dispassionately comparing the great qualities of Keshab and Vijoy with his own mental state found himself unworthy of such high praise, and strongly protesting against the words of Sri Ramakrishna he said: "Sir, what do you say? Hearing such words from you, people will take you to be mad. Where is the world-famous Keshab and high-souled Vijoy and where am I, an insignificant school-boy! Please do not make such statements comparing me with them." Sri Ramakrishna, pleased with him at this, said: "What shall I do? Do you think it is I who speak such words? It is the Divine Mother who showed me like that and so I said. The Mother never shows me anything but truth and therefore I said so."

Sri Ramakrishna would not obtain release from the arguments of Narendranath by simply saying that "the Mother Divine had shown me or spoken through me." Doubting the truth of his visions, Narendranath would sometimes say in reply: "Who can say whether the Mother has shown you or you have seen so by your own mental imaginings? If I saw such things I would doubtless conclude that I was seeing so by my imagination. Western science and philosophy have proved beyond doubt that our senses deceive us many times. And add to that if the desire for a special vision is always awake in the mind, then, with this bias, our senses are sure to deceive us at every step. You love me and desire to see me great in every way, therefore such visions come to you."

Thus adducing proofs and illustrations by which Western physiology and science have by empirical investigation and research sought to prove the self-existent and intuitive truths of religion as erroneous, Narendranath would proceed to explain the matter to Sri Ramakrishna. Sri

Ramakrishna in his high spiritual moods would regard such childish endeavours on the part of Narendranath as indicative of his love and advocacy of truth and feel the more pleased with him.

But in his normal moods, the strong arguments of Narendranath would overpower his simple and childlike innocent mind and set up a commotion of doubt therein. Then perplexed he would think, "Really, Narendranath is devoted to truth heart and soul, and is not a man to utter a lie. In the minds of such persons so firmly devoted to truth, nothing but true thoughts arise—so the scriptures say. Are then my visions affected by error?" Again he would think: "But many times before I verified that the Divine Mother did not show me anything but truth and similarly I was assured again and again by Her own words; why then does the truth-loving Narendra say that my visions are fabrications of my imagination, and why does not his mind feel them as true?"

Cast into this doubt, he would ask the Divine Mother for a solution and hearing Her assuring words—"Do not listen to his (Narendranath's) words. Afterwards he (Narendranath) would admit the truth of your visions"—he would feel composed and his doubts laid to rest. As an illustration of this the incident of one day would bring the matter home to the reader's mind.

At that time the Brahma movement was divided into two parties over the question the Cooch-Bihar Marriage and as a result the Sadharan Brahma Samaj had been established. Narendranath visiting Keshab Chandra now and again would also regularly join the Sunday worship of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj and sing devotional songs. For some

reason Narendranath could not visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar for two or three weeks. Disappointed at daily expecting him he decided to go to Calcutta personally and meet Narendra there. He then reminded himself of the fact that the day being Sunday, Narendra might not be at home but out to meet some friends, and decided that as he was sure to be present at the evening worship of the Brahma Samaj he would meet him there. Again he bethought himself that his unexpected presence might be the cause of displeasure to Brahma devotees, but remembering that a similar appearance at Keshab's Samaj on his part, had given nothing but delight and that Vijoy, Shivanath and other leaders of the Sadharan Samaj had visited him at Dakshineswar many times and knew him well he decided to go. Thus the simple mind of Sri Ramakrishna came to a simple conclusion but forgot to take into account one fact. The fact that many in the Sadharan Samaj had left off visiting him at observing the change in the religious views of Keshab and Vijoy by their coming in contact with him, did not rise in his mind. And naturally so—for he had all his life felt the truth that as the human mind ascends higher and higher spiritual planes and advances in the path of spiritual progress, the previous religious views broadens and changes. He did not suspect that the truth-loving Brahmos always fighting so long for the establishment of truth would endeavour to set a limit to spiritual realisation and follow a different path.

It is the time of the evening worship and the tide of devotion welling up from the hearts of a hundred Brahma devotees ascended high and high in unison with the Vedic utterances of "Satyam Jnanam, Anantam (the Existence, Knowledge and

Infinite)'' and mingled in the holy feet of Sri Bhagavan. The worship and meditation ended and to increase the devotion and spiritual fervour of the devotees, the Acharya addressed words of spiritual instruction to the congregation from the pulpit. At such a time Sri Ramakrishna entered the *Mandir* (temple) and advanced towards the Acharya seated in the pulpit. Many among the congregation had seen him before and therefore the news of his arrival soon spread among the congregation and those who had not seen him before stood up on their legs or on the bench to have a look at him. Finding such disorder spreading among the assembly the Acharya desisted from his work and Narendranath sitting in the midst of the congregation understanding the reason of his sudden arrival there came and stood by the side of Sri Ramakrishna. But neither the Acharya nor any prominent member of the Samaj received him, and knowing him to be the cause of bringing a change in the religious views of Vijoy and others appeared reluctant to show him even the common courtesies.

Sri Ramakrishna without looking towards any direction came near the pulpit and fell into a trance. Then the eagerness of the people to see him in that condition increased the previous disorder; and finding it impossible to stop it and with a view to break up the congregation all the gas lights of the room were switched off. As a result there was a great commotion in the assemblage in trying to come outside from the darkness.

Finding nobody in the Samaj receiving Sri Ramakrishna with cordiality, Narendra felt much pained. He was hard put to take him out of the *Mandir*. Afterwards when he came to himself he brought him outside by the back door and taking him in

a carriage accompanied him to Dakshineswar. Narendra said: "Seeing him receive such a rebuff that day I cannot say how pained I felt. How much I censured him for his action! But utterly unmoved at the above incident he paid not the least heed to my words.

"Seeing him bestow not the least thought on himself in great love for me, I did not shrink from using hard words to him. I said: 'If it was true as is written in the Puranas, that the King Bharat by continuously thinking about a deer was reborn after death as a deer, then you should be careful and think about the result of your continuously dwelling in mind on me.' Sri Ramakrishna in his child-like simple mind would feel anxious at such words. He said, 'Yes it is true, but what shall I do then? I feel great longing to see you.' In great remorse he went to speak to the Divine Mother about it but returned smiling and said: 'I would not listen to your words. The Divine Mother said: You see the Narayana (the Lord) in him (Narendra) and therefore you love him. The day you won't see the Lord in him, you will not be able to look at him ever.' Thus all my previous arguments he brushed aside by one word that day."

(To be continued.)

Such a unique personality like that of Sri Ramakrishna,—a synthesis of the utmost possibilities of Jnana, Yoga, Bhakti and Karma has never before appeared among mankind. He is a true disciple and follower of Sri Ramakrishna whose character is perfect and all-sided like his. The formation of such a perfect character is the ideal of this age, and everyone should strive for that.

—Swami Vivekananda.

A PEEP INTO SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S PERSONALITY.

IN more respects than one Sri Ramakrishna's personality was a marvel of the nineteenth century. Brought up in the full glare of modern civilisation we have certain established notions about what qualities constitute the notability of a man at the present day, and among these we may mention family greatness, personal grace, learning, and some conspicuous ability such as oratory or statesmanship or business capacity etc. These are enough now-a-days to entitle a man to be called a notable person, and if in addition to these he has some rare moral traits, so much the better. But this last item is not the *sine qua non* of greatness, and a man may be considered one of the greatest figures in spite of his sadly lacking in this respect. This is what the Western ideals of civilisation have taught us. Considered in this light Sri Ramakrishna would not seem to have much chance of comparing with the other celebrities of his time, for apparently he had none of the accomplishments above enumerated, except for the last one. He came, as we all know, of a poor Brahmin family in an out of the way village, had no personal comeliness to boast of, was innocent of education and never showed his ability as a writer or platform speaker, much less as a statesman. Still it cannot be doubted that he in his life-time did command a great amount of respect from the worthies of the day, such as Babu Keshab Chandra Sen, Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachudamani and Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar—to mention only two or three out of many—and what is stranger, is becoming more and more famous after his exit from the world, as days pass on. This silent yet wide-spread recognition which, notwithstanding his challenge to the idols of the nineteenth century, Sri Ramakrishna has succeeded in wresting from the modern world, is a fact which compels us to look deeper for

the secret springs of his power and influence.

What, then, was the secret of his greatness? The first answer that comes to our lips is that it was his wonderful character—its purity and simplicity—that exerted such charm over the people he came across. The power of the flesh we find so overwhelming, and the temptations of the senses so difficult to resist, that we cannot help expressing our genuine sense of wonder when we meet a personality like Sri Ramakrishna to whom the very idea of lust was as foreign as heat in ice or darkness in the sun, and who looked upon every feminine form as that of the Divine Mother whose favoured child he was. And so deep-rooted was this attitude in him that he would then and there feel like a child of five whenever a woman ever so suddenly presented herself before him. This was, as we have said, his characteristic attitude towards the female sex and this it was that enabled him to mix so freely with the numerous lady devotees that in his later years used to seek his holy company. Another most powerful attraction that we find swaying the hearts of men is that of money, and in this respect too Sri Ramakrishna was as invulnerable as an infant. In fact, he had taken such pains to root out the very idea of possession, and his success in it was so complete that he could not bear the touch of coins, and if any was without his knowledge secreted under his mattress, his feet automatically refused to touch the bed! To one who thus looked upon wealth as a bondage, as a barrier between the Divine Presence and the devotee, the temptation of riches was of no potency at all. Freed from these two bonds, sex and wealth, and having not the least hankering for fame, he moved like a child through the world, captivating the hearts of all who saw him.

Side by side with this purity and simpli-

city was noticeable in him an abundance of unselfish love for all—a love to which we seldom see a parallel on earth, which knew no limitations of time or place or circumstances, which was the spontaneous outflow of his wonderfully sympathetic heart,—which never cared for any return, which included the sinner as well as the saint, and which led him to offer his whole life at the altar of humanity. He had realised what a terrible suffering life on earth meant, and discovering the sovereign balm to it, passionately invited all to partake of that and be blessed. This love of his was all the more remarkable as it had its birth in a unique vision of immanent Divinity—which enabled him actually to see the Lord of the Universe in all beings, and so there was no chance of this love being shaken by any outward shortcomings of the person loved. His one burning desire was to rouse the dormant spirituality in all, so that they might feel strong enough to resist the evils of life. He was often seen to shed tears whenever he was afraid lest any one under his care might stray from the spiritual path through the importunities of his worldly-minded relatives, or for some other reason. Even in the grip of a fatal illness he could never turn away anybody seeking spiritual instruction, and he declared himself ready to undergo a long series of births if thereby he could be of any service to the least of mankind. This consideration for others is a trait of the higher types of men who, though their own sense of want has been satisfied for ever, are anxious to help other erring souls in the wilderness of the world. Like true shepherds they wish first to see their flocks safe before they would think their mission in life as ended. Of such stamp are the Buddhas and Christs.

Sri Ramakrishna's mastery in the spiritual domain was unique. In the course of twelve years of austere practices, of unprecedented devotion and earnestness, he explored the ins and outs of the spiritual life, and not

stopping—as others might have done—at one kind of realisation he went on and on, searching for the Truth in all its phases, and when the course of his Sadhanas was finished, he came out of it with a fund of experience that beat all previous records. Not only did he realise the various Personal aspects of Godhead, but realised the heights of Advaita where all form is blotted out, and coming down to the ordinary plane, proclaimed anew the Vedic truth—एकं सद्ब्रुवा बहुधा वदन्ति—"Truth is one, sages call it by various names." This all-sided realisation equipped him with the rare qualifications of a teacher of all mankind, and curiously enough, we find all sorts of aspirants coming to him and receiving enlightenment on their respective subjects. The utter absence of egoistic ideas in Sri Ramakrishna, coupled with this all round spiritual illumination, gave people of all sects an opportunity to mix with him freely and everyone considered him as a perfect man in his special branch of Sadhana. Having reached the bed-rock of religion—the unity of the Self—he had no need to identify himself with any particular aspect of it, to the exclusion of others, and was literally "all things to all men." His teaching was: Be sincere and stick to your own form of worship, and you are sure to reach the Goal." He instructed each disciple according to his bent of mind, and patiently watched their growth along their lines. This ministrations to the disciples often entailed a great hardship on him, but like the mother tending her children he would allow them full liberty and gladly bear all their boyish pranks, for they were seekers after God, and as such claimed his tenderest attention. He ungrudgingly bore their abuses even at times, and directed them towards their Goal, without minding personal indignities, knowing in his heart of hearts that sooner or later they were bound to come round. And his expectations never failed.

Sri Ramakrishna's life marked the unquestionable triumph of spirit over matter,

of the soul over the body, of moral force over intellectual or physical endowments. Those who had the good fortune to witness the Master's Samadhi knew how radiant and magnetic in influence his countenance at that time was! No mere physical beauty could stand by it. It soled as it ennobled the beholders, translating them unconsciously to altogether new heights of experience, and the memory of that scene has been abiding with them. Intellectually, too, he was a prodigy, for his mind was keen enough to understand every shade of thought, and though devoid of any academical training it had come to the highest generalisations by ways known only to itself. His manner of expression also was unique. Nobody could discuss such abstruse topics with such lucidity and forcefulness, and his accurate observation of the everyday incidents of life, combined with his superabundant sense of humour, always had a telling effect on his hearers, sometimes moving them to tears, at other times creating side-splitting laughter, sometimes making them feel they were in the company of a chum, and sometimes striking them with awe through a sense of the tremendous difference between his level and theirs. He was a fascinating singer also, and would carry his audience into transports through his rapturous absorption into the meaning of the devotional song he was rendering. He had a perfect eye for beauty, and there was nothing inartistic in or about him. He would instantaneously detect any the least impropriety in manner, dress, or talk, and sometimes such aberrations would give a blow to his finely attuned nerves.

Living, as he did, in a spiritual level altogether removed from the ordinary standpoint, his actions and utterances at times looked like those of a maniac, and many who saw him only once or twice, actually took him to be one. But upon closer scrutiny these departures from normal life were found to be the outcome not of an undeveloped, but

on the contrary, a super-developed mind. It was quite in the fitness of things that he refused to take things at our valuation. For instance, when everyone considered the boy Narendra—the future Swami Vivekananda—as a scape-grace atheist, Sri Ramakrishna always persisted in predicting his future greatness. Again when he was strongly advised to give up Babu Girish Chandra Ghosh for using strong language, he on the contrary ordered for a carriage to go and see the dramatist! When the priest of the Kalighat temples, exasperated by Sri Ramakrishna's failure to explain (while in a state of ecstasy) the reason of his influence over the rich Mathur Babu, kicked him in anger, the latter, out of consideration for the man's safety, bound himself down by an oath never to disclose the incident to Mathur Babu—for it would surely have endangered the offender's life. His attitude towards the street-walkers may also be cited in point. But the very fact that his super-conscious realisations were highly moral and conducive to the welfare of humanity, and always came true, as also his unimpeachable character, showed that he had tapped other sources of knowledge than were accessible to ordinary men, and that he was not a lunatic but a superman, a Seer, to whom Nature had revealed her secrets and who was born to show mankind the way to peace and blessedness.

About this extraordinary status of his Sri Ramakrishna himself was at first doubtful, and tested in various ways whether the supernatural knowledge that had dawned upon him was genuine and corroborated by the scriptures or not. But several great scholars, of their own accord, declared his realisations to be on a par with those of the greatest world-movers and Incarnations, and the matter was so indisputably proved that when, in later life, some of his devotees would come forward with the statement that he was an Avatara, he would dismiss the subject by remarking, "Vastly learned men, some versed in all the six, some in five or four systems of Indian

Philosophy, have repeatedly pronounced this body (meaning himself) an Incarnation, and now comes a chemist or a theatre-manager to take up that thread-bare subject! What do these know of an Avatara?" To him the final test of truth was supersensuous realisation, and by this standard he had known and afterwards declared, "He who was born as Rama and as Krishna has now incarnated Himself in this body (showing himself)." To us it seems that this kind of testimony of an inspired soul, in the light of his general character, is the best means to judge personalities like Sri Ramakrishna. But it is immaterial whether one takes him for an Incarnation or simply a perfected man. We should study his life and character with an unbiassed mind and we are all at liberty to form our own estimate. But his purity and "God-intoxicated" life, far, far above the ordinary level, his selfless love and service to his fellow-beings, his preaching of the harmony of religions and passionate exhortation to renounce ideas of sex and possession, his superhuman knowledge and absence of the ego—these and a thousand other qualities of head and heart will proclaim him to be one of the rarest gems the world has produced, and one whom all mankind should look up to for inspiration and guidance. The proof of religion is the life of such personages, and they serve as the messengers between man and God. Nay, they are God Himself in the vesture of flesh,—through them percolate Divine Knowledge and Love for the edification of the world. One with the Sat-Chit-Ananda, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, they are the living embodiment of Truth, and one touch, one glance of theirs dispels man's beginningless ignorance and misery. They cannot be said to be *doing* good to the world merely, their very breath imparts a fresh pulsation of life and energy to it; they simply *live*, and the world feels a change for the better. They are not bound by conditions of time or place. They are

for all ages and climes. Universal good is the result of their advent on earth—and the welfare of the country they consecrate by their birth follows as a matter of course. That India has produced a man like Ramakrishna Paramahansa is a proof that she, the motherland of spirituality, is living, and her natural function of saint-production is at work now as it was in ancient times. This was one of the grandest discoveries of the Swami Vivekananda who epitomised his estimate of his Divine Master in the following pregnant words: "He was the embodiment of all the past religious thought of India. His life alone made me understand what the Shastras really meant, and the whole plan and scope of the old Shastras,What the whole Hindu race has thought in ages, he *lived* in one life. His life is the living commentary to the Vedas of all the nations." Sri Ramakrishna has inaugurated a new life-current into the world, and it has reached the distant shores beyond the seas, slowly transforming them, with the power of the spirit over matter, and already the first murmurs of this tidal wave are being heard. The world will be ennobled, mankind will be uplifted, and the glory of bringing about this happy regeneration will belong to India. Those who can read the signs of the times feel this. Upon every Indian, man or woman, rests an onerous task,—that of assimilating Sri Ramakrishna's teachings and sowing them broadcast into the world—developing an all-round character like his and converting others by its influence. There is no time to lose. The world is waiting for this. "Arise! Awake! and stop not till the Goal is reached!"

SWAMI MADHAVANANDA.



SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE HIGHER RELIGIOUS SYNTHESIS.*

THE subject I have chosen for to-night's address is Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the Higher Religious Synthesis" and my observations will be based entirely upon such of the teachings and sayings of the great man as are available.

But it is well known that the materials at the disposal of a student who wants to study critically the teachings of the Paramahansa are scanty indeed and especially so to those who are ignorant of Bengali. Like all the great men of our country he seems to have sown broadcast the spiritual truths that revealed themselves to him in his स्वानुभूति (self-realisation) and taken little care to have them codified or systematised, much less to have them committed to writing, but thanks to the devotion of a few bhaktas, we have these two books rendered available, i. e., The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna according to 'M' and his "Sayings."

Prose as a medium of literary expression is of comparatively recent origin in our country and a method of expressing profound ideas in a simple and easily rememberable manner was a question of necessity with our ancestors who lived in days prior to the introduction of printing, and this national tendency is still seen at its best in the sayings of persons untouched by the Western civilisation. Further, those who know a subject thoroughly well and that at first hand, have got a knack of putting things in an abnormally easy form which is sublime in its simplicity. Both these elements of terseness and simplicity are found united in Sri Ramakrishna. Hence the tiny volume containing his sayings is crammed with statements each of which can be expanded into pages, just as the tiny fruit of a banyan tree is crammed with seeds each of which is capable of growing in good time into a huge tree capable of sheltering even big armies in its shadow.

There is no department of spiritual activity

* An address delivered at the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore on the 86th Anniversary of the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa by Mr. S. K. Yegnanarayana Aiyar, M. A., Principal, Salem College.

which is not touched upon in this book (Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna) and nothing touched upon that has not been further illumined. I take, however, for study to-night only one string of truths, those that have been brought under the significant heading of the "Harmony of Religions."

With each new mind, says Emerson, a new secret of nature transpires and it is my humble opinion that this truth, that all religions are equally true and that any one properly followed is as efficacious a medicine of the soul as any other, and that therefore there need be no quarrel among the religions of the world which has been taught by Ramakrishna is an advance upon the teachings of his predecessors.

It is a common psychological fact that when a person is obsessed by a great thought and wants to express it so as to be understood by all, he uses different similes and hammers it into the mind of his hearers in all possible ways. The illustrious author of Sri Lalita Trisatee (श्री ललिता त्रिशती) who wants to express the idea that the great Mother is the very essence of the mystic syllable ॐ, the gifted poet Shelley who is in raptures on listening to the divine melody of his lark whose form he sees not, the great philosopher-poet, Thayumanavar who after experiencing the inexpressible bliss of God-realisation, tries to exhaust the vocabulary of sweet things in attempting to give us an idea of the bliss he experiences, are some instances which prove the truth of my statement. Similarly Sri Ramakrishna also harps upon this great theme of harmony of all religions and impresses that upon us by no less than ten different examples and similes as may be seen from his "Sayings."

It is interesting to note that Vivekananda lays special emphasis upon this lesson which he learnt from his Guru. In his well-known lecture on "My Master," he says that he learnt two truths from his teacher, first, that religion is not mere talk or formal observances but realisation, and the second, that all religions are equally true and effective as means of salvation.

It would be a very fascinating subject indeed for the student of evolution of religious thought to trace the attempts that have been made from time to time to make religion less and less exclusive: how, for example, people realised that not only by the proper performance of certain rites enjoined upon them by a particular portion of the Vedas we get salvation, but by other methods also, by Yoga, by Bakti and above all by Jnana; how later on, when Islam came to stay in the land, some great ones like Nanak and Kabir saw that ultimately both Hinduism and Mahomedanism taught the same truths and hence preached union, peace and good-will among the followers of both and how later on Sri Ramakrishna went one step further and taught that all religions are true because he knew it to be a fact by direct personal experience. This historical development of the doctrine of "Harmony of Religions" I leave to be done by abler hands. My task to-night is much simpler.

The great American Pragmatic philosopher William James said of philosophical truth that existential judgment or pronouncing an opinion upon it regarding its origin, development or its indebtedness to others does not estop us from forming another estimate about it, what he calls the spiritual judgment and suggests three tests for arriving at such an estimate, namely, immediate luminousness, philosophical reasonableness and moral helpfulness.

That this doctrine of Harmony of Religions strikes us at first sight as good and convincing and that it does not clash with any well-recognised body of truths, goes without saying. It will be a very dull world indeed if all of us are to think alike in matters religious. On the other hand, if each religion is to cry out that the truth is its own monopoly and belongs to none else, that salvation is to be got only if persons go through this gate and through none else, it leads to bad feeling among people who are intended by our Divine Father to live as brothers upon this beautiful earth of His. Therefore the best way to fulfil His purpose is to see the underlying unity in all these various paths which ultimately lead on to Him. In these days when historical criticism has undermined the old-world notions of exclusive Revela-

tions, it would be absurd for any sect or religion to claim monopoly of spiritual truth.

But more important than these is the practical value of this truth of the Harmony of all Religions. How far is this useful to us as human beings that happen to inhabit this "troublesome little planet of ours" at this juncture in the history of our race and more especially, how far is this useful to us, Indians of the present day? It is this aspect of the question that I should like to emphasise upon to-night.

To any student who has studied the world problems of to-day the most striking post-war social change would appear to be the great interest that man has begun to evince in matters religious. When the stream of life runs smooth, men easily fall victims to a hedonistic philosophy, but when by some cause the scales fall off their eyes, they are confronted with the eternal verities, and the old, old questions force themselves upon them with redoubled vigour and demand solution. "Whence? Whither? Wherefore?"—all these are questions that engage the serious attention of the people. The recent war has been such an eye-opener. It has not merely revolutionised the European politics and economics, but it has brought about a silent though none the less effective revolution in European religion. The men who march forward to certain death at cannon's mouth want better consolation than mere sects or creeds can offer and they are not satisfied with superficialities but want real truths to be taught to them by persons who know them at first hand and have realised them in their own lives.

It is an object-lesson for persons of narrow views to see the pious Catholic, the bigoted Calvinist, the gentle Hindu and the Muslim all cheerfully marching together to death, each thinking of his God, who is the God of all and each singing his own divine song which he sees is as good as another's to brace him up to his task. The Christian soldier dying in the battle-field of Flanders will never for a moment believe that his Hindu brother lying by his side and thinking in his last moments of his sacred Ganga and the mighty Himalayas, his Great Shiva and all-pervading Narayana is doomed to eternal perdition simply because he does not believe in Christ. Nor

would the pious Hindu regard his Christian or Mahomedan brother, all starting with him on the long journey from which there will be no return, as having no possibility of getting salvation. They all instinctively realise the grand truth that all religions are equally true and such world-cataclysms as the recent war offer unparalleled facilities for verifying this truth.

Neither the soldier who survives bombs and machine guns and returns home maimed or whole, nor the civilian who has been staying at home but following the march of events, can ever be forced back to the old narrow grooves and exclusive creeds and this mighty truth of Harmony of all Religions comes to them like refreshing showers in summer and cements further the bond of friendship formed in the face of common danger.

And what about the much-talked-of League of Nations, which is an approach to the realisation of the dream of the poet who sang of the Parliament of man and Federation of the world? Because the organisation has no spiritual basis, the only basis of union being one of common worldly interests and common opportunities of exploitation, it is lacking in the real bond of union. If all the members of the League who follow one or other of the great religions of the world realise in full the potency and significance of the doctrine or truth of the Harmony of all Religions, this union which has been brought about by selfish motives and temporal considerations, would develop itself into a true League of nations. It is religion and God's words misinterpreted that have kept mankind apart hitherto and it is the same religion and true word of God that must bring us all together.

In this connection, it may not be out of place if I refer to the view of one of the most advanced thinkers of the West at the present time. Mr. H. G. Wells writes in his famous "Outlines of History" that the future world-state which is his ideal will be based upon a common world-religion very much simplified, universalised and better understood. How shall we bring about this consummation of a world-religion which according to the author will be neither Christianity nor Mahomedanism, nor Buddhism, but religion itself,

pure and undefiled? Do you think we can bring about that consummation by allowing each religion to proclaim, "Come to me, I alone know the truth; all others are impostors," and thus encourage a sort of competition in matters spiritual? Shall we not, on the other hand, solve the problem of well-recognised principles of co-operation allowing each religion to have its own way, being assured that the gain of one is the gain of all? How can we have this attitude of the mind unless we imitate fully the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and realise the grand truth,—I say realise and not merely to subscribe to the truth in an academic manner,—that all religions are equally true, they being different paths leading to the same goal? So if the world at the present time is athirst for one truth more than another, if there be one truth more than another which will heal the wounds of the sore-afflicted mankind and help them to knit themselves closer in bonds of affection and brotherhood, it is this grand truth of the Harmony of Religions taught by this so-called illiterate Brahmin priest of Dakshineswar.

If the world at large need this truth to save itself, what about us in India? Our motherland has aptly been termed an epitome of the world and this is true of her religions even more than her physical features or climatic conditions, her flora and fauna or her ethnic, linguistic and cultural varieties. The vision of a united India is dawning upon us all, Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians and Parsees. What chance is there, I ask you in all earnestness, of the vision being realised and the feeling of brotherhood firmly established on a stable foundation if the Hindu in his heart of hearts were to believe that his patriotic Muslim brother who shares with him all the burdens and anxieties incidental to the arduous task of national regeneration and uplift is after all a *Mlechchha* a *Veda Bahy*, one not entitled to salvation till at least he is born as a Brahmin after a long chain of lives? How unstable the foundation of the Indian nationalism will be if the Indian Christians were to sincerely believe that all of us, his idolatrous brothers, are doomed for ever to dwell in purgatory, if not already destined for the hotter regions below, because we do not place faith in the great Jesus as the only saviour of mankind to the extent he does!

Unfortunately or fortunately for us, we cannot assign to religion a secondary place in the scheme of our life and unite together merely for temporal purposes as the Westerner does and can. We are made of a different stuff. Whether for good or evil, religion has always remained with us as the first and last concern of life. The separation between civilisation or culture and religion which was almost complete in the West and which many a profound thinker of the West* deplored as tending to the weakening of both, has scarcely been possible in this country. Our finest pieces of architecture and sculpture are in our temples and our best poet-musicians have been great saints like Thyagaiyar. Like the blue sky above, below and around us, religion has ever been our sustaining element. It is almost impossible for us Indians to forget our religion, much less so for political and other worldly purposes. That being our national temperament, a United India is an impossibility unless it has a broader basis than mere political expediency.

Then it might be proposed as an alternative, why not give up all points of difference and all of us observe that religion which contains the common points of all? This solution is not as easy as it might at first appear. Who is to judge which are essential and which are non-essential in particular religions and what after all will be left if all these differences be dropped? Some abstractions will be left which will perhaps be acceptable to the philosopher in his study but the man in the street will no more care to have that lifeless, formless religion as the stay of his soul than he would care to have as his food a few molecules of Nitrogen, Oxygen and other elements that constitute the basis of all human food. The only way therefore to provide us all, the followers of different religions, that form the population of this country, with a common platform is to follow the teachings of this Dakshineswar sage and really and sincerely feel and believe that all religions are true and every one, rightly observed, leads us on to Him, the goal of all.

It was a fancy of mine in my younger days to look upon the Brahmo Samaj and other movements that from a rationalistic point of view arrive at some common basis of all religions, as

those which were looking for the meeting point of all petals in a lotus bud at its bottom, whereas Ramakrishna who taught us the Harmony of Religions was compared by me to one who sought for the meeting point of the lotus petals at the top of the bud. By the former view one sees the meeting point no doubt but he misses the beauty of the petals that branch gracefully on all sides to meet again at the top; whereas the one who looked at the higher point did not miss the unity but had the further advantage of not losing sight of the petals. It is this that I mean by the higher Synthesis of Religion as contrasted with the lower Analysis of Religion and it is my sincere conviction that this great truth alone will bring about the peace of the world and the prosperity of mankind.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S NATIVITY HYMN.

श्रीरामकृष्णाविर्भावतिथौ
स्तवार्घ्यषट्कं ।

विलाखास्तीर्त्वा यः सखिलविपुलोरुष्णसखहरी-
जघान कठशादान् कपिकुलवल नीलजलधेः ।
सुदेहो वैदेहीप्रणयगगनन्दुर्नृपमणिः
स रामः "श्रीरामः" परमशरणोऽयं भुवि सतां ॥१॥

मुकुन्दः कालिन्दीकलकलितकूले पुलकिते
पुरा मञ्जौ कुञ्जे व्रजयुवतिवृन्दैरभसतः ।
स्वयं रमे साक्षान्मदनमदनो यः सुखमधौ
मधुध्वंसी वंशीधरकरकदम्बाश्रिततनुः ॥२॥

कलौ लीलालालो गलितविमलासौ हरिरिति
गदन् यो हेमाङ्गो निजमधुरिमास्त्रादनपरः ।
कृपासिन्धुर्वन्धुर्हरिचरितसंकीर्तनपिता
यचीसूनुः सोऽयं "रघुयदुपति"-श्चेति सुमर्त ॥३॥

यशङ्के लङ्केशं द्रुयागुणानिनादैर्भुवि पुरा
सुरह्याः पस्पन्दे व्रजयुवतिचेतांसि सुरगैः ।
धरित्री तत्रे यो मधुरहरिसंकीर्तनरगैः

"कथापीयूष"-नैः प्रजयति मूर्ति सोऽय कृपया ॥४॥

*Eucken's collected Essays.

इतायां सीतायामधिगतविमोहः समजनि
 लुलोयठ क्षीण्यां यश्चिरमधुरराधाविरहतः ।
 अपि न्यासी कान्तां स्मरन्निह च चक्रन्द नियत-
 मही चोद्यं सोऽद्योपरतरमणीसंगकणिकः ॥५॥

स्वयं गुप्तोऽप्यद्य प्रभवति भुवां योऽद्भुतगुणः
 पुमान् श्रीमान् शक्त्या युगमतिविधाने युगगुरुः ।
 अकुर्वाणांऽप्येकां निभृतनिलयस्थः प्रकुरुते
 स्ववीर्यैः सर्वत्र प्रभुरवतु वः सांऽमितकृपः ॥६॥

इति श्रीमदभिन्नश्रीरामकृष्णतत्त्व श्रीविवेकानन्द-
 भगवत्पादकिकरेण श्रीराधारमणनन्दिसरस्व-
 तीविद्याभूषणन विरचितमेतत् ।

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS MESSAGE.

AN almost illiterate man, yet exercising the most wonderful influence on brilliant graduates of the university, a man of matchless moral character worshipping all woman-kind including his own wife as the manifestation of the divine Mother and dreading money and possession as poison, a devotee constantly meditating on God with an intense love and devotion and losing, on that account, the consciousness of the external world and the body many times during the day, a teacher pouring forth a continuous stream of instructions in the simplest language and parables containing the highest divine wisdom, a man of wonderful catholicity mixing with men of various creeds sometimes as contradictory as light and darkness and accepting all of them as divine dispensations equally authoritative and binding—

Such is the imperfect picture of the wonderful personality who lived at the village of Dakshineswar near Calcutta at the end of the nineteenth century, which we gather from his still living intimate disciples and admirers and from the rich literature regarding

his life and teachings. Keshub Chandra Sen, the great Brahmo preacher, was, we are reliably informed, profoundly influenced by this wonderful personality and it is known to everybody how the later development of the Brahmo religion known as the New Dispensation was due mainly to this influence. The whole world also noticed the manifestation of the wonderful power of this personality in Chicago in 1893 through his illustrious disciple, the great Swami Vivekananda. Let us study, in brief, the principal messages which Sri Ramakrishna, the greatest Incarnation of God in the nineteenth century as he has been called by many, came to deliver to the world.

It appears to us that we can derive two most important lessons from his life and teachings. The first is that religion does not consist in theorising, in mere intellectual assent to certain doctrines however profound, nor in the mere scrupulous performance of certain ceremonials however salutary and instructive they may be in themselves, neither in controversial proficiency, nor in the profession of secret occult wisdom, nor in a particular manner of eating and drinking. It really is in realisation in one's heart of the living God. That religion is a reality, everybody was convinced whoever chanced to meet this unique personality. He saw God, talked with God, lived always in that Holy Presence and everyone near him felt with what intense feeling of devotion he was constantly consumed and what transcendental insight he gained thereby. Everyone knows how he answered the challenge of Swami Vivekananda whether he had seen God. He said that not only he saw God himself, but could show Him to Swamiji. This wonderful influence of religion showed itself in a small group of educated young men headed by Swamiji, who gave up all worldly prospects and advantages in order to realise religion and see God face to face. By the help of the Master and his disciples, a large number of

men and women throughout the world have learned even in this materialistic age to consider religion a reality. They have learnt that the doctrines and dogmas and rites and ceremonies and temples and all other things are only helpful as means to the ultimate realisation of God, but not in themselves. They have learnt that in whatever field one may work, he must have living religion as the basis of all his activities.

The other great message to which we have referred is that all religions are true; they are, as it were, so many paths to reach the same goal. Sri Ramakrishna practised the precepts of many of the existing divisions of the Hindu religion, such as Shakta and Vaishnava, to the letter. He also practised the Moham-
medan and Christian religions, and ultimately came to the conclusion that they are all equally true. We cannot understand the true import of this message, unless we study the condition of the present-day religious world a little.

In the most ancient Rig-Veda Samhita we find the unique utterance—

“Truth is only one—the sages call it by various names.”

This wonderful ancient idea of not only toleration, but acceptance of all the religions has mainly guided India and its religious consciousness and for this reason throughout its whole history we find very little fight between different sects, and compared to other countries the different religionists here have lived most amicably side by side. But the weak human nature even asserted itself here in this land of peace and we hear of the fight between the Shaivas, Shaktas and Vaishnavas. In philosophy also each school has tried to establish its supremacy over all others. The Lord Sri Krishna tried once to reconcile these warring sects by re-asserting the ancient truth by saying—

“Whoever approaches Me in whatever way, I also reveal Myself to him through that path.”

But soon the message was forgotten and the different commentators of this Divine Song itself are seen to interpret the message each his own way and regarding other interpretations as not true. If we study the present religious movements also, we find that their founders, who were great spiritual men, had each emphasised a particular path; and though we may infer they were not themselves unappreciative of the efficacy of other paths, still by the method of their teaching and preaching, their disciples soon became as narrow as ever and tried to fight the other contemporaneous sects. It is the speciality of the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna, that it is so simple that even a boy can understand it easily and in this teaching the *sine qua non* of a religious life has been repeatedly said to be the aspirant's intense hankering for the truth and all paths have been mentioned as equally efficacious according to different temperaments. Whether you believe in an impersonal or a personal God, whether you believe in Vishnu or Shakti or Mahommed or Buddha, Sri Ramakrishna's teachings equally apply to you. Not only that, but he had a message even for an atheist. We hear that to an atheist he recommended prayer in the following form:— O God! I do not know if Thou existest or not. If Thou art, reveal Thyself to me.” In brief, he wanted all men to be perfectly sincere and said that this sincerity alone could help men to know the perfect truth ultimately.

Of course, there is the danger here also of setting up the personality of Sri Ramakrishna and forgetting his wonderful teachings about the equal efficacy of all religions and to insist on the worship of his person as the only means of salvation. We admit the possibility of this danger, but we will ask the reader to forget the personality for the present and fix his attention on the wonderful, catholic teachings and try each one to grow into a perfect religious man by trying to realise the highest truth in his own way and allow his neighbour

also to follow the path he has chosen, however different it may seem from his own path. In this way, may we not fervently hope that within a measurable distance of time, the cultured and liberal section of every religious sect will form a holy brotherhood and join hands to fight the materialistic tendency of the age and its consequent corruption?

We cannot look into the distant future, but if in this world such a state of spirituality, brotherhood, love and peace only continue for a considerable period, shall we not be justified in considering that period as *Satya-Yuga* and shall we not gratefully acknowledge the services of that wonderful man, who by his unique teachings, nay, more by his unique life, made such a transformation of society possible for some time at least?

SWAMI SUDDHANANDA,

THE EIGHTY-SIXTH BIRTHDAY
ANNIVERSARY OF BHAGAVAN SRI
RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA.

Belur Math.

The 86th birthday anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated on Sunday, the 13th March, at the Ramakrishna Math, Belur, the headquarters of the Mission, with great enthusiasm and devotion as befitting the occasion. The Math premises assumed a joyous appearance on this great national day when many thousands of people assembled to pay their homage to the great Prophet whose divine life and teachings have infused a new spirit into the life of the nation. Since early morning people began to pour in from steamers, country-boats, trains etc. Under a huge canopy a life-size portrait of Sri Ramakrishna was placed for public worship on an altar tastefully decorated with flowers, garlands and evergreens. The various *Kirtan* parties singing the glory of the Lord roused love and devotion in the hearts of the devotees and created a spiritual atmosphere in which they forgot the cares and anxieties of life.

Thousands of people sat down, without any distinctions of caste or creed, to partake of the holy *prasada*, which was distributed during the whole day. Volunteers under the guidance of the monastic members worked hard for the distribution of *prasada* and the supplying of water to drink, and by their zeal and devotion to service helped to make the function a grand success. The festival terminated in the evening and people returned to their homes carrying with them the happy and ennobling impressions of this memorable day.

Benares.

The eighty-sixth birthday ceremony of Bhagavan Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva was celebrated at the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Benares, on 13th March, 1921 with great *eclat* and solemnity. The occasion was graced by the presence of three dignitaries of the Ramakrishna Mission, their Holinesses Swami Brahmananda, Swami Turiyananda and Swami Saradananda. The open hall of the Advaita Ashrama was decorated with flowers, wreaths, buntings and ever-greens. A picture of Paramahansa Deva was placed in the middle profusely garlanded. The Puja ceremony was attended with recitals from the Vedas and after it was over, the assembled Bhaktas, both lay and monastic, gave offerings. Then they began *Bhajan* and *Kirtan* which lasted for about two hours.

One notable feature of this year's celebration was the *Samasti Bhāndārā* (feeding of all the Sannyasins of principal sects of Benares). The feeding began at about 1 p. m. and it was a sight to see about 250 Sadhus assembled on the memorable day enhancing the solemnity of the occasion. The monastic members of the R. K. Mission were all attention to the distinguished guests. The Sadhus were at first garlanded and their forehead besmeared with sandal paste. They then partook of the sumptuous dinner amidst chantings from the scriptures. A meeting was held at about 4 p. m. in the Advaita Ashrama compound presided over by Srimat Swami Saradanandaji. It was largely attended, with a fair sprinkling of ladies. The proceedings commenced with a song sung in chorus. Prof. P. K. Telang was invited to give an address and at the request of the president he delivered a felicitous

speech on Sri Ramakrishna Deva and his teachings, a summary of which is given below.—

He began saying that he did not come prepared to give an address on Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva that evening as he did not give deep study to the subject so as to be able to do justice to it. Secondly in an assembly like it where he saw around him many followers and disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, it would not be possible for him to give a new light on the subject. The audience, he thought, knew more about that great personality than the speaker. The speaker wished to confine himself to one or two points of the life of Sri Ramakrishna Deva and to the movement that he had started. He would rather narrate his own personal reflections on the life of that magnetic personality.

Continuing the speaker said: In a world so full of doubtings and contradictions, the question naturally arises in the thoughtful whether there is anything worthy to be followed after. The modern world presents a large problem full of apparent anomalies and contradictions. Is there anything by which this problem could be tackled and made understandable? Hinduism says that there is one way to get out of it. One reads in the Vivekachudamani: There is no fear, no danger and no harm from anybody. This truth has been embodied in the dictum "Tattvamasi" or "Thou art That." One further learns that by knowing the truth one can get out of this misery and trouble of the world. But this point had been explained from so many standpoints and in so many ways that the explanation had been entangled hopelessly in the meshes. The Sruti very often contradicts itself. It has been the great quest of religion to find that bedrock on which it can stand. One often tries to get a standpoint from which he can survey the whole world. Deep as our scholarship advances, humanity gives different answers to all these riddles. The question arises whether books can be taken as final proof and authority in this matter. But even there are contradictions in the statements of books. What is called higher criticism has taken away a great deal of value from the life of the great persons of the past. Under all these difficulties how can a man be sure as to the correctness of his position? The evidence which no philosophy can break is that of human experience.

The value of the life of Ramakrishna is that he stands as the living witness of the great truths. The Vedanta stands justified by being practised by Ramakrishna Paramahansa. To me the greatest value of the life of Ramakrishna is that he is the latest—though I hope not the last—of a series of seers whose very life is the exposition of the truths of the Vedanta. It is not so much what he taught, but the life that he led that explained the Vedanta. Mere arguments can only satisfy the mind or intellect. By arguments you cannot prove the existence of God. Argument only makes it to be a probability. But to a seer the truth that he preaches is part of his life, his own realisation. That seer is a Rishi. There is a gulf of difference between a *Tattvadarshi* and a *Pandit*. As regards the former, the truth becomes the law of his life. To me, I think, it is not the sayings of Ramakrishna that matter much, but the atmosphere which he created by his own life that counts most. He expressed truths in the familiar examples of everyday occurrence. He could find such easy means of expression, because he realised those truths in his own life. The Pundits, in order to make these truths intelligible to us, make use of such subtle things as *Ghatakasa*, *Patakasa*, and use the simile of *Rajju* (rope) and *Sarpa* (snake). But instead of making it clear they make it more complicated. We in this age do not understand *Ghatakasa* and *Patakasa*; many of us who live in towns, perhaps have never seen a snake and it would be mere foolishness to mistake a rope for snake. These metaphors and similes might be interesting in those old days, but certainly they cannot do us any good now. Ramakrishna saw truths revealed to him, so he could give an easy expression to them in trifling incidents of everyday life. He was the latest of a long list of teachers who taught by giving examples from the everyday incidents of our life.

Continuing the speaker said that greater than his teaching was the way in which he brought illumination to other people's heart. He could easily make others understand what he realised in his own life. In the Upanishads we hear that the Guru extinguished all other desires in the mind of the disciples except one, and that was a desire to be like his Guru in his own life. To perpetuate the work of the Guru was the only desire of his disciple. This was also the characteristic of Rama-

krishna. We see this explained in the life and work of Swami Vivekananda. In all his speeches he said that he was only preaching the divine message of his Guru.

The speaker continuing said: "The Vedanta cannot be explained from books but by the life of man. All these hospitals and charitable institutions lying around us are the greatest monuments of the life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and from time to time we should help them by our mite if we cannot actually join these institutions. Vedanta is the greatest truth to learn, Vedanta is the foundation principle of our activity. It is not the turning away from life, as so many of us suppose. It declares emphatically *Jivo Brahmaiva Niparah*. In these days of democracy Vedanta should exert the greatest influence upon our life. Because Vedanta contains the finest exposition of democracy. For what is the reason for believing that every man is as good as another, which is the pivot of modern democracy? The Vedanta says that in every man lies God—in fact every creature—sensitive or insensitive—is God Himself. The war-cry of democracy is equality. It is the order of the day. Vedanta boasts of no shibboleth or slogan. The teaching of Vedanta is not a war-cry. It is a calm and philosophic exposition of the basis of our everyday life. We should therefore unfurl the banner of Vedanta and carry its teaching—which we have long forgotten—to the wearied world reeking under the hammer-blow of uninspired materialism. Therefore the life of such a man as Ramakrishna Paramahansa who is the living example of the Vedanta truths is invaluable to guide us in our everyday life.

Swami Madhavananda and Swami Yotishwarananda next addressed the meeting in English. They were followed by Swami Jotirmayananda who spoke in Hindi. Swami Saddhananda was the next speaker who in a few well-chosen words dealt with the chief characteristics of Paramahansa Deva. The President brought the proceedings to a close by a fine speech in Bengali which was heard with rapt attention. The meeting separated at about 7 p. m. Then music brought to a *finis* the 86th birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna Deva at the Benares Advaita Ashrama.

Madras.

The 86th birthday anniversary of Bhagavan Sri

Ramakrishna was celebrated with great *ecst* and zeal, at Madras on Sunday, the 13th March. From early morning devotees began to pour in at the Math premises. A beautiful large-sized photo of the Bhagavan beautifully decorated with ferns, flowers and garlands was installed in the spacious hall of the Math. There were many Sankirtan parties present on that day. From 8 a. m. till noon the Lord's glory was sung with great ecstasy. At noon the Bhajana terminated and the worship of the Lord took a new shape, that of feeding the poor Narayanas. About 4000 were fed sumptuously. At about 3 p. m. one of the devotees gave a Harikatha recital which was very much appreciated by the public. After this a public meeting was held which was largely attended. M. R. Ry. S. Varadacharan B. A., B. L. gave a lucid discourse with Prof. Sundarama Iyer M. A. in the chair. The President spoke fervently about the greatness of India and of Sri Ramakrishna saying that at a critical time when India and the world needed Him most, He came to fulfil His words in the Gita.

At the request of the Math members Mr. Aladi Krishnaswami Iyer, High Court Vakil, thanked the Bhagavatar, the Lecturer and the President.

With Aratrikam and the usual distribution of Prasada the functions of the day terminated.

Bangalore City.

The Eighty-sixth Birthday anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was celebrated with the usual devotion and ardour at the Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore City, on Friday the 12th and Saturday the 13th March. The former, the *tithi puja* day was observed by the worship of Sri Ramakrishna all through the day, by *Bhajanam* in the evening and the customary children's treat. The observances of the latter day commenced with the arrival of *Bhajana* parties from the Cantonment and the City at about noon. Next came the feeding of the poor in Tumkur Thimmaiya's Chatram at Gavipur (just behind the Ashrama) which was over at about 5 p. m. At about 3 p. m. Sriman Jayaramachar began a *kalakshepam*, specially prepared for the occasion, on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and kept the audience spell-bound till 6 p. m. It is to be acknowledged that Sriman Jayaramachar contributed largely to the success of

both the celebrations this year by his original compositions

The evening's functions commenced immediately after, with a thoughtful lecture on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna by Rao Saheb H. Chennaya, Retired Sub Judge of Coorg. Next followed Prot. S. K. Yegnanarayana Iyer, M. A., Principal of the Salem College, who read an erudite paper on "Ramakrishna and the Higher Religious Synthesis" (published elsewhere). The theme of his paper was that Sri Ramakrishna stood for a high order of religious synthesis (rather than any low analysis) pointing out as indeed he did in actual practice that all religions have only one goal in view and the world-religion talked of in several quarters could easily be rendered possible on this basis.

At the desire of Swami Nirmalanandaji, the President of the local branch, Mr. M. A. Narayana Iyengar thanked the *Bhagavatar* and the lecturers and in particular Mr. S. K. Yegnanarayana Iyer who had come all the way from Salem for the occasion. The proceedings terminated at about 8 p. m. with *aratrikam* and distribution of *prasada*.

Kim, Guzerat.

The 86th Birthday of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated under the auspices of the Sri Guzerat Arghyashala, Kim Station.

In the morning *Puja* and *Aratrika* were performed by Dr. Balawantray and holy *prasada* was distributed to the public. In the evening a general meeting was held and it commenced with a prayer to Ramakrishna Bhagavan and the great Swamiji and many *Haribhajans* were sung to musical instruments.

Dr. Balawantray delivered a lecture on the life and teachings of Sri Paramahansa Deva and pointed out the spiritual and philosophical aspects of his life, referring to the great religious service being performed by Sri Ramakrishna Mission in India, America and other parts of the world.

Hari Kirtan of *सुसुत्तुविचारणा* (written by His Holiness Sri Sagar Maharaj) was specially selected for the occasion. Then followed Harinam Sankirtan and chanting of Hari Om, and Jay Sri Ramakrishna Bhagavan etc. The proceedings came to a close at about two o'clock at night with *pujana*, *aratrika* and distribution of *prasada*.

The assembled devotees paid high reverence to the Paramahansa Bhagavans and Sri Swami Vivekananda's portrait.

Srinagar, Kashmir.

The anniversary was celebrated on 13th March at 5 p. m. in the premises of Sanatan Dharma Pratap Bhawan, Srinagar, Kashmir. The room was decorated with wall-mottos and pictures. The audience was overflowing. The proceedings began with the singing of "All India morning song" by the Boy Scouts. Pandit Daulat Ram addressed the audience first introducing the subject of the meeting. Dr. Sri Ram then gave a short sketch of the life of Paramahansa Ramakrishna in whose honour the day was celebrated. He at the same time touched on some incidents in his life and the teachings he gave to his disciples. A poem in Urdu was read in honour of the occasion. Prof. Pt. Nityanand Shastri in the end spoke on the qualifications of the great men of the world, who are sent here for the uplift of humanity. Poor Narayans were given food in Sri Ramakrishna's name.

At Other Places.

At Faridpur the 86th birthday anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated in due solemnity on the 13th March. Parties of *Sankirtan* paraded the streets from very early in the morning. From 1 p. m. till the evening about 1200 poor people were fed. At 5 p. m. a meeting was held presided over by Babu Mathuranath Moitra, B. L., a leader of the local bar. Babu Kamakhya Nath Mitra, M. A., Principal of the local College and Babu Prakas Chandra Ghosh, B. L., spoke on the life and teachings of Paramahansa Deva. Two very able papers were also read—one by Kaviraj Nagendra Nath Bhishagratna and the other by Breeman Atul Chandra Sen. Great enthusiasm prevailed.

At Betila (Dacca) the anniversary of Ramakrishna Paramahansa was celebrated with great eclat. About a thousand poor were sumptuously fed in the noon. All the students of the neighbouring villages and leading men of the sub-division graced the occasion with their presence. A huge mass meeting was convened in the evening under the presidency of Pundit Upendra Chandra Goswami. All the villagers took a vow before the picture of Sri Ramakrishna not to spend money in luxuries, or in-

dulge in fraternal quarrels but to improve the condition of their ancient and deserted villages.

At Sylhet, Assam, the 86th Birthday Anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was celebrated by the Bhaktas on the 13th March, with imposing solemnities. In the evening more than two thousand people including sweepers and beggars of the town were fed. Many ladies attended the Utsav.

At Worore, S. India, under the auspices of Venu Vilasa Sangam the 86th Birthday Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was celebrated and a special meeting was held by the above Society on the 13th March. The special item of the programme was the offering of a prayer to Almighty God in memory of the Great Soul. The following resolution was passed and carried with great acclamation, the audience standing: That this Association places on record its sense of pride, privilege, and pleasure in contributing its own quota to the All-India celebration of the 86th Birthday Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the renewer of the Modern Spirit, by holding a meeting on the subject, "The Paramahansa Spirit," and prays to Almighty God that that "Spirit" may be an inspiration to the rising generation of India.

At Chavara, S. India, the 86th birthday of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated by the members of the Ramakrishna Vilasam Library on Sunday, the 13th March, 1921. There were Puja and prayer in the morning. From 3 to 4 p. m. there was Bhajana and it was followed by a procession. At about 5 p. m. the public assembled in the local vernacular High School and a meeting was held with Mr. N. Sankara Pillai, the Ayurvedic doctor, in the chair. Mr. N. Trivikraman Tampi B. A. gave a speech on "the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna." It was followed by another lecture by Mr. P. Krishnan Nampiathiri about "the Ramakrishna Mission." After the meeting there was Bhajana and all dispersed, after Aratrika at about 8 p. m.

The eighty-sixth birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva was also celebrated at the Vivekananda Ashrama, Kuala Lumpur, F.M.S.; Ramakrishna Sevashrama, Lucknow; Ramakrishna Archanalaya, Entally, Calcutta, Ramakrishna

Math. Koalpara; Vivekananda Society, Jamshedpur; Ramakrishna Samity, Parseebagan; Ramakrishna Mandap, Alpur; Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Kishanpore (Dehra Dun), and Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati.

NEWS AND NOTES.

THE thirteenth annual Report of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Brindaban, for the year 1919, shows a good record of activity. The total number of patients treated during the year in the indoor hospital of the Sevashrama was 270, of which 215 were discharged cured and 17 died. In the outdoor dispensary 35582 patients were treated, of whom 3708 were new patients and 31874 were repeated numbers. Some cases of distressed people unable to come to the Hospital were treated at their homes and supplied with medicine and diet, and some ladies living in Brindaban and reduced to poverty were helped with money grants. The total receipts of the Sevashrama during the year, including receipts for the building fund, were Rs. 4970-0-0, and the expenditure was Rs. 3244-13-0, leaving a balance of Rs. 1725-3-0, of which Rs. 1250-0-0 belongs to the permanent fund, Rs. 413-0-9 to the building fund and Rs. 62-2-3 to the Sevashrama Balance with the Secretary. It thus appears that the financial condition of the Sevashrama is far from satisfactory and it appeals to the generous public to help the institution in carrying on its work of benevolence. Its principal wants are funds for the new building under construction, contributions to the permanent fund for the permanent financial basis of the institution, and funds for an outdoor dispensary and separate infectious ward, which latter are urgently needed considering the expansion of the work of the Sevashrama. It is to be hoped that the generous public will warmly respond to this noble call.

ON the occasion of the *Ardhakumbha Mela*, held at Hardwar in the months of March and April this year, nearly three lakhs of people assembled, Sadhus and lay devotees. The Seva-Samiti of Allahabad made excellent arrangements for the convenience of the pilgrims. The Ramakrishna Mis-

sion Sevashrama, Kankhal opened a branch centre for the distribution of medicines and giving of relief to the pilgrims. Swami Karmananda with a batch of fifty workers also rendered service to the pilgrims.

SWAMI Sharvananda, President Ramakrishna Math, Madras gave a series of lectures under the auspices of the Vivekananda Society, Calcutta, on some of the burning topics of the day. The subjects of his lectures were : (1) Indian Nationalism and Vedanta, (2) Real Democracy, (3) The Ideal of its Realisation, (4) The Cult of the Coming Man.

SWAMI Paramananda spent two weeks of February in Cincinnati and Louisville, U. S. A. He reached Cincinnati on Saturday, the 12th, and on Sunday conducted a devotional Service at the rooms of the Branch Centre there. In the evening he spoke on "Higher Consciousness" at the New Thought Temple before a large audience. The following evening he delivered a lecture in the neighbouring town of Hamilton on "India and Her Message." His next lecture in the Assembly Room of the Gibson Hotel called out so numerous an attendance that it was almost impossible to accommodate all who came. The Swami's subject was "Supernatural Powers." On Wednesday afternoon one of the members of the Cincinnati Centre arranged a meeting in her home at Hyde Park, one of the outlying suburbs of the city. A large number of friends responded to her invitation and listened with deep interest to what the Swami said to them regarding "The Power of Silence and Meditation." On the same evening the Swami spoke again at the New Thought Temple, his subject being "Life Hereafter." A class meeting in the Rooms of the Centre on Thursday evening closed his visit. Besides these lectures the Swami spoke before the Greek Circle of the Woman's Club of Cincinnati on "Buddha and His Message to the World." This proved to be an occasion of special interest, the Swami's words arousing great enthusiasm among those present.

The Birthday Anniversary of the illustrious Swami Vivekananda was celebrated on January 30th, at the Hindu Temple in San Francisco,

California, with unusual devotion and enthusiasm. The temple auditorium was tastefully decorated with fragrant yellow *acacias* and beautiful pink roses and choicest greens. The soft colouring of the walls and the artistic inverted lights, recently installed, harmonised wonderfully with the picturesque decorations and the ochre-coloured robe of Swami Prakashananda.

The Swami chose for his morning topic, "Swami Vivekananda, His contribution to the World-thought." He emphasized Swamiji's teaching of *Shradddhā* as being absolutely vital and necessary in all fields of activity of individuals as well as nations. He touched upon the veritable genius of the world-renowned Swami, and laid special stress on the "spiritualisation of the human race" as being one of the great messages of the broad and universal teachings of the Vedanta to the world.

The topic for the evening service was, "Swami Vivekananda's Ideal of the Harmony of Religions." Swami spoke at length of Swamiji's ideal of a Universal religion as revealed to him by the life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. It was an illuminating exposition of the broad and universal ideas suited to this age which is so given to the narrow and sectarian view-points of different religions.

Swami Abhedananda sat on the platform with Swami Prakashananda, and asked by the latter recited a few interesting reminiscences and spoke of the greatness of the founder of the world-wide Vedanta movement.

The sweet and melodious chanting of Swami Prakashananda at both the services, the inspiration of his words, and the favourite songs of Swamiji beautifully sung by Mrs. Edith Allen carried the audience far above their ordinary and commonplace thoughts and ideas of life, and made each one feel the blessed presence of this great Acharya, the greatest and ablest apostle of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, the benign and uplifting influence of which is undoubtedly working towards bringing out the higher civilisation and evolution of humanity.
