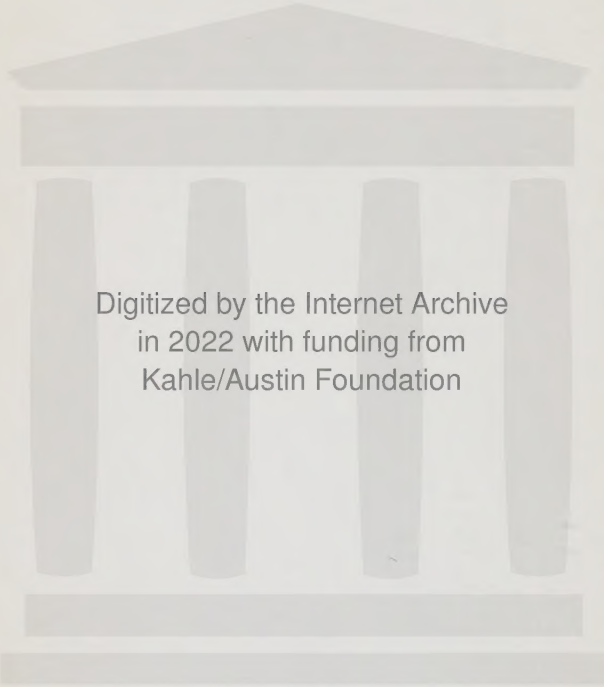


**DAYS IN  
AN INDIAN MONASTERY**

**BY SISTER DEVAMATA**



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DAYS IN  
AN INDIAN MONASTERY

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WORKS BY SISTER DEVAMATA

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS DISCIPLES  
DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY  
BUILDING OF CHARACTER  
WHAT IS DEATH?

BOOKLETS

HEALTH AND HEALING  
PRACTICE OF DEVOTION  
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SLEEP AND SUPER-CONSCIOUSNESS  
WHAT IS MAYA?  
ROBERT BROWNING AND VEDANTA  
THE INDIAN MIND AND INDIAN CULTURE

COMPILED BY SISTER DEVAMATA  
SAYINGS AND PARABLES OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

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# DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY

BY SISTER DEVAMATA

*Author of "Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples," "Building of  
Character," "What is Death," etc.*

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SECOND EDITION



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ANANDA - ASHRAMA  
LA CRESCENTA, CALIFORNIA

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by

Sister *Devamata*

To

SWAMI PARAMANANDA

*To whom I owe my Indian life  
this book is  
gratefully dedicated.*





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## FOREWORD

The Monastery around which cluster the larger part of the memories recorded in these pages is at Mylapore, a beautiful suburb of Madras, in South India. Day after day I sat in the dim monastery hall at the evening hour listening to the swaying voice of a great soul. What I heard was simply spoken, but it engraved itself so indelibly on my mind that often when I crossed the road to my dwelling at nine, eleven o'clock still found me beside my flickering candle writing out what had been told me.

After I had filled several notebooks I let Swami Ramakrishnananda know of them and he asked me to bring them to him. The following afternoon he met me with the question: "Sister, how did you do it? As I read your notes I felt that I was speaking."

This commendation planted the seed of a new thought,—to interweave this teaching with my other Indian experience and call the volume "Days in an Indian Monastery." As we were driving into the city where the Swami was to lecture, I revealed my plan. He turned to me in the carriage, his face lighted by a radiant smile, and said: "That will be splendid, Sister, and you are just the one to do it."

By these words he laid a sacred task in my hands. I accepted it humbly. Now it attains ful-

## FOREWORD

fillment. With grateful heart has it been accomplished.

My life in India brought me in close daily association with some of India's mightiest spiritual Teachers. It was lived under the protection and guidance of one of her greatest religious organizations. These blessings seem too rich to garner and hide away in one small memory. I therefore offer these reminiscences to the world with the prayerful hope that what I have set down in devout reverence and gratitude may create a wider understanding and a deeper sense of kinship between East and West.

DEVAMATA.

ANANDA-ASHRAMA,  
LA CRESCENTA, CALIFORNIA,  
JULY, 1927.

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## GLOSSARY

ANNA	- - - - -	An Indian silver coin, value of an English penny or two cents American currency.
ARATI	- - - - -	Indian Vesper Service.
AVATARA	- - - - -	Divine Incarnation.
AYAH	- - - - -	Nurse or servant.
BHAJANAM	- - - - -	Service of song.
BIKSHU	- - - - -	Religious mendicant.
BRAHMACHARIN	- -	A religious postulant or novice.
BRAHMACHARYA	- -	First stage of the spiritual life. Literally, student-life.
CHUDDAR	- - - - -	Shawl or upper cloth.
DEWAN	- - - - -	Prime Minister of a Maharajah.
DHOBI	- - - - -	Washerman.
DHOTI	- - - - -	Chief garment worn by Indian men.
DURGA-PUJA	- - - - -	Festival of the Protecting Mother of the Universe.
DWIJA	- - - - -	Twice-born.
GARI	- - - - -	Carriage.
GARUDA	- - - - -	A species of eagle.
GHAT	- - - - -	Landing.
GURU	- - - - -	Spiritual teacher.
HARIKATHA	- - - - -	Song cycle based on the life of a saint or Saviour.
JAPAM	- - - - -	Repetition of a holy name or word.
KOUPINAM	- - - - -	Loin cloth.
MANDAPAM	- - - - -	Open Temple or pavilion.
MANTRAM	- - - - -	Sacred text.

## GLOSSARY

MATH	- - - - -	A Monastery or religious Centre.
MUNI OR MOUNI	- -	One who has taken the vow of silence.
PANDAL	- - - - -	A tent or pavilion.
PANDIT	- - - - -	A savant.
PARAMAHAMSA	- - -	An illumined soul.
PRADAKSHINAM	- -	Act of walking three times around a holy place.
PRANAM	- - - - -	Salutation.
PRANAVA	- - - - -	Ultimate Divine Word or Logos.
PUNKAH	- - - - -	A fan placed in the ceiling and pulled by ropes, or a hand fan.
RASHAGOLLA	- - -	A sweetmeat of cream cheese and sugar.
RUDRAKSHA	- - - - -	A rosary bead made of a natural seed.
RUPEE	- - - - -	Indian coin, normal value thirty-two cents.
SADHU	- - - - -	A sage or holy man.
SADHANA	- - - - -	Spiritual practice.
SAMADHI	- - - - -	State of super-conscious vision.
SAMSARA-CHAKRA	-	Wheel of creation.
SANNYAS	- - - - -	Life of renunciation.
SANNYASIN	- - - - -	One who has taken up the life of renunciation.
SANDHYA	- - - - -	Spiritual practice specially observed by the Brahmans.
SANKIRTAN	- - - - -	Service of song.
SARI	- - - - -	Chief garment worn by Indian women.
SHRADDHA	- - - - -	Memorial service.
SLOKA	- - - - -	Verse.

## GLOSSARY

TAMBOURA	-	-	-	-	A musical instrument.
TANK	-	-	-	-	An artifical cemented pool sometimes several hundred yards long and wide.
TAPAS	-	-	-	-	Practice of austerity.
TIFFIN	-	-	-	-	Light luncheon.
TYAGI	-	-	-	-	A renouncer.
UPADESHAM	-	-	-	-	The holy word given at the time of spiritual initia- tion.
VAHANAM	-	-	-	-	Vehicle.
VAIRAGYAM	-	-	-	-	Renunciation or non-attach- ment.
VEDA	-	-	-	-	Scripture.
VINA	-	-	-	-	A musical instrument.
ZEMINDAR	-	-	-	-	A large landholder like a count.







HEAD MONASTERY OF THE ORDER OF RAMAKRISHNA  
ON THE GANGES NEAR CALCUTTA



DAYS IN  
AN INDIAN MONASTERY



## INTRODUCTION

I went to India as a member of the Order of Ramakrishna, a remarkable non-sectarian religious organization which in its methods and ideals strives to unite East and West, ancient and modern, action and meditation, philanthropy and self-help, broad catholicity and one-pointed devotion to a chosen Ideal. It teaches that the form of faith is of minor importance; the vital concern is practice—living, not mere believing. It advocates inwardness and meditation as the preparatory means, service to mankind as the end.

Relief work forms a very large part of its activities. If flood cuts off a district and boats are not available, its members swim to the isolated places distributing food. If drought destroys the harvest, they dig irrigating canals, plough and plant and put the farmer on his feet again. If earthquake ravages a village, they rebuild and replenish it. If famine or disease weakens and afflicts, they feed and clothe, nurse and heal.

They maintain a number of "Homes of Service" where they care for the sick and suffering. They also carry help into the obscure lodging and the humble dwelling. They come to the aid of the aged, the dying and the dead. So efficient is their philanthropic work that the government turns over whole stricken areas to them together with the necessary funds with which to relieve the distress.

## DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY

The Order has also a number of educational institutions,—day schools and night schools, libraries, reading rooms, an industrial school for orphaned boys and girls and an agricultural training farm. At this farm, work and study go hand in hand and the scholars may be seen in the fields with their books, sitting in a circle round the teacher, while the cattle they are tending graze in a larger circle round the scholars. In connection with this branch of work is a special night school for men and women of the neighborhood who during daylight hours labor in the field.

The Order has monasteries at Calcutta, Benares, Madras, Bangalore, Bombay, Vrindavan and in other places. Here the workers receive training in the life of action and the life of meditation. As soon as they are considered fit, they are put into practical service—in charitable work, in publishing or in lecturing and teaching. The task is allotted according to the aptitude. The Order numbers five hundred monks and it has likewise a less numerous Sisterhood, but the work for women by women is in process of extensive development and promises to become one of the most salient features of the general work of the Order.

Around this dual religious body and looking to it for guidance and impulsion is a large lay organization known as the Ramakrishna Mission; called that, not because it is a missionary movement, but because it has the avowed mission of

## INTRODUCTION

consecrated service to humanity. Whenever the monastic workers need a larger band of helpers in their relief work, they call upon these lay householder members to assist them, either directly by coöperation in alleviating suffering or indirectly by providing foodstuffs and money for the sufferers.

The Order bears the name of its founder, Sri Ramakrishna, a great spiritual Light of India during the last century. Much will be said of him in the pages which follow. Some confusion may result from the frequent recurrence of the same name in another form. Sri Ramakrishna is the Master; Swami Ramakrishnananda is the disciple, who was given the Master's name because of his ardent devotion. "Sri" means "revered," "Swami" means "spiritual teacher." Sri Ramakrishna is sometimes spoken of as *Gurumaharaj*, the "King Master;" or as *Thakur*, "Lord;" also as *Paramahansa*, "illuminated soul."

I have tried not to multiply foreign words, but it was not possible to eliminate them altogether without dimming the local color and destroying the atmosphere. When I quote the words of others, I give them as they were spoken that they may reflect more vividly the personality behind. My use of terms may seem at times unaccustomed. I have adopted the word "Indian" in place of "Hindu," because the name "Hindu" was fixed upon the people by foreign conquerors and is not indigenous to the soil of India. Some vowels in

## DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY

the foreign terms should be accented, but such precision was not possible on an English press. I have sought to leave nothing strange unexplained.

One must always remember that India is more a continent than a country. Customs, language, dress, vary from province to province; even the religious forms, the music, the manner of singing and dancing, of playing and praying show certain variations. The basic tenets of faith and the Scriptures are common to all, except of course to Mohammedans, Parsees and converts. My experience was chiefly with South India and Bengal, but in telling of customs and manner of living I have striven to present what was fundamental and more or less universal, that a larger outlook may be gained on Indian life and thought as a whole.



## I.

### MONASTIC LIFE IN INDIA

In India the religious life is not a distinct vocation taken up here and there by an isolated member of the community. It is the basis of all living. Every child born into an Indian family may be said to be born into the religious life. All his acts thereafter are directly or indirectly religious acts and each new step in his earthly career is marked off by a religious ceremony. The songs that lull him on his mother's lap are sacred songs; the stories that stimulate his awakening mind are of the great saints and spiritual heroes. Has he perchance a toy? It is a miniature sacred image. Does he play? It is at worship with bits of a broken earthen pot as his sacramental vessels. The songs and games of his schoolroom are most often of the shepherd days of Sri Krishna at Vrindavan or of Lord Rama in his forest exile; and even the scavenger boy as he drives his ill-smelling cart along the country road sings gaily of divine things.

The first lessons in literature or history are learned in a Temple porch in the cool stillness of the evening, when to the vibrant notes of the tamboura, some itinerant *Pandit* chants the ringing metres of the great epics, the Mahabharata or the

Ramayana. Or perhaps in the hushed hours before dawn, the father will rouse his little sleeping brood from their last slumber, and while the mother busies herself about the house, he will teach them of their saints and Scriptures.

As the boys pass out into active life, it is the monastery more often than the club which draws them at the close of their day's work; and busy doctors, lawyers and government officials will gather at the feet of some simple holy man to hear him expound the Vedas or to chant together the praises of the Lord. With coming age more and more is the daily routine permeated with religious thought and practice, until the man or woman who began by bringing religion into every part of life, ends by taking the whole of life into religion.

Indian teaching declares human existence falls naturally into four stages:—child life, student life, householder's life and the forest life or life of religious retirement. Each has its special duties and opportunities for spiritual development. Yet it is not believed that every soul must necessarily pass through all these stages in each birth. Since to the Indian, earthly life is not merely a stretch of seventy years, but a consecutive journey through many earth lives back to God, it is quite possible that a man may have learned all the lessons of the earlier stages and be born with a natural tendency to forest seclusion. Whether it comes at the beginning or at the end, however, to every Indian this is the highest

## MONASTIC LIFE IN INDIA

point to be attained, the culmination of all human effort and achievement; and the man who has entered on the life of renunciation transcends all social and caste restrictions, though perhaps the beggar monk was once a pariah.

In India taking up the monastic life means a very different thing from what it means in the West. It is not passing from a home into an institution, from a family into a larger household. It is going out into the open, the sky the only roof, the ground the only bed, chance alms from door to door the only food. Caste, kinship, name, fortune, all are merged in a larger measure of things. The whole human race becomes the family of the *Sannyasin* or monk, every living being must be equally dear to his heart, every part of the world must be equally his home. Because he seeks to rise above his physical nature and realize his soul, he must renounce all that is related to the body and the little self,—comfort, ease, money, the special community and associations of his birth. He must transcend the physical, if he would reach the spiritual.

All this must be done with no sense of giving up. As a mountain climber reduces his luggage to a minimum and rejoices in the lightness of his kit, so must the *Sannyasin* rejoice in his voluntary poverty. He is setting out on a journey and he must not weight himself with material possessions and concerns. The wrench of renunciation must

be forgotten in the joy of expanding spiritual consciousness. He must be like the man who, having found the pearl of great price, sells all he has to buy it. And when this call comes, no Indian dares gainsay it, for it is the voice of the Lord before which every human voice must be silent.

Nor are these acts of sudden and complete renunciation rare in India. A religious play at the theatre, a chance word in the street, a vision of higher things in meditation, the touch of a holy man, are even to-day sending men out from office, counting-room and palace to search for God. Only a few years ago while I was in Calcutta, there came a married couple from the South. They were of the merchant caste, rich and still in their thirties, yet the husband was bringing his wife to take her first vows in religion. "I cannot give myself up to the forest life," he said, "because my brothers have been less successful than I and their families are dependent on me, but my wife has fulfilled her duties. Our two daughters are well married and I should feel it a great sin to keep her from following out the deep religious longing she has always had. I have taken the first vows of *Brahmacharya* (godliness and continence) with her. Now we shall go home together and wait two years. Then I shall bring her back and leave her with the Order. I know that her life of spiritual consecration will bring blessing to the whole family."

In entering the monastic life, all initiation is

## MONASTIC LIFE IN INDIA

given by the individual *Guru* or spiritual teacher, who must himself be a *Sannyasin* or monk. Is he a member of a special monastic Order? Then the neophyte may be regarded as a member of the same Order; but this is a secondary consideration. The initiation is primarily not into an institution, but into a new life of selfless devotion to Truth; not into association with a brotherhood or sisterhood, but into direct companionship with God. His daily prayer becomes: "O Supreme Lord! Thou art my mother. Thou art my father. Thou art my friend and companion. Thou art all my learning. Thou art all my wealth. Thou art my all in all."

The first initiation, into *Brahmacharya*, vows the disciple to a life of spotless purity, of absolute simplicity and above all of service. It is believed that only through constant service, perhaps the most menial, can body and mind be purified and prepared to receive the Truth. In the old days the disciple went to his *Guru* in some quiet hermitage hidden away in the heart of a woodland grove; and his daily duties were to bring firewood from the jungle and water from the stream, to cut fresh bamboo poles to rebuild the hut or collect dried palm leaves to mend the thatch. When these simple tasks were finished, the boy would sit at the feet of his Master and learn from him the sacred teachings of the Scriptures. The chief lessons, however, were not given in words, but through hourly contact with an enlightened soul.

It was the kindergarten system applied to spiritual training. The disciple was taught what holiness was by watching a holy life. He learned of purity and unselfishness by living with a pure and selfless character, just as a little child growing up in daily association with a naturalist comes to know all the birds and flowers without apparent effort or study. Often days passed by in perfect silence, when the *Guru* was so wrapped in contemplation that none could approach him. The sincerity and earnestness of the neophyte were tested in this way. It is on record that a disciple served the great Sankara eleven years before the Master even spoke to him; and in the Upanishads we read of this service stretching over long periods of time before the ultimate Truth was revealed.

Outer conditions may have changed since then, but the fundamental principles, methods and ideals for the period of *Brahmacharya* remain the same to-day as in Vedic times. It is a life of humble, loving service near the Master, learning through obedience and devotion the lessons of the spirit. Throughout there is no violence of enforced discipline. There is as much of play and simple gaiety as there is of work and grave study. Those who enter upon the life of spiritual consecration must feel the joy of the Lord, the freedom and light-heartedness that come through renunciation.

It is believed that no one should renounce the world and take up the life of the spirit unless he



## MONASTIC LIFE IN INDIA

feels that he is exchanging a lesser thing for a greater; that his "loss" is literally "a gain," as Saint Paul declares. Does he feel this? Then he need not be driven to any rigid training, any more than an eager student has to be driven to his books. God, he is told, is most easily perceived where opposites meet, hence the best hours for meditation are at dawn when night melts into day, or at sunset when day fades into night. Does the neophyte care too much for his sleep or comfort to remember these hours—of what use to ring a bell to remind him? His ear is not yet open to the Divine call, so let him go home and serve God in the world. Does he heed more the hunger of his body than the hunger of his soul, so that of his own accord he does not curb his appetites—of what avail to lock him in a cloister? Better for him to live a godly married life at his own fireside.

He is not made to feel any sense of failure or degradation, however, in returning to the householder's life. It is equally honorable, he is taught, and if properly lived, may lead to high spiritual attainment; but the ideal remains none the less clear in every Indian mind that the highest state is, as Christ put it, not to keep all the commandments as a member of the social body, but to "sell all thou hast, give to the poor, take up thy cross and follow me." He who goes away sorrowing is not yet ready to pass on to higher things; but he who hears the call and with heart aflame follows it,

for him all the discipline and denial which the vocation itself involves become a blessed privilege which needs no coercion.

When months or years of selfless service have subdued the ego and a first vision of the Divine has fortified the *Brahmacharin* in his life of detachment, then the *Guru* bids him make ready to set out on the ruder way of the *Sannyasin*—one who renounces all. Mixing a special natural clay or powdered rock with water, he dyes his cloth the bright orange typical of the flame of wisdom and renunciation; he shaves his head; and receiving a begging bowl from his Master's hand, he sets out to beg food, which he cooks and offers to his *Guru*.

This done he receives the last solemn rites of *Sannyasa* (complete renunciation) and taking his begging bowl and staff he goes forth alone with the parting injunction from his *Guru* to follow his staff, looking neither to the right nor to the left and never remaining more than three days in any one place lest some new bondage of attachment seize upon him. Through this first period this staff becomes the symbol of renunciation; and since in shape it suggests the Christian bishop's crozier, one is tempted to ask whether it was not the cross or crozier of renunciation which Christ bade the man take up.

The first thought of the young *Sannyasin* or monk, thus thrown upon himself, is to make a pil-



grimage on foot to all the holy shrines of India. Fulfilling literally the injunction of Jesus to his disciples, he wanders under the burning heat of the sun or beaten by the storm, carrying "neither purse nor scrip." These days spent in humble pilgrimage, however, are not wholly selfish days. Through every village and hamlet unconsciously the *Sannyasin* bears the message of the Lord, and he is the God-appointed teacher of the people. As Swami Vivekananda declares: "The beggar monk carries religion to every door." Has any one a doubt or question? At once he brings it to some *Sannyasin* resting under a tree by the roadside or in some shaded Temple porch; and often a householder will beg such a holy man to live with him for months at a time and become the teacher of himself and his family.

Not men only, but women too wander, so safe that the most timid have gone alone on pilgrimages of two years' duration or even more, fearless and joyous in the care of the Supreme Protector of all beings. The married woman may go veiled, but the *Sannyasini*, who has consecrated herself to God, walks freely with face uncovered, for no one looks upon her except with deepest reverence. Many of them, too, have been noted teachers. Even some of the great Vedic Scriptures were written by women.

The early monastic system of India was free from the trammels of organization. It was Bud-

## DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY

dha who first created the fixed institution of the monastery; and nearly all the monastic systems of the West can be traced to Buddhism. Having broken the crystallization in which hereditary caste had imprisoned society, he laid the foundation of a new and equally dangerous social crystallization in making the cloister the one sure refuge from the ills of life.

No one ever preached a loftier ethical ideal than he; but as time went on and thousands gathered within convent and monastery walls, the old ideal of *Vairagya*m or renunciation was lost, corruptions crept in one by one, and India was sinking under the weight of religious degradation when another mighty reformer, Sankaracharya, sprang up, swept the degenerated remnants of Buddhism out of India and raised aloft once more the pure ideals of the Vedas.

The monastery remained and still remains, but cleansed and purified; not a monastery, however, as in the West, with Gothic cloisters filled with hooded monks, but a simple house where the one fixed resident is God, while the other inmates go and come, scarcely a handful there at any one time. Worship and service of the Lord determine the whole routine of the day and all is done for Him as an actual Presence. If a new class is begun, the text-book is first laid on the altar and the Lord's blessing asked. Is a new work undertaken? The plan is first told to God in the Chapel. No

## MONASTIC LIFE IN INDIA

one leaves the monastery without taking “the permission of God;” no one returns without coming to the shrine to tell Him of it.

The monks live like children in the mother’s house—going off for long periods in solitary wandering or in loving service to others, then coming back at intervals to rest and pray at the Divine Mother’s feet. It is a life of true freedom, in which renunciation and service are the watch-words and God-vision the goal.

## II

### A GREAT INDIAN MONK

Swami Ramakrishnananda stands as a towering figure in my Indian life. He was an inherent part of it from the moment when he waited on the station platform to greet me as the in-coming train brought me to Madras, until he leaned through the railway carriage window to give a parting word of counsel as the out-going Bombay mail carried me westward. There was always a bigness and a majesty about him that impelled. He had a way of sweeping aside the belittling details of life and leaving large spaces for nobler thought and action.

I recall one afternoon when he sat on my upper verandah for four hours talking to me of God and godly living. His face was alight, his whole being seemed to glow with the exalted joy of his thought. Suddenly he rose, strode down the narrow brick stairway and along the dusty road to the monastery gate. His step was so uplifted, his bearing so lofty that as I watched him approach the gate, quite spontaneously and involuntarily I felt surprise that he was not as tall as the monastery. He looked to me taller.

With a few words he could make a universe

## A GREAT INDIAN MONK

crumble. "That this world is hollow and unreal I can prove to you in a few minutes," he said to me one evening as we talked in the dimly-lighted monastery hall at Mylapore. "All memory exists in the mind. Indeed the mind is made up of memory, therefore all the past and all the future exist in the mind; only the present exists in the senses. Now how long does any sense perception last? Just the point of time when the object comes in contact with the sense organ, then at once it becomes a matter of memory.

"This point of time, like Euclid's geometrical point, actually has no magnitude. The present therefore is in reality only such a point without dimensions; but man, because he wishes to live in his senses, magnifies this point and extends it to the 'present age' or the 'present time' or to 'now-a-days,' which means these few weeks or months or years. Actually the present has no real conceivable existence and only the past and future have duration. As these exist in mind, the whole of the universe may be said to be in mind; and when a man goes out of his mind he goes out of the universe.

"This is proved when a man is in sound sleep. At that time he goes away from his mind and his senses. He does not remember that he has a wife or a child, that he owes money, that he has a house or a garden; all these have ceased to exist for him. Only when he wakes up does he grad-

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ually remember them and his anxieties return. This shows that they only exist in the mind and have no existence outside. When a man once understands this, he ceases to care for the mirage of the mind, the mirage of the senses. This world of outer creation then appears to him hollow and meaningless and nothing can disturb him."

On another occasion he said: "The whole universe exists for a man between the two ends of the nerves,—this outer end on the surface of the skin, and the inner end in the spinal column. One part of the network leads me out through the channel of the eyes, another takes me out through the ears, another through the tongue, so this universe of forms and sounds, tastes and touch comes into existence. We are as it were caught in this net of the nervous system. We have entangled ourselves and we seem to love to entangle ourselves. Such is the perversity of our nature. But only when we extricate ourselves from this labyrinth of nerves can we hope to be free."

It was characteristic of Swami Ramakrishnanda that he should have set as one of the last tasks of his life to prove how and where mental space merges into spiritual. Indian philosophical teaching holds that each sphere of activity, physical, mental and spiritual, has its own space with its special dimensional conditions. The Swami believed that if he could open the higher realms of thought by scientific demonstrable steps, he

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would provide a satisfying religion for all material scientists, who now look upon pure spiritual verities as undemonstrable visions.

He requested the professor of a local college to procure for him all the latest, most authoritative books on astronomy and he began a zealous study of them. It was not difficult for him to understand even the most abstruse among them, as he was an able mathematician and played with logarithms as a boy with marbles. More than once when I went across to the monastery in the early morning I found him sitting on his mat by the open door working out a problem in trigonometry as a pastime.

There was no deception in his mind however regarding the limitations of this outward method. It might carry him to the farthest reach of vastness, but there would always be space and more unexplored space beyond. He knew that his ultimate course must be inward. "Actually time, space and causation are not separate entities outside; they all exist in me, that is, in my mind. The whole universe is inside the man," are his own words. Yet, although he saw clearly the boundary lines of material science, he also recognized its value and essential place in human evolution.

"Science is the struggle of man in the outer world. Religion is the struggle of man in the inner world," he declared one evening. "Science makes man struggle for Truth in the outside uni-



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verse and religion makes him struggle for Truth in the inside universe. Both struggles are great, no doubt, but one ends in success and the other ends in failure. That is the difference. Religion begins where science ends.

“The whole scientific method is based on observation and experiment; but the moment man realizes that there is something beyond observation and experiment he will give them up and leave material science behind. Science will always have to deal with finite bodies and God is infinite. The scientific method is the ordinary method; for science, as we have seen, is based on observation and experiment, and observation and experiment are based on the senses, therefore science cannot go beyond limited being. But God and Truth are limitless.

“How then, can we hope to understand Truth or God? Of course we can understand Him because we are He. He is inside us. We have got ourself so mixed up with this sense world, that we imagine that we cannot understand Him. He is the easiest thing for us to understand. He represents our natural condition.” And he added: “Those scientists who are earnest seekers after Truth like Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall are sure to realize soon. Those are far from Truth who are bound by their sense nature, because the senses deaden and brutalize.”

The Swami's researches grew more and more



introspective as he proceeded. He spent long hours in profound thought and interior seeking. How far he advanced in his investigations I never learned, as I left Madras while they were in progress and he made no reference to them in his letters. At no time were they allowed to absorb all his effort. He kept ample leisure for other occupations. Often I found him with a worn Sanskrit tome in his hand. He was deeply versed in this language of the ancient Indo-Aryans and believed that it had a quality not shared by any other language.

I had a convincing proof of his Sanskrit scholarship one afternoon when some South Indian *Pandits* came to the monastery. They knew neither English nor Bengali, Swami Ramakrishnananda's native tongue, and he had too limited a knowledge of their tongue, Tamil, to carry on a serious conversation in it, so the *Pandits* proposed that they converse in Sanskrit.

The Swami sat on the rug opposite them rocking slowly back and forth, as he often did, and giving ready answer to their questions or remarks. Suddenly without understanding their words, I realized that the conversation had turned on me and in a moment the Brahmins began intoning the melodious lines of the Sanskrit Scriptures. Swami Ramakrishnananda explained to me that he had requested them to chant that I might hear how they chanted the Vedas in Southern India.

The *Pandits* had wonderfully mellow voices and as the swaying words rolled from their lips, marked by a low clapping of hands, it had the rhythmic fundamental sound of a long ocean swell with an occasional breaking wave as accent.

A profound acquaintance with the Vedas by no means gave the full measure of the Swami's Scriptural learning. He was an untiring student of all the great Scriptures. He knew the Bible from cover to cover and expounded it in a spirit and with an understanding which are rare even in Christian countries. Every Friday at six he held a class at the Hindu Theological High School. When Good Friday came, he talked on the Crucifixion. The depth of his feeling and the vividness of his description could be possible only to one who "had seen" as Browning makes St. John say in his "Death in the Desert."

My whole being was stirred by the living reality of his words and as we drove home I asked how he could make them so real and living. He sat silent for a moment, then he said quietly and simply: "My Master used to tell me that in a previous life Saradananda and I were Christ's disciples."

Later in speaking again of Jesus he declared: "I always had a strong feeling for Christ even in my boyhood. Christ was a universal helper of humanity, He was truly a great Saviour. Without the resurrection, however, Christianity would not

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have been a religion. Otherwise Christ simply would have died as any man. It was because He rose again that Christianity lives. And He undoubtedly did rise, but I do not believe that He died on the cross. All things are possible with God and despite all that was done a spark of life must have remained somewhere in the body and this re-kindled in the tomb.

“It was the glorious example which Christ gave on the cross that made the Christians such willing martyrs. If their Master had been a little more luxurious or a little less brave His followers would have been different. As it was they were glad to die as their Master had died. Peter, when he was to be crucified, had but one thing to ask: ‘Let me be placed with my head downward. My Master died honorably with his head up. It is proper that His servant should die with his head in the dust.’

“The ways of the Lord are unfathomable. When Christ’s disciples were scattered and overpowered by persecution He turned His worst enemy into His greatest apostle. A man who gave no quarter, who when he asked ‘Are you a Christian?’ and heard the answer ‘Yes,’ at once drew out his sword and struck without mercy—that one became the greatest defender of Christianity.”

One evening a torrential tropical storm swept over Mylapore after *Arati*, the Indian Vesper Service. Some Mohammedan students who were pass-

ing took shelter in the monastery. Swami Ramakrishnananda gave them cordial welcome and then with true spiritual courtesy he began talking to them, not of the Vedas and his own form of faith, but of their religion and the Koran. His exposition of the words of Mohammed was so illuminating that the students returned every evening for a week to hear more of it.

The first day the questioning of the group was chiefly regarding the personal reality of Satan. When the young men had gone, Swami Ramakrishnananda turned to me and said: "What in the West they call the devil, we here in India call ego. In the West they externalize their devil. Here, too, they do it, but not in the same way. The West also puts its God far off up there somewhere, while the Hindu keeps Him inside.

"It is the greatest relief when we get rid of egotism. It is as if a heavy burden rolled off. At once all our doubts and fears, anxieties and troubles disappear. When the 'I' is gone, nothing remains but God or Divinity. Let Him exist alone in his glory. Deny ego, it is the cause of all your miseries."

Then he added in incisive tones: "You will have to get rid of this ego, you will have to drive out the first personal pronoun 'I' before you can realize God. God's will is the only will in the whole universe and your little will is only a small reflection of that universal will and only exists because that great will exists.

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“Bring God inside yourself. This is the way to forget the ego. Feel His presence in your heart. The moment you feel that presence, you will not have to drive away the ego. It will disappear of itself. Selfishness will go. Your little glory will be lost in the infinite glory of God.”

With all his intellectual attainments, Swami Ramakrishnananda was above everything a devotee. It was his ardor of devotion which won for him his Master's name. “I would like to have taken it myself, but I thought Sasi deserved it more,” Swami Vivekananda said to a fellow-disciple, who repeated it to me. “Sasi” was Swami Ramakrishnananda's name before he took up the religious life and he is still known as Sasi Maharaj among the members of the Order.

When Sri Ramakrishna passed away Swami Ramakrishnananda made a vow that he would not desert his Master's ashes. His brothers in the nascent religious Order went out to wander as mendicant monks and were not heard from during long periods, but for twelve years he kept unbroken vigil in the Shrine dedicated to his Master. He brought the water from the Ganges for use in the daily worship, he polished the altar vessels, he gathered the flowers, he prepared the food for the offering to the Lord and never wearied of his holy service.

Often for dress he had only a piece of cloth large enough to cover his loins and as he carried

the large jar of water on his shoulders, the servants along the river bank joked with him and treated him as one of them. I heard from others that he never indicated by manner or gesture that he belonged to a Brahmin family of high standing in the community.

For many years he conducted the daily worship in the Shrine with unwavering ardor. His fervor of spirit was specially manifest on feast days. There was one particular Festival of the Divine Mother which tested his endurance in prayer to the utmost. It comes in the late autumn and calls for continuous worship during twenty-four hours. This long interval is usually divided among several celebrants, but Swami Ramakrishnananda would take his place before the altar at six o'clock on the morning of the Festival and remain there until six the next morning without moving from his seat. It was regarded as little short of a miracle even by his Brothers in the Order, some of whom also had great power of spiritual endurance. Several of them spoke to me of it. To Swami Ramakrishnananda it seemed nothing remarkable.

One day I asked him how he was able to do it. He replied modestly: "Devotion can accomplish anything." There rose in my mind a story he had told me. I give it in his own words:—

"One day in the forest Rama and Lakshmana stopped by a clear stream to rest. There they saw a crow, apparently parched with thirst, yet each



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time it would go down to the water, it would turn again and come back without drinking.

‘What a foolish crow this must be,’ said Lakshmana, ‘to be suffering from thirst here on the bank of a stream of cool water and not to drink a single drop.’

‘Do not judge so hastily, my brother,’ Rama replied. ‘This crow is a great devotee of God who is constantly repeating His name. Whenever he goes down to the water to drink, he remembers that in order to drink he must cease to repeat the name of the Lord and he cannot bear to do that, so he goes back without drinking.’ ”

And the Swami added: “The true devotee is like that, he never thinks of himself. He is so full of the thought of God that his own self is forgotten. This body is only an instrument, a passive instrument and an instrument really has no existence of its own, for it is wholly dependent on the one who uses it. Suppose a pen were conscious, it could say, ‘I have written hundreds of letters,’ but actually it has done nothing, for the one who holds it has written the letters. So because we are conscious we think we are doing all these things, whereas, in reality we are as much an instrument in the hands of a Higher Power as the pen is in our hands and He makes all things possible.”

Often and often the Swami would repeat a holy name with as tireless a zeal as the crow devotee. I was wakened more than once before

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dawn with his voice sounding in my ears and I knew he was on the roof terrace of the monastery lost in devout thought. The rise and fall of the name in sacred cadence would go on and on without a break. I have known it to continue unremittingly from three o'clock until five with scarcely pause for a breath.

During the time of worship in the Shrine some worshippers ring a little tinkling bell; and Swami Vivekananda, when he was in an iconoclastic ultra-monistic mood, would taunt Swami Ramakrishnananda for his mediaeval bell-ringing tendencies. But in reality Swami Ramakrishnananda was not bound to these outer forms and observances, for he said to me one day:—

“Every devotee must practise discrimination to be a true devotee. All these things,—going to Temples, waving burning camphor, making *Bhajanam* (singing holy songs) are for beginners. They are the first standard. They are meant for people who in the midst of their worldly activities might not otherwise remember God. A man is hurrying by on some matter of business, he looks up and sees the gate tower of the Temple and for a moment he remembers, ‘there is a God.’ That is good, but it is only the initial stage.

“You must go beyond all external observances and realize God in your heart. You must know that you are not body nor mind nor ego; you are the eternal Reality behind them all. When you



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can do this, all this world will seem to you nothing but a playground. It will be like a stage built to play on and you will play your part with the same gusto as the king plays the part of a sweeper in his palace."

Swami Ramakrishnananda's devotion was not a surface emotion. It reached down to the deepest roots of his being. There seemed no limit to his surrender and his trust. He had little patience with a wavering half-faith in the Higher Power. "Now we trust God only partially" he said one day. "We think we can do many things better ourselves. We may say, 'God, please write this letter,' but all the time we believe we can write it a little better than He, so we do not entrust it entirely to Him. When, however, we can give up everything to Him, then we shall see how well He will serve us, for He says, of such devotees He actually becomes the servant."

I asked: "Then where is there any place for individual struggle?" His answer was: "Individual struggle leads to surrender. Until that comes we shall have to struggle."

I asked him again whether steadiness in devotion meant that we must always feel the same fervor. He replied: "Steadiness in devotion means that though you may be busy with many things, still your mind is always turned toward God. It should be like the needle of a compass; the needle may swing a little to this side or that but it always has a tendency to point back to true north."

“But do not great devotees often complain of dryness of heart?”

“That very complaining,” the Swami answered, “shows that their devotion is strong, even though they may not seem to express it so well as at other times. The very fact that they are restless proves that this dryness of heart is an unnatural condition for them, just as the fish feels dryness and jumps about when it is out of water, water being its natural element. Their devotion is not lessened in any way. So long as the hunger for devotion to God is there, a man is steady in devotion.”

Shortly before I left Madras, as we were driving back from the city one evening, I expressed regret that I was leaving when he had so few to help him. The answer that came was direct and uncompromising:—

“I do not need any one to help me. I am all full of God. What need have I of any one else? If He sends people to help me, I am satisfied. If He does not send, I am satisfied. I know that whatever He sends is for my good and is the best thing for me.”

Swami Ramakrishnananda's early training was of the most orthodox. His father was a conservative high-caste Brahmin of the old type,—an able scholar, thoroughly grounded in Sanskrit and in knowledge of the Vedas and rigidly careful in observing Scriptural custom and injunction. The

son also kept caste faithfully until he came under the influence of the Brahmo-Samaj, a Unitarian movement in Bengal during the last century, which was strongly tinged with Western ideas and reacted against Vedic ceremonial and certain social usages.

For a time Swami Ramakrishnananda adopted the more radical habit of life taught in the new Samaj; but in regard to his food he remained unbending. Fish is so abundant in Bengal that it has become the natural food. People look upon it almost as a vegetable and even the most conservative eat it. Swami Ramakrishnananda, however, made no concession.

"I was a vegetarian from my young boyhood," he told me one day when speaking of his early life. "I read a book by Lord Gouranga and at once I gave up all animal food. If I found fish in the curry, I would eat plain dry rice and go away. When I came to Gurumaharaj he told me it was very good for me to be a strict vegetarian." His Master also advised him to observe the regulations of his caste. To some others of his disciples Sri Ramakrishna gave quite different counsel; but he evidently foresaw that Swami Ramakrishnananda's work would be in South India where strong emphasis is laid on caste observance.

Renunciation with Swami Ramakrishnananda was unconditioned and whole-hearted. There was no element of reluctance or sacrifice in it. Giving

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up meant for him the fruition of life. "Since the world cannot bring us lasting satisfaction, the only remedy is God," he once exclaimed. "Why should a man give up? Why should he be unselfish? Rather let him be the most selfish man; let him not be satisfied with anything short of infinity. Let him not be content with the little finite things of this world. Let his ambitions be infinite. Let him only give up because he is going to get a great deal more. If anyone throws away one hundred Rupees in the street, we call him a madman; but if he throws away one hundred Rupees to get one hundred thousand, then we think him very sane. So let man give up this world which can bring him only perishable happiness in order to get God who can give him everlasting bliss."

"Man is a hero so long as he struggles. But to conquer one's passions is no joke. Man can only do it by finding something that gives him greater pleasure. To be able to give up the sense world means that man has found something better. Man must give up everything to God, then alone he thrives." At another time he said: "If you will study all the personal religions, you will find that all preach renunciation. Renunciation is their fundamental teaching."

The standard he set for himself in the life he had taken up was a very high one. It is summed up in these words: "A *Sannyasin* (one who has renounced) should be ready to help even his worst

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enemy. That is why we have become *Sannyasins*,—that we may bring help to every human being without regard to his worthiness or unworthiness. This is not the duty of a householder. He has his wife and children to look after, so he must always be prudent and help only so far as he can without injuring his family.”

With all his breadth and loftiness of vision Swami Ramakrishnananda was as humble and simple as a child. There rises before my mind the memory of one morning as he talked with me while I ate my breakfast. He sat on a light folding-chair and as he rocked back and forth I was afraid every moment it would break under his heavy weight. The Head of the Order had arrived at the monastery three days before and Swami Ramakrishnananda had come over to request me to go in town and make certain purchases for him. When he had finished enumerating what was needed he asked abruptly: “Sister, what do you think of our President?” My reply was: “I think he is very wonderful, but I am a little afraid of him.” Swami Ramakrishnananda leaned far forward on his chair and whispered, “So am I.”

He confided to me then that the President, Swami Brahmananda, had been scolding him gently for not being more careful about wearing the *Sannyasi* color. As I looked at him and saw his dress—orange to the waist, a brown chuddar about the shoulders and beneath it a pink and white

striped shirt—I could not but feel that the President had some reason for his reproach.

Swami Ramakrishnananda was at all times indifferent to personal appearance. Once when he had a bald unflattering photograph taken, I said to him: “Swami, why did you let yourself be photographed in that way?” His answer was: “How could I help it when I look like that?” He was always an imposing figure, but his features were plain save when they were lighted by his smile, which transfigured them and lent them a rare spiritual beauty. I had involuntary proof of this. I was standing on my upper verandah one late afternoon watching a carriage come down Brodie’s Road. A face appeared at the carriage window and I thought quickly, “What a marvellous smile,” then I saw that it was Swami Ramakrishnananda.

It is very difficult to portray spiritual greatness. It is too subtle and evasive to be defined by word or line, but Swami Ramakrishnananda will draw his own portrait as he lives and speaks through these pages. This is but a first sketch. Let his own words give the final brush-stroke to it. They were spoken as the Swami sat under the tall cocoanut palms outside the monastery door. It was the evening hour. He was silent and abstracted. It was evident that his thought was wholly inward. A question or two passed unanswered. Once he looked up and said: “Excuse me Sister, but this is a time I like to be quiet.”

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Later the meditative mood passed and he began to talk, referring to certain trying conditions which had arisen. I felt rebellious that such things should come to disturb the tranquil tenor of his life and I expressed my feeling. He lifted his head, his eyes lighted up and there was an undaunted ring in his voice as he replied:

“My life is eternal. This little life belongs to God. He created it. Let Him do with it what He will.”



### III

#### ARRIVAL AT MADRAS

The journey to India consumed thirty-eight days. It was on the evening of the thirty-seventh day that the captain said at table: "To-night we shall see land." I asked to be wakened when it came in sight, but the precaution was unnecessary, for I kept involuntary vigil, peering at frequent intervals across dim stretches of Indian Ocean towards an invisible coast. It was about four that I looked out my port-hole once more and caught the turn of a lighthouse lantern. That flash of light was India! And symbolic of her—India groping in the night of subjection waiting for the dawning of a new day, yet even in the darkness sending out her light of wisdom to the world!

We entered the harbor of Bombay just as the sun was rising behind the city, glinting on domes, minarets and a distant hill Temple, and turning into burnished copper the numberless tinted sails of the harbor craft. The steamer had to wait for high tide to dock, so with a fellow passenger I took a small boat and went ashore, thereby missing the friends of the Order who came later to the pier to meet me. A day of quiet sight-seeing and I was again on my journey.



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I travelled all that night, the following day and the next night. As we were due to arrive in Madras at an unseasonably early hour, I had wired the Madras Monastery not to meet me. Great was my surprise therefore to hear my name spoken outside the window of my compartment before the train had ceased moving; and still more surprised was I when I stepped from the railway carriage and found a group of twelve or fifteen Indian gentlemen waiting to greet me, with the majestic figure of Swami Ramakrishnananda at their head.

There was quite a line of carriages as we left the station, but the others took the shortest way through Mount Road to the monastery; while at Swami Ramakrishnananda's request our carriage went by the Marina, one of the beautiful parkways of the world. It extends for many miles along the ocean front. On one side are luxuriant tropical gardens with here and there a government or university building, rising out of tall ferns, high palms and blossoming forest trees. On the other side is a narrower strip of green, where arid sand has been replaced by soil and growing things. Then comes a rolling beach and beyond, a pounding ocean with a relentless deadly undercurrent. As we drove along beside it, over the wide stretches of combing waves hung a low mist, grey with the greyness of early morning. Suddenly out of the water rose a glowing southern sun, transforming the dull haze into an opalescent sea.

The first rays were tipping the top of the high Temple tower as we turned from the Marina and entered the village of Mylapore. The carriage skirted two sides of the Temple tank, a large body of water filled with pink lotuses, passed beside a cocoanut palm grove and drew up at the monastery gate. Those who had been at the station were already there and others had come to welcome me, so there was a numerous gathering. Their hearty cordiality touched me profoundly.

Swami Ramakrishnananda first led me to the Shrine, then to a large table at the far end of the hall where breakfast for me only had been set out. He was as loving and watchful as a mother with a home-coming child. He kept laying fruit after fruit on my plate, refilling my tea-cup and urging me to eat with such persuasiveness that I was forced to overstep the usual limits of my morning meal.

About nine I was taken to my own living quarters. They had hired a large house for me obliquely across from the monastery on the edge of the palm grove we had passed; but at the last moment illness had prevented the former tenants from moving out, so in the late evening before my arrival they had made ready in great haste some unused rooms in the Primary School building. The school, which was two squares away from the monastery, stood opposite the Temple and the lotus-covered tank. The Swami himself insisted on



UPPER: VIEW OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS AT MADRAS  
LOWER: TEMPLE TOWERS AT MADURA,  
SOUTH INDIA



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going with me and several devotees of the work followed. He carried in his hand a picture of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, which he had given me, and some sticks of incense.

We entered by the main school door, went up a broad high stairway and into a square room with only a thick rug on the floor. There was no other furniture. This was my reception room, and later when visitors came they sat at one end of the rug and I at the other. We passed from here on to a balcony around a court, with a roof, a solid railing and bars between to protect against marauders. On the side of this was a long narrow room where a cot, a writing table, and a coat rack had been placed hurriedly. Beyond was another room which had been converted into a bathroom. There was no running water, but a large container, filled each morning. The water carriers had access to the container by a door leading from a rear roof terrace. My drinking water was brought from the monastery and kept cool in a long-necked earthen jug.

After we had seen all the rooms, Swami Ramakrishnananda opened the door of a storeroom and pointing to a bushel-basket full of cabbages, cauliflower, egg-plant and less familiar green things, he said: "We thought you might like to cook your own food." My heart sank. I knew that at a certain stage of the spiritual life the devotee was expected to prepare his own meals; but to cook

that pile of vegetables on a one-burner blue-flame kerosene lamp which I did not understand, and in such heat, seemed a greater discipline than I could bear. My face must have betrayed my dismay, for the Swami added quickly: "We can send you your food from the *Math* (monastery) if you prefer." I acceded eagerly and he motioned to one of the younger men to carry away the bushel-basket. With it went a load from my mind.

The incense was lighted, the Swami chanted a few holy texts, then they left me. The Swami returned at three to see if all was well with me. I was forced to keep him waiting a few moments. When I entered the outer room, he was seated on the rug with a quiet smile on his face, apparently unmindful of the intense heat at that hour. I began to apologize for my delay, but the conventional words grew empty and died on my lips when he answered: "It did not matter. I have been sitting here thinking of God." Then he told me that he was forced to go into town a little later to hold a class, but that a gentleman of Mylapore was sending me his carriage for a cooling drive along the sea front.

While I was waiting for it a visitor took me to the roof terrace of the school building. Across the tank or lake the high carved gate tower of the Temple glowed a deep pink, dyed by the rays of the setting sun, the dwelling houses on the four streets enclosing the Temple and Temple tank

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were in grey shadow. It seemed to tell the story of India, the real India, the high light always on the religious aspect of life.

Along the streets moved bare-footed crowds with noiseless step, stirring a low ground haze of dust,—men and women carrying heavy loads on their heads, young girls going alone to the Temple; a freshly clad Brahmin holding aloft a polished tray bearing grated cocoanut, sandalwood paste, fruits and coin, a special votive offering to the Lord; weary parents with a tired child on hip or shoulder and other tired little ones following after; cows and bullocks with small boys clinging to dragging ropes; a dull murmur of many voices, the rumble of a low-hooded bullock cart, and over all an intangible spell which wove itself around the mind and heart.

I spent many years in Europe and felt a little of the same subtle charm in Italy, but it was faint and feeble compared with the lure of India as I knew it. The disorganization of to-day may have weakened it, but I am confident it can never be obliterated. A subtle evasive charm is always somewhere in the atmosphere and in the consciousness, making itself felt even when dormant. India's spiritual idealism is like a beautiful Venetian vase; it may be broken, shattered even, but each minute fragment still retains the iridescence and colorful beauty of the whole.

On his way home from the class Swami Rama-



krishnananda stopped a third time to see whether I was safe and unafraid in the great empty, silent house, doubly silent and empty after the noise and varied sounds of school hours. I was not unprotected, however, as a Brahmin family lived in a bungalow just below my rear window and a peon slept on the verandah across the main entrance. The Swami stood talking in the hall. When I was in the middle of a sentence, with unheralded brusqueness he said: "Sister, go and rest," and walked down the stairs.

For an instant I was stunned, then I remembered a warning given me that these occasional moments of abruptness might occur. They were not infrequent and sprang, I believe, from a sudden indrawing of the thought. Whenever the Swami wished to cut short a conversation or bring a visit to a close, he always did it with those four brief words, "Sister, go and rest." The sentence became proverbial.

At six the next morning a worker was sent from the monastery to see how I had slept and later Swami Ramakrishnananda himself came. I mention these details to show how warm and generous was the welcome accorded me by the members of the monastery and by every one. There was no limit to their desire to be of service. One prominent gentleman of Mylapore placed his carriage at my disposal and sent his secretary to purchase whatever I needed for the new conditions,



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another spent several days at the Bazar searching for suitable materials for lighter habits. Others brought me food or lovely flowers or other gifts. I found later that when the letter announcing my coming reached Swami Ramakrishnananda, a number of gentlemen, devoted to him and to the work, had called a meeting to discuss how they could best look after and provide for my needs and comfort.

I lived at the schoolhouse for more than a month. Every morning at four I was wakened by the deep-toned notes of a man's voice to which the high-pitched voice of a young boy gave answer. It continued for an hour and I found that it was a Brahmin who came each day at that hour to rouse a little boy living in the palm grove behind the school and teach him to chant the Sanskrit Scriptures. Every Brahmin family has some one of the Vedas which tradition requires its members to memorize, and which in South India is chanted in chorus at all orthodox family feasts.

The sons of the house begin their task at the time they receive their holy thread, a cord they wear over the right shoulder and under the left arm. It is given by the family *Guru* or religious teacher at about the age of eight and marks their second or spiritual birth, for the Brahmin is known as a *Dwija* or twice-born. The little boy I heard had just passed through this sacred rite and each dawning day so many lines of Holy Scripture were taught him by his Brahmin *Guru*.

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Quite different was the clatter of child voices which came daily from the court below my balcony. The first grade scholars had their recitations here. Most of the classes were in Tamil, the native language of Madras, and represented only sound to me; but the English lesson I followed with relentless regularity. The instructor would begin at one end of a long row of pupils and repeat over and over these same sentences: "Gopal, come here. What is your name? Where do you live? What is your age? Go to your seat." Each question was answered in hesitating English, then the sequence began with the next boy.

When the end of the line had been reached, the first boy took the teacher's place and questions and answers were gone through once more down the row. Then the second boy became the teacher and so on and on and on. Occasionally a new question was added, but the old ones were never dropped and "Come here" and "Go to your seat" opened and closed each conversation with unfailing reiteration.

My house was now ready. The previous tenants had gone, the wood-work had been scrubbed, the walls white-washed and everything made fresh and clean. The anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was approaching and Swami Ramakrishnananda chose that as an auspicious day for my moving. The morning was spent at the monastery assisting at special religious exercises in honor of

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the festival. It was noon when I returned to the school and a little later the boys from the Students' Home, a branch of the work, came and carried off my two steamer trunks and the few household articles that had been purchased for me. Then I was told that I must not leave my apartment until some one called for me.

I understood why, when at three I drove by the house on my way to the monastery. The entire front of the house had been decorated. Green festoons hung between the heavy pillars of the verandah and there were garlands of mango leaves over the entrance. On either side of the steps stood tall banana stalks and over them hung green cocoanuts. Each branch and leaf and fruit had an auspicious significance.

We formed into a little procession at the monastery gate. Swami Ramakrishnananda carried my holy pictures and bade me walk beside him with lighted incense, next came some devotees of the monastery and last a line of students from the Home. We walked down the sunny road, over a tiny bridge, into a door-court, up the steps, between the banana stalks and under the mango garlands. At the door we paused to stoop and touch the threshold in salutation to the invisible Divine Presence that had gone before us into the dwelling. Then we crossed the hall, mounted the stairs and entered a high-beamed upper chamber. Here we made an altar of my writing table, took our seats

on straw mats and for a half hour the students chanted the rhythmic Sanskrit lines of the Upanishads.

A conservative South Indian Brahmin living opposite had watched us go by with open disapproval. For him I was a hostile invader in orthodox territory. The swaying cadences of the holy words, however, softened and drew him irresistibly. Suddenly, unannounced, he came up the stairs and into the room bearing a huge handwritten Sanskrit tome in both arms. Without a word he sat down by the window, opened his book on the floor and began to chant in a loud singsong voice. He chanted so long, we began to wonder how we could stop him.

This put the stamp of orthodox approval on my presence in the community where my house stood. It was one of a block of three houses always occupied by Brahmins and they were all Brahmins across the way. Quite frequently when I was looking out from my upper verandah I would see passers-by stop and stare in mute wonderment at the anomaly of a European in that Brahmin environment. All Occidentals are Europeans for the Indian. Yet I was never made to feel that I was an interloper. Every one was friendly and cordial. The family next door, the son of an ex-Prime Minister of Mysore, always gave me a neighborly greeting; and more than once when I had no food to give to beggars at my door the

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lady of the house would come to the end of her verandah and ask me to let her have the privilege of feeding them. The ladies of the second family beyond also came to see me bringing their little children with them.

The house was far too spacious for my needs. In front a wide deep ditch ran down the side of the road to carry off the torrential rains of the monsoon season. This ditch was spanned by a small bridge with a brick railing. It led into a door-court paved with brick and enclosed by a low brick wall. Five or six steps took one to a wide verandah running the full length of a broad frontage. It had a solid adobe railing, thick round pillars, a brick floor, and around three sides a broad seat with a highly polished red surface.

From here one passed through a double door into a small vestibule with a long room on one side having three windows and on the other a small square room with one window. A second door led into a large two-story square hall. In this at the level of the second story on two sides ran balconies, necessary to reach the five windows, which gave the hall light and ventilation, and the door which led to the roof terrace along the side and back. Under this terrace were large alcoves from the main hall, their supporting beams held by round wooden pillars. Along the front of the hall rose a narrow adobe staircase with brick steps, and a row of high windows stretched down the side.

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From the rear alcove a door led into the kitchen department consisting of three rooms,—one a storeroom which had only one window opening into the hall. The two kitchens were high-studded like the hall and had a shuttered open space at the top of the wall to allow the smoke from the open hearth to escape. In the first kitchen there were two wall cupboards; the strong pungent odor of spice told what they were used for. A loft over one end served for extra storage, and across the entire other end a broad slab of stone provided table space for preparing food. There was nothing else in the large room except an old-fashioned meat safe which was bought for my provisions. It was placed directly in the middle of the room to be away from crawling and jumping things and its legs stood in stone bowls of water to protect it from creeping things.

The other kitchen was beyond and there was no access to it save through the outer kitchen. Here the cooking was done. On one side lay a hearth—two raised places to support pots and a trough between for long logs of wood. We did not use this. For two Annas or four cents we purchased a tiny round clay fire-pot with an opening on one side into which the end of a log was stuck and lighted, then as it burned it was pushed in. We also had an earthen oven,—a flat round urn with a cover; inside, sand and two bricks served as supports for the baking dish, under which



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burned charcoal lighted on the hearth. The sand also became hot and hastened the baking.

In the far corner of the room a sunken place in the floor with a small opening supplied drainage for a low faucet of running water. Beside the sunken place was a stone slab and stone roller for grinding. In the main hall stood a huge stone mortar with heavy stone pestle. On the same day of each week all day long I could hear the ring of my neighbor's mortar as the servant crushed the spices for the week's supply of curry powder. I do not know why the mortar should have been placed in the hall, instead of in one of the kitchens. Perhaps because it was cooler there.

A long narrow passage led from the hall to a paved, high-walled court behind the house. It was quite large and had a wide well with adobe well-head and iron arch for the bucket. There was also a table-like stone slab for beating the clothes when washing them, and along the inner side ran a deep square gutter for carrying off the bath and wash water. The bathroom opened off from this court. It consisted of a small rectangular room with an open hearth for heating water and a sunken place in the floor for the bath. In the wall at the rear of the court was a solid wooden gate leading down several steps to another court with a stable. As I did not need this, it was rented to some one else.

All my social life was lived in the large hall

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downstairs. Two fair-sized mats stood in the angle of the stairs. When visitors came I unrolled these on the floor. Visits were incessant. To protect me from too frequent intrusion, Swami Ramakrishnananda made it a rule that every one desiring to see me should go first to the monastery and he determined whether I should be sent for or receive the visitors in my own house or not see them at all.

My private life was lived upstairs in one long room with five windows and three doors. A two-foot folding cot stood at the far end, and at the near end a writing table which had once been a washstand. A slatted folding chair served as table, and deeply recessed window-sills as bookcases. The ceiling was very high, pointed and beamed. The woodwork here and throughout the house had a weather-worn appearance due to exposure; for there was no glass at the windows,—only vertical iron bars and solid shutters which always hung open. There was not even screening, because it would keep out the breeze. One did not feel the need of it, however, for there were scarcely any flies, and mosquitos seemed to come only after lights were out and the person in bed. A mosquito curtain served as protection then.

Two of the doors of the room opened on the hall balconies. Through the third door one went out on an upper verandah, the counterpart of the one below, without the seat. It was shielded from



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the street by a great banyan tree, the branches of which curved up over the tiled roof and spread out on either side, creating a green bower. The floor of the tree, where the main branches stretched at right angles to re-root, and the floor of my verandah were on a level and the living things that flew and ran round in the tree,—chameleons, chipmunks, crows, sparrows and other birds, were my comrades.

There are no set seasons for the vegetation in South India. Every tree has its own time for changing leaves. The banyan gets its fresh leaves in April and they are a great temptation to the poor for their goats and cows. They also make plates of them. Without meaning to, I grew to be the protector of the banyan beside my door-court. When I saw men stripping whole branches of their new leaves and making them wither for lack of sufficient breathing surface, I would drive them away by clapping my hands and calling in Tamil: "Go! Go! I will call the police."

One afternoon I was sleeping when I heard the call of "Mother," "Mother." I jumped up and ran to the front door and the back gate. There was no one. I looked again, still no one. Then going out on my verandah, I saw a man in the tree with his cloth full of fresh leaves. In the evening when I went to the monastery I told Swami Ramakrishnananda of the incident and asked him if he knew who had called me. "The tree," was his

answer. And he continued: "You were sleeping, your sub-conscious mind was uppermost, so you were able to hear the appeal of the tree for protection." It seemed a matter of course to him. He used to say that "plants were conscious animals without the power of locomotion." Everything for him was pulsing with life and consciousness.

"In India Nature is our mother and our father," he declared one day. "We have been able to commune with Nature as with our own mother and so we boldly give out that the whole universe is living. Western thinkers think that only when a nation is in a baby condition, it has a tendency to personify everything and that that is the reason why in the Vedic period they saw mountains, rivers, etc., as living entities. But this is a foolish blunder. It requires great purity and insight to be able to see the workings of Nature and perceive life and intelligence in every part of her. The whole universe is bristling with omniscience. To an ordinary man this may appear to be a dead, soulless universe, but that man who has the inner eye opened sees that the whole universe is palpitating with life."

The banyan tree made my upper verandah cool and shady and most of the hours of my day were spent there. From the lower end of it I looked out across the Temple tank to the Temple and I learned to mark off the day's routine by the varying sounds which came from there. The

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tinkling of numberless tiny bells told that the Temple gates were opening or closing and that it was seven in the morning or nine at night. Certain special strains of music would tell off other hours in the twenty-four. One melody would be played at noon, another at four, still another at six; and they were as uninterchangeable as matins and vespers. Each was fitted to the hour.

My watch seemed to give me very poor service. By the village clock sometimes it was fast, sometimes slow. I found the cause one evening when I was walking with a boy who came daily to see if he could be of help to me. We passed a small suburban bank. On a recessed verandah hung a large gong and beside it slept an old man on a narrow wooden bench. "That is the town clock," the boy remarked. Then he explained that the old man was supposed to follow the bank clock and strike the hours; but sometimes he overslept and would be five or ten minutes late; at others he would wake with a start, think he was late and strike the gong too soon. Once while I was there, he struck thirteen for twelve; he waited a moment, then gave another blow to subtract the extra one. The position of time-keeper was reserved for the old men of the community.

In many villages they have not even this simple device. They are too poor to have house clocks and the crow becomes their time-piece. The crow has very regular habits, so they get up and go to

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bed with it. The rest of the day they live by habit. In that intense heat haste is impossible and one grows to have less and less regard for clock and watch. People keep their appointments when they can and eat their meals when they are ready. Everything that can wait is put off to an indefinite "next day" and life becomes a matter of routine rather than of time.

## IV

### LIFE AT THE MONASTERY

The Mylapore Monastery as I knew it had been recently constructed. It was an unobtrusive one-story building of tinted stucco, on a high foundation, with a large roof terrace, an enclosing stucco wall and a wide green gate. The outside woodwork of the house was also light green. In the interior there was a spacious high-studded hall in the form of a Greek cross, a wide door and two windows at the end of each arm and broad steps leading from each door to the ground level. The door in the arm of the cross to the right of the entrance opened on a court where stairs led to the roof terrace. This court had a solid wooden gate at either end and near one was running water where they washed and polished the cooking pots and trays and other vessels used at meals. On the far side was another building containing dining-room, kitchen, storeroom and bathroom. The sleeping-rooms were in the main building.

At that time there was only a small compound; but the cocoanut grove opposite, a vacant lot on one side and the Temple garden at the back gave it the appearance of a large enclosure. Since then the vacant lot and a portion of the Temple garden

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have been purchased, a new two-story building has been erected and the area of the monastery has been increased in every way.

Inside the gate was a cement platform with running water to wash the dust from the feet before going into the monastery. Such provision is made in India at the entrance of every holy place. Often I saw people wash not only their feet, but their legs and arms, their face and head, all the while repeating a sacred name that they might be thoroughly cleansed before entering the holy precincts of a Temple or Sanctuary. The first act after a visitor crossed the monastery threshold was to go to the door of the Shrine and bow down in prayerful salutation to the Lord. Next he would give salutation to Swami Ramakrishnananda, then greet all others present.

Swami Ramakrishnananda did not let any one forget the sanctity of the monastery. More than once when a thoughtless visitor took out his daily paper and began to read, I heard the Swami say to him: "Put away your paper. You can read that anywhere. When you come here you should think on God." He did not hesitate to administer even more drastic rebuke when he felt it would be beneficial. Once a bombastic *Pandit* came full of plans for reforming Temples, schools and society in general. Swami Ramakrishnananda listened to him for a long time, then he said quietly: "I wonder what God did before you were born."

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The man grew abruptly silent, a really helpful conversation followed and he went away in a more wholesome frame of mind.

The monastery lay on the road to Adyar and many Theosophists stopped to see Swami Ramakrishnananda. They showed great reverence for him and had many interesting talks with him. One day one of them introduced the subject of Mahatmas. Several others were present and there was some discussion. Swami Ramakrishnananda brought it to a close with these incisive words: "If you want an invisible guide, why not take God?"

Visitors were many and bi-weekly classes brought still greater numbers. On Wednesday the boys from the Students' Home came to the monastery for religious instruction and on Friday Swami Ramakrishnananda had a class in the city. He always took me with him, a gentleman of Mylapore gave us his carriage and we started early to go to the Bazar and lay in supplies for the week. There were occasional amusing experiences on these excursions.

One afternoon Swami Ramakrishnananda wished to buy a large copper cooking pot. We stopped in front of an open booth where long lines of copper vessels rose in steps to the ceiling. Swami Ramakrishnananda selected one, but found the price high. His Tamil vocabulary was not ample enough to bargain; so singling out a shrewd-



looking Brahmin in the large crowd which always gathered round the carriage wherever we stopped, he called to him: "Will you buy that pot for me?" Every one stands ready to serve a *Sannyasin*. The Brahmin replied: "Is she a Hindu?"

Swami Ramakrishnananda said again: "Will you buy that pot for me?" And again the Brahmin made answer: "Is she a Hindu?" A third time Swami Ramakrishnananda repeated his request and once more the Brahmin asked: "Is she a Hindu?" Then Swami Ramakrishnananda exclaimed with insistence: "What difference does it make? Will you buy that cooking pot?"

The Brahmin bought the pot for much less than the merchant had wanted for it and as a reward Swami Ramakrishnananda told him who I was. He was always careful to make plain that I had not changed my form of faith. Almost invariably he introduced me with the words: "This is our Christian Sister." He believed in the practice of religion, not in conversion.

The real life of the monastery circled round the Shrine. It is well-nigh impossible for the Occidental mind to get the Indian point of view regarding the household Sanctuary. It is not established for man's religious convenience. It is the place where God lives and receives constant loving service as the most revered member of the family. No nation has a clearer, broader grasp of the infinitude and oneness of the impersonal





AN INDIAN SANCTUARY



Supreme Being; but in his daily intercourse with Divinity the Indian devotee is not afraid to make Him personal and concrete.

He realizes that so long as all the rest of his life is intensively concrete and personal, the higher aspect of it must retain these elements if he is to maintain a point of contact between the outer and inner, between the material and the spiritual; so he creates a special home for God in the household. God's permission is taken, His blessing invoked, when any member of the family goes out; He is the first to be greeted on the return. All the flowers of the garden are grown to be laid at His feet, and no food is eaten until it is carried to the Shrine and offered there. This service is as real and genuine as would be the care of a very dear father or mother. The reality of it is exemplified in a story told me while I was in India:—

A Brahmin priest, being forced to go away one day, left his little son to make the noon offering. The boy carried the food to the Chapel and laid it before the altar. Then he sat down on the floor and closed his eyes in prayer. When he opened them again and saw the food still there untouched, he began to cry, saying: "What have I done, Lord, that my offering is not acceptable to You? If You do not take it, it will bring misfortune on my father. Please, Lord, come and eat." His prayer was so fervent that, it is said, a deific

figure actually came and ate the food. The boy's child-heart was satisfied and he did not suspect that anything unusual had occurred. He believed God always came.

At the monastery all food was prepared as an offering and that it might be the more carefully made ready, Swami Ramakrishnananda himself pared and cut all the vegetables for the daily curry. He sometimes spent two hours of the morning on his task. The household was a small one in the beginning of my stay in Madras,—the Swami, a *Brahmacharin* or novice and a Brahmin cook, a Bengali boy of seventeen who had been brought from Orissa. Many fruits and sweets also were offered in the Shrine for visitors. Every one who came to the monastery was given some blessed food—even the coolie who brought a bundle.

By five in the morning Rudra, the *Brahmacharin*, was up and out in a neighbor's garden picking flowers for the day's worship. On his return the Shrine was opened and the first offering of the day carried there. Then the Shrine was cleaned and everything made ready for the main Service of the three which were held daily. At all, food, flowers and water were offered and incense burned.

In India flowers are not gathered with long stems and arranged in vases about the house. They are grown primarily for religious worship. Just the flower itself is picked and laid on the altar,

lying there until after the evening Service. There was one wonderful blossom which kept perfectly fresh until sunset, then suddenly faded. It was pale burnished copper in color and like satin in texture with a throne-like yellow centre. It grew on the trunk of a large tree and was so fragrant that one blossom would perfume the air of the whole house. Swami Ramakrishnananda took me to a private garden to show me the tree and the owner invited me to come daily for some of the flowers.

I rose at four and kept the first hours of the day for myself. At half past six I walked to a lovely garden a mile away, along a shady road with high-walled tropical gardens on either side. A wonderful banyan tree stood on the roadside and I never ceased to marvel at it. It looked like a forest in itself. Sometimes I went to other gardens, for frequently strange gentlemen would stop me and ask me to come to their garden to gather my day's supply of flowers.

Once I tried to go too far and feeling exhausted I sat down on the low stone balustrade of a bridge to rest. A gentleman passed; I could see from his turban that he was an official. He hesitated a moment, then came back and said: "Sister, you look ill, can I do anything for you?" I explained that I was merely over-tired. "Let me get you a carriage," was his reply. "There is not a family in any one of these houses that would not consider

it a privilege to send you home in their carriage." I assured him it was not necessary and he left me, coming back again to see if I was all right. This was but one of the many expressions of kindness that came to me constantly.

I tried always to be at home from my morning walk by half past seven. I had my first meal about nine. At the monastery they did not eat until after the main Service, which was held when the offering was ready. The hour varied with the temperature. When the heat was very intense they cooked early and the Service also was earlier. After the meal had been offered, some of it was brought to me. Sometimes it came at ten, sometimes at twelve; but on hot days, which were the early days, although I did not eat until half past twelve or one, the food was never really cold. The air kept it warm.

Whenever a vegetable was specially palatable, I would speak of it and Swami Ramakrishnananda would say in unvarying reply: "Did you like it, Sister? You shall have it every day." The result was a lengthening of my bill-of-fare until I had eight or ten dishes at a meal and to prevent the addition of more I had to give up expressing my appreciation. I did not discover until long after that Swami Ramakrishnananda himself prepared all my food, fearing lest the Brahmin cook would season it too highly for my delicate digestion. It was only one more proof of the unfail-

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ingly loving care he always gave me. I write of it in humble gratitude.

The monastery and my living quarters were so devoid of ornament and non-essentials that house-keeping in both was extremely simple, although with no rain for nine months of the year and too little water to make possible the sprinkling of the roads and streets, the battle with dust was incessant. A sweeper woman, however, swept the two houses thoroughly morning and evening; also once a week a gentleman, closely allied with the work, sent a man-servant from his own home to clean for me.

The mid-day hours were spent necessarily in the cooler shade of the house, but at half past four or five I went over to the monastery to do my part towards keeping it ordered and clean. The evening Service came at the sunset hour. In South India day and night are almost equal, the greatest difference in Madras being forty minutes. Twilight and dawn are brief. The sun rises and sets with tropical abruptness. I watched it daily,—the Temple garden wrapped in a deep blue haze, a filmy veil of white mist over the Temple tank, a rosy tipping of the Temple gate tower and the sun was up. At night there was a glow, a greyness and it was gone. Twilight is the hour of “cow dust,” because it is the time in the day when cows and bullocks are driven from outlying village fields along the dusty road to be milked before each buyer’s door in the town.



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When the lights were brought in the monastery hall, Swami Ramakrishnananda invariably saluted them with clasped hands as symbols of the light of Divine wisdom or illumination and there was a moment's quiet for silent prayer. No matter how earnestly he might be absorbed in conversation, he never let this holy moment pass unnoticed. After the lamps were lighted, incense was carried over the house, then came *Arati* or Vesper Service. Rudra often conducted this. He was the oldest son of a widow and in his own home from the time he was ten years old, at every nightfall his mother had called him from his play to perform the sacred rite, so his heart and mind and hand were well trained in waving the flickering lights, the flaming camphor, the burning incense and the fragrant flower before the altar.

At first we did not have music; but after the Head of the Order had been in Madras for some months and had introduced it into the Service, Swami Ramakrishnananda was reluctant to eliminate it, so we continued the evening chant and hymn. They were in Sanskrit and very beautiful, but Swami Ramakrishnananda had no voice and Rudra and I still less.

Swami Ramakrishnananda would begin each stanza a tone higher than the previous one until we would be singing against the top of our heads. As we went up, the tempo ran down. Once or twice Rudra tried to quicken it a beat or two and



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Swami Ramakrishnananda stopped short to say: "Why are you hurrying? You cannot feel the meaning of the words, if you go so fast." Then we began over again more slowly than before. Yet there was nothing ludicrous about it. No one could sit near Swami Ramakrishnananda at a time of worship without feeling a glowing fervor of spirit. Such power of devotion radiated from him that it lifted the thought entirely above the world and material concerns.

The hour or two after *Arati* was the time when Swami Ramakrishnananda most often gave his teaching and such words as these were spoken:

"Do your duty, never grow anxious and do not think of the future. Whenever anxiety rises in you, you become an atheist; you do not believe in God and that He cares for you. If you have real faith you can never grow anxious."

"Outer experiences are like pieces of glass which reveal more or less of your own nature. The opaque glass which veils the face of happiness in you is what is called pain; the clear glass which lets the flame shine through, you call joy, but that flame is always burning inside you and nowhere else."

"God was not discovered by Christ. He was not discovered by Buddha. He was not discovered by Mohammed. He is revealing Himself all the time. He has revealed Himself throughout the beginningless past and He will continue to reveal Himself throughout the endless future."

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“A man who realizes God will have to be realizing Him throughout eternity. No power can make him forget Him.”

“What keeps us from seeing God? Our egotism. The more you can minimize that, the nearer you will approach the goal. If you can throw it away altogether, then freedom is yours. The more you can keep your mind on God, the more quickly you will reach Him.”

“It is true that I am one from head to foot; but here I am called eyes; here I am called ears; here I am called legs or feet. Thus although I am one self, that which the legs can do the eyes cannot do; what the eyes can do the ears cannot do; what the ears can do the nose cannot do. Therefore being one, yet I am many. It is one self that is manifesting as eyes, as ears, as nose, as legs, as hands. It is one self at the centre and all these are emanating from that centre as radii. So God is One, yet He is manifesting Himself in many forms. From the outside standpoint He is many; from the inside standpoint He is one. From the standpoint of the circumference the radii are many; from the standpoint of the centre they are one.”

“Again when a man looks at one object sometimes it seems to him to be several. When one appears thus as many it means a deranged vision. So from the standpoint of Truth there can be but one. Only from the standpoint of relativity are there many.”

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“In the West they have found out evolution, while here in India we have found out revolution,—the *Samsara-chakra* or wheel of creation. We have discovered that everything moves in rotation. In the week we have Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and again Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. The months begin January, February, March and again January, February, March. The seasons rotate. The sun rises and sets again. Everything in the heavens is revolving. Thus throughout Nature we find rotation or motion in a circle. The evolution theory cannot be final; even granted that evolution should go on throughout eternity, still the result would be finite and compared to infinity it would be infinitesimally small.”

“In one day you claim this body as yours for sixteen hours, and for eight hours, when you sleep, you do not claim it as your own. In the same way when the Creative Principle becomes dormant or sleeps, that is the dissolution of the universe; and when It wakes up, that is creation. As many days and nights make up your life, so many creations and dissolutions make up the life of the universe. The rotation is endless.”

At half past eight or nine this informal instruction ended and the second meal of the day was taken. When it was ready I left the monastery. Before going home, usually I walked round the four streets of the Temple. It consumed about forty minutes and nearly always they were deserted,

everyone was at home eating the evening meal. As I moved along in the blue darkness, made darker by the flicker of an occasional street lamp, a closely strewn canopy of stars overhead, the sound of chanting from the Temple porch or of holy song with drum and tamboura from some pillared verandah, I seemed to drop back into Epic India and to hear again the flute of Sri Krishna or the later call of Chaitanya to sing and dance in praise of Hari the Lord.

During the light fortnight of the moon's course it was like day and the street lamps were left unkindled, for the rays of the Indian moon have the golden note of sunlight. I recall one night when I woke with a start thinking I had overslept and the sun was up, then I found it was only the moon that made the room so bright. On these nights I ventured farther and would stop for a moment in the porch of a quieter little Temple beside a smaller tank in a side street of the village.

Little was done after the evening meal and the evening walk. They brought the day's routine to a close and by half past ten or eleven all was still at the monastery and in the house across the way.

## V

### TEMPLE FESTIVALS

The city of Madras consists of a chain of villages twelve miles or more long, bound together by a common municipal government. Wide gaps of rice fields and cocoanut palm groves divide one village from another, giving the appearance of open country at unexpected places. Banks and department stores and offices stand in large walled gardens and there is little to suggest town life until one plunges into a densely populated nucleus near the middle of the chain.

Each village has its own Temple and special festivals. Like the household Sanctuary, the Temple is built for God, not for man. It is not for congregational worship. That is an Occidental institution, the natural outgrowth of a seventh day religious custom. In India religious practice is a daily habit, and religion an individual matter.

“In the West they preach to masses of people and that is known as religion there,” Swami Ramakrishnananda explained to me one day. “But here in India one man whispers one or two holy words in the ear of another in a solitary place and this is religion according to the Hindus. Man’s religious consciousness is awakened by the *Upadesham*

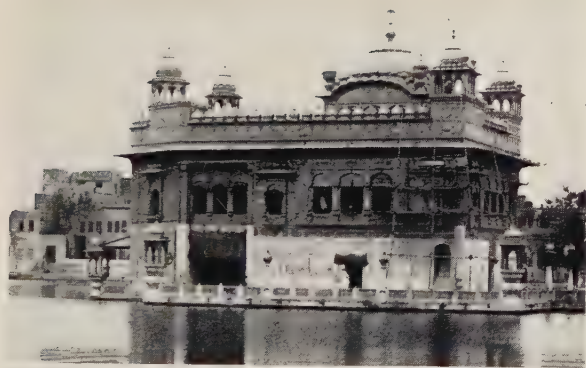
(holy word) and this must be made known to none. Wife must not tell it to the husband or the husband to the wife. It is the person's individual property.

"Religion here is altogether an individual thing. For that reason there must be as many forms of religion as there are people. This is literally true. As one coat cannot fit both you and me, so one aspect of God cannot suit all. In the West they give one aspect of God and expect him to suit everyone, but in India every man has a form of God fitted to his peculiar need—that is why we seem to have so many Gods."

A missionary once asked a merchant in Madras why he carried a daily offering to a Temple in the Bazar dedicated to the God of Success; why did he not make his offering to the one true God. "That would not be honest," was his answer. "If I have a shop, that means I want to prosper; so by my action I am worshipping the God of Prosperity. To worship the highest form of Deity I would have to cease to care for money. I would have to give up shop-keeping and devote my whole life to Him. That is why here in the Bazar our Temple is dedicated to Ganapati, the Success God." This was told me by one who overheard the conversation.

In the ancient system of Indian Government, every village had its headman. God is the Supreme Headman of the village and the Temple is His





UPPER: TEMPLE AND TEMPLE TANK AT  
AMRITSAR, NORTH INDIA  
LOWER: TEMPLE TOWERS AT TRICHINOPOLI,  
A PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE IN SOUTH INDIA





## TEMPLE FESTIVALS

dwelling-place, where He receives His children and blesses them by His Presence, protection and loving care. They go to the Temple singly to salute and commune with that One who is Mother and Father and Friend. They carry to Him the first fruits of their labor, they bring to Him the child who has been saved from death or the young daughter who is about to become a wife. Their life mingles freely with the Temple life and gathers strength and sweetness from it.

I knew gentlemen in Madras who each year celebrated the birthday of their eldest son at the Temple, feeding hundreds and hundreds of hungry poor. The ladies of the family were busy for a week before, preparing the many dishes with their own hands. One gentleman of Mylapore sent the son himself from the Temple to my house with a tray bearing such a feast. I counted thirty different leaf-cups, each containing a different kind of food.

The Temple porch is the age-hallowed seat of education and the Temple itself stands as a lofty lesson in carven wood or stone. The carvings are archaic, grotesque even, but they tell the whole story of human life, its struggles and its triumphs, its pains and its pleasures, its high lights and its shadows. The Indian philosopher is not afraid to look Nature squarely in the face and to take account of all her aspects. He knows that each has its use and place in the created universe; that beneath the endless variety there lies an unchang-

ing Unity, behind even the darkest aspect there shines the radiant light of Soul. The mindfulness of this buoys him up and carries him on.

The matron of the Bangalore Hospital, an ardent Roman Catholic, once said to me: "In the fourteen years I have been here I have noticed that the average Christian shrinks from death while the Hindu meets it cheerfully and fearlessly; and I am forced to admit that for the Christian the soul's immortality is a theory and for the Hindu it is a fact." Many Temples, especially in South India, are built with the Holy of Holies within five enclosures, to symbolize the sheaths of the human constitution and teach men that they must go deep within,—beyond body, senses, mind, intellect and ego—if they would reach the innermost sanctuary of soul-consciousness or God-union; the state Christ defines in the words "I and my Father are one."

In the chain of Sanctuaries which form the pivotal centres of the village districts of Madras one of the most holy and revered is at Triplicane, three miles from Mylapore. It is an imposing Temple with a large pool before it, and I never approached it without the vivid consciousness of great power emanating from it. It is the only Temple in South India dedicated to Partha-Sarathi, that is, to Sri Krishna as Arjuna's charioteer. It was as Partha-Sarathi that he spoke the sacred words of the Bhagavad-Gita.

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I had not been at Mylapore very long when a gentleman of Triplicane came to tell us that the main festival of the year was just beginning and he hoped Swami Ramakrishnananda and I would take part in it as his guests. His house stood across from the Temple. That evening was to be the floating festival, so we made a special effort to go. A friend took us in his carriage. When we reached Triplicane at dusk we found it a surging mass of human beings. The steps on three sides round the pool were packed with people, the steps on the fourth side had rows of countless flickering votive lights. The streets were seething with more people, there were thousands upon thousands.

The crowd fell back for us; and when we reached the side of the pool in front of the Temple gate, we found a wide clear space on the steps. As we took our places here, the float turned and poled its way to the foot of the steps where we stood and remained there for ten or fifteen minutes. This gave us a wonderful view of it. It was broad and long. On the outer edge on either side was a line of men holding flaming torches, next to these were a number of Brahmins chanting Vedic texts in Sanskrit. High up on a throne at the back was the Sacred Image covered with votive garlands. Before it stood the priest waving burning camphor and incense. It was profoundly impressive and as we paid our homage to it there rose in my mind the saying of Sri Ramakrishna:—

“Bow down and worship where others kneel, for where so many have been paying the tribute of adoration the kind Lord must manifest Himself, for He is all mercy.”

As we moved away I said to Swami Ramakrishnananda: “How fortunate we were to find such a splendid place and to have the float come across the tank (pool) just as we got there.” He replied in a quiet matter-of-fact tone: “It was all done specially for you.” I was bewildered and amazed. I had not dreamed of such a thing.

We went several times again to the festival that year and the next. One evening we mingled with the throng and caught the kindling ardor of its pious enthusiasm. There was one festival, however, to which we did not go and which I regretted missing. It came in the rainy season and lasted only one day. What marked it specially was the opening of a certain holy gate to the Temple, not open at any other time. Those who passed through it, particularly the first ones, were supposed to reap a rare blessing. It reminded me of the stirring of the waters in the Bible.

I heard of this festival in an unexpected way. One late afternoon a drenching storm broke over Mylapore. A young Brahmin widow with three little ones fled for shelter to my front verandah. Despite their evident weariness there was a glow of fervor on their faces that told me they were returning from no ordinary errand. Although shy,

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the mother seemed glad to talk with me. She was twenty-six, she said, and the children were eight, six and five. They were on their way home from the Temple festival at Triplicane and had been among the earliest to pass through the gate. As she spoke of it the light in her eyes grew brighter.

They had risen before four that morning. After bathing herself and the children and putting on fresh cloths, they had set out without touching food or water and had walked the six miles from her village to the Temple. When the smallest child grew tired she had carried it on her hip. The little ones had had a modest meal at noon in the home of a friend, but she was still keeping a rigid fast—no food or drink—and they were walking the six miles back again. She spoke of it simply, without thought of merit.

When the rain abated I asked to get a bullock cart for her. These carts are very small, two-wheeled, hooded and springless. They jolt along behind a small bullock and for a few cents will carry a passenger long distances. With the same frank simplicity she told me they were very poor and she had no money. There was a modest dignity and fineness about her which made the offering of charity impossible, but I pointed to the children leaning against her sound asleep and begged the mother-privilege of saving them from further fatigue. She looked at them and consented.

My last visit to the Temple at Triplicane lingers

in my memory like the perfume of incense in a Shrine. I had expressed a desire to see it once more. The day before my leaving, a trustee of the Temple and a friend of Swami Ramakrishnananda, a delightful, highly cultured Brahmin gentleman, came to the monastery to tell us that he had arranged to have the Temple kept open beyond the habitual hour and that he would call for us in his carriage at half past eight. It was the bright fortnight of the moon and the lights and shadows seemed as sharply defined as under the noontide sun, but without the garishness of noonday.

When we reached the Temple, the usually crowded porch was empty. Everyone had gone home for the evening meal. We threw off our slippers at the gate and passed into the court. Swami Ramakrishnananda went on into the Temple. When I reached a certain point beyond which I knew I was not expected to go I stopped, but the Brahmin priest who had come to welcome us and the gentleman who had brought us motioned me to go further and they led me to the threshold of the inner Shrine. There I stood in silent awe. The voices of the mighty Vedic Sages who had spoken the words of wisdom reiterated in the Bhagavad-Gita by Krishna the Charioteer seemed to resound in my ears, mingled with the voices of countless devotees who down the centuries had prostrated there in supplication and worship. Differences in race and creed, time itself, seemed to melt. Only Infinite and Eternal Oneness was left.



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Suddenly out of the darkness, at the end of a faint vista of ornate pillars there shot up a flame. It was the priest waving lighted camphor before the ancient Image that I might see it. I bowed in prayer. As I raised myself a garland was dropped round my head. I looked up and found it had come from the hand of the Brahmin priest. Swami Ramakrishnananda told me later that he had taken it from the Sacred Image to give to me. The other Brahmins in the Temple, catching the spirit of the priest, gathered up the flowers that had been used in the day's worship and brought them to me by handfuls. I held out a small silk shawl I was carrying and they filled it. It still bears the stain of sandalwood paste and pollen from that night.

Incidents such as this and that of the floating festival are too intimate and personal to set down for many eyes to read. I tell of them only to make plain how quick is the Indian heart to give response to the heart from another nation, when it comes with understanding sympathy and fellow-feeling. A Brahmin gentleman, trustee of a large Temple in South India, once declared to me: "We would be glad to open our Temples to foreigners but they themselves close the doors. We bathe, put on a fresh cloth, take off our slippers and enter reverently. The average foreigner stalks in with dusty shoes, unwashed hands, and opera glasses. To him our Temples are objects of curiosity, to us they are holy places of worship. Do you wonder we bar the gates?"

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The great Temple festival of Mylapore occurs in April. It lasts twelve days and on some of them fifty thousand people are present. As it falls in the hottest season of the year, to temper the heat for coming and going devotees, the rich build large *Pandals* or sheds of bamboo poles and palm leaves at their gates. Here they serve a cooling drink of sweet curds, lime juice, rock candy and water. It is given freely to all who come.

My door-court and lower front verandah during these days were transformed into a hostelry, and compact rows of weary pilgrims slept there every night. All the verandahs of the neighborhood had their quota of uninvited guests. Some families gave up a room or two to them. They bathed and washed their cloths in the Temple tank, got food or fasted as it came. Those who slept on my verandah asked me for their drinking water.

The Temple at Mylapore is dedicated to the third person of the Indo-Aryan Trinity. The Indo-Aryan Trinity consists of the Creative Principle or Brahma, the Preserving Principle or Vishnu, and the Transforming Principle or Siva. Each Deity in turn has its special *Vahanam* or vehicle which he rides. Siva rides the bull; Vishnu, the eagle; Brahma the coiled serpent. The significance of this symbolism is that in our march to Divinity, we must not destroy any part of our nature. Even our lowest forces must be tamed and made to carry us to the Highest.

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On each day of the festival there was a procession depicting some event or legend connected with the "Great Transformer." The vivid reality of His living Presence for every person in this vast throng none could doubt. The question was never "What time is the procession?" but "When does the Lord come out of His Temple?" The hour varied; sometimes it was during the day, sometimes in the evening, sometimes at night. I remember being roused at one o'clock one night by the beat of the big Temple drum and the plaintive notes of wood wind instruments. I ran to my verandah and saw at the end of the street facing it a glare of many flaming torches, the tall figures of chanting Brahmins, the rising smoke of burning incense, and the flower-adorned image of the "Great God." As I watched the swaying concourse approach I could easily imagine that the Lord had come out of His Temple at dead of night to see that all was well with His children.

Another evening we were standing near the Temple gate seeing the preparation for the gathering procession. The crowd was dense and nearly all were simple people of modest station, full of piety and devotion. A young girl with shining eyes, glowing smile and the gentle composure that characterizes Indian women, looked at me with friendly interest for some time. Then coming nearer she said, her voice full of genuine yearning: "Is your God in America as beautiful as ours?" It was

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evident that her blessings could not be sweet to her so long as all did not share in them.

I was very ready to share in her joy and in her worship, for as I assisted at this Feast of another clime and another religious heritage, I felt more than ever the living truth of Sri Ramakrishna's words:—"Different creeds are but different paths to reach the Almighty. As one can ascend to the top of a house by means of a ladder or a bamboo pole, a staircase or a rope, so divers are the ways and means to approach God and every religion in the world shows one of these ways."

I sought to follow all the religious customs of the festival—not with condescending sympathy which is so often mistaken for catholicity—but with genuine kinship of ardor and devotion. It was no effort. Such fervor of spirit called forth an inevitable response and created a feeling of oneness of faith. Thus it was that on a special evening when the procession passed before my house, I too made my offering. All my neighbors were making theirs, there should be no blankness of worship at my door.

A Brahmin boy offered to carry it for me and he brought a large brass tray. On this we placed a snowy pile of grated cocoanut, some choice fruits, sandalwood paste, some sticks of incense and a small coin. The day's story called for the Lord on a galloping horse. The bearers of the

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Sacred Image came running down the road at such speed I was afraid the young Brahmin boy would fear to venture, but he ran out boldly in their path and they came to a stop just beneath the banyan tree. The priest lighted the incense and waved it, lifted up the votive tray, then with clasped hands in salutation and a friendly smile he sent back the blessed offering to be given to friends or to the poor.

The most stirring day of all the twelve for me was that of the Car Festival. No Indo-Aryan religious observance is more often misunderstood or misrepresented than this. It typifies God riding in his universe. The car is the universe and sets forth the dual aspect of creation like the carvings on the Temple. Ugliness and beauty, light and dark, are given equal place, as in Nature wave and hollow, action and reaction are equal. The pendulum of created things must swing evenly to mark the beat of time.

On the four corners of the car are colossal figures of the elements, terrifying as air, fire, earth and water are terrifying when they come in the form of wind or consuming flame, avalanche or flood. The body of the car is like a tower carved and colored and in it rides the Lord of creation receiving the loving homage of His children. Many of the cars in the different Temples are very ancient and crudely built, but all have the same symbolism. The wheels are heavy, solid wooden disks cut out

by hand and are guided by placing a stout plank at different angles under them. The one who does this walks bent beneath the car and must exercise great courage, yet he is jealous of his privilege.

The car is carried forward by a long rope with room for many hands. Five hundred could draw the car at Mylapore, and in all its course round the four streets never once was there a single hand-space. Shy women, aged men, little children, ran out from their houses to seize the rope. Those who could not lay hold on it ran beside those who held it and fanned them. They were content to be servants of the servants of the Lord. Now and then, pushed too rudely by the crowd, one fell. No one was injured while I was there, but I saw the origin of the oft-repeated story that devotees in madness of worship throw themselves beneath the car. Swami Ramakrishnananda pulled the rope at more than one festival. Once he was thrown down, but he rose with smiling unconcern and continued to fan or pull as opportunity offered. It was impossible to withstand the exalted spirit of self-forgetting devotion which swept the throng.

The story was told me of an ardent devotee who every year for forty years walked one hundred miles to a certain Temple festival. Each year the way grew longer for him and his feet less enduring until at last they could not carry him to the end. Sitting down on a stone by the wayside he cried aloud: "Lord, I can no longer come to



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you. Now you will have to come to me." It is said that at that moment the Deity appeared to him in the form of the image of the Temple to which he was going and talked with him for some time. The devotee returned home blessed and happy. At the same hour the bearers were carrying the image from the Temple. Suddenly it grew so heavy they could not hold it and they were obliged to set it down. For half an hour they waited. Then a voice was heard declaring: "I have been with my devotee." The image grew light again; they lifted it and the Temple procession proceeded.

I saw little of life on the west coast of India, but I assisted at one important Temple festival in Bombay. The Temple stood on a high hill and the steep road to it was lined on either side with the blind, the deformed, the hungry and the sick. It reminded me of Holy Week at Seville in Spain. Each beggar was crying out his needs or attracting attention by gong or bell. The crowd was dense and the whole atmosphere was more garish and worldly. I went with some Bengali friends. They spoke to one of the priests, who cleared a way through the compact mass of people and led us to the innermost Shrine to lay our offering of flowers before the Deity.

At another time I visited a very ancient and holy cave Temple at Bangalore. Its grounds and picturesque lake adjoin the property where at pres-



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ent our own monastery stands. At that time however it was not built and we lived in temporary quarters more than a mile away. Swami Ramakrishnananda took me and we walked out with the gentleman whose guests we were. It was the evening hour. The Temple was still and wrapped in shadow. A few worshippers waited in the garden before the Temple. *Arati*, the Vesper Service, was late and the door was locked.

We sat down in the darkness of the Temple porch. It was not the priest who came to conduct the Service but the priest's son. When he saw me he demurred, but Swami Ramakrishnananda swept aside his anxiety by a commanding sweep of the arm and the words: "God's child must go to God. Come, Sister," so we entered. We assisted at the waving of the lights; made *Pradakshinam*, going three times round the Shrine bending down at times to avoid the low roof of the cave; watched a wedding party that came for blessing; then we walked home in silence under a wonderful starlit deep blue sky.

## VI

### SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

“The great man works silently, he is never fussy,” Swami Ramakrishnananda exclaimed one day. This is preëminently true of the great men in India’s religious life. The Indian truth-seeker or truth-seer is never boisterous in his spiritual practice. He never parades his spiritual attainments. If he does, he is looked upon as a hypocrite or a religious charlatan. When he wishes to carry on certain higher researches or practise any form of spiritual exercise, he goes to a mountain cave or a solitary woodland glade or to some place in his own domain where he will be unseen and unheard. To display his inner aspirations would be to break confidence with his God, yet there is no element of mystery in his practice. He is not trying to conceal anything esoteric.

“According to the Hindu teaching there is no mystery,” Swami Ramakrishnananda once said to me. “Whenever there is mystery there is a flaw. Mystery is weakness. It is blindness. There is nothing in this world that cannot be explained rationally. There should not be anything mysterious connected with religion. God is in no way

a mysterious Being. He is clearer than day, than light, than the sun. People say that these Yoga practices are mysterious, but they are never mysterious. Mystery means something that cannot be explained. When a man is physically weak he takes to cunning, when he is spiritually weak he takes to mystery."

At another time the Swami asked: "In the West why do they talk so much about the psychic and the occult? What do they mean by these terms?" One rarely hears them in India. That they should be so closely associated with India's teaching is perplexing. It may be because there are so many people among the Indians who gain phenomenal mastery over their body and over Nature; but these powers are never regarded as evidences of spirituality. A young man who had spent fourteen years learning to walk on water was told by his brother that his long practice had accomplished what could be done in a ferryboat for a penny. I myself knew a young girl who had the power to swallow her tongue and pass into another state of consciousness; I saw her do it; but she was a modest little person free from any pretense to spiritual development.

There was a man in a neighboring town who possessed this power to such a degree that he could remain in the other state of consciousness for days together; but some mischievous boys thought he was "making believe" and to test him threw

him into the river, expecting him to begin to swim. When he did not, they were frightened and confessed what they had done. People found the man after several hours and by a special process brought him back to normal consciousness. He was surprised to learn what had happened. He had known nothing of it.

I heard from responsible sources of men who could live for many hours under water, or who could consume an abnormal quantity of food and then not eat for a week or more; but all these exhibitions of extraordinary control are merely branches of the physical science of Hatha Yoga, which is based on the governing of certain perfectly natural laws. There is nothing occult about them, and they have no more nor less to do with religion than has the re-rooting of the banyan tree or the delicate shrinking of the sensitive plant.

Sometimes subtle powers come as the consequence of spiritual unfoldment; then they acquire new grace and value. The story is told of a disciple of the great monistic reformer Sankara, that one day he was going to see his Master and in the eagerness and fervor of his devotion, as he went he sang a song of love in Sanskrit—a language unknown to him but profoundly familiar to his Master, to whom the song was addressed. So absorbed was he in his soul's outpouring that he did not perceive, when he reached the river, that he stepped from earth on water. He walked

across the river singing his song of adoration; and it is said that wherever his foot touched there sprang a lotus, until behind him from bank to bank stretched a path of fragrant blossoms. The song is still preserved.

The spiritual practices given in India are countless. There is one for every phase of human nature, for every temperament and constitution. They can be gathered up, however, into certain general classes. The first step in spiritual preparation is the elimination from our constitution of all that clogs or hinders its free action. This process is called the practice of austerity or *Tapas*, a Sanskrit word signifying "burning"—that is, these practices burn up all alien, impeding elements in the system and make it ready for further growth.

These austerities do not mean that a man must lie on spikes or hold his hand up until it withers. Such exhibitions are but excesses of fervor, possible and inevitable in a nation like India which has had a passion for religion down the ages. The Indians themselves, although they may respect the sincerity and strength of endurance manifested, regard such immoderate practices as unwholesome and without real value.

Very different are the austerities enumerated in the Bhagavad-Gita:—Service of God, of spiritual teachers and wise men; the practice of cleanliness, simplicity, continence and non-injury—these are austerities of the body. Speech that causes no

pain to others, but which is true and beneficial; regular study of the Scriptures, kindliness, silence, self-control, purity of heart—these are austerities of the mind. Such exercises may seem primary, but to imbed in the nature the apparently simple qualities they induce, one must teach the body not to whimper or complain in changes of heat or cold. The ardent aspirant after higher attainment therefore practises the austerity of the five fires—that is, he sits under a flaming sun with four fires burning about him; or he floats in a Himalayan stream amid cakes of ice. I give extreme examples; there are many lesser ones.

Again he must bring body and mind into perfect rhythm. He does this by the continuous repetition of a holy word or name until the whole being vibrates in unison with the exalting thought behind the name. Still again he must form a habit of lofty living and thinking. To do this he associates with those who possess that habit. He must become a spiritual apprentice. So association with the holy becomes another practice.

The aim of every practice is to gain command over the entire consciousness. Control of the body means conquest of the sub-conscious, control of the mind means conquest of the conscious, control of the intellect or higher realm of thought brings conquest of the super-conscious. There is nothing dismal or forced in any of these disciplines or exercises in self-mastery; they are carried on with



cheerful ardor. "Do not think that religion does not give enjoyment. It gives a hundred times more enjoyment—of the mind, of the senses even, than any pleasure-seeking householder can ever know. When we renounce anything for the sake of religion, we merely give up a thing of small value for something of infinite value," Swami Ramakrishnanda said to me once when we were talking together.

Fasting is a universal practice in India. On the Indian religious calendar there are two regular fast days in every month. They fall on the eleventh day of each lunar fortnight. I knew many houses where at that time no cooking was done and the family did not taste food or water from sunset to sunset. Only the children were exempt from total fasting. Yet the routine of life was not modified in any way. The gentlemen went to their offices as usual and the ladies attended to their customary duties at home. On Feast days also, like our Christmas, they prefer to abstain from food and water, believing it a greater privilege to be able to forget the needs of the body and devote themselves to the needs of their higher nature.

There is no sanctimonious sense of merit in this fasting. The Indian devotee takes it very casually. He knows it is only a means to the end of bodily control and bodily purity. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, if fasting makes one think



more of the body, one would better eat some light food. That a little food more or less does not determine a man's salvation is shown in this incident related to me by Swami Ramakrishnananda:—

“Swami Vivekananda was once passing through Bengal when a forestry officer and his wife were so much impressed by his appearance that they insisted on his stopping in their house. ‘The rains have just set in, Swamiji,’ they said, ‘this is the time when no *Sannyasin* tries to wander. Why do you not come and live with us for a while? We have no children and we can give you a place where you will be altogether undisturbed.’ Swamiji consented.

“Both became his disciples and the wife took initiation from him. On the morning when he was leaving she said with some compunction: ‘Swamiji, I am in the habit of drinking a cup of tea in the early morning. Will that interfere with my spiritual progress?’ Swamiji replied, ‘I would not care much for a religion which could be washed off by a cup of tea.’”

*Japam*, repetition of a holy name or word or text, is another practice that is universal. There are numberless devotees who repeat the thousand names of God every day. A close friend of the monastery was learning them when I was there and each morning at five o'clock a well-versed Brahmin scholar came to teach them to him.

No means of spiritual development is more

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prized in India than serving an enlightened soul, that is, the practice of discipleship. Daily contact with one who knows is the most effective way of gaining culture, whether of the soul or of the intellect. One imbibes what one lives with. One's habit of thought is determined by the trend of one's conversation. There was a deaf boy who spent his days at the monastery while I was in Madras. He would come early, take his seat on a mat in the hall and watch. When he saw anything to do, he would get up and do it, then sit down again and wait. He could not hear a word that was spoken, but he was content to be near an illumined soul like Swami Ramakrishnananda and feel the uplifting power of his personality.

It is not possible to speak even cursorily of the various Indian practices, but they all have one end in view,—the conquering of the mind and the attainment of God-vision. Swami Ramakrishnananda once said to me: "Mind is like a big mirror which gives a perfect reflection but which has been so thickly covered with dirt that nothing can be seen in it. The more you can rub off that dirt the more you will be able to see yourself in it. The more you can remove the least speck of dust the more you can get a perfect image of your true Self. What is that dirt that hides the image? Selfish desires.

"There was once a great *Tyagi* (one who has renounced). He cared for nothing in the world,

only he had a little love for his *Koupinam* (loin cloth). He kept it hanging on a tree and sometimes the rats used to come and gnaw it. This annoyed him very much. 'What,' he would say, 'I have nothing in the world but this *Koupinam* and the rats want to take this from me!' So he got a cat to keep off the rats. A cat, however, requires milk, so he asked one of his disciples to bring him a cow. The cow again requires fodder, so he asked for a pair of bullocks that he might till the ground. Thus he added one possession to another until finally, unable to care for them all, he married a wife to look after them.

"Our Master, Sri Ramakrishna, used to say that as when you catch hold of one end of the creeper that grows on the surface of still water, the whole tank will come; so if you have one selfish desire, that connects you with the entire universe. Be free from every selfish desire. That is purity. Purity means singleness. Desire is a very dangerous thing. Sometimes we think we have killed all selfish desire; but somewhere in our mind there lingers some remnant; and as from a spark left in the corner of the hearth may come again a big fire, so out of that small remnant may spring a huge fire of desire."

One evening some one asked Swami Ramakrishnananda how one should practise meditation. His answer was:—"Meditation means complete self-abandonment. Meditation requires complete

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annihilation of self-consciousness. You know before a great light, lesser lights disappear; so before the effulgent glory of God, the little glory of the ego will completely vanish, as stars vanish when the sun rises. You must therefore practise the presence of God inside you.

“You may say, ‘I cannot see Him with these eyes of mine. I cannot hear Him with these ears. How then, am I to perceive Him?’ You can never perceive Him in this way. To go to the Creator you must throw aside these instruments which take you directly to the creation. You must go beyond your mind and senses, then meditation will come of itself. This is the only way to get inner vision. These senses are made for the creation, not for the Creator.

“God is always supposed to be perceived more clearly at the point of meeting between the two opposite poles. He is neither light nor darkness, but He is beyond both. He is to be found just where they meet. Hence the twilight hour, morning and evening—the meeting-place of day and night—is considered the best time for meditation. Also at the noontide, just when the sun reaches its highest point and begins to drop down towards night. The voice rises to its highest pitch at that hour and even the cries of the street-vendors grow shriller. As sound and mind are inseparably connected, sound being the primary expression of mind, so the mind also reaches its greatest height at noontide.”

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

The question was asked: "Could not God free us from ignorance at once if He wished?" Swami Ramakrishnananda answered: "Surely; but He is so infinitely loving that He does not wish to molest us. So long as He sees that we really cling to our ignorance and our desires He does not come to free us. Only when we turn all our desire to Him, then He comes and selfishness and ignorance go away. But we must not bribe the mind, we must not pretend to be free from desire. The feeling must be absolutely sincere; no fraud or bribery.

"If you wish to see God, the only way is to make the mind single and one-pointed. If we pray to God in right earnest with our whole heart He is sure to come to us. The trouble is we pray to so many others besides God. We pray to the doctor to give us health, to the shop-keeper to give us food, to another for something else and in among the rest, we pray to God to give us spiritual light and knowledge. When we look to Him and pray to Him and to no one else, He is sure to answer our prayers, if we make them really intense.

"We must not cease to strive for the highest even though it seems unattainable. We must keep God as our ideal and aim, that will pull us on. If a man aims at the sky, at least he may strike the top of a tree. If he aims at the top of the tree, he may not get above the ground."

Music holds an important place in all Indian

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religious observances. Every shade of religious aspiration and supplication has a song to voice it. One of the most general forms of celebration on a Feast day is what is known as *Harikatha*. The life of a saint or a Saviour is written in rhythmic lines and intoned with a low running accompaniment on the tamboura. At unexpected intervals the narrator bursts into some appropriate song and a group of assisting players and singers join with him. The story usually lasts two hours. I heard several such musical narratives and without understanding the letter I felt stirred by the spirit of the performance.

There are also many song-cycles descriptive of the life of Rama or Krishna or of some other Divine Incarnation, which are not only sung, but acted out, especially where it calls for dancing. Dancing still forms a part of religious worship in India. As a rule it is very restrained and ingenuous. To certain anniversaries at the monastery a large band of cobblers invariably came. When it was their turn to sing the praises of the Lord, they would form in a long line across the monastery hall, with their arms out and their hands resting on one another's shoulders. The leader stood in front. As the song began, the line of worshippers would start to sway and move slowly towards the altar set up for the day at the opposite end of the hall. The leader clapped his hands in rhythm and the musicians danced like the others, playing all the while



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on violin or tamboura, tuned drum or a small cymbal which has the sound of a triangle. Their earnestness and sincerity, added to the strongly-marked rhythm, made it deeply impressive.

When the swaying line reached the altar, it broke into single swaying figures and the contagion of devout feeling spread until nearly every one in the large hall was dancing. There was one boy of twelve who danced with special grace and ardor. On more than one occasion Swami Ramakrishnanda joined the dancers. I remember one festival when, swept by his devotion, he took his place at the far end of the hall with his face turned across his shoulder towards the altar, his arm and hand outstretched and pointing to it. The other arm was curved as in fencing.

In beat with the song he swung round and extended the other arm, curving the one that had been extended; thus in slow stately turns he approached the altar; and not once did his eyes leave it or an arm cease to point towards it. The fixity of his concentration could not fail to stir the deeper emotions. Every one fell back and watched him. He had said to me in the morning: "Sister, if you see me begin to dance, stop me;" but I could not have checked him any more than I could have broken in on him at a time of deep meditation. He seemed the embodiment of rhythmic prayer, the spirit of worship incarnate. When he came to a stop before the holy place, a sudden consciousness



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of many eyes roused him, he left the hall quickly and did not return for an hour or longer.

*Sankirtan* is a specially popular form of religious recreation. A group of people, sometimes large, sometimes small, will meet together in some gentleman's house and spend two hours or more singing holy songs in chorus, to the accompaniment of various instruments. One such group met each Friday evening at the home of the head medical officer of Madras, a few doors from my house; another near by on Saturday evening, a third not far away earlier in the week.

During the month of May this third group would make the turn of the four streets around the Temple every day. They would start from the Temple gate at five in the morning. I could hear the voices grow louder as they approached, then grow faint again as they passed on, until just at six they would die away at the Temple gate. The chorus sang a special series of songs and some of the singers as they walked played on musical instruments.

A slight eclipse called forth from Swami Ramakrishnananda the mention of another interesting religious custom. "An eclipse," he said, "means that the Cosmic Mind is a little clouded. When we know that this Universal Mind is overclouded we should be watchful. At the time of an eclipse we are enjoined by our Scriptures to take a bath, repeat some holy name, pray and meditate, being

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careful to allow no frivolous thought to cross our mind.”

Religious observances, like Indian spiritual practices, are innumerable. Every occasion has its special observance. Some among them may have become mere empty forms, but this only bears out these words voiced by Swami Ramakrishna-nanda one evening as we talked together after the Vesper Service:—

“Religion never deteriorates; man deteriorates. Religion is eternal, it is always the same. If you stand before that wall it will not reflect your image, but let there be a bit of mirror on the wall and at once you see yourself. So religion is always there unchanged, but sometimes man reflects it and sometimes he does not.

“The great incarnations like Christ, Krishna, Buddha were perfectly clear mirrors which gave us a perfect reflection. They did not bring us anything new. Truth is always existent. Christianity existed before Christ. Christ was only the mouthpiece. Mohammedanism existed before Mohammed. Mohammed was only the mouthpiece. Each one was a reflector of eternal Truth, but one man catches the light from Christ so he says, ‘Christ has given me the Truth. I belong to Christ. I am a Christian.’ Another sees the light through Mohammed and says, ‘I am a Mohammedan.’ A third says, ‘Buddha is Truth. I belong to Buddha.’ So each great teacher has his followers who be-

lieve that the Truth can come from him alone; but all teachers reflect the same Truth.

“Human nature is all the same, dresses differ. One man may wear a coat and trousers. I may wear this one simple cloth; but underneath, the nature is all the same. What is there in dress? Naked I came out of my mother’s womb and naked I shall have to go away, but behind all dress, all ceremonies and religious rites is this one idea—to realize God. Hindus, Jains, Christians, Buddhists, Mohammedans, all agree in this. To realize God is the aim of religion. The ideal of every religion is God and God alone. Hence we must not find fault with other forms of religion or with differences in external manners and customs. That which makes up the external is the shell side. It is always rough and hard; yet it has one advantage, it preserves the kernel.

“In this apparent battle of life, God is the infinite side and matter the finite side. The infinite is bound to gain the victory over the finite; that is, spirit is bound to conquer matter. It may seem at times that matter overpowers spirit, but that is only for a short period. The infinite is bound to triumph at last.”

## VII

### FOREST SCHOOLS OF ANCIENT INDIA

The natural university of the early Indo-Aryans was the forest. No college campus or cathedral close could offer so still a retreat as was to be found under the high-arching trees of the jungle beside some cool flowing stream. It was Nature's own cloister made for the student. And here the teacher lived in humble retirement, accepting the pupils who came to him as his own; clothing them, feeding them, caring for them like sons, and sharing with them whatever of plenty or privation was his.

Even the richest were not allowed to pay for their tuition. To impart knowledge as a means of livelihood was regarded in those days as a dishonor, unfitting the teacher for his task. Did not Truth belong to God? How could it be sold by man? Every child was taken as a sacred charge. Nor did it matter whether few came or many. The schoolroom with its carpet of soft moss and its roof of over-lapping branches was elastic and could be stretched to any limit. There were also bamboo poles and palm leaves in plenty for the walls and thatch of a new dormitory.

To this secluded woodland college the father

brought his boys at the age of eight or ten and surrendered them without reserve to the guidance of the teacher. During the years of schooling there must be no conflict of authority, no counter-acting influences. As home and parents had possessed the toddling child, giving him his first lessons by sacred song and story, so now at the outset of a new period the boy must be carried into a specialized environment, to live beside one whose whole thought was consecrated to the pursuit of knowledge and whose earnest exalted life was the chief text-book spread open before the scholar's awakening mind.

The nursery time was over and the moment come for the graver duties of *Brahmacharya*,—service and study. These two factors were given equal place in the daily routine; greater emphasis perhaps was laid on service, as it was in the system of apprenticeship during the Middle Ages. Those wise men of the forest knew that only he who can make himself a servant is ready to receive so great a thing as Truth.

We read in the Chandogya-Upanishad that when Satyakama came to a sage begging for instruction, he was given four hundred lean cows and told to drive them to a distant pasture and keep them until the drove had multiplied to a thousand. Evidently the deep-seeing eyes of the Master discerned that the boy's heart was ripe for solitude and contemplation, hence there could be

no better preparatory training than that which could be gained on the high stretches of a lonely mountain-side. So truly did experience bear out his judgment that when at last the patient student, his task accomplished, returned once more to the hermitage, the Master greeted him with the words: "Friend, your face shines like one who knows the Truth."

Education, as those ancient teachers conceived it, meant primarily a process of purification, a removal of that within which barred the way of knowledge inherent in every human being; and this was most quickly achieved by the lowlier activities of the common life. Also in this way a more familiar relation was established. It was believed that the lessons learned through close personal contact between teacher and pupil were of greater value than those taught during class hours, just as more of birds can be learned by one walk through the woods with an ornithologist than in many recitations behind brick walls.

Nor was the feminine element lacking in those woodland cloisters. Nearly every forest school had its mother and the dripping vessel of cold water from the lake or the fagots of wood from the jungle were as often for her needs beside the hearth as for the sacrificial rites of the Master before the altar. Now and then, too, her softer heart would plead against the stern discipline of her husband.



Thus was it in the house of Satyakama Gabala, after he had become a teacher. When a certain student, Upakosala, had dwelt with the Master for twelve years patiently serving, his wife made appeal to her husband saying: "This boy is quite exhausted with service. He has carefully tended your fires. Let not the fires themselves blame you, but teach him." Yet Satyakama went away on a journey without having taught him and the boy from sheer grieving could not eat.

The wife, seeing his grief, approached him with tender concern and said: "Student, eat! Why do you not eat?" The boy replied: "I am full of sorrows and shall take no food." The record makes no further mention of her; but it is evident that she revived his drooping spirits; for soon he returned to his service and out of the fire, which he had so faithfully tended, he heard a voice revealing the knowledge which the Master had withheld—perhaps because this final test was necessary to prepare the pupil to grasp it.

The courses of study in these schools were not unlike those followed later in the nascent mediaeval universities of the Occident,—a classic instruction with a dominant background of religion. While in the West, however, religion during that scholastic period was theological and verbose, in Vedic India it tended away from dogma towards silent independent research. The method of imparting instruction also was not the dialectic method of



mediaeval Europe, but rather the dialoguic method adopted later in Greece by Socrates and Plato.

All branches of secular learning in the Indo-Aryan curriculum were classed as "lower knowledge" or the preparatory stage, while "higher knowledge" was defined as "that by which the Indestructible is apprehended." The chief aim of all study was to reach an ultimate generalization, because it was believed that without an understanding of the First Cause no explanation of the universe could be stable or conclusive. The student should be so trained that he would be able to apprehend this for himself.

Education which merely gave information about things was in their opinion superficial and incomplete. Learning, in other words, was not accepted as a substitute for direct vision. A father, for example, chides a son, who being asked: "What is God?" replies with long passages from the Scriptures defining Deity. "That is enough," he says sternly. "You have evidently profited little by your schooling."

Another youth after spending twelve years in the teacher's house returns home self-satisfied and "considering himself well-read." His father deals a telling blow at his pride by putting the question: "My son, since you are so conceited and think yourself so well informed, have you ever asked for that instruction by which one hears what cannot be heard, perceives what cannot be perceived,

knows what cannot be known?" The youth, humiliated, is forced to admit his ignorance.

Also a book-wise Brahmin, who comes again and again to a court, offering to teach the king, is told: "Go and learn." Each time, puzzled by the rebuff, he plunges deeper into his study, until at last the true meaning of knowledge bursts upon him and grown humble he stays at home. Then the king comes to seek him and asks to be taught of him.

In the Vedic system three distinct stages in the acquisition of knowledge were recognized:—hearing, reflection, and realization. The first was the period of theory; the second, of experiment and test; the third, of definite knowledge. In the terms of an educational curriculum, these might be classed as the preparatory school, the college and the final specialized work of the university. The method employed in the last two was strictly empirical. Present day science is not more rigidly exacting in its demands that all statements rest on direct observation and experiment than were those ancient instructors.

When Svetaketu is being taught by his own father regarding the True, he is told to bring a fruit of the Nyagrodha tree and break it. "It is broken, sir." "What do you see there?" "These seeds, almost infinitesimal." "Break one of them." "It is broken, sir." "What do you see there?" "Not anything, sir." Then the sage drives home the

lesson: "My son, that subtle essence which you do not perceive, of that very essence this great Nyagrodha tree exists. Out of this subtle essence springs all life. It is the True and thou art It."

The youth then craves to know more and he is told to put some salt in water and leave it until the morning. On the morrow the salt could not be seen and the father tells him to taste the water from the bottom, from the surface, from the middle. "How is it?" he inquires. "It is salt everywhere." "Throw it away." The son does so and as the water dries up, the salt lies, a white deposit, on the ground. Again a lesson: "Now also in this body, forsooth, you do not perceive the True, my son; but it is always there." Could there be a more vivid tangible demonstration of the reality of the invisible Essence of our being?

Thus in the laboratory of Nature did they study the hidden facts of life. It may be objected that this does not bear the character of true scientific analysis, it is rather a moral lesson. So it seems to the Western mind; to the Indo-Aryan there was no distinction between physical and metaphysical, moral and material. God and soul were as much objects of empirical study as were unknown substances in chemistry or rock strata in geology. For them there was no limit to the area of exact science. It must reach to the very end of creation.

If they seemed often to proceed by inference and analogy, so also does the modern scientist

when he frames a fresh hypothesis based on the observation of some new and unexplained operation in Nature. This stage, moreover, was wholly primary in their scheme of education and the student was not expected to stop until he had found an original demonstration for every theorem propounded. In the ancient writings we find it recorded that the Master sometimes did no more than repeat the initial equation each time the pupil returned with an answer, and the student was thus led on and on until wholly by his own thought processes he reached an ultimate, basic solution.

The man of science, however, must have instruments, it may be said. Yes, and those age-old teachers knew it as well as the instructors of to-day; but almost at the outset they made the valuable discovery that Nature had provided every human being with an instrument of wider range and more delicate adjustment than any man could make with his own hands,—the instrument of the human mind. The aim of all their instruction was to give their pupils a thorough command of this. The pupil was trained in concentration, meditation and intravision, as to-day we are taught the use of microscope or telescope.

Nor was this a mere idle subjective theory. There can be no doubt of its practical validity; for, centuries before the Christian era, we find these wise forest masters teaching virtually all the

axiomatic truths of modern science,—the equilibrium of forces, the indestructibility of matter, the uniformity of law, and the vital fact of evolution. Also they had a remarkable understanding of the human organism, its control and use.

How did they discern these things? By studying Nature they discovered that the swifter and finer the vibration, the greater the penetrative force; and since focused thought was the swiftest and finest vibration known, it should be able to pierce the densest veil of matter. Working on this hypothesis, soon they perceived that creation was a loosely woven mesh, easily penetrated by the trained and subtle gaze. This makes plain why in their system of education such stress was laid on the rigid discipline of body, mind and senses; for these were the student's instruments and must be well tempered.

In those ancient days there was no break in the course of study. The school merged automatically into the university. It was customary for the scholars to remain in their teacher's home for eight, ten or twelve years. At the expiration of that term the father came to take his sons, leaving a thank-offering if he had wealth. But often it happened that among the sons some one showed such aptitude for study that he remained longer with the teacher and in the course of time he might even build his own bamboo hut and settle permanently in the jungle. Thus around the nucleus

of a simple schoolmaster's thatched cottage there grew up extended seats of learning.

Often, too, scholars in advanced grades came. Only ripe and thoughtful minds could have formulated such questions as appear at the outset of one of the sacred records of the time. "Whence are we born, whereby do we live and whither do we go? Should time, or Nature, or necessity, or chance, or the elements be the cause, or He who is called the Supreme Person (the Personal God, the Creator)? Or is the Absolute the cause?" Also that more ancient pupil in the Rig-Veda must have passed beyond the primary grade when he begged to be taught "that, knowing which all else is known."

In another record we read that Narada approached the venerable Sanatkumara and said: "Teach me, sir." And Sanatkumara replied: "Please tell me what you already know; then I shall tell you what comes after." Narada then enumerates the studies he has completed: "I know the four Vedas, grammar, the rules for certain sacrifices, the science of numbers, the science of portents and of time, logic, ethics, etymology, pronunciation, ceremonial and prosody, the science of weapons, astronomy, and the fine arts (the making of perfumes, dancing, singing, playing, etc.). But sir, with all this I know the Sacred Books only, I do not know the Spirit within." And the Master replies: "Whatever you have read is a name only."



## FOREST SCHOOLS OF ANCIENT INDIA

This strikes the keynote of all ancient Indo-Aryan teaching. The knowledge of this world was by no means despised. Nowhere more than in India was learning more eagerly cultivated; but the pupil was never allowed to forget that without the illuminating flash of soul-consciousness, all was but a dead letter, a lightless lantern. The craving for higher attainment was stimulated by such promises as this: "If you were to tell this truth to a dry stick, branches would grow and leaves spring from it." Or again: "If a man knows the underlying truth of all things here, that is the true end of life. The wise who have thought on all things and discovered the Divine Essence in them, attain immortality." "He who knows Him who has no beginning and no end, in the midst of chaos, creating all things, having many forms, alone enveloping everything, is freed from all fetters."

What wonder that young men lingered year after year in some quiet retreat striving with heightening fervor to plunge deeper and deeper into the hidden recesses of knowledge? The forests became populous with men—and women too—aflame with the desire to know that ultimate unit by knowing which all else would become plain.

Sometimes they gathered into groups called hermitages, which grew to number many hundreds. Bodily needs were reduced to the simplest formula in order that the major portion of time and energy might be devoted to the quest of Truth. They



married, but with the lofty aim of creating the best possible environment and conditions for enlightened souls to incarnate; and it is said that children were born among them with such aptitude for knowledge that even in tender years they attained super-conscious vision.

Nor was their life over-grave and joyless. The note struck in a hymn of the Rig-Veda: "Let the oxen work merrily, let the men work merrily, let the plough move on merrily, fasten the traces merrily," is characteristic of all true Vedic teaching. The West regards it as pessimistic because it sets small value on those things which the Occident prizes, just as to a boy the grown-up who prefers a lonely walk to base-ball or cricket seems a misanthrope. Whoever takes delight in his task is an optimist, and no people ever found deeper delight in any labor than did the Indo-Aryan in his search after the Ultimate Reality. Could a dejected heart have given voice to that verse of the Vedas: "Out of joy the universe has come, in joy it lives and back to joy it goes?"

In the scheme of life developed by the Aryans of India we find no conflict of ideals, no contradictions or inconsistencies. The home, the school and the Temple all faced in the same direction. There was as natural an orientation in the performance of the homely tasks of the household as in the setting up of an altar, and no scholar ever began his schooling without bowing before the

family Shrine and invoking the blessings of the Most High. The final goal of all their effort was one, which may be summed up in the words spoken by a saintly teacher to a worthy pupil in the Chandogya-Upanishad:

“The Infinite is bliss. There is no true bliss in anything finite. The Infinite alone is bliss. This Infinite, however, we must desire to understand.”

## VIII

### INDIAN EDUCATION OF TO-DAY

It would be impossible to tear out and discard the deeply rooted educational systems of earlier India. They would spring up again and still again, because they are the outgrowth of Indo-Aryan life itself, the product of its racial experience. So, old and new move on together, sometimes converging, sometimes diverging, sometimes mingling, the more ancient method always plainly distinguishable and always vital.

A rich cultural storehouse for the Indian people has been found at all times in their Sacred Writings;—the great religious epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana; the Forest Books or Upanishads; the Puranas or minor Scriptures; and the older Vedas. For these the Temple porch or the shade of a holy tree is the classroom and the *Sadhu* the teacher.

I remember going one evening to the home of a close devotee of the work at Mylapore. Several branches of the family lived together, forming a community household. I found the head of it in the central court of the house surrounded by children of all ages, some toddling, some crawling, one wee one of a few weeks swinging in a sus-

pended crib. I asked him how he happened to be playing nursemaid. He replied that a wandering *Sannyasin* was reading the Ramayana every evening in the porch of the Vishnu Temple near by and that night Sita was to give her answer to Ravana, the hostile king who had carried her off. The ladies of the house were so anxious to hear it that he had offered to stay with the children while they all went. I saw one of them running eagerly down the road as I approached.

When I first reached Madras the other sacred epic, the Mahabharata, dealing with the life and teaching of Sri Krishna, was being read at the Mylapore high school. The school stood at the lower corner of the four streets of the Temple, close to the primary school building where I was then living and I could hear the sound of the voices from my rooms there. A rich resident of Mylapore had engaged a learned *Pandit* and another Brahmin scholar to read the whole of the epic. It took six months. This is a not infrequent form of public service.

Every evening at dusk the *Pandit* would take his place at a table on the school verandah with a lamp beside him and a large Sanskrit tome open before him. A bench stood at right angles and on it sat cross-legged the other Brahmin holding a tamboura. Next to him on the bench stood a large picture of Sri Krishna. Their appearance was a signal for people to gather. The readers

waited patiently for their listeners. Brahmin widows with shaven head, unbordered cloth, arms and neck bare of ornament, climbed the few steps shyly, hung a garland over the picture and disappeared in the darkness of a classroom which extended at right angles to the verandah, meeting it just where the readers sat. Young women, elderly women and girls, old men and young, poor and rich, came one by one in silence, the men taking their seats on the verandah, the ladies in the shadow of the schoolroom. Many brought garlands for the holy picture.

When a sufficient number had gathered, the *Pandit* began to chant in a deep voice a passage from the Mahabharata; then he paused and the other Brahmin rendered the passage in the vernacular, intoning it in a soft, melodious tenor voice to the accompaniment of the tamboura. It was remarkably beautiful and musical. During the hour that this continued, many stopped in the street outside to listen. Tired burden-bearers laid down their loads and sat in the dust of the road beside them to hear the heroic lines; home-coming coolies and peons and sweeper-women joined them. I too sometimes lingered near to enjoy the mellow rhythm of the chanting and always some one ran out from the school with an armchair for me.

A Brahmin friend from Madura said to me one day at the monastery: "Formerly the father woke his sleeping brood at five o'clock and for two hours

while the mother was busy making the house fresh and clean, he taught them the Sacred Scriptures or told them of the life of some saint or spiritual hero. Now, tired from overstudy, the children roll off their mats wearily at seven o'clock and begin reading about the wars of Napoleon or Alexander the Great."

This is the difference between yesterday and to-day. It was not that under the earlier regime secular education was lacking. They had a highly-developed and comprehensive system of schooling, but this was regarded as secondary knowledge. To discern and understand the ultimate basis of all knowing was the end of every method of training. As Swami Ramakrishnananda once put it to me:

"Real learning is that which will enable man to realize Truth. Our Master used to say, 'Repeating "food," will not appease your hunger; so repeating the texts of books will not appease your hunger for knowledge.' Your hunger will be satisfied only when you perceive Truth. Truth is that food, eating which you will never hunger again. Truth is that, drinking of which you will never thirst again. Health, wealth, property and book learning: you imagine unless you have these you cannot be happy. But you have actually need of nothing. You are already complete. You are now omnipotent.

"You are really omniscient and you have forgotten it. You have thrown away the diamond and

are making much of a pebble in the street. You have given up your omniscience and are thinking of yourself as a scholar with a little learning. You are infinitely better than all this. Truth dwells in the heart of every man. It is the nearest thing to each one of us, but the mind has been dragged out so long by the things of this world that now it is difficult for it to come home."

Modern education in India packs the mind with facts, the ancient system developed a ready instrument of knowledge, one that would respond on demand to every call; and the result of the earlier method is apparent in the subtlety and quickness of the Indian mind, its piercing penetration and its remarkable power of concentration. I had frequent evidences of this.

During the evening hours at Madras the family life is lived chiefly on the front verandah. The *Purdah* system does not exist there and the women do not remain in hiding. They go about freely. As I walked through the streets after nightfall, I would see the entire household seated on the floor of the verandah around one small candle light. The father would be reading the daily paper aloud to the mother, while five or six children would be studying their lessons out loud, one of them perhaps walking up and down declaiming a piece; yet no one seemed disturbed by the sound of the many voices near at hand or on neighboring verandahs. Each was intent on his own task. The con-



trast with the scattered restless Occidental mind was striking.

The memory which comes with such concentration is remarkable. The uncle of an Indian boy I knew could let fifty people ask him questions in rapid succession, then he would begin with the first one, tell him what his question was and answer it. So he would do with the entire fifty. He never attached a question to the wrong person.

Swami Ramakrishnananda once remarked to me: "When people sometimes say to me 'I find it so difficult to concentrate my mind. It goes to my business, to my household affairs, to amusements, and it is impossible to hold it on any higher point. Why is this?' I tell them: It is because your mind does not belong to you. You have sold it to your worldly interests. How can you expect to command what is not yours?"

Education was defined by Swami Ramakrishnananda as "a process of rolling out." In this development from within a new power of vision must be acquired. "You cannot see God with these eyes," he said, "they are too inadequate. These are owl's eyes, they cannot see in the daylight."

"That teacher," he declared again, "is a dunce who knowing a pot has a hundred holes in it says to his pupil, 'Fill it with water.' He is the true teacher who says, 'First mend all these holes and then fill the pot with water.' As long as you are held by your senses, as long as you care for good

food, for sweet sounds or for beautiful sights you cannot hope to fix your mind steadily on any point. True education consists in the sacrifice of vanity and the manifestation of the God within."

In considering Indian educational problems we must never forget that India, like the continent of Europe, is made up of many principalities and provinces each with its own language. In the Madras Presidency alone there are four languages—Tamil, Canares, Telegu and Malayalam. The first three are derivatives of Dravidian tongues, the Dravidians having preceded the Indo-Aryans in that part of the country. Sanskrit is the one universal tongue indigenous to India and at present Sanskrit is the language of Scriptures and religion. For this reason it has been difficult to centralize or create a unit in secular education. To meet this difficulty, the government decreed that English should become the language of the classroom from the first grade in high school through the university. The vernacular, however, is obligatory through the whole curriculum up to graduation in the university. So also is English. Besides these, two optional courses of study are required.

This subordinating of the vernacular, it was felt by Indian educationalists, lessened literary productivity and put a check on the intellectual life of the nation. Reiterated protest has finally reinstated the mother tongue in many places. The University of Calcutta has accepted the change

and other universities are following its example. Now in certain districts it is permissible to give all instruction in the vernacular. Until the present time there has been no free education provided by the government, but a movement is now on foot to make no charge for primary grades.

Few peoples of the world have such ardent longing for education as the Indian. They are willing to endure any hardship to get it. I saw boys go hungry and cold for it, and widowed mothers deny themselves food and all the necessities of life that their sons might procure it. To help such boys is one of the most favored forms of charity in India. Many students go through their preparatory and university courses without touching money. One gentleman lets them sleep on his verandah or in his house, another gives them their clothes, a third their books and for tuition they earn a scholarship. There are families who stint themselves to share their modest daily meal with one or two such students.

The university examinations are open to men and women alike and women are taking part in them more and more, sometimes with distinction. One young wife, whose family I know, passed ninth among twenty thousand students who came up for matriculation. Her sister likewise made a brilliant record. Women have a separate college until they receive their degree of B. A. After that all post-graduate work is carried on with the men.

At the present time there are at the University of Calcutta many hundreds of women students.

Girls' schools also are multiplying everywhere. As the average girl leaves school at an early age, the courses of study are primary, with the addition of some art and other higher branches. I visited a number of these schools and spoke at some. I recall one such occasion especially. Swami Ramakrishnananda and I were both invited to address a school at its closing exercises. They sent a carriage for us and we had a long drive. When we were a half mile from the end of it, the entire school met us, with parents, neighbors and friends. There was also a band of musicians. Our carriage was stopped, two little girls climbed in and sprinkled us all over with rose water. They got out and two more climbed in to place flower garlands round our necks. Then another little girl came and presented me with a bouquet.

This ceremony over, the crowd fell into line, officers of the school took their places on either side of the carriage, a garlanded banner was raised before it, and we moved in slow procession through the street between crowded verandahs, the school children singing, the musicians playing and bystanders cheering. At the school the exercises were simple. The scholars spoke pieces shyly, danced modest little dances—more with the hands than the feet—sang songs and listened with gentle courtesy to our addresses. It was all delightfully simple and spontaneous.

## INDIAN EDUCATION OF TO-DAY

In connection with the work of our Order there are a number of educational institutions, night schools and day schools for both boys and girls, libraries and reading-rooms. There are two notably important ones—one in Bengal the other in Madras. Both began modestly, impelled by an immediate need. Swami Akhandananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was wandering through the plague-stricken District of Murshidabad in Bengal, begging his food and bringing help where he could. One day as he was going along a road he felt a little hand slip into his larger one and a small boy made appeal to wander with him. His family, the child said, were all dead of the plague and he was alone in the world. A few days later another little lad joined them, then another and another, until there were six.

A rich gentleman, not willing that they should have only the shade of a tree or a chance verandah for their shelter, offered them the use of a vacant house in his compound. Out of this unplanned beginning has grown up a large orphanage, an industrial school and an agricultural training farm. Both boys and girls are admitted to all three. There is also a night school for men and women who labor during the day in the field.

The inception of the Ramakrishna Students' Home at Madras was equally uncalculated. It is in reality the achievement of a single devotee, an ardent disciple of Swami Ramakrishnananda, un-

der whose guidance, blessing and inspiration the Home was established. It began in a small rented house with one resident teacher and a few young boys, chiefly sons of widows. The boys did all the work except the cooking and attended outside schools. Unless they kept up to a certain average in their studies they were not allowed to remain. Everything was provided for them except their tuition. That they had to earn by their standing. There were certain incidental courses given in the Home, such as stenography; and on certain days a Brahmin scholar trained the boys to chant the Vedas in Sanskrit. Such was the Home as I knew it.

This passage from a letter which came to me recently from the one who started the work tells into what it has grown:—

“We have now attached a residential high school to the institution. It has been working satisfactorily for the past three years. A permanent building has been erected this year for the school at a cost of one and a quarter Lakhs (one hundred and twenty-five thousand Rupees). We have an idea of raising it to the status of a college ere long and I am sure it will fructify through the grace of the Lord and through the love and good wishes of friends like yourself.”

There are over one hundred and twenty-five boarders at present. Teachers and pupils live in close association. The boys are divided into bands



of twelve or fifteen, each with a teacher in charge. The general direction is in the hands of a resident warden. Sanskrit and one of the South Indian vernaculars are compulsory in the high school and some manual training is required. Formerly boys who failed in their studies were sent out of the Home; now they are kept and taught rattan work, weaving, carpentry, machine knitting and other trades. The institution is steadily expanding, yet it still retains the simplicity, sincerity and fervent spirit of its first days.

At a small town of South India called Vayambadi is another educational centre of unusual character. It consists of two schools for boys and girls of the forgotten class of society. Connected with these schools is a non-sectarian Temple where the children receive daily spiritual instruction of the loftiest, most universal nature. On Sunday also they gather there for various Services of song and prayer and counsel. The founder and director of the schools, the builder and preacher of the Temple, is one simple man of lowly station. He has no resources for his work save the meagre profits of a stall in a local Bazar; but he gives what he has without stint, reserving for himself scarcely enough to feed and clothe his body. Complete self-effacement makes its demands few.

He possesses certain untrained, natural gifts which enable him to deliver sermons with stirring rustic eloquence and to compose songs—words and



music—which his scholars sing with lusty enthusiasm in school and Temple. He feels that the impetus for his work came to him from Sri Ramakrishna, through Swami Ramakrishnananda, and he pays periodic visits to the Madras monastery. He came once while I was there and Swami Ramakrishnananda asked him to sing some of his own songs for me. With complete lack of self-consciousness he sang song after song and so intense was his devout feeling that tears stood in his eyes and trickled down his cheeks. At the school festivals the children march through the streets singing these songs and all the houses along the way are alight with rows of flickering tapers.

I have said nothing of Babu Rabendra Nath Tagore's school because I had no personal contact with it when in India and already much has been told of it. My aim has not been to write an exhaustive treatise on modern Indian education, but merely to give pictures and impressions as I gathered them, hoping thereby to contribute a little towards a deeper insight into the thought life of India.



UPPER: AN ASHRAMA OR PEACE RETREAT  
IN THE FOOTHILLS OF THE HIMALAYAS  
LOWER: LAKE BEHIND THE MONASTERY  
AT BANGALORE



## IX

### BUILDING A NEW MONASTERY AT BANGALORE

March, April and May are the hottest months in Madras. During my first spring there the heat was exceptionally intense. The sun burned its way through roof and closed shutter like a relentless withering flame, forcing one to spend the mid-day hours in gasping idleness. To enable us to escape from the heat, gentlemen offered the use of their country places in the hills or by the water. One—a large bungalow on the edge of a river with a spraying waterfall near by—attracted us particularly; but when we found that to reach it we must travel two days and nights by train and three days and three nights by bullock cart, we abandoned the idea of taking it.

In April a Swami of another Order came to the monastery to invite Swami Ramakrishnananda to lecture before a religious congress which he organized each year at Tinnevely; he asked me to speak also. Swami Ramakrishnananda accepted for himself but declined very emphatically for me. “You would never be able to stand the heat,” he explained after the Swami had gone. “And I do not intend to let them put you on an elephant and parade you in the procession round the streets, as

they would be sure to do." There is always a procession in connection with the Congress.

Before the Swami set out for Tinnevely a devoted follower, who occupied an important office in the Mysore government, paid us a visit. He gave form to our plans by suggesting that he rent a house at Bangalore and that Swami Ramakrishnananda and I become his guests. There were two branches of our work there, a large plot of land had been procured by the Order, and Swami Ramakrishnananda had been considering the advisability of our going there to beg the money for building a new monastery. I shrank a little from the idea, but I said nothing, especially after Swami Ramakrishnananda remarked that begging was a test of egotism and we could measure how much ego we had by how much we minded it.

Bangalore is three thousand feet above the sea level and has a much more temperate climate than Madras. It was possible therefore to go and come more comfortably at all hours and as soon as Swami Ramakrishnananda arrived from the South we began our begging. We went out for several hours every day. The Swami gave to me the task of making the appeal and nearly always it met with friendly and generous response, but occasionally we received rebuffs. There rises in my memory one notable instance.

We went a long distance to the house of a high official in the Maharajah's service and waited for

## BUILDING A NEW MONASTERY AT BANGALORE

two hours to see him. When he came in, I began my usual explanation of our errand. Suddenly he cut me short with the abrupt words: "I cannot understand why they make so much of this Ramakrishna." I was silenced. There seemed nothing more to say; but Swami Ramakrishnananda turned to him with a glowing smile and said: "Let me tell you of him. I was his personal servant." Then the Swami began to talk of his Master with such impelling fervor that he caught the gentleman's interest. For half an hour he listened with growing attention, then he excused himself and left the verandah. When he returned, he carried in his hand a contribution to the new monastery building.

The Dewan (Prime Minister) of Mysore showed the keenest interest in our project and was eager to have the new monastery under way. After we had been begging for nearly a month, he sent us a request to meet him at the property the following morning at half past seven. We imagined that he wished merely to go over the grounds and hear more definitely of the plans for construction. Great was our amazement as we approached, to see the road crowded with carriages, and on arriving to find the Dewan with his whole staff, many other notable officials and twenty or twenty-five coolies already there. He greeted us cordially and explained that he was impatient to begin the work and he meant to have the ground cleared at once. He had brought with him a state architect.

A corner stone had been laid some time before, but its position was not considered satisfactory, so a new site was chosen, measurements taken, the brush cut and everything made ready. Then the Dewan handed me a wooden mallet and asked me to drive the first stake to mark the foundation. This I did, the space for the building was lined off, Swami Ramakrishnananda chanted some verses from the Scriptures and the morning's ceremony ended. The begging continued until a sufficient fund had been collected, after which, plans were completed, and the building was begun.

The regular work in Bangalore at that time was under the direction of Swami Atmananda, one of the most earnest and genuine characters I knew in India. When at one time he was returning to the Head Monastery on the Ganges, Swami Prem-ananda said of him to the younger men in residence there: "Now you will have a true model to follow. Do as he does and you cannot go wrong." Always the passion of renunciation flamed in his heart with unremitting fervor. When he left Bangalore his successor in the work found a chest full of *Chuddars* (shawls) and *Dhotis* which had been given him but which he had never worn; also all the offerings of money made to him were deposited in the bank to the account of the Order. He had not used one Anna of it, having preferred to beg his scanty meals like a true *Bikshu* or mendicant.

He told me that just after he had taken his



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degree at the Calcutta University he was seized with a nameless unrest. He walked the streets without aim for days and weeks. He had never met Swami Vivekananda, but he had heard much of him and he determined to go and see if the Swami could bring him relief. He went to the monastery on the Ganges. Swami Vivekananda listened to his story and gave this answer to it: "The trouble with you is, you want to renounce and do not know it." Swami Atmananda added: "It took me just two minutes to decide and at once my mind was at peace."

In the first years of his religious life he spent much time wandering in the Himalayas. Often he walked thirty miles a day, sometimes without food because he found no hamlet from which to beg it. Even when he was suffering from a serious digestive ailment he would walk ten miles. One hot afternoon I went into the court of our bungalow in Bangalore and found him lying on the stone paving closely wrapped from the top of his head to his feet in what is called in South India a sheet. It is a wide piece of heavy twilled cloth three yards long corded at the ends and used as a *Chuddar* or shawl.

Fearing lest he might smother in the heat, I roused him. He met my fears with an amused smile and explained that during the long interval he had spent his nights on the ground under some tree in the jungle, he had always wrapped himself

in this way to protect his body from creeping and crawling creatures and now he was unable to sleep uncovered. He often spoke to me of the free joy of those days in the open and I am sure that whatever the hardship he was forced to endure, he went with a loving word on his lips, a prayer in his heart and a blessing for all who crossed his path.

The other branch of the Bangalore work makes special appeal to the interest. It was started and has been carried on for many years with faithful zeal by Swami Somananda, one of the first South Indian members of the Order. When still a youth under twenty he announced to his mother one day that he was going to Swami Vivekananda and ask to become his disciple. He had never seen him, nor did he know any member of the Order. Also, he had no money, but he set out and walked to Madras, a distance of eight hours by express train. There he was told that Swami Vivekananda had just gone to Calcutta. He walked to Calcutta, begging his food along the way. Calcutta is a forty hours train ride from Madras. Here he found that Swami Vivekananda was in Kashmir. He walked to Kashmir, only to learn that Swami Vivekananda had gone into unknown retirement somewhere in the high Himalayas. He plunged into the snow-bound hills and found him.

When Swami Vivekananda passed away, he returned to Bangalore and began to work among

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the poor of the neighborhood. Later the municipality gave him a small unused Temple, with a modest compound and several out-buildings. It stood at the centre of a weaver community numbering several hundred souls. To these humble workers he devoted and still devotes himself with untiring love. When I was there the little boys came to his *Math* or monastery every morning from six to eight for spiritual instruction and lessons in English. He had also organized them into a religious Boy Scout body. Each small boy wore an orange-colored jacket like the Swami's cloth, to indicate that he had consecrated himself to a life of service.

I never went anywhere, it seemed to me, that I did not see two yellow-clad urchins waiting to do something for me. If I happened to be in a carriage, they rolled off the back springs and ran round the rear wheels to help me out. If I opened my door, they were standing there watching for a chance to be of use. They were at the station before me to carry my luggage, and always they had several miles to walk to reach me.

The women had their turn in the afternoon from two to four. They brought their hand looms to the Temple and went on with their weaving while Swami Somananda expounded the Scriptures and gave them practical counsels. The men spent the evening hours from six to eight at the *Math*. They had religious instruction and English lessons.

Learning to sing sacred songs also formed a part of their training.

The whole community gave us the heartiest welcome when we went to Bangalore. On the first Sunday evening after our arrival, they came, fifty or more of them, and for two hours sang and played for us. Their ringing voices, sustained by violin, flute and drum and the rhythmic clapping of hands, could not but rouse even the dulllest emotions. The chief purpose of their visit was to invite us to spend the following Sunday at their little Temple.

When Sunday arrived, Swami Somananda called for us at eight o'clock and we drove for a mile or more. Unexpectedly at the entrance to a long street we met a large crowd and found that it was the whole weaver community come out in a body to greet us. They took the horse from our carriage, attached a rope and drew us with their own hands the remaining two miles. As we marched in compact line down the street, every one sang lustily "Ram, Ram, Sita Ram." The voices of the orange-jacketed little boys sounded out above the deeper voices of the men, with a mingling of the gentler tones of the women and little girls. An exuberant joyousness filled the fresh morning air.

At the Temple a full programme had been arranged for the day. The forenoon was devoted to lectures and the afternoon to music, chiefly to *Harikatha*, the life of Sri Ramakrishna being told in song and chant composed by one of the weavers.

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Between the two sessions a hearty meal was served. When the meal was over, we were taken to the best of the humble homes to rest, but no opportunity was given for it. The family was so delighted at the honor of having Swami Ramakrishnananda in their house that they overwhelmed him with worshipful attentions; and all the young girls of the neighborhood gathered round me, asking me questions in a strange tongue, in which I could not answer, trying to put grapes or sweetmeats into my mouth and giving expression to their loving feeling in many ways.

The long day closed at six o'clock. Somewhat weary we drove home, with two little boys hanging on behind and two more on the box beside the driver. They stood guard as we got out of the carriage, then walked the long way back to the Temple. The next morning as we were returning from an errand I noticed two women with shy smiling faces waiting for us by the side of the road. They came forward as we approached and explained to my companion that they had come to see me. I did not speak Canares which is the language of Bangalore, so we could converse only through an interpreter.

When we reached our bungalow they disclosed the purpose of their visit. An Indian Christian had moved into their neighborhood a few months before and every morning when they passed his door in going to the Bazar for their day's supplies,

he warned them in grave tones that they were worshipping a false God and that misfortune would overtake them unless they turned to the true God. They did not mind about the misfortune, they said, but not to worship the true God was a terrible thing; yet to change their Deity meant leaving home, community, family and all they held dear. Still if that was the right choice they did not wish to be cowards. They had talked it over each day as they sat at their looms working and always they had come back to the question: how could they abandon the God who through all their lives had shielded them in danger, soothed them in distress, sustained them in sickness, comforted them in sorrow; the God to whom their mothers and grandmothers and great-grandmothers had prayed and found answer? How could they turn their faces from Him?

Thus for long months their hearts had been troubled and their minds tormented by doubt. Now I had come from the country where the Christian God was worshipped and I had told them that their own religion was good for them, if they only practised it. This had brought them peace, so they had come to tell me of their gratitude and to ask me to give them *Mantram* (initiate them into the spiritual life). I replied that for *Mantram* they would have to go to Swami Ramakrishnananda, but I was very happy that they had found quietness of mind. They came again several times,



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bringing with them relatives and neighbors, and when we were speaking in public, often they stood at the door of the hall to give us silent salutation. Their wordless friendship touched me deeply.

Our routine at the bungalow went on despite constant interruption. Swami Ramakrishnananda continued to prepare the vegetables for the curry. He gave to me the privilege of caring for the Shrine. Every afternoon without fail he brought from the garden a double handful of jasmine flowers with the request that I string a garland to offer at the Vesper Service. It seemed to give him the keenest joy to pick these fragrant blossoms for the Lord. Visitors came in great numbers. Swami Ramakrishnananda was deeply revered and beloved in Bangalore and many sought him out to have instruction from him. At times the hall was so full, it was like a class.

Our life continued in this groove for a month, then there came a radical change. Our host returned to his official duties, the bungalow was given up and we became guests of the Maharajah of Mysore, moving to the royal guest quarters at the other end of Bangalore, several miles away. The plan was that we should remain here for a short interval, then go to Mysore City, the capital of the province, where the Maharajah was at that time. The Dewan hired a house for us there and made everything ready for our coming.

On our return, it was proposed that I go on



## DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY

a lecture tour in conjunction with a judicial party that was to make their semi-annual circuit of the villages in a certain district of the province. The judge was to hold court during the day and there would be a lecture every evening. These circuits were made in great state. They were away from hotels and railroads, so the journey was by carriage, the nights were spent in royal tents, and there was a retinue of servants to make and break camp.

It would have been a unique experience but all our planning was made abortive by an attack of fever which overtook me a few days after we had moved to the royal guest quarters. We believed that it was only malaria. It was the monsoon time and many people were having their customary attack, so it did not seem necessary to give up. Public activities were no longer possible, but the time was not wasted. Swami Ramakrishnananda spent it enlarging my knowledge of the sacred Indian epics and minor Scriptures in the traditional ancient Indian way, by word of mouth.

One afternoon he was obliged to go out on an important mission and left a friend with me. On his return his first question was "What have you been talking about?" The gentleman replied that he had been relating stories from the epic Ramayana. "That is good," Swami Ramakrishnananda exclaimed in gratified tones, "I meant to tell you not to waste Sister's time by foolish worldly conversation."

Another day a member of the Maharajah's official staff came to see us. He thought to entertain me by retailing some harmless court gossip. While he was speaking Swami Ramakrishnananda shifted his position in his chair again and again and showed such evident discomfort that finally I asked if he did not feel well. "I'm all right," was his answer, "but I do not like your conversation." The gentleman took the rebuke without offense and changed the subject.

When the Dewan returned from Mysore City he moved us to his compound. A few days later it became necessary for Swami Ramakrishnananda to return to Madras and I remained as the guest of the Dewan. I was given a guest apartment on the second floor of a building the lower floor of which was devoted to the Dewan's official work. It consisted of two enormous rooms, a bathroom and a wide verandah. A man-servant sat all day and slept at night by the entrance threshold to guard me from hasty intrusion, for visitors came without formality; a major domo stood in pompous silence behind my chair when I ate, and a third servant cooked my meals elsewhere and brought them to me. This boy touched me by his faithful service. One morning he came to ask if he might go home, saying that he was suffering from fever. At two o'clock I was surprised to hear his voice. "I thought you had gone," I said. "I was going," he replied, "but mother seemed so much

worse than I, I could not bear to leave her.” He always spoke to me in the third person.

The Dewan went frequently to the place where my food was prepared to see that it was properly cooked and his wife more than once made me some tasty dish with her own hands. He also stopped at my door every morning and evening to inquire how I was. Their kindness was without limit. Occasionally the Dewan came in to talk with me. On one such day as I sat opposite him and looked at his calm brow I could not resist asking him how in all his arduous official career he had been able to keep his face so unfurrowed. In answer he said to me:—

“When I was a little boy we were very poor and my mother did all the work of the house. While she cooked, we children used to sit on the floor of the kitchen and listen to her as she told stories of the lives of the great saints and *Avataras* (Divine Incarnations). Since I entered upon public life, whenever a problem or difficulty has threatened to overwhelm me, the picture of that gentle loving face, lighted by the glow of the open hearth flame, and the sound of that quiet voice have risen in my memory and have adjusted my values. At once my anxieties have dropped away.” Although poor, the Dewan belonged to the highest caste.

The fever continued and one morning we awoke to the realization that it was typhoid, not malaria. I was hurried to the hospital. The Dewan went

personally to arrange for my care. I was not sorry for this illness. I learned much of Indian ways through it. The hospital at Bangalore is a large one and is wholly maintained by the Maharajah. No one is allowed to pay for anything. When I was there it was excellently managed and there was a human quality in it which is often lacking in our over-organized Western institutions. The nurses were European, Indian and Eurasian. Wards for men were in one wing, Europeans at the other end and Indian women in the long central portion. There were wards for Brahmins and for non-Brahmins and a separate kitchen for every section. All the food was of the best and was served generously. The hot dish was carried round in large water-heated containers.

The doctor in charge was a remarkable man. He had received his entire training in India, yet his skill in surgery and in diagnosis was so great that people came from far-distant places to seek his aid. He seemed to adopt every patient who was admitted to the hospital. He made the tour of each ward once or twice daily and listened with unwearying patience and sympathy to complaints and tales of suffering, although the Indians are naturally very enduring and bear their pain with mute heroism. The Irish matron declared that they took it too lightly, that often when she left them in bed, she would find them an hour later walking in the garden outside. She grew quite

indignant with a young man who had his shoulder crushed and who after the first agony was over would not consider himself an invalid.

The new monastery building in the meanwhile was under way. It was completed in January. We were all in Madras at the time. The Head of the Order, Swami Brahmananda, had come to the South and accompanied Swami Ramakrishnananda to Bangalore. I was sent on twenty-four hours earlier and was installed in the old monastery. They arrived the next day in the early morning and drove immediately to the new monastery. Various tents had been set up on the grounds for our use. A huge open *Pandal* or tent, decorated, fringed and supported by ornamental poles with pennants, stood before the new building. Poles with pennants lined the driveway. All the tents and decorations were lent by the Maharajah. The *Pandal* could shelter at least twelve hundred people. It was crowded and many stood outside.

By half past eight the Dewan, his staff and a number of important officials had arrived. We formed in procession and marched to the front verandah which was to serve as platform and the dedication exercises began. The Dewan made the opening speech. Swami Brahmananda followed, reading his address; next Swami Ramakrishnananda spoke; after them came several others and I was the final speaker. The key was handed then to Swami Brahmananda, who unlocked the door

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of the monastery and entered. All those who were on the verandah made a tour of the building, returning to the central room which had been converted temporarily into a Chapel.

Here the real consecration Service conducted by Swami Ramakrishnananda was held. A fire was lighted as a symbol of purification and the blessing of the Lord was fervently invoked by prayer and supplication. At the close a group of Brahmins chanted passages from the Vedic Scriptures. As they came to the end of each *Sloka* or verse they threw a handful of rose petals on the altar. When they had finished it was piled high with the fragrant petals, almost hiding the sacred picture behind it. While the chanting was in progress, the Dewan leaned over and whispered to me: "Sri Ramakrishna has certainly performed a miracle that these orthodox South Indian Brahmins should be willing to chant the Vedas before you, a foreigner." They have grown reluctant to chant their Scriptures when an Occidental is present because he listens usually with undisguised contempt.

Swami Brahmananda, Swami Ramakrishnananda, Swami Atmananda and several younger Swamis took up immediate residence at the new monastery. Swami Ramakrishnananda opened a class which met every evening after the Vesper Service and life fell into a quieter routine. I was left at the old monastery in charge of the Shrine which was not moved at once. There was some



discussion about my remaining permanently in Bangalore. Both on the morning when the first stake for the foundation was driven and at the dedication, the Dewan requested me with great insistence to write Swami Paramananda and urge him to return to India with a band of American workers and establish himself at Bangalore. He promised to coöperate with the Swami in any work he might undertake, especially in work for women.

We looked at several houses that might serve as temporary quarters; but Swami Paramananda was deeply interested in his American work and Swami Ramakrishnananda wished me to return to Madras, so the plan was abandoned. The Dewan was reluctant to accept the decision and wrote me a letter with his own hand begging me to return to Bangalore and prepare the way for the Swami and his Western workers.



## X

### THE HEAD OF THE ORDER

One day in early autumn Swami Ramakrishnananda said to me: "Swami Brahmananda is coming to Madras for six months. I am going to Puri to bring him." A week later he set out on his northward journey. At the station, on leaving, an incident occurred which revealed anew his unvarying habit of thought. Through a misunderstanding no place had been reserved for him in the train and the only thing available was an upper berth in a compartment with two Englishmen.

A person of Swami Ramakrishnananda's size and weight in a lightly built upper berth meant no little peril for the one who slept beneath and the English travellers did not hesitate to talk of it with rude frankness. Swami Ramakrishnananda paying no heed to their words sat cross-legged on the long seat of the railway carriage, rocking slowly back and forth, a smile of calm unconcern on his face. In reply to an indignant comment from one of the many who had come to see him off, he said quietly: "Do not mind. Divine Mother will take care of me."

The hour for departure arrived but the train did not move. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes

passed, still the train remained motionless. Then the station-master came running down the platform calling: "Engine derailed! All out! Go to track number five." He stopped to say to Swami Ramakrishnananda: "I have a place for you. Wait a moment." When he returned, he led the Swami to a single first class compartment with washroom attached. As Swami Ramakrishnananda stepped into it he said to me with the same quiet smile: "I told you, Sister, that Divine Mother would look after me."

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

"Swami Brahmananda lived with Sri Ramakrishna for five or six years before his passing away. We all regarded him as Sri Ramakrishna's son and he treated him exactly like an own child. Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) always slept in the same room with him; sometimes under the same mosquito curtain. If the Master saw him with a torn cloth, he would weep, crying, 'Is there none to give Rakhal a new cloth?' Often when people brought him food he would say: 'Give it to Rakhal. I eat through his mouth. Feeding him

is the same as feeding me.' Once at night the Master was thirsty, so he asked Rakhal to bring him water; but Rakhal had already gone to bed and was sleepy, so he merely gave a little grunt of refusal, turned over on his mat and went to sleep. Gurumaharaj (Sri Ramakrishna) was overjoyed: 'Now I see he feels I am really his father,' he declared; and all the next day he kept telling the incident to everyone with the greatest satisfaction."

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

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

but all the carriages of the neighborhood were offered for the occasion, so we were protected.

When the train pulled into the station, the dense crowd that had gathered on the platform surged towards the railway compartment where Swami Brahmananda and Swami Ramakrishnananda were seated. To each one Swami Brahmananda gave a gentle, smiling greeting. I was already prepared for his great loving-kindness by the welcome he had sent me through Swami Ramakrishnananda on my arrival in India. It read: "I come to learn from your letter to Ram that Sister Devamata arrived at Madras safely. Please convey our best wishes and greetings to her. I hope our Lord has brought her here for great works and may our Lord fulfill our hopes and grant her peace of mind and heavenly happiness."

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

After *Arati* the conversation turned on feats of jugglery. Swami Brahmananda seemed to take keen boyish interest in them and told me this story which he knew to be true:—A Mohammedan in Calcutta seemed to have the power to draw solid articles through closed barriers. An Englishman challenged him, declaring that he could have all the money he could get out of the locked safe in his office. The Mohammedan accepted the challenge, merely asking to lay his finger for an instant on the roll of banknotes. Four thousand Rupees were placed in the safe, the door was closed, the combination lock turned and with folded arms and scornful smile the Englishman leaned against it. Meanwhile the Mohammedan sat on the floor in an adjoining room and did not move. At the end of five minutes he told the English gentleman to feel in his pocket and there were the four thousand Rupees.

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

conduct the Vesper Service one evening. He did it almost shyly, declaring he was not suited to priestly tasks.

If, however, he spoke little, the few words he uttered had in them the quality of gentle benediction. Often when I went over to the monastery at nightfall I would find him walking up and down the hall, lifting and dropping his arms at intervals like a little boy. As soon as he saw me, he would say with kindly inflection: "Come in, Sister; are you doing well?" That would be all, yet that brief sentence never failed to bring me a vivid sense of well-being and blessing.

The renewing, exalting power of his words and his touch is told in this extract from a letter written me by the daughter of an Oxford Professor:—

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



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

Swami Brahmananda's silence was always genial, never solemn or sanctimonious. It sprang, I believe, from the habit of long hours of meditation, and also from the fact that his mode of thought sought subtler avenues of expression. I remember one early morning when he sent for me to request me to write a preface for Swami Vivekananda's "Inspired Talks," the manuscript of which I had prepared for publication. I brought the finished preface to the monastery in the evening and read it to him. He made no comment but got up and walked into his room. I thought he did not like what I had written and determined to try again on the morrow. In a moment Nerode, one of the young Swamis who had accompanied the



President, came from Swami Brahmananda's room with a small bottle in his hand. "Swami Brahmananda," he said, "has asked me to give you some of this sweet perfume," and he sprinkled over my head nearly all the contents of the bottle. For days it lingered in my veil and hair, conveying to me a fragrant sanction.

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

He rarely talked of himself and never mentioned the unceasing honors and attentions showered upon him. Wherever he went, people came in large

numbers to bow at his feet and beg his blessing; but it seemed to reach his consciousness only impersonally, as if he had merely a casual acquaintance with the one who was being honored. I recall a pilgrimage he made to the holy Temple of Conjeeveram. A gentleman living near the Temple had given him the use of his house and servants, another had provided a carriage for him, the whole population had come out to welcome him and while he was there had sought to serve him. His only comment when he returned to the monastery at Mylapore was: "Sister, the image in the Temple was so beautiful. I wish you might have seen it."

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

A silent reserve marked his manner at all times and made many fear him, but this reserve sprang less from with-drawing than from in-drawing. He

had a natural inward habit of thought and life which detached him from outward things. Occasionally it overpowered him completely and broke all connections with the external world.

One evening while he was at Madras he went into *Samadhi* (the super-conscious state) during *Arati*. He sat on the rug at the far end of the hall, his body motionless, his eyes closed, a smile of ecstasy playing about his lips. Swami Ramakrishnananda was the first to observe that he did not move when the Service was over. Realizing what had occurred, he motioned to one of the young Swamis to fan his head. In deep meditation the brain becomes very much heated. For half an hour no one stirred—a boy who was crossing the hall did not even draw back his foot. Perfect stillness pervaded the monastery—a radiant, pulsing stillness. Then Swami Brahmananda opened his eyes, looked round in dazed embarrassment, got up from his seat, went silently to his room and was not seen again that evening.

The same complete abstraction of thought overtook him again in the Temple at Madura which he had stopped to see on his way to the sacred Shrine of Rameswaram. In the morning he had said to Swami Ramakrishnananda that he had a strange feeling, as if something might happen. Afterwards he explained that as he entered the Temple, the image of the Divine Mother in the Sanctuary suddenly became living and moved

towards him. At once all outer consciousness dropped from him and he entered into deep communion with the all-encompassing Mother of the universe. For a long time he stood, supported by Swami Ramakrishnananda, there where the vision had come; and people perceiving him thus lost in inner seeing, prostrated at his feet in devout reverence.

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

With all his power of spiritual vision, Swami Brahmananda was exceptionally practical and possessed remarkable judgment in business matters. He followed in detail every branch of the extensive work at the head of which he stood; yet here again he never interfered, he merely made suggestions; but his suggestions were invariably so wise that they were always accepted. I had personal experience of his practical ability. We published

several books while he was at the Mylapore monastery. Having been in charge of the publication department of a leading Centre of the Order for a number of years, I had had long training in book-making, but a difference of opinion never rose between us that I did not find that he was right and I was wrong. A light burned within him that illumined whatever it shone upon. He had developed his basic instrument of knowledge and it gave him universal power of knowing.

A notable instance rises in my memory. On a very rainy afternoon in January Swami Brahmananda sent over to me a request to go in town to an English shop and buy him a word game. I got it at once, wondering what was to be done with it. When I went to the monastery later, I found the entire household playing the new game and I understood its purpose,—it was to enlarge the English vocabulary of the younger men. Swami Brahmananda himself never played, but he always watched and gave help to all the players impartially. Occasionally he suggested some impossible combination of letters and we would exclaim: "But, Swamiji, there is no such word in the English language." "Oh yes there is," he would reply quietly. "Get the dictionary and you will see." Some one would look in the dictionary and unfailingly the word was there.

A rarely keen sense of humor hovered near the surface of his thought, ready to bubble up into

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fun and laughter at any moment. Like a boy himself he would tease the young boy who brought the cow and milked it night and morning at the monastery gate, and among those who knew him well he was constantly finding new and unexpected ways of giving expression to the childlike gaiety inherent in his nature.

One day he discovered a box of toy stationery at the monastery. Some one had presented it in jest to Swami Paramananda when he was there. Swami Brahmananda gave me a sheet of it and had me typewrite a business letter regarding the management of the main monastery to Swami Premananda, at that time in charge of the Head House of the Order. As there was room for three words only on a line, the letter could not be long. To see those solemn typewritten instructions on a minute pink sheet with a crude little flower printed at the top could not but draw forth a hearty laugh. The letter was mailed in a tiny pink envelope so covered with titles of honor and reverence that the stamp had to go on the back.

Swami Brahmananda was equally lavish with honorable terms whenever he wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda. Letters would come addressed "To His Holiness The Right Reverend Swami Ramakrishnanandaji Mohunt." "Mohunt" is a title like "Abbott" and "ji" is a suffix which accentuates reverence. The letter itself would begin: "My dear Mohunt Maharajji of Madras."



## DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY

Despite his natural reserve and reticence, he radiated an atmosphere of quiet joyousness. He was extremely fond of music and wherever he was living there was always much of it. While Swami Brahmananda remained at the Madras monastery we had singing with violin and harmonium almost every evening and he himself frequently accompanied the singing by playing on tuned drums or the tamboura.

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

When December came, he said to me: "Sister,



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you are the Christian member of the *Math* (monastery) you should give us a Christmas party." "What kind of party do you wish, Swamiji?" I asked. "As much like a Western Christmas party as you can make it," was his reply. A Christmas tree was out of the question, but I went to the English shops and ordered plum cake, glacé fruits and whatever savored peculiarly of Christmastide. When Christmas day arrived, the boys brought green branches from the jungle and bound them to the pillars in the hall, then they made long garlands of mango leaves to hang between the pillars and over the doors.

The Indian tradesman is quick to sense when his wares are needed and while we were trimming the house, a vendor appeared at the door with a basket full of jasmine garlands. We made curtains of them on the supporting beam of the smaller alcove in the large hall and draped them back, forming an arch with the Christmas altar in deep perspective behind the fragrant hangings. Swami Ramakrishnananda had charged me to be sure to place beside the altar some bread and wine as a symbol of the Christian Eucharist. A table in the larger alcove, almost a separate room, was piled high with fruit, sweetmeats and plumcake.

At four o'clock Swami Brahmananda, Swami Ramakrishnananda and the Christmas party arrived. Swami Brahmananda took his seat at the far end of the hall opposite the altar with Swami

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

Swami Brahmananda then asked to visit the other rooms of the house, after which he told us to bring the refreshments. He explained with emphasis that the house was like a Temple, the food was blessed food and every one could partake of it freely. All obeyed him and ate heartily and without compunction of what I had provided. When Swami Brahmananda thought they had had enough, he said to them with unexpected abruptness: "You would all better go home now. Swami Ramakrishnananda and I will stay a little longer." The company took their dismissal good-naturedly and left. After they were gone he said: "Now,

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Sister, bring your bread and butter, your English plumcake, your French chestnuts and your German prunes and we'll have a real Western party." He took a little of each thing and had me give it to him. I soon found, however, that I was not to lay it in his hand, but drop it into the hand from a short height. He enjoyed especially the bread and butter. He did not care so much for the fruit cake, it was too rich.

As he was eating he remarked to me: "I have been very much blessed in coming to your house to-day, Sister." I answered quickly: "Swamiji, it is I who have been blessed in having you come." "You do not understand," he replied; "I have had a great blessing here this afternoon. As you were reading the Bible, Christ suddenly stood before the altar dressed in a long blue cloak. He talked to me for some time. It was a very blessed moment." There was no more thought of food. I poured water over his hands, then some sweet perfume, and with Swami Ramakrishnananda he went back to the monastery radiant with the joy of the vision.

The Swami visited my house several times after that. He disliked the noise and confusion of festival days. At such times I would empty my large upper room, put in his furniture and give the house over wholly to his use, reserving for myself a room which could be reached without going beyond the vestibule. Away from the sing-

ing and playing and lecturing at the monastery he would receive a few special friends and pass his day in comparative quiet. I suspected always that he wished to escape from the ovation his presence would call forth, should he mingle with the large assembly, taking part in the celebration.

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

“My dear Sister:

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

I remain,

Yours affectionately,

Brahmananda.

“Dear Sister:

Very glad to receive your note of the 23rd and more so to hear that you have enjoyed your stay in Calcutta to the best content of your heart. I expected so of you. Had you written me beforehand I would have requested you to visit Puri on your way to Madras, as some of our best friends and their wives had great mind to see you and

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make your acquaintance. However it was not to be. I hope you have reached Madras safe and sound. Please give my love to Swami Ramakrishnanandaji. Write to me from time to time. I shall be really glad to hear from you. With love and prayers,

Yours affectionately,

Brahmananda.

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

“Dear Sister:

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

Affectionately yours,

Brahmananda.”

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

## XI

### PUBLIC MEETINGS, THE INDIAN THEATRE AND INDIAN MUSIC

Public meetings in India usually take place between six and eight in the evening. Offices close at five, the evening meal is eaten at half-past eight or nine and the public meeting is held between these hours. In nearly every town and city there are free halls, which have been built and presented to the community as an act of public service. It is not an infrequent form of philanthropy. The Indians are peculiarly fond of coming together in large assemblies and listening to some one talk. Audiences gather easily.

My first experience of a public meeting occurred soon after I reached Madras. A delegation from the Vaishya (Merchant's) Association came to the monastery to welcome me to Madras and invite me to address their association. Swami Ramakrishnananda accepted the invitation for me. The meeting was to be at six o'clock. When the day arrived a friend took Swami Ramakrishnananda and myself to the city in his carriage.

The members of the association lived in a special district, cut by one long street. They met us at the end of this street with a band of musicians



and led us in procession to the hall. All the verandahs and roof terraces on both sides were filled with ladies who waved their hands to us in loving greeting. A spirit of cordial friendliness prevailed everywhere.

When we were all seated in the hall a few words of welcome were said, then I rose to speak. With Swami Ramakrishnananda and a prominent gentleman of Madras on the platform it did not seem fitting that I should consume all the time, so after I had spoken for nearly forty minutes I sat down. Swami Ramakrishnananda rose at once and explained that I had been suffering from fever all the day and it had been only with great effort I had come; that I had done so because I had been unwilling to disappoint them. I could not imagine why he was giving these personal details and on the way back to Mylapore I questioned him about it. "I had to offer some reason for the shortness of your lecture," he replied. "They expected you to speak for two hours." As he and the gentleman with us each spoke for some time, the assembly lost nothing by my mistake; but I learned then that South Indians like lengthy lectures.

My second large public meeting was in Bangalore. It was organized by the Dewan and some of his officials. Swami Ramakrishnananda gave an address. The Dewan presided and requested me also to be one of the speakers. There were over twelve hundred men in the hall and one other



woman besides myself. The majority of women in Southern India did not understand English readily and rarely attended English lectures. At subsequent meetings I saw a few in the audience. Now they go quite freely to public meetings and take part in them also. The poet Sarojini Naidu, though a woman, was elected president of the National Congress. She has also attained eminence as a public speaker.

The Indians are very susceptible to the charm of eloquence. Facile beauty of language weaves a ready spell over their thought and the Indian crowd can be swayed by words as was the crowd in the Forum at Rome. In this their temperament is very Latin. The spell does not persist, however, unless the words are backed by the life. The French have a way of making or unmaking a literary production by the brief phrase: "C'est vecu" or "Ce n'est pas vecu"—"It is lived" or "It is not lived;" and the Indian applies the same measure. If he is susceptible to eloquence, he is more susceptible to living. The orator or writer must do more than speak or write to make a vital and lasting impression on the Indian public. That is why proselytizing movements seem to obtain negligible results in India. When a new form of Truth or a new proposition is presented by a teacher or preacher, the invariable test is, "How does he live?"

A passage from St. Augustine's writings describes very aptly the Indian attitude of mind.

It runs: "What I learn is not from the man who speaks to me and whose knowledge I acquire, it is what his words induce me to seek, for which I go direct to that Verity which reigns in my understanding and ask." This power to impart a deeper something behind thought Sri Ramakrishna calls having the "Divine commission," because a commission is given naturally to the one who is most efficient and he is most efficient who has proved his claims by personal experience. Swami Ramakrishnananda in alluding to this told me the following incident of his Master's life:—

"A man is drowning; if you know how to swim, you may venture to try to save him. If you do not know how to swim, then you can only see him drown. There was a well-known *Pandit* in Calcutta; he was well versed in the six schools of philosophy and had a smattering of Western philosophy too. He used to deliver lectures at the Calcutta University. He had a clever and convincing way of mingling the Western sciences with Hindu philosophy and all the students were very much taken with him. They used to come and tell me how wonderful he was and ask me to go to hear him, but I never cared much to run here and there to lectures. At that time also we were going often to Gurumaharaj (Sri Ramakrishna).

"When Sri Ramakrishna heard of this *Pandit* he went to him and asked: 'Have you a commission from the Lord? Has He commanded you to teach?'

When the *Pandit* admitted he had not, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Then all your lectures are worthless. People will hear you for a time but it will not last.' What he said proved true. Soon the *Pandit* lost all his popularity, everyone began to criticize him and he had to give up. Then one day he came to Dakshineswar and prostrated before Sri Ramakrishna saying: 'All this while we have been chewing the chaff and you have been eating the kernel. We have been content with dry books while you have been enjoying life.' "

Indians have the gift of speech. Even a little culture gives them a remarkable command of language. There may not be many linguists among them, because they have lived very much to themselves and have had little need of foreign tongues, but they speak their own tongue ably. Hindustani or Hindi grew up to provide the army with a common medium of communication. English has become the common language of the platform. When the audience is a mixed one, the programme also is mixed; first there will be a lecture in the vernacular, then one in English. I took part in meetings when there were addresses in two different vernaculars and a third in English.

Being the language of all higher education in India, English is almost like a second mother tongue and the Indians use it with much greater facility and grace than the majority of English-speaking peoples. I recall a lecture delivered on

a day of celebration at our monastery in Mylapore by a professor from the Madras University. He had been ill and consented to preside at the meeting on the condition that he would not be called upon to speak. Another gentleman read a paper on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the subject evidently stirred the professor. He rose and began to talk on Sri Ramakrishna's place and mission in the modern world. It was a masterpiece in English, in historical learning, and in deeper understanding. He reviewed the whole past of India with remarkable precision and enumeration of facts, building up a mighty pedestal, brick by brick, stone on stone; on this he placed Sri Ramakrishna as the culmination of tolerance, inclusiveness and universality.

In South India the English spoken is almost classic in its purity of expression and the same is true of Bengal. There is great rivalry between these two sections of the country. Bengal is generally regarded as the brain of India and South Indians believe they have the monopoly of learning, especially of Sanskrit learning. They quarrel with the Bengali about the way he pronounces Sanskrit, the way he chants it and the way he interprets it. But the war is a harmless one and there is no doubt that South Indian and Bengali alike have a large place in the rich cultural life which India possesses.

The Indians pay ready homage to distinction.

## DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY

When a person of importance is arriving, a throng meets him at the station, a garland of flowers is hung about his neck and he drives under a long line of flower-wreathed triumphal arches, or he walks on a carpet of fragrant blossoms strewn beneath his feet as he advances. When he leaves, again he is garlanded and many come to bid him God-speed. A lecturer is garlanded as he comes to the platform and a special visitor receives similar greeting when he enters a house. Garlands are given on all occasions. A very distinguished person is put on an elephant and led through the streets with acclaim. There is no stint in honoring greatness, and sometimes mediocrity gets its share also.

The stage has never had social standing in India. The actress has been a courtesan always, and the actor has been classed as a profligate; yet the stage has wielded a mighty influence on Indian society. Many a lover of worldly pleasure has gone to the jungle or hills and taken up the life of renunciation after seeing a religious play. I met an ascetic who had been a successful journalist in Calcutta, but who had given up everything in one night at the end of a performance of a drama based on the life of the Divine Manifestation, Lord Gouranga. With all its social lawlessness, the Indian stage is strongly tinged with religion. Many of its masterpieces tell the life-story of some spiritual hero or humble saint. Religious themes are more popular than lighter subjects.

I found in South India that Shakespeare had many followers, especially among younger women. One of them told me that she never failed to go when a Shakespeare play was given and the theatre at Madras on such occasions was always full. The Indian stage is very much Westernized at present. It uses the same kind of scenery as in the Occident, but less of it. An effort is being made however to revive the ancient national traditions of the stage. The social status of the men and women who appear on it also is improving rapidly. Moving picture performances are very popular all over India and there are many of them.

Indian music has developed along lines very different from the music of the Occident. It resembles most closely the Italian school in which melody predominates over harmony. During the year I lived in Italy I noticed again and again how naturally the people sang their melodies in unison. I recall one afternoon when I was walking along a high path running over the hills behind Prato near Florence. Some one down in the valley began playing a folksong on a cornet. It was the time of olive-harvesting. Every tree had its picker. The song was caught up from tree to tree and rolled up the hillside like an advancing ocean wave, but always in unison, the boys a shrill octave above the men—very different from the Germans, who if they sing two notes, harmonize them.

The music of India defined in European terms



may be called aptly an amplified Gregorian chant, and in that definition perhaps we find an explanation of its character. The Gregorian chant sprang out of a simple religious aspiration. Indian music takes its rise from the same source. It was primarily religious. The ancient Vedas or Scriptures of the Indo-Aryans were given in song—no one can associate the rhythmic Sanskrit lines with dry prosaic reading. They sing themselves.

That Indian music has retained its primary archaic nature is probably due to the greater simplicity of the emotional life of the Indian people. Music is above all an outpouring of the heart. Only as it grows self-conscious and labored does it become intellectual. The emotional life of the West is complex, its passional life more stormy and lawless, and its music reflects its mood. The structure of Indian society makes for greater quietness of spirit, greater restraint in the relation between men and women. I have never lived in any country where the sex-consciousness was so little apparent, and this conduces to a simpler rhythmic expression of feeling.

If however the form of Indian music is simple, its theory is most intricate. A musician once said to me in India that he did not believe that any foreigner could master fully the Indian science of music. In their scale there are quarter tones. This multiplies the number of intervals. It alters also the character of the modes of their melodies.



Some of them are neither major nor minor but between the two. The Russian music in its rhythm and succession of intervals is very like the Indian but this is not surprising as Russian cultural development touches the Orient at many points.

The Indian music has a totally different method of notation. An Indian book of music might almost pass for a book of essays. No bar is used, the name of the note is written out and, if a song, the word of the song is written under it. The time and key of the composition are indicated in the same literary manner. An artist reads his piece, commits it to memory, then plays or sings it. He always performs "without notes." The chief way of learning, however, is orally—from teacher to pupil. The composition as set down in the book is only an outline, the musician who renders it is allowed great liberty in ornamenting it, like a running obligato; thus a creative element enters into every interpretation.

Music in India in recent times has been impoverished by the introduction of Occidental instruments like the harmonium and cabinet organ, which cannot reproduce the finer intervals. The violin is an Indian instrument, invented by the Indians to meet the requirements of their highly sensitized perception of shorter intervals. It is widely played there, even little children showing great aptitude for it.

One hot afternoon I opened my entrance door

in answer to a loud knock and found a group of eight or ten little girls ranging from six to twelve, all dressed in bright silken *Saris* with many gold chains and bangles. There was a tall beturbaned servant with them; he acted as interpreter and explained that the children had come to give me a concert. I unrolled a large mat on the floor of the lower hall and they sat down cross-legged upon it. The servant stood beside them. Then they took out their violins, put the neck against the crossed right foot, the other end under the chin, and began to play and sing. I was surprised at their skill and fluency of technique. They remained for nearly two hours and it touched my heart deeply that they should come in that scorching heat to entertain me.

While at Mylapore I had a rare opportunity to hear Indian music at its very best. One of the leading singers of South India asked to come and sing for the Head of the Order while he was at Madras. With him he brought his father, also a famous musician, and his young brother of nine. The little boy played the violin with great facility; the father played small tempered steel cymbals with one hand and with the other marked the beat by softly snapping thumb and first finger together, producing a sound of mellow ivory. The singer himself played the vina, one of the most perfect instruments art has created. It is shaped and strung like a guitar, with the short string of the

banjo added, but under the main strings are scores of finer ones which give the overtones, lending an evasive delicacy and sweetness to every note struck.

The musicians sat in the centre of the huge rug in the monastery hall; Swami Brahmananda, Swami Ramakrishnananda and I sat at one end. There was no one else in the hall and the whole monastery was still. The singer sang with indescribable art; and vina, violin and cymbals wove a spell round his song. Sometimes his voice faded to an intangible pianissimo, violin and cymbals died away, nothing remained but the subtle tones of the fine understrings of the vina. Then they lost themselves in a subtler silence and the song was over. I devoted many years to musical study both in Europe and America and have heard nearly all the great musicians, but never did music give me a keener pleasure than on that late afternoon in the monastery at Mylapore. I seemed to be listening to something more plastic and melodious than mere human sound.

The Indian musician is never indiscriminate in the practice of his art. He never sings a midnight song at noonday or a morning hymn at the evening hour. There is special music for every time and season and it can never be performed at any other time or season without offending against art and decorum. In the Punjab there is an interesting type of musician called a morning minstrel who goes about to different houses in the early morning

## DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY

and wakes by song those who live there. Often these singers improvise and sing the glories of the family they are rousing from sleep.

Each social and religious ceremony also has its type of music. The Washington Post March on the great organ at the close of the Benediction Service, as I heard it in a Catholic Church of Boston, is an anachronism impossible in India. I once attended a village church in America where every Sunday the organist played "Mulligan Guards" in varying rhythm with varying stops. It was the only tune she knew except hymn tunes. If she had done it before an Indian assembly, she would have been sharply rebuked. The Indo-Aryan demands harmony in his artistic expression.

## XII

### SOCIAL CEREMONIES AND ENTERTAINMENTS

The most important ceremony of Indian society is the marriage of the daughter of the house. For it the father not infrequently incurs heavy debt or even bankruptcy. In Bengal the marriage rites consume three days. All of them possess a deep and highly poetic significance. They are performed usually in Sanskrit, but among members of the Brahmo-Samaj and a few other radical groups the vernacular is used. By this innovation, however, the ceremony seems to lose a certain sanctity and dignity which the ancient tongue lends it; but it has one vital advantage,—those who speak the words must be more conscious of their import when they are spoken in the more familiar vernacular.

In Bengal on the day of the actual wedding both bride and bridegroom fast. At the opening of the marriage festivities two seats are placed near each other in the courtyard under a canopy. The seats are beautifully decorated and painted. The marriage takes place at night. At the appointed hour the bridegroom enters with the officiating priest and goes to one of the seats. A cloth

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is dropped over his eyes. Then the bride, veiled, enters with some member of the family and walks seven times round the bridegroom, after which she sits down opposite him, a curtain is lifted in front of them and behind this they unveil their faces and look at one another. They exchange garlands and throw flowers over each other.

The father then says to the bridegroom: "With God as my witness I give my daughter to you." The bridegroom replies: "I take your daughter to be my companion in all my joys and sorrows, pleasures and pains, a very part of my life and living." As a confirmation of this pledge the priest takes the right hand of the bride and the right hand of the bridegroom and binds them together with a garland of fragrant flowers, the father's hand being placed over the joined hands. Thus united the bridegroom says to the bride: "My heart is yours, your heart is mine. Bound together, they are laid at the feet of the Lord." Throughout the ceremony the bride remains silent; the father speaks for her.

On the second day the household fire is lighted and again the father says to the bridegroom: "With this fire as my witness I give my daughter to you," and the bridegroom again takes her. This fire is regarded as the symbol of Divine protection and of the purity and happiness of the united life. In ancient times it was never allowed to go out after it was lighted at the marriage feast.



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A cold hearth and darkened ash meant misfortune. The fire was vigilantly tended with reverent hands and a sacred chant on the lips. At present it is watched and kept burning for ten days.

Other rites come after that of lighting the fire. An interval of quiet follows those of the third day; on the fifth day there are further rites and on the tenth day still others. The feasting sometimes continues for a fortnight. During the entire time hundreds of guests are lavishly entertained and many rich presents exchanged.

The wedding in South India lasts five days. A simple printed invitation is sent out, but as a special mark of deference a verbal invitation also is given in certain cases. A young girl from the bride's family and a young boy from the bridegroom's family go to the house and bid the members of it to the marriage. While I was at the monastery such a youthful couple came with an invitation to attend the wedding of a professor's daughter. It is not customary however for those who have taken up the life of renunciation to attend a marriage, so the invitation was declined.

One early evening I heard strains of music and going to the verandah I saw an informal procession of men and boys walking through the street with a group of musicians and a number of servants carrying lighted torches. It was the father of a bridegroom accompanied by his son and all the men of a large family connection going with gifts



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to the home of the bride to ask whether her father still wished to give his daughter in marriage. This was the opening of the wedding ceremonies, but it was a mere formality, as everything had been arranged definitely several days before.

A day or two after, I met the young couple riding in a large open carriage. This first ride together constitutes a part of the ceremonies. The bride wore over her head a tight net-like cap of sweet-scented jasmine blossoms and strands of the same flowers were woven into the wide braids which hung down her back. The *Sari* and the little jacket which she wore were of heavy silk with broad border of solid gold thread, a gold belt with gold dangles encircled her waist and there were many gold chains about her neck and bracelets on her arms. A large part of her dowry was in jewelry and gems.

While we were in Bangalore, Swami Ramakrishnananda took me to the marriage of the daughter of a devoted friend of the work. He was reluctant to go, but he wished me to see the fire-lighting ceremony. When we arrived the many guests were already assembled in the large square entrance hall, the men on one side, the ladies on the other. Deliciously scented water was poured over our hands, then we were led down a hallway to a courtyard where we found the bride and bridegroom seated before a burning fire. We were too late for the lighting. The priest was chanting Sans-

krit texts and the newly married couple were throwing flowers, melted butter and other offerings on the household fire to feed and sanctify it. When they had finished, they took their seats on a sofa in the hall where the guests were, each put a garland round the neck of the other, then they sat side by side looking very shy and ill at ease.

I had glimpses of an Indian Christian wedding. They went through all the Indian rites first, then on the morning of the last day they drove to the church and had the Christian Service and blessing. They would not have felt the marriage properly solemnized if they had not observed all the traditional customs of their caste and community.

The fundamental elements are the same in the marriage Service of North and of South India. The same texts are chanted, the ideals are the same. Only the secondary rites and customs differ. I was most familiar with those of Bengal and of the South. In Bengal the marriage takes place after the bride has attained a marriageable age. In South India the bride is much younger and the wedding is merely a betrothal. The bride continues to live in her father's house for several years until she has attained womanhood and even then she waits. When she goes to live with her husband in her father-in-law's house there are other ceremonies. One day when we were driving to the city we were held at a crossing for a half hour by a wedding procession. A rich merchant was taking

his daughter to the home of her husband and the line of servants each bearing a gift seemed endless. The gifts were a motley mixture of East and West.

The average age at which the young wife joins her husband is fifteen, but in some families it is as late as seventeen or eighteen. In South India the very early marriage prevails because the South Indians believe that even the thought of another besides the husband desecrates the wife's chastity, so from her childhood her mind must be turned to the one with whom she is to spend her life. As a little girl she pays periodical visits to her mother-in-law and grows gradually to know her husband. Marriages are arranged by the parents; but this is not peculiar to India. It is equally true of all Latin countries and is as much Christian as Indo-Aryan. The wisdom or unwisdom of the custom is a problem by itself.

Funeral customs vary according to locality, caste and community. The habit of keeping the body for several days is unknown in India. The extreme heat makes it impossible. The law is that the body must be cremated before sunset of the day of the passing away. If death occurs at night the cremation takes place the following day. Among the Brahmins the body is swathed in a white cotton cloth, other castes are usually not wrapped.

We were sitting on the verandah of the Theo-

logical High School at Madras one late Friday afternoon waiting for the hour of Swami Ramakrishnananda's lecture, when a dead body was carried by. It was that of a young man of twenty-five and was clothed in the usual dress with a fresh garland about the neck; long lashes lay against the cheeks and the head moved with the swinging of the bier—a litter of bamboo poles and a platted palm leaf, borne on the shoulders of four coolies. Before it walked a man blowing a conch shell. This always precedes a funeral procession. The sound is remarkably mellifluous and never breaks. It is absolutely continuous. How the blowers can walk and keep it up without apparently taking a breath is a mystery passed from father to son in the caste which does it.

No one followed the body. Probably all the family were in some far-away village and this young man had come to the city to take a position. As I watched the lonely body pass down the street I thought of one day in Paris when, sitting on the top of a tram, I saw a laborer in corduroy blouse raise his hat and heard him murmur: "There is a poor little one who is going away all alone." I looked over the railing and saw a baby's coffin being carried to the cemetery by hired pall-bearers.

Dead bodies do not travel about in India as they do in the Occident. When life is gone, the body is taken to the nearest burning-ghat. That is one reason why when people feel the end approach-

ing, they ask to go to Benares or to the Ganges-side or to some other chosen spot that the last rites may be performed in hallowed surroundings.

The cremation service is very simple. A pyre is built, the body laid on it and the eldest son or, if there is no son, a brother lights the fire. In some places the family remains until the body is consumed, in others they leave when the brief service is over. The funeral ceremonies are more elaborate for the old than for the young. Age is highly honored in India. It is not considered such a calamity as it has come to be regarded in Western society and they do not make such pathetic efforts to mask it.

A grandfather of ninety-three belonging to a prominent family known to me, died in his village home. The entire community attended the funeral—praying, singing and chanting. When the pyre was lighted, every member of a large family connection threw a piece of sandalwood on the flames and there were many other rites. At their close several hundred poor people were fed, gifts were distributed and the whole village was entertained.

The real funeral rites take place later—twelve days after the cremation among Brahmins, twenty-one days in the military caste and thirty days in other castes. There may be a slight variance in the time in different parts of India. This *Shraddha* ceremony is performed by the eldest son and is repeated every year.

Although cremation is the universal rule among the Indian people, an exception is made sometimes in the case of holy men. Often they are buried. A square grave is dug and lined with salt to purify it; the body is lowered into it seated cross-legged, with folded hands as if in meditation. One morning in Mylapore my attention was attracted by the shuffling of many bare feet in the dust of the road before the house. I looked out and saw all the gentlemen of a rich family of the neighborhood passing in informal procession. They wore unbordered cloths and their long black hair, unknotted, hung down over their shoulders. This told me they were in mourning. Then my eyes rested on a figure veiled by an orange cloth and seated in meditation posture on a wooden seat swung by ropes from a stout bamboo pole resting on the shoulders of two men. The seat swayed back and forth as they moved forward, but the figure remained immovable. Suddenly I realized that it was a lifeless body going to its burial.

I learned afterwards that the one whose clothing it had been, had left it in an unusual way. From his earliest boyhood he had had a passionate desire to renounce the world, but his family had induced him to marry and for over thirty years he had led a householder's life with this unsatisfied yearning in his heart. When the end was drawing near he had asked to have an orange-dyed cloth brought and wrapped about his wasted form.



Then he had taken the vows of *Sannyasa* (renunciation) and had gone out a religious mendicant to wander in the Great Unknown. For him it was a preparation for the next earth-life, a safeguard against a new entanglement.

Many other social ceremonies came within my observation; it is possible to speak only of a few of them. The first visit to a home is made an occasion for special formalities, if the visitor is an exceptional one. Frequently such invitations came. Sometimes I would be walking along the street and a gentleman would run out from his home and invite me to enter, saying that the ladies of the family had been reproaching him for not bringing me to see them. In this way I found myself often in strange houses, but I never felt a stranger.

There comes to my mind a late afternoon visit to a home in Mylapore. The head of the household met us at the gate and led us through a garden into the house and to a more intimate living room on the second floor overlooking the garden. Here I was seated in an armchair and the wife of the gentleman laid before me a large shining metal tray. On it was a fleecy pile of grated cocoanut, also blanched almonds, sandalwood paste, sweet perfumes, fruits and a lovely string of *Rudraksha* beads—the Indian rosary. Other refreshments were served and conversation carried the visit over an hour. A like ceremony took place whenever



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I went for the first time to the house of a stranger or of a friend—gifts and food were always offered. The last visits before leaving Madras brought a repetition of the same social formalities.

A visit which causes the greatest excitement is the visit of a son-in-law. The father-in-law almost strips himself of personal possessions to make presents to his son-in-law; he will give watch, rings, whatever he has of value, and there is perpetual feasting as long as the son-in-law remains in the house.

The Indian people have a novel way of entertaining a religious community. They will send a cook and a large assortment of choice provisions. The food is prepared in the monastery kitchen by the visiting cook and the members of the community are feasted at home. The host is not even present. This happened several times while I was at Madras. One gentleman even offered to send a cook to my house and give me a dinner party by myself, but I declined the invitation. When I was in Calcutta a devotee had a feast prepared at the famous Temple of Kalighat; offered to the Lord there, then brought to Holy Mother, the head of our Sisterhood, and her household. It came at ten o'clock at night, two hours late.

We were bidden often to a meal at the home of one friend or another. Occasionally, Swami Ramakrishnananda consented to go. I remember especially one dinner given by a leading physician

of Madras in honor of Swami Brahmananda. He and Swami Ramakrishnananda were received with great reverence. It was regarded as a rare blessing to have them come to the house. The poet and orator, Sarojini Naidu, was also among the guests. The dinner was served in a central court.

As we entered it, water was poured over our hands. Then we were seated on mats spread on the floor along the inner wall of a broad arcade. A large leaf plate was placed before each one of us and filled with rice. A number of little leaf cups were set around this. They contained a great variety of side dishes, mild and pungent, sweet and sour, curries, vegetables and fruits. The lady of the house and her daughters served the guests. They were too jealous of the privilege to allow any one else to claim it. Their graciousness and sweetness added much to the joy of the dinner. When it was over, water was poured over our hands once more and we went home. All the visiting had been done before during the hour we had to wait. Meals are always late in India.

Our host, Dr. Nundjen Rao was a remarkable man. He held the post of chief medical officer of the City of Madras; besides this he had a very extensive private practice and a household of twenty-five to maintain; yet he was never too busy to respond to the cry of pain of the poorest laborer. He even maintained a salaried assistant doctor who did nothing but pay free visits to the poor. The

elder physician always diagnosed the case and prescribed the treatment, then the younger one followed it up.

Once an English stenographer who had done some work for Dr. Nundjen Rao wrote him from Bangalore that an English physician there had told her she must have an operation and she had not the money for it. He wired her to come to Madras. He sent one of his carriages to the station to meet her, had her brought to his own home, gave her an apartment in a wing of his house for her use, provided a servant, and took care of her for a month. At the end of that time there was no need of an operation. She herself told me that in all her Anglo-Indian experience she had never met with so much kindness.

There was a brilliant professor of mathematics at the Madras University. He was looked upon as a mathematical genius and received a large salary, but he was a relentless sceptic. When Swami Vivekananda came to Madras for the first time, this professor went to see him with the avowed purpose of confounding him. Instead of this he fell so completely under the spell of Swami Vivekananda's fervor of spirit and extraordinary attainments that he gave up his position at the university, left his home and became an ardent ascetic.

Dr. Nundjen Rao offered him shelter, but the professor would accept only a small tent in the

doctor's garden. Here he spent his days in prayer and meditation. Once in each twenty-four hours he went to the court of the main house for a little food and as he ate it Dr. Nundjen Rao's father and mother—a matter-of-fact couple—stood beside him and showered reproaches upon him for having thrown away a lucrative position and a good home. When Swami Ramakrishnananda heard of it, he went to the professor and asked him to come to the monastery for his daily meal. The professor's answer was: "I would enjoy your company, but the abuses of these old people provide an opportunity for the practice of patience and endurance which I cannot afford to miss."

Dr. Nundjen Rao related to me another striking incident connected with this first visit of Swami Vivekananda to Madras. One afternoon Dr. Nundjen Rao had gone to Adyar to see a Theosophical friend and had found a newly arrived American member clearing out some drawers. On one side lay a pile of things to be burned. Among them was the picture of a *Sadhu*. Dr. Nundjen Rao stooped and picked it up, saying: "This is a holy man. You should not throw this on the floor." "Oh! No one knows who it is," the American replied, "and we must get rid of some of this clutter." "Let me take the picture then," the doctor said. He carried it home, had it framed and hung it up with his other pictures of holy men.

When Swami Vivekananda came to Madras

Dr. Nundjen Rao invited him to dine at his home. At that time no one knew who Swami Vivekananda's *Guru* or spiritual teacher was. Whenever any one asked him, he always replied: "I represent him so poorly. I am not worthy to speak his name." On the day of the dinner, when Swami Vivekananda arrived, he was led to the room where the holy pictures hung. As he waited, he walked about looking at them. Suddenly he started, stopped before the Adyar picture transfixed and those with him saw tears gather in his eyes and roll down his cheeks. They inquired in wonder: "What is there in that picture to move you so, Swamiji?" He turned and with deep emotion in his voice, exclaimed: "It is my *Guru*, Sri Ramakrishna!"

I have already spoken of the *Durga-puja* or autumn Feast of the Divine Mother of the universe. It is most elaborately celebrated in Bengal and there it is peculiarly a religious Feast. In South India it is more essentially a social festival. It lasts three days and on each day a certain number of families stay at home and receive while others go out to pay visits. The ladies of the house wear beautiful silk *Saris*, stiff with gold thread, and many jewels and gold ornaments. The best cooking-pot, the best musical instrument, the best toy, the best of everything in the house is gathered together, thoroughly cleaned and polished, then offered to God. The laborer wreaths his tool with a flower garland and offers it to his Deity. The pupil of-

fers his pen and ink and copy book. Every one offers up the best that he has and at the close of the third day, family, friends and enemies are expected to embrace and forget all grievances. The man who fails to forgive loses all the merit gained by his observance of the Feast. Presents are given also and new garments are put on.

They had an interesting custom at Madras. On a board platform they made a village of toy houses with little men and women, jinrikishas and bullock carts, roads, miniature plants and trees and lakes. Over the ground was a thin layer of earth in which short blades of wheat were growing and green. To have this fresh green wheat for the festival seemed the chief purpose of these toy villages. Sometimes they were large and pretentious. Sometimes there was only a simple farmhouse. They always stood in the room where visitors were received and the members of the household seemed to take great pride in them. They reminded me of the *Creche* one sees at Christmas time in the Catholic churches, especially in Paris.

The picture of my first *Durga-puja* at Madras rises before me. Each morning Swami Ramakrishnananda, Rudra and I were alone at the long Service. We sat near the altar and Rudra conducted the worship while Swami Ramakrishnananda read the holy words which accompanied it. In the evening more gathered for the Vesper Service of *Arati* or the "waving of the lights." On



the last evening there was quite an assemblage of devotees in the hall of the monastery. At the close of it every one wrote the name of the Protecting Mother, "*Durga*," in Sanskrit characters on strips of dried palm leaves and these were carried to the Shrine as a parting salutation to the Great Mother. Then all present gave a loving greeting to each one and the festival ended.

About three weeks later came another Feast of the Divine Mother. That which characterized it especially, apart from a long religious Service, was the decorating of the verandahs and window sills of every house with rows of flickering taper lights. At the monastery we had a bank of them outside the Shrine door. Fireworks also were displayed and grown-ups and little ones, all children together, sent off fire crackers and danced about in glee.



## XIII

### THE INDIAN WOMAN AND THE INDIAN HOME

On the morning of my last day in Madras a gentleman sent his eldest son to bring me to their home for a parting visit. The son came for me in a pretentious carriage with two liveried servants on the box and two standing behind. We drove along a broad shaded road edged by handsome residences, through a high gate and beautiful garden, round an imposing house with up-reaching pillars, to a curving verandah-terrace in the rear. There amid other seats and swinging hammocks stood a narrow wooden bench with one end raised like a pillow. Laughingly I said to the boy with me, pointing to the bench: "I suppose you sleep there." The quick reply came: "No, but my grandmother does."

That hard narrow wooden bench struck the key-note of the South Indian home, I might say of the home everywhere in India. There may be ease-loving, luxurious Indians, especially in Bengal and in some other more northern provinces, but austere simplicity is the prevailing rule. The climate demands it and all the ideals call for it. Springs, cushions, hangings and decorations

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smother one in that heat and one flees gladly to a straw mat stretched on a cool brick floor. Even the hardness is refreshing and the body soon grows accustomed to it. It is not that the Indians cannot have beds or are not civilized enough to use them. In Bengal they have elaborate bedsteads but without springs, the dip of a spring is too hot.

The South Indian by choice sleeps on a mat on the floor with his head on his arm. I had one close friend at Madras, a government official, who all his life had slept on an eighteen-inch bench with Webster's Unabridged Dictionary as a pillow. The Indo-Aryan also prefers to sit on the floor. It permits a more stable, natural posture and one that prepares better for the practice of meditation and concentration. The Occidental expends an enormous amount of subconscious energy holding himself on a raised seat against the pull of gravitation. We realize it when we try to indraw our forces. I do not suggest that the people of the West discard chairs; but for a nation as inward and contemplative in habit as the Indian, sitting cross-legged on the ground or floor is beyond a doubt the best posture. It is the one peculiarly fitted to the life. They have chairs and use them on occasions, but chiefly in receiving visitors. The inner apartments show a great barrenness of furniture.

The Indian shrinks from the tyranny of things. He has not the Western mania for collecting and

storing. If he stows away, moth and rust quickly corrupt and insects of all kinds destroy. He has no closets in his house, they would be breeding places for destructive creatures. His simple articles of dress are folded flat and laid away in stout metal-bound chests and he avoids superfluity. Each set of garments is washed every day, dried and worn on the morrow. The same is true of men and women. The whole scheme of dress is of the simplest.

Fashions have not been altered materially since the days of the Upanishads thousands of years ago. The *Sari* and *Dhoti*, that is the strips of silk or cotton that are wound and draped about the body, are always the same, with slight variation in border and color; they are put on in the same way and are worn until they are worn out. The "cloth," as both are familiarly called in South India, does not have to be "made over" from season to season to meet the requirements of shifting styles.

As among South Indians the mark on the forehead tells the form of the religious belief, so the way the cloth is put on indicates the community and caste. The manner of dress labels a man or woman. In South India no Brahmin lady ever wears anything on her feet, unless it be silver anklets. Gold is never worn on the foot. Bare feet are a sign of distinction. The soles of a working-woman's feet wear out, just as the sole of a shoe wears through, and she has to resort to sandals;

otherwise walking would be painful. In Bengal they always wore slippers and now they have added stockings. Western influence is more apparent there and wherever the Occident comes, material things multiply.

A South Indian lady also never carries an umbrella, but she goes out rarely in the rain or hot sun. Old and young dress alike, except very little children. Pins, hairpins, shoes and stockings, hats, gloves and trinkets form no part of her toilet and this means the elimination of many personal needs. Her hair is parted, combed in glossy straightness to the ears and coiled in thick braids at the neck, with a bar of jewels at the centre of the coil and often another jewelled ornament on the crown of the head; yet ornaments and braids are held by the hair itself. No comb or hairpin is used and the hair remains smooth and in place even after a night's rest.

In India no effort is made to mask bodily defects or to accentuate bodily advantages. People are frankly what they are. Unveiled frankness indeed appears to characterize all Indians. As there are no closets, so there are no skeletons. People talk openly of their family affairs, honorable or otherwise. The Indian manifests always a striking detachment from his external life. He rarely identifies himself fully with it. He is subjective rather than objective. He is soul and possesses body as a transient tenement. Clothes, houses, furniture

and material belongings are momentary and hence secondary.

Among Indian women beauty is usual and it is all the more lovely because it is accompanied by an utter lack of self-consciousness. I used to watch in wonder the loveliness and grace of the women and their complete unawareness of it. This is probably due in part at least to the fact that mirrors do not stand at every turn to remind them of their appearance. A mirror is a rare article of furniture in India. I never saw one in a house there; I am told that a few have them, but not in evidence. Each lady has a toilet box in the cover of which is a small glass. The box contains comb, brush and other articles necessary to the toilet, among them the *Kumkum* powder with which she makes the red mark between the eye-brows if she is married, or the black paste with which the young girl puts a similar mark on the forehead if she is still unmarried.

When the hair is dried after the morning bath, and no bath is considered a bath unless water is poured over the head, the toilet box is taken out and opened, the hair is arranged and the clean *Sari* and jacket put on. The toilet finished, the box is set away and the lady does not look at herself for twenty-four hours. The mirror bought for me measured about nine inches by twelve and Rudra apologized for getting so large a one. It was hung in a far corner of my bedroom. One

morning the sweeper woman happened to catch her reflection in it. She stood transfixed. It was the first time she had ever seen herself in a mirror. She was too poor to possess a toilet box. After that she would give a few strokes with her broom, then run to have another look; then again sweep, then look. Her face was a revelation to her. She did not know that I was on the verandah outside watching her.

Indo-Aryan tradition gives great freedom to women. The *Purdah* system has no place in it. That sprang up in India as a reflex of Mohammedan domination, which preceded British rule. The Mohammedan did not understand feminine liberty and wherever he prevailed it became necessary to veil the women and withdraw them from public gaze. In Bengal, where Mohammedan influence was strong, even to-day ladies do not go into the street except in palanquin or carriage. In Madras where the Mohammedan influence has always been negligible, ladies go about freely, even at nightfall, sometimes followed by a servant, more often alone and with face and head uncovered.

There are, none the less, certain conservative restrictions about their coming and going. A gentleman must not greet a lady in the street or even look towards her, much less stop to talk with her; it matters not how close a friend of the family he may be. Young married girls who have not yet gone to live in their husband's house are ex-



empt from this restriction. I recall one evening when I was walking with a householder friend of the monastery; we passed a house where he was very intimately connected and he called a kindly greeting to a young girl standing on the steps. She made no response and he said to me quickly: "I forgot, she has joined her husband; I should not have spoken to her."

The mother is the ruling spirit of the house. She holds the key to the strong box and dispenses the money and family treasure. She directs the course of life of the various members of the household and she has sometimes twenty-five or thirty to look after. She regards it as her special privilege to serve them all before she thinks of herself. By choice she sees that every one is fed before she will eat. She does this to be sure that should an unexpected guest or a beggar come to the door, there will be food for them. It is told of Sri Ramakrishna's mother that when they were so poor that they had only one meal a day, often she gave that to a chance visitor or mendicant and joyfully went the twenty-four hours without food.

Unselfishness is a living, ever-present quality in the Indian woman's heart; a natural, spontaneous attribute of her character. She does not come last because she is put last, but because she covets the place. Many of the usages that are misunderstood by the Occidental world are based on a desire to honor, protect or cherish woman—not to



subordinate or dishonor her. Take the custom of the wife walking behind the husband: it arose in the days when to go abroad meant facing many dangers and the first place was a place of peril, the second was a place of protection. With that idea behind it, it has come down the ages.

When a custom is imbedded in the Indo-Aryan social structure, it is extremely difficult to uproot it, for the Indo-Aryans are tenacious of tradition. I do not discuss the problem of the widow, as her position is in a state of transition; old conditions are breaking down and I feel confident that a new order will be established for her in the social readjustment now in progress. She will become, I believe, the teacher and helper and reformer of modern Indian society.

Indian women possess unusual executive ability. Indo-Aryan annals contain the record of able rulers and administrators among them. One salient instance is known to me. It is that of Rani Rashmani, who lived in the last century and built the Temple on the Ganges where Sri Ramakrishna spent the larger part of his life. She sprang from a humble station and had little schooling, but she managed a large property with great efficiency and even had the courage to oppose the Government in a controversy over some land. She not only defended her rights with fearless determination, but she carried the dispute to the Court, pleaded her own case and won it.

There have been notable spiritual teachers also among the women of India. They are declared to be the authors even of some of the Vedic Scriptures. Sri Ramakrishna's first teacher after his initiation was a woman. I was told by one who was very close to him that she remained with him for eleven years, then went away one day suddenly. She could recite by heart in Sanskrit one hundred thousand lines of Aryan Sacred Writings and was possessed of astounding Scriptural learning. She seemed to have acquaintance with all the religious literature of the Aryans and could tell just where even unfamiliar injunctions were to be found.

I knew a simple-hearted mother in Madras to whom the gift of verse came while I was in India. She had always busied herself quietly about her household duties and was an unassuming gentle person without any claim to scholarship, but she was naturally devout and her "fancy work" consisted in decorating holy pictures. One day when she was working on one, a hymn to the Supreme Lord burst from her lips. This was followed by another and still another. They continued to come as long as I was in Madras. As they poured forth she wrote them down. They were in Tamil so I could not judge of their merit, but I was told by an authority in literary matters, that they were remarkable for purity of form and chaste, rhythmic beauty of language.

There have been various gifted poets among

the women of modern India, but the Indian woman is primarily a mother and guardian of the sanctity of the home. The home in India is sacred and inviolable. I had daily evidence of this. My house stood on the edge of a large cocoanut palm grove and every day a man came to tap the trees to make a drink of the sap. I was an object of curiosity—a foreigner and a woman in the midst of an Indian community. As he climbed the tall straight palm trunks it would have seemed justifiable for him to cast a glance into my windows, but always he climbed with his back to the house and never once did he look towards it.

In striking contrast to this toddy-drawer, was a hill-tribe boy who became devoted to me at the Bangalore hospital when I was ill with fever. I was an anomaly to him and every now and then I would look up and find him sitting on the broad gutter outside my window peering in to see what strange thing I might be doing. The nurse had to resort to drastic threats to break him of this habit of watching me.

House-keeping is much easier in India than in the Occident. With fewer household appointments, less accumulation, less furniture and a simpler form of dress, there is less to care for. There is also less to provide in the way of implements. Tools of trade are manufactured on the spot and from materials at hand. The ingenuity of the Indian workman in this regard far outclasses

the inventive power of the Occidental, who first makes a machine to make the tool, then manufactures his tool. This machine requires several other machines to make its parts, so he is caught in a mechanical labyrinth.

The Indian laborer keeps wisely to simpler ways. If he needs a scrubbing brush, he creates one out of the coarse brown fibre of the ripe coconut. When he has finished with it he throws it away and there is no soggy brush propped up to dry in untoward places. Does he want a feather duster? He slits a palm leaf into fringe, winds it round a bamboo pole, long or short as the need may be. For broom his arm serves as handle and between thumb and first finger he flattens a bunch of broom straws from the jungle, a dozen bunches of which he can buy for a few cents from a peddler at the door. His dustpan is made of platted dried palm leaf stretched on a split bamboo frame and great is the skill of the sweeper in jumping the dust over the thick edge.

If the working man or woman requires a disinfectant, he mixes a little cow dung with water and has a perfect one. Anglo-Indian doctors declare there is no better. If he is too poor to buy fuel, he rolls more cow dung in the dust of the road to make it pleasanter to handle, mixes it with rice straw and water, shapes it into flat cakes, bakes it in the sun and he has an effective peet. Some was used one day to heat the water for my bath

and I asked my *Ayah* why she had been burning incense. The smoke from the fire gave off a delightful fragrance. But there is nothing surprising in this, for it is known that much of Japanese and Chinese incense is made from camel's dung.

I could cite countless instances of the Indian laborer's ready power of adaptability and his skill in simplifying, instead of complicating daily living; but these few examples suffice. His method also makes for better sanitation, since no article employed in cleaning is used a second time. Even his way of caring for his teeth is more sanitary. He takes a fresh twig from special trees, softens the end of it and carefully rubs each tooth, after which he rinses his mouth and throws away the stick.

He also washes mouth and hands thoroughly after eating. There are none of the careless habits of the quick lunch counter about his way of doing. Once in Madras a conductor requested all the passengers not to take his car but to get into the open car in front, because he had eaten his luncheon, there was no water near to wash his hands and he could not think of giving change with unwashed hands. He explained that at the junction a mile away there was water, then we could move into the cooler car.

Among the poor the family goes with the mother. The children follow her to work and wait near by while she performs her task. I used to see

a sturdy young woman helping on the construction of a new road at Madras. As she moved back and forth, four little ones sat by the roadside watching or playing together and a fifth hung from an over-spreading branch in a hammock, made of a piece of cotton cloth. When the lunch hour came she gathered her happy brood about her, fed them, suckled the baby, hung it up again in its improvised hammock and went back to her work. Although she carried a small basket of broken rock on her head, she seemed to me better off than many saleswomen in Western shops, shut away from light and air and children in bargain basements.

Although house-keeping is simpler in India, the Indian housewife has not fewer duties. She takes many upon herself out of devotion and a feeling of consecration. In homes where there are ample resources and servants the mother still prepares the daily meals by preference. She realizes the physical and spiritual value of food cooked with love and a sense of sanctity and does not wish to deprive her family of this advantage. Indian women have a remarkable gift for cooking and cooking is for them almost a religion. As the food prepared is nearly always offered in the Shrine before it is eaten, its preparation becomes an actual part of the daily worship. In homes where a cook is employed, the ladies of the house frequently keep as their task the paring and cutting of the vegetables for the curry.





A YOUNG GIRL OF BENGAL





## THE INDIAN WOMAN AND THE INDIAN HOME

The care of the household Sanctuary also is claimed as the mother's privilege. She cleans it, polishes the vessels used in the worship and often conducts the Service. Sometimes the younger members of the family help her. The order of the day in a Madras home is this. Every one is up by six or before. While the women are busy with their house or with the children, the gentlemen see clients, transact business, visit the sick or teach the little ones. Next comes the bath, which is taken by rubbing the body first with soap or a cleansing earth, then pouring water over head and body until earth or soap is rinsed off. The Indian says if you get into a tub of water dirty, the water is no longer clean; how can you get clean by washing in it?

After the bath comes meditation or worship or a pilgrimage to the Temple. Then follows the main meal of the day and when this is over the men of the family go to their office or business. Government offices open at eleven. At one or two o'clock many take *Tiffin*, a light luncheon usually brought from the home by servants. The restaurant habit is alien to Indian traditions of purity and cleanliness. When the office closes at five, the men on their way home go to a *Math* or a holy man for an hour of spiritual refreshment and ladies go to the Temple. Evening worship and a late meal close the routine of the day.

The South Indian home is the centre of multi-

furious activities. Is a harness needed? The gentleman of the house buys leather and the necessary hardware, a saddler is called from his village and in some quiet corner on the premises builds a new harness. Or a weaver comes from the village and on the verandah of the house takes the order for *Saris* and *Dhotis* enough to provide every member of the family with wearing apparel for a whole year. A tailor sits with his sewing machine at one end of the verandah making an official pongee or cloth coat for the head of the house, and at the other end may be a jeweller cross-legged on the floor before a minute anvil.

The Indians are very wary of banks, they have lost so much money through them. They feel safer to convert money into jewelry and make their women their safe deposit boxes. The family next to me inherited some money and for several months a jeweller sat on their front verandah and the ring of the little steel hammer on the anvil sounded through the air from sunrise to sunset. Each morning the gold was weighed and the gems counted when given out; each evening gold and gems were weighed or counted again, then locked up in the strong box for the night.

I had personal experience of Indian home industry. When Swami Brahmananda was coming to Madras, we wished to have made for him a comfort to lie on. I offered a lower room in my house for the work. We went to the city and

bought a number of pounds of silk cotton and some material. The next morning a Mohammedan came and set up a large flail in the room. All day long the sound of the beat of the bamboo rod against the wall sounded through the house and the air was full of a fine fluff which forced its way through closed doors into throat and nostrils. By night I was almost suffocated, but the room down stairs was filled to the ceiling with snowy cotton as soft and light as down. The next day he made the comfort on the lower front verandah and I watched with admiration his deftness in laying the cotton and sewing a pattern to hold it, all without mark or measure. He had trained his eye and hand to do the work instead of training them to use implements to do it.

When we were living in Bangalore a journeyman tinker came to our bungalow to inquire whether we had any brass cooking vessels which needed re-tinning. We had several. At once he laid down his bundle of implements, went to a rose-bed in front of the house and began digging a small round hole. He wet the earth in the hole and beat it gently until it was hard. Then he dug another hole underneath this first one, leaving a thin layer of earth between. This he perforated. Next he inserted the end of his blow-pipe in the under hole, put some charcoal in the upper hole, lighted it and had an efficient forge. He melted his tin, poured it into each vessel and by adroitly turn-

## DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY

ing the vessel made an even, smooth surface of tin over the interior. He charged a mere pittance for his labor and went on his way contented.

There may be little regularity or system in the Indian household, but the rough places which ordinarily come from this lack are made smooth by sweetness and loving-kindness. Gentleness and a quiet withdrawal of self characterize the Indian home and spontaneous self-sacrifice stands as its foundation. It is these glorifying qualities which make possible the community spirit which holds together under one roof father, sons and grandsons, with their wives and children. This patriarchal system has weakened in new India but the tradition which sustains it is not dead and will not die so long as Indian women continue to possess the noble selfless nature that has always been theirs.

## XIV

### A WOMAN SAINT OF INDIA

My journey to Calcutta was in the nature of a pilgrimage. Not far away on the edge of the Ganges stood the Temple where Sri Ramakrishna had worshipped and taught; on the opposite bank of the river lower down was the Head Monastery of the Order; and more than all else there lived in a modest house in the Baghbazar district one of the greatest saints of the present time. Her name was Saradamani Devi, but she was familiarly known as Holy Mother or *Mata Devi* (Goddess Mother). It was to be with her that I was going on pilgrimage to Bengal.

A few days after I had reached Madras, I had received this loving greeting from her:—

“My dear Devamata:

I am very glad to hear of your so much devotion to my Lord. You are my daughter. May infinite devotion rise up in your heart—this is my blessing to you. For this I pray to my Lord. May you live long and along with all my other children may you remain merged in bliss eternal. . . . I am doing well.

Your affectionate  
Mother.”

The letter was written in Bengali and translated by Swami Ramakrishnananda.

My pilgrimage was a modern one,—by train, not on unsandalled feet; but I tried to retain the spirit of the older tradition and go with offerings in my hand. To visit the holy, empty-handed, is an offense against Indian spiritual custom. I carried with me bordered handwoven cloths for the older members of the Order—a large bundle wrapped in a new piece of white cotton cloth; a bushel basket full of a rare variety of orange grown only in South India; a large roll of bedding for the train (each passenger takes his own); a small tin trunk, another basket of fruit and some books. My fellow-travellers in the railway compartment looked with scorn at my pilgrim luggage. They had just as much, but it was English luggage and mine was Indian. That made a vast difference.

It was with impatient eagerness that I counted off the forty hours of the journey from Madras to Calcutta. I arrived a little before noon of the second day and was taken by Sister Christine to the Girls' School, where I found a tender expression of Holy Mother's love awaiting me. Holy Mother had prepared a room for me in her own house, on the roof terrace with a glimpse of the Ganges in the near distance over intervening roof tops; but there had been several cases of contagious illness in the house, so it was deemed safer to have me sleep at the school. Sister Nivedita



and Sister Christine gave me most loving, generous care and I was glad to be with them, but I could not suppress a pang of regret that I was not to spend my nights as well as my days close to Holy Mother.

She lived several long blocks away from the school. I was told some one would call for me and take me to her; but I could not wait, so filling a smaller basket with some of the oranges I had brought and gathering up my other offerings I set out to find the way for myself. A strange gentleman seeing me staggering a little under my heavy load told his son to carry it for me and together we walked to Mother's house. It was a new one. She occupied the second floor; offices of the magazine published by the head work were beneath.

I passed hurriedly through the entrance hall and court, climbed a broad stairway, found Holy Mother alone in a room behind the Shrine and laid myself and my offerings at her feet. She repeated my name twice with tender surprise. Then she placed her hand in blessing on my head. At her touch a spring of new life seemed to bubble up from my innermost heart and flood my being.

She led me to the altar in the Shrine and after I had made salutation there I took my seat on the floor, while she lay down to rest near by. A *Sannyasini* (woman mendicant) came in and began to rub her body, a usual mode of loving service in India. As I watched her the question crossed my

mind, would I ever be worthy to serve her thus. Scarcely had the thought been formed before she motioned me to take the *Sannyasini's* place. It was a benediction to pass my hand over her delicate shapely body, but the marble paving grew very hard as I knelt beside her. Again she divined the unspoken thought and made me sit instead of kneel. We had no common tongue, but when there was none to interpret for us, she spoke that deeper wordless language of the heart and we never failed to understand each other.

Mother took me into her daily life at once and gave me the privilege of caring for her rooms. Every morning I came early to her, made her bed and put everything in order. In doing it I observed that the five large French windows opening on the front verandah were blurred with paint and putty. They always stood open and evidently no one had noticed it. One morning I brought with me some clean cloths and a cake of "Monkey Brand" soap, the Indian substitute for "Bon Ami," and gave the panes of glass a good polishing. Mother was overjoyed when she saw them and that day whenever a visitor came she insisted on having a window closed to show how clear and shining the glass was.

At another time some one brought her two choice mangos. She wanted me to take them. I refused, knowing they were the last of the season and that she was very fond of them. "It would

## A WOMAN SAINT OF INDIA

give me greater pleasure to have you keep them," I said. Her response came quickly; it was: "Do you think it will give you greater pleasure to have me keep them or give me greater pleasure to have you take them." This answer sprang spontaneously to my lips and seemed to please her very much: "It must give you greater pleasure because you have a larger heart to feel it."

Unbounded was her tender concern for every living thing. No human measure could contain it. In her letters one catches glimpses of it. I share a few extracts from them, although I do it reluctantly. They seem too intimate to give out, yet I would not deny to others this picture of her thought.

"My sweet daughter:

Your loving letters are duly to hand. Excuse me please not to answer you in time. I always remember you. Whenever I see the place you used to sit and meditate your loving form comes to my mind. All the inmates of this house always speak of you. I am glad to learn in your last letter that Swami Ramakrishnananda is feeling better . . . All well here.

With my blessings,  
Your most affectionate  
Mother."

"My sweet daughter:

Your letter of the 1st of November, I received. I cannot tell you the joy I felt on receiving it. I

have come over here (to Puri) for a change and will stay here for a month or two more. I hope you will write to me every now and then. I am feeling better now. I am glad to learn of the removal of the quarters of the Boston work and the spreading of the Lord's doctrine progressively day by day. I always think of you, my sweet daughter. Hope you are quite well now. With my loving blessings.

Your loving  
Mother."

"My sweet daughter:

I am in due receipt of all your letters. I can't express in words how I like them. The mode of your passing your days is good. I am glad to learn you are growing stout and strong. . . . Be sure, my daughter, that the Lord is with you and taking care of you. I too always remember you. I am starting for my native village on the sixteenth instant. . . All well here. My love and blessings—I am, my sweet daughter,

Your most affectionate  
Mother."

Mother herself never wrote. She always dictated her letters to one of the ladies living with her. Her scribe must have been exceptionally faithful and must have set down everything just as Mother spoke it, for one letter to me came addressed "To my Beloved Devamata." Some one

else somewhere had added the rest of the address. The letter read:

“Baghbazar, Calcutta, India.

My beloved daughter:

Your letter of August 16th received. I was thinking of you when the letter came to me. So you can easily guess how much joy it has given me.

I am glad to go through the part which gives the report of the work there. Please convey my love and blessings to Paramananda and to all the devotees there, both in Washington and Boston. I am more glad to find you well again and doing Thakur's work with earnest zeal. I am indeed very happy to receive this news. I am feeling myself somewhat better now.

Saradananda, Yogin-ma, Golap-ma, Satyakama, Kushum Devi, Gonen, Nivedita and Sudhira are all right. They often speak of you.

With my love and blessings to you,

My beloved daughter

Your affectionate

Mother.”

The two letters which follow also were written me after I had returned to America.

“Sundaravilas, Madras, India.

My sweet daughter:

I am glad to receive your letters dated Jan. 17 and Feb. 9. The report of the works of both Wash-

## DAYS IN AN INDIAN MONASTERY

ington and Boston is interesting to me and I like to hear more in future. . . .

I was at Kothar for nearly two months and have come over here. Now I am residing in the same house in which you lived. I am here since a month and a half. Meanwhile I went to visit Rameshwaram and stayed there for four days. The family of Balaram Babu is here with me. All are doing well here except a lady of the same family who is suffering from enteric fever. As soon as she gets cured we will start for Calcutta. To-morrow I will have to go to Bangalore and will spend there a day or two. Thence I will come back here.

Swami Ramakrishnananda is somewhat better now. All the other Swamis are well. . . .

My blessings to you and to Swami Paramananda and to all the devotees both in Washington and Boston. I am

Your affectionate  
Mother."

"Joyrambat Village, Hughli Dt.  
Devamata, my beloved child:

It is with much pleasure that I acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated the 11th of July. Sriman Paramananda has not as yet reached India. I have become very happy to see you improved in health. Yogin-ma, Golap-ma and all others are well. I am well at present. I hope you are all right there. . . .

## A WOMAN SAINT OF INDIA

It is with much regret that I inform you of the irreparable loss that I have sustained at the expiry of my beloved son Sasi (Ramakrishnananda of Madras *Math*) who left this world on August last.

My blessings to you all.

Your most affectionate

Mother."

Innumerable were the devotees who gathered at Holy Mother's feet to crave her blessing and learn of her. She herself told me that when she was in her village she would be wakened frequently at two or three o'clock in the morning by eager pilgrims, who not daring to cross the long stretch of unshaded fields under the scorching heat of the sun, made the journey after nightfall, thus arriving very late. Most often they were personally unknown to her; but always it was her custom to rise, prepare food for them with her own hands and then send them to rest in the Guest House, built by a village disciple for the use of her devotees.

Also in Calcutta nearly every day brought some group of devout pilgrims to pay her homage. It mattered not whence they came. Geographical boundaries, caste or creed, did not exist for her. The same tender welcome awaited all who sought her, whether from East or West. All alike were her children. Hers was an all-embracing mother heart which wrapped itself in love about every



child born of woman, and her family was the human race.

At an early age she was married to the great spiritual light, Sri Ramakrishna. In reality, however, it was only a betrothal; and, the various solemn marriage rites ended, she continued to live in her village with her parents; while her husband, many years her senior, returned to his priestly duties at the Temple of Dakshineswar. Years went by. A passion of God-longing had swept over the husband's soul, bringing the peace of highest illumination, but leaving him purged of all human impulses.

Vague rumors had reached the remote Bengali village and warned the young wife of the peculiar widowhood which must be hers. With the unquestioning loyalty of the Indian wife, however, she waited; then the yearning to see and know for herself led her to set out on foot and travel the many miles to the Temple on the Ganges above Calcutta. Sri Ramakrishna received her like a troubled child, saying as he saluted her: "I see only Divine Mother in every woman's form, how can I look upon you as my wife?" Her answer came quickly. "I ask nothing of you," she said, "I have come only to serve and learn."

Sri Ramakrishna's earthly mother was living at that time in the small Concert House in the Temple garden. She was very old and Sarada Devi was given the task of caring for her. Her chief

duty was to prepare the daily meals, which often the devoted son shared with his mother. These were happy days, but the pall of death fell over them. The mother's life, a century long, came to an end and Sarada Devi was left alone.

In the upper room of the Concert House the Temple musicians marked off the hours of worship, but an oppressive stillness reigned in the room beneath. The verandah of the lower floor where Mother lived was hung round with curtains of platted palm leaves reaching above the height of the head. Only one small opening gave her a view of the garden and there she stood through long hours of the day and far into the night, hoping to catch just one glimpse of the Master's face; but all in vain. Even when he passed at midnight to meditate under the banyan tree beyond, he would draw his shawl about his head. In telling us of it, she added: "It was of course a test."

As time went on, other Bengali ladies joined her and her little room was often full of joyous devotees eager to be near the Master. Disciples also gathered about him and she saw her spiritual family growing. Once Sri Ramakrishna said to her: "When one has children, they are often bad or disobedient and give much trouble; but these children whom I have brought to you are pure and good and will never cause you trouble."

She never wearied of preparing the daily food, it mattered not how many mouths there were to

feed. Now and then, too, her skill was taxed to the utmost. One evening some distinguished gentlemen came to Sri Ramakrishna. Her store of green things was exhausted. She had nothing left for curry but a few cast-off leaves of cabbage and some bits of vegetables not deemed good enough for the earlier meal. She was in deep perplexity, but Gopal-ma assured her she could make a delicious dish out of these remnants. "Very well," Mother replied, "I will try. If it succeeds, all the merit will go to you. If it fails, the blame will be yours also." She cooked it quickly and carried it to the Temple. Sri Ramakrishna asked in surprise where she had found materials for so wonderful a curry; but she could not take his praise or blessing—they belonged to Gopal-ma.

She was not always at the Temple. In all she lived there fifteen years, but not consecutively. There were long intervals when she remained in her village. Then Mathura Babu, the son-in-law of Rani Rashmani, the devout widow who had built the Temple, would say to Sri Ramakrishna: "Bhagavan, you are not eating well, why do you not have Mother come and cook for you?" And she would return with happy heart to her open hearth on the verandah of the Concert House.

It was her privilege in those later days not only to prepare the Master's meal, but to carry it to him and sometimes to sit by him while he ate. Yet she never lost her first girlish shyness and always

kept her face veiled in his presence. She told us of one evening however, when she had gone to serve him with another Brahmin lady and he had talked of God through the whole night, unmindful of the hour. "When dawn broke," Mother added, "I found myself standing before him with my veil thrown entirely back from my face, lost in the wonder of his words. The daylight recalled me to myself. I quickly drew my veil and ran to the Concert House."

Her life there was of the simplest. She rose at three or four to take her bath in the Ganges before any one was astir, and the silent hours before day-break were devoted to God-communion. Some one had once said to me, "Mother never meditates," but I knew this could not be; and one day when we were talking together, she admitted in a half whisper that between four and six in the morning was her special time for meditation. The Indian woman will speak openly of all she does except of the hours she gives to God. This she guards as a holy secret.

Preparing the Master's meals and caring for the devotees who came in ever-multiplying numbers to the Temple filled her days. How her nights were spent, in part at least, is shown by the story of a devotee, whose faith in the Master's austerity of life had wavered for a moment. Listening to the idle gossip of a maid-servant, a suspicion had entered his mind and he hid himself in the Temple

garden to keep watch. It was bright moonlight and just at midnight Sri Ramakrishna's door opened and he saw the Master walk quickly towards the Concert House—then on down to the banyan tree beyond, where he seated himself in his accustomed place for meditation. Overwhelmed by a sense of his own unworthiness, the disciple ran and threw himself weeping at the Master's feet, confessing his foolish doubt. The Master only smiled gently and said: "Of what use to go to Mother? She is not in this world just now. Her soul is far above it. Did you not see her, as you passed, sitting on the upper verandah rapt in deep meditation?"

She had no wants. Among Sri Ramakrishna's followers were many merchants who in August and September would bring him great quantities of rice, pulses and other stores. One day one of them came with ten thousand Rupees (three thousand dollars) sewed up in a pillow. "I do not want them," Sri Ramakrishna said to him. "What should I do with them? Take them to Mother." And Mother continued: "He brought the money to me and Thakur (the Master) came with him. As if to test me, he said: 'Why not take it and buy jewels and ornaments which you have never had?' 'But what should I do with jewels and ornaments? I do not want them,' I replied. And the man had to take his money away."

At another time it had been thought best that

Mother should live where she would have more light and air than in the curtained shade of the Concert House verandah, so a devotee made her an offering of two whole trees. The long heavy logs were towed up the river and Mother instructed Hridaya, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, to tie them firmly to the Temple bank. But he tied only the outer one and in the night the tide floated the inner one out into midstream. Great was the excitement in the morning, for the trees had cost five hundred Rupees. Hridaya began to reproach Mother, saying that it was her lack of faith which had caused all the trouble; but Sri Ramakrishna rebuked him sharply and sent him to bring back the straying log. Both logs were sawed up then and a little house was built for Mother in the village adjoining the Temple garden.

At the time when I came to Holy Mother these days were long gone by. The Temple at Dakshineswar had become a place of pilgrimage, where ardent followers came to catch the lingering fragrance of the Master's presence. Mother was living in a new dwelling in Calcutta given her by devoted followers of Sri Ramakrishna. She occupied the upper floor with the few women disciples who were always with her.

She lived as they did, performing the same homely tasks, making no effort to differentiate herself from others save by greater modesty, greater gentleness and humility. I remember one day



seeing her bow in deepest reverence before a rustic Brahmin who had come to see her, because he chanced to be a village *Guru* or spiritual teacher. By her outward manner she was the most obscure of all the household, yet beneath the veil of simplicity which enveloped her there was a lofty majesty of bearing which caught the heart and bowed it in prayerful homage at her feet. The human covering was too thin to hide the radiance of divine consciousness beneath. She never taught, seldom ever counselled. She merely lived. And who can tell how many lives were cleansed and exalted by that holy living?

Across the front of the second story where she spent her days, there ran one large room. This was the meeting place of the household. At one end was the Shrine; but there was no need of a dividing line, because there was none in the lives of those who sat in that upper chamber. The Lord was their accustomed Companion, and it was natural to them to pass all the hours of day and night at His Feet. From early morning devotees came and went. As they entered, they would bow before the Shrine and lay their offering of fruit or flowers beside the altar; then they would salute Holy Mother and at her bidding take a seat near by. There were certain young men who never began the day without coming for her blessing; and she was especially tender towards these, because she had known them since they were little babies in her arms.



A gentle cheerfulness there was about her always, and a lurking sense of humor which made it possible to talk to her of anything. The smallest concern was of interest to her and she could lose herself in childish play with as much zest as the little niece of eight, Radhu by name, who lived with her. I can still see her keen amusement over a jack-in-the-box which I brought the little niece from an English shop. Each time it sprang out with the familiar squeak, she would repeat the sound, laughing heartily.

Another day when I came in, I found her engaged in stringing little glass beads and Radhu explained: "My Baby Krishna had no jewels as the images in the Temples have." There was no mockery of play in Mother's manner. Even this little toy was a sacred symbol of Divinity, and she decked it with the same grave devotion as a devout nun might dress the Baby Jesus for a Christmas *Creche*.

Holy Mother has gone from us, but her spirit still upholds us in brooding protection. A short time before her going came this last letter from her:

"My sweet daughter:

My blessings be on your head. After a long time I have received a letter from you. Sriman Basanta (Swami Paramananda) and you are keeping well, hearing this I am very happy. You are my

daughter, you are also my mother because you have prayed for my welfare to the Lord. Give my blessings to Sriman Basanta and for you also my blessings—my blessings to all. What grief I have suffered due to the passing out of Baburam (Swami Premananda) I cannot convey in a letter. I am happy to know that Basanta's work is going on so well. I am sorry to hear because of much pressure of work he cannot come here. I hope he will try to come when it is again possible. Convey my blessings to all the people who live at the *Math*. May the Lord make you all His true children is my prayer. Write to me about your own welfare. Write me.

From the one who blesses you  
Mata Thakurani."

Those who had the rare blessing of living with Holy Mother learned that religion was a sweet, natural, joyous thing; that purity and holiness were tangible realities; that the odor of sanctity was literally a sweet perfume overlaying and destroying the foulness of material selfishness. Compassion, devotion, God-union were her very nature; one scarcely knew that she possessed them. It was through the soothing benediction of a word or touch that one sensed their presence.

Such lives are like a lake or river. The sun may draw up its waters, but they fall again to refresh the earth. So these saintly ones in body may

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be lifted from our sight, but their holy influence falls back upon us to revive our fainting hearts and give us new spiritual life, new strength of purpose.

## XV

### THE PRESENCE IN THE TEMPLE ON THE GANGES

On the bank of the Ganges six miles above Calcutta there stands a Temple dedicated to the Divine Mother of the universe. Twelve Shrines to the third person of the Vedic Trinity border the river, broken into two groups of six by a high-pillared porch or *Mandapam*. These Shrines are closed on the outer side and open inside on a vast court, at the rear centre of which, opposite the *Mandapam*, towers the Temple to the Mother. In the upper front corner of the enclosure is a room of specially hallowed association. Through the end door of this room one passes under trees to the Concert House not far away, where on the upper verandah at certain hours of the day musicians play their praises to the Lord.

Beyond is a sacred Temple in the open, made up of a great banyan interlaced with four other banyans and called for that reason *Panchabati*, the place of five trees. A bricked platform in several levels surrounds the banyan and over one special spot a huge branch has bent down and set it apart as a holy place. A few feet away is a small hut also set apart and sanctified. Farther on in the



BANYAN TREE WHERE SRI RAMAKRISHNA ATTAINED ILLUMINATION.  
TO THE RIGHT WHERE THE BRANCH BENDS DOWN IS WHERE HE SAT.



## THE PRESENCE IN THE TEMPLE ON THE GANGES

heart of a small jungle stands a Bel tree with a cement seat built about it.

From the edge of the water rises a strong rampart to protect against ebb and flow, for the Ganges is a tidal river; and from the *Mandapam* broad steps lead down into the water. Between the wall and the Temple runs a garden where gardenias and other flowering shrubs lift their blossoms as petal-elled censers, from which stream forth unseen clouds of sweet perfume. Wide-spreading trees cast dense shadows on paths and Temple pools; birds sing in the branches, mingling their twittering notes with the slow chant of devotees; devout pilgrims mount the steps to lay themselves prostrate in the porch; and over all there floats a Holy Presence. It permeates like a lingering fragrance, enveloping worship and worshippers with the peace of a benediction. One seems to breathe it in with the perfumed air of the garden and as one catches its evasive sweetness, it lends new reality to the Mother Love imaged in the Temple, to the transforming power of the Great God enthroned in the twelve Shrines on the river bank.

This Holy Presence when it wore a form was called Sri Ramakrishna. He came to the Temple as a youth and for a while served there as priest. But as he worshipped rose within him a haunting doubt:—Was the Mother merely the moulded form before him or a living Mother with tender heart and protecting arms? His torment grew from day



to day and with it grew his yearning and his fervor. Sometimes in fever of questioning or in ardor of ecstasy he would forget to worship or he would wave the burning camphor all day before the image. At last other Brahmins of the Temple took the Service from him and tried to send him away, declaring him to be mad; but the Temple's founder, Rani Rashmani, and her son-in-law, Mathura Babu, insisted that it was a holy madness and he must stay, worshipping when and as he chose.

He took his seat under the banyan tree, there where now the branch bends down to cover it, and for twelve years he scarcely ate or slept, so anguished and unremitting was his search for the Ultimate Reality. Now and then his nephew would pour a little milk into his mouth and strike him across the shoulders to make him swallow. Or the ringing of the Temple bell at the evening hour would call him back to earth and he would beat his brow against the ground and cry out: "Mother, another day is gone and Thou hast not revealed Thyself to me."

Then came the hour of attainment. His search was ended. The Great Mother took pulsing form and stood before him. No cry of triumph burst from his lips, no claim to proud achievement; but only the simple words a little one might utter, at peace after a storm of tears. He said: "Mother I am only a little child. I can not care for myself. Who will take care of me?"

## THE PRESENCE IN THE TEMPLE ON THE GANGES

Having been lifted to the heights, he put himself in the lowest place. Divine Mother became all and he nothing. He rarely used the first personal pronoun after that. He would say pointing to himself: "Come here. Mother will help you." or "My Divine Mother says"—then he would give his teaching. The disciple who bears his name once said to me: "Never forget that Ramakrishna was always a little boy of four or five with his Mother by his side."

With the coming of vision, Sri Ramakrishna's labors were not over. Though in his humility he seemed unaware of it, he was nevertheless the prophet of the Universal Spirit and as such he must relate his vision to all forms of faith, to every phase of religious expression. Above all he must organize and coördinate his own inward powers. This required arduous spiritual practice, which in turn called for solitude and retirement. The small hut beneath the banyan tree was built to meet this need.

The way of its building was like a miracle. A true child, Sri Ramakrishna asked his Divine Mother for everything, so he prayed to Her to provide a quiet spot for his practice. One day the river washed ashore a bundle of poles and timbers, tied with stout cord, with a sharp knife struck through it—everything necessary for the construction of the little house. The Mother had heard.

The seclusion still was not deep enough and

one morning Sri Ramakrishna disappeared altogether. Holy Mother, Lakididi, his niece, and another devotee went to the banyan tree to find him, but he was gone. They searched for him everywhere—in the garden, by the Temple pools, in his room, in the Temple, in the hut. At last Holy Mother concluded that he had gone into *Samadhi* (deep meditation) on the Ganges side and had fallen into the water. They all began to weep bitterly. It so happened that a cow went astray that day and the gardener, unable to find it, plunged into the thorny undergrowth of the jungle in the corner of the Temple compound. There near the boundary wall under a Bel tree he saw Sri Ramakrishna sitting in *Samadhi*, wholly unconscious of the grief he was causing.

The Master explained afterwards that as he sat under the banyan tree, he was so disturbed by the many women who on their way to their bath in the Ganges stopped to prostrate before him and beg him to bless them with a child or some worldly advantage, he determined to seek out a more inaccessible retreat and had found the Bel tree. As he pushed his way through the thick brambles, his feet must have been scratched and torn; for when we went to the tree along a partial clearing, our feet, bared in reverence, were sore and bleeding. This incident was related to me by the niece, Lakididi.

She also told me this story. "One day," she said, "I went with Mother to carry Thakur (Sri

Ramakrishna) his food. Rakhal, and others who were with him, at once left the room, leaving us alone there. Thakur was lying on his bed in *Samadhi*, but he looked so devoid of life that Mother, having long been anxious for his health, began to weep thinking he had left the body. Then she remembered that he had once said to her that if she ever found him in this state she was just to touch his feet and that would bring him back; so she began to rub his feet. Rakhal and the others hearing the weeping had also hurried back into the room and they too began to rub him vigorously.

“This brought him back to consciousness, and opening his eyes he asked with surprise what was the matter. Then realizing their fears, he smiled and said: ‘I was in the land of the white people. Their skin is white, their hearts are white and they are simple and sincere. It is a very beautiful country. I think I shall go there.’ ‘But you will get very hungry if you go there,’ Mother replied with anxious solicitude. Then Thakur struck his forehead with his hand two or three times and said to Mother: ‘Oh! you are so foolish, you do not know anything.’”

When Sri Ramakrishna's intensive *Sadhanas* or spiritual practices were ended, people began to come in great numbers to the Temple. No one knew whence they came or how they divined an illumined soul was living there; but when the lotus

opens, the bees do not have to be asked to come; they come of their own accord, are the Master's own words. Swami Ramakrishnananda told me that these visitors seemed to fall into groups—at one time the followers of Lord Gouranga; at another, worshippers of Siva or members of some other sect. Sri Ramakrishna would foretell their coming and ask Mathura Babu to stock the Temple storehouse with the food and drink peculiar to their special religious bias.

Some one asked the disciple, Swami Ramakrishnananda, when his Master had begun to teach. Swami Ramakrishnananda's answer was: "He was teaching from his very birth. His entire life was one long lesson." Then he added: "It was characteristic of him that he used the simplest language such as a child could understand, yet into that simple language he put thoughts that only a great sage could think out."

"People would come to him and ask him to initiate them into the spiritual life and he would say, 'My dear sir you are not meant to be a *Sadhu*. You would better get a position and take care of your family.' He was able to tell at a glance what a man was fit for. A disciple told me that when one day some one asked Sri Ramakrishna how he knew so clearly what was in others' minds, he replied: 'When you look through a window, you see everything in the room, do you not? So when I look into the eyes I see all that is behind.'"

That even at a distance he could sense the feelings of the heart is shown by the following incident related to me by Navagopal's widow:—

“One Sunday we were all at Dakshineswar. A poor woman came bringing four *Rashagollas* (a sweetmeat made of sugar and cream cheese) for the Master, but his room was so full of devotees that she dared not enter and offer them to him. She came over to Mother's verandah and began to weep bitterly that she had come so far and now she must go away without seeing the Master. We knew too that to bring even these four *Rashagollas* meant a great sacrifice for her. Suddenly while she was thus weeping Gurumaharaj (Sri Ramakrishna) appeared on the round verandah overlooking the river. He stood for a few minutes gazing at the Ganges, then he came down the steps and walked quickly towards Mother's house. When he entered the verandah, he looked hither and thither as if searching for some one. Then seeing the poor woman, he went to her and said: ‘I am feeling very hungry, can you give me something to eat?’ The woman in great joy offered him her *Rashagollas*. He ate all the four with evident relish and returned to his room, while she went home with her heart full of happiness.”

Even dumb beasts found tender shelter with him. “Once a cat took refuge in Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar with her three little kittens,” Navagopal's widow told me at another time. “The



mother-cat would sometimes sleep on his bed near his feet and if he reached down and touched her with his hand at once she would get up and seem almost to make *Pranam* (bow before him). It troubled the Master much to know what to do with the cat and her kittens, for he felt that they did not get proper food at the Temple; so one day when I came to see him, he asked me: 'Will you do something for me?' I clasped my hands before him and said: 'Whatever it is, that I must do.' But again he asked and I replied as before. Then he told me of the cats and asked me to take them. 'Remember,' he said, 'that they have taken refuge with me, so see that they get the best of care.'

"I took them home and whenever I went to the Temple he would question me in every detail about the cats:—Were they getting proper food? Had the kittens grown? What did I mean to do with them? He was much concerned lest I might give them away to some one who would not treat them kindly and again he would remind me: 'Remember they took refuge with me.' The mother-cat never had another family. At the end of a year she was suddenly taken ill and died. As she was dying I poured Ganges water into her mouth and repeated Gurumaharaj's name."

Although visitors were coming constantly to the Temple, Sri Ramakrishna did not attain prominence until the close of his life. It was within the last ten years of it that nearly all those who have



played the most important part in his work came to him. The leader of the Brahmo-Samaj, Keshab Chunder Sen, was among the first to proclaim him at Calcutta. Swami Ramakrishnananda gave me this account of their meeting:—

“It was really Keshab Chunder Sen who may be said to have revealed Gurumaharaj and made him known to the world. At that time Keshab was the most prominent figure in Calcutta. His church was always crowded and many young men were his ardent admirers. It was indeed impossible not to be moved by him. When he stood in his church, dressed in his white robe, and talked with God, the tears streaming down his face, there was not a dry eye in the whole congregation. He was a really great soul and a true devotee. Gurumaharaj had heard of him, and learning that he was stopping in a garden not far from Dakshineswar, he expressed a desire to go to see him.

“When he entered, Keshab was sitting in meditation surrounded by a number of his disciples. These half-Europeanized youths looked scornfully at the plainly clad *Sadhu* and when, as soon as Keshab opened his eyes, the visitor said: ‘I see that your tail has dropped off,’ they all began to laugh aloud believing the stranger to be mad. Keshab checked them. Then Gurumaharaj apparently unmindful of the rudeness of the boys explained: ‘You see, when a tadpole is young and has a tail, it can live only in the water; but when its tail drops

off, it can live both in water and on land. So I see you can live both in the world and in God.' Then Keshab turned to his disciples and said: 'You see what words of wisdom this holy man speaks' and they were all abashed."

We must not imagine from this incident that Sri Ramakrishna gave the impression that he was eccentric or unbalanced. One day some one asked Swami Ramakrishnananda if his Master appeared mad. The disciple's answer was quick and emphatic. "Not at all," he said. "Sri Ramakrishna was most careful in his speech and manner. Compared to him we are all boors. When do we call a man mad? When there is incoherence in his thought and words, or when he behaves differently from others; but neither of these was true of Sri Ramakrishna. He was always most courteous and every word he uttered was full of wisdom. Even when he would sit and talk to his Divine Mother people could not possibly have taken him to be mad. For what was he doing? He was shaping the lives of those who sat there before him awe-struck by his words. He was satisfying the needs of each of those hearts and lifting their burdens.

"He had such wonderful power. Every time you went to see him you felt as if a great load had been taken off your back and off your mind. Whatever doubt you had in your mind was sure to be cleared, without putting any question. Yet he was

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always simple and humble in his manner towards every one and ready to learn even from a baby.

“The first time any one went to him, he would ask the visitor a question which was always on the subject about which he knew most. The person would begin at once to talk eloquently, as if he were teaching Gurumaharaj, who would listen most intently. The man would talk on confidently, but he was sure to commit some blunder; then Gurumaharaj would check him gently and point out his error with so much wisdom that the man would hear in wonder, suddenly realizing that this man to whom he was talking so freely was in reality a great sage, and never again did he venture to speak in his presence.

“This happened to me. I was oldest of the group of fifteen or twenty boys who came all together to Gurumaharaj. He asked me whether I believed in a formless or a formful God, and I began talking very glibly about whether there was a God at all. But it was the last time I ever talked before him.”

Swami Ramakrishnananda went to the Temple and saw Sri Ramakrishna for the first time about a year or a year and a half after Swami Vivekananda. Swami Brahmananda was the first to join the Master, then Swami Vivekananda and one by one the other disciples followed. Nearly all of them had had some contact with the Brahmo-Samaj and had heard its leader speak of the great sage at the Temple of Dakshineswar. In telling me of this,

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Swami Ramakrishnananda said: "We none of us came to Sri Ramakrishna through Keshab directly; but we all had intense admiration for Keshab, so we thought: 'If Keshab Chunder Sen whom we regard as so great pays such great reverence to this man, he too must be very great indeed.' So we all went to see him."

All the disciples were still at a malleable age, in their "teens" or early twenties—two were scarcely sixteen—and the Master played with them as if they were little children. He was very fun-loving and was discovered near the *Panchabati* one day by a visitor having a game of leap-frog with his boys. Sometimes he would send them into peals of laughter by his mimicry. Then again he would be grave and wake them long before the dawn and make them sit in meditation on the mats on which they had been sleeping. Again at the evening hour he would tell them to go to the banyan tree and meditate.

Whether grave or playful, always an atmosphere of blissfulness enveloped him and radiated from him. He declared frequently that he would have nothing to do with a religion that had not a laugh in it. To him there was no greater offense than a gloomy face. Sadness was selfishness. The children of the All-blissful Mother of the universe must be gay and blissful.

Sri Ramakrishna did not spend the closing days of his life at Dakshineswar. He passed away in

## THE PRESENCE IN THE TEMPLE ON THE GANGES

Calcutta, but his Spirit has never left the Temple. His voice still sounds through the silence of the Temple close, his unseen Presence still pours blessing on the countless devotees and pilgrims who come to bow down in the Sanctuary where he struggled and attained.

My first visit to the Temple was made with two of the Master's dearest disciples,—Swami Saradananda and Yogin-ma; a householder disciple, professor in a local college, also went with us. As we sat on the floor of the flat-bottomed boat in the little house built over it, we scarcely glanced through the row of open windows at the Ganges and its banks, so absorbed were we in talking of Sri Ramakrishna. They told me incident after incident of his life, their personal experience with him, the words he had spoken to them. They lost themselves in an ecstasy of memories. So saturated was I with all they said, it seemed as if the Master himself must be waiting on the Temple steps to bid us welcome.

When we reached the landing-ghat, we ascended the broad steps quickly, skirted the Temple enclosure, passed into a pillared arcade at the end of the great court and through this into the corner room where the Master had slept and meditated, taught and lived. His nephew, Ramlaldada, told me afterwards that that morning he had been irresistibly impelled to take from the wall a life-size picture of the Master and place it on the wooden

couch where he always sat. The impression was indescribable. It was as if Sri Ramakrishna was there again in the midst of his devotees, for Navagopal's widow and other disciples had come to meet us at the Temple.

We remained for some time in the room, then Swami Saradananda and Yogin-ma led me to the Concert House, to the Banyan tree, to the Bel tree in the jungle, and back to the central porch or *Mandapam*, where we stood as they opened the great doors of Divine Mother's Temple that I might see the tall figure of the Mother standing on the silver lotus.

My next visit was with Master Mahasaya, the recorder of Sri Ramakrishna's Gospel. With his long white beard and noble, venerable bearing, he seemed a part of the Temple Spirit as he showed me all the places hallowed by the Master's touch. The third visit was made by land in carriage. Sister Christine went with me and we stopped at the Cossipore Garden house where Sri Ramakrishna passed the last year of his life. I also spent an afternoon at the Temple with Lakididi, the Master's niece. After we had gone to his room, to the banyan tree, the Temple pool and garden, she took me through the high gates in the garden wall and along a shaded road to her home in the village beyond.

Her tiny cottage stood near a pool edged by tall trees and tangled creepers, with other small thatched adobe houses all about it. Three little



boys ran and sang in the fading sunlight, happier with their wind-blown leaf as toy, than our Western children with all their intricate mechanical playthings. We sat on the narrow verandah of her cottage for an hour listening to stories of Sri Ramakrishna. Her words came with a low ripple of laughter and when I asked her if she was always smiling, she told me she had never known what it was to be unhappy. Yet her life was unsoftened and full of the sacrifices poverty imposes.

I went to the Temple at other times with other devotees but my last visit was made alone and I remained quietly for a long time in the Master's room. I lingered under the banyan tree and on the verandah of the Concert House, half expecting that pervading Presence to take form before me. The nephew, Ramlaldada, gave me some blessed food to eat and poured water over my hands on the round porch outside the Master's door. He gathered a large bunch of gardenias from the luxuriant bushes beside the porch and with these fragrant flowers in my arms I walked slowly and silently along the garden path and down the wide steps to the landing-ghat.

A parting visit to the Head Monastery carried us to the opposite bank and as the boat pushed out into midstream again, the voices of the monks in the Chapel reached out across the water, sounding above the surging of the river and the splashing of the oars. They were singing in rhythmic Sanskrit



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the evening hymn. The boat moved swiftly with the current and as we swept on these closing words of each verse followed us with yearning reiteration:

“Without Thee, O Lord, we are helpless;  
Therefore, O Thou Friend of the helpless, we take shelter  
in Thee.”

It was a call to the Presence in the Temple.

## XVI

### DISCIPLES OF A GREAT MASTER

The passing of the Master left the young disciples orphaned and adrift. They were most of them university students; some had taken their degree, others had missed it because before their course of study was over, they had preferred to exchange dull hours in the classroom for long happy days at the Temple. "At that time Gurumaharaj had taken such possession of our minds that we were unable to study," one of the disciples told me. "We could not attend our classes at the university. We would run away to Dakshineswar, walking the five or six miles there and back again without the least thought of fatigue."

The Master gone, parents began dreaming of return; some of the boys did go home for a short period to complete their studies, but the bond of the new life had grown too strong to be broken, the youthful band determined to hold together and face whatever of hardship and sacrifice might come.

They found a vacant house in Baranagore, an outlying quarter of Calcutta, which could be had for a mere pittance because it was said to be haunted. The few Rupees asked for the rent were supplied by a householder devotee of the Master.

That there was something uncanny about the place they could not doubt. One afternoon a young boy was seen going up the stairway; some one followed him to ask what he wanted, but when he reached the head of the stairs, he turned, gave one pleading look and disappeared through a solid blank wall. Frequent such occurrences made evident why the rent was so low. The disciples, however, merely accepted the ghosts as co-tenants and remained.

When I visited the house its walls had crumbled partially and it was a ruin. Torrential rains and a tropical sun work swift destruction on brick and mortar in India, when repairs are delayed. The garden was there, however, still lovely in its tangled neglect. Two clear pools of water edged about with a luxuriant growth of trees and shrubs, a wide-reaching high wall, the whole compound, told of past elegance before death and haunting ghosts had touched it. There rose before me the picture of that band of earnest young souls gathered in this abandoned retreat, ready to endure privation and ignominy even, out of fervor of devotion for an Ideal.

"We were so full of ardor in those days, we did not care what we had or what we did not have," Swami Ramakrishnananda said, in telling me of that time. "We had no money to buy mats to sleep on, so we slept on the bare floor or ground and when we got up in the morning our bodies would be smeared with dust. There were not *Dhotis* enough for every one, so some of us had to be

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content with a loin cloth. When we went to the Ganges to bathe we would wash out our *Dhotis*, spread them to dry, then take our bath and the first ones out got the *Dhotis*, the others had only loin cloths, which meant they had to stay at home.

“Often we had only plain dry rice to eat and that once a day. We had no dishes, not even leaf plates. There was one piece of matting, this we would wash, put the rice on it, sit round and eat from a common pile. But we did not mind. In our hearts was burning a fire of renunciation which the Master had lighted and we were blissful even in our poverty.”

Swami Premananda referring in a letter to this period, writes:—“When our *Math* was first established at Baranagore, how full of enthusiasm we were, what indomitable energy we possessed, not caring a bit though the bare necessities of our life were wanting. One thought reigned in the hearts of all, how to be thoroughly absorbed in Divine contemplation.”

The disciples had had ample training in self-denial, for the Master with all his smiling gentleness, could be a rigid disciplinarian. Sometimes he would wake them at midnight and have them spend the hours of sleep in meditation or he would cure them of some harmful weakness with quiet but unrelenting firmness. Swami Ramakrishnanda related to me that the youngest of the boys had formed the habit of taking snuff, although he

was a mere lad. When Sri Ramakrishna heard of it he asked the boy to spend the day with him at the Temple. He came with his snuff-box hidden in his *Dhoti*. The Master said nothing but every minute he kept him busy waiting on him. Occasionally the boy would creep away behind a tree or bush to take a pinch of snuff, but each time just as he would be opening the box, the Master would call: "Bring me some water," or "Come and fan me." Not once was the boy able to gratify his craving and when the day was over it had left him.

In speaking of this, Swami Ramakrishnananda said: "Our Master never asked any one to renounce but he would give such a direction to the mind that the man of his own accord gave up. I had heard a great deal about the beauties of the Sufi poets, so I determined to learn Persian in order to be able to read them in the original. I bought several Persian text books and began to study most diligently. Often when I was at Dakshineswar, I used to go off to some corner with my books, instead of staying to serve Gurumaharaj. One day he called me, I did not hear and he had to call a second time. When I came he asked: 'What were you doing?' I told him. He said: 'If you neglect your duty to learn Persian you will lose what little devotion you have.' Not many words, but they sufficed.

"By that time I had purchased fifteen or twenty Rupees' worth of books, but I threw them all into

the Ganges and for fourteen years I did not read a book. Only when I came to Madras, where people care so much for learning, did I begin to study again." Sri Ramakrishna did not disapprove of book-learning, but he believed that those who take up the spiritual life should uncover deeper sources of knowledge.

Swami Ramakrishnananda continued:—"Such was his great power. Although he was very gentle, sometimes he would be so awe-inspiring that even one word from him would make you tremble. He gave new direction to the soul of every man. That power which enables you to move, that which is the source of your life, over that he had absolute control. Yet if one of his own made a mistake, nearly always he would check him in the gentlest, most loving manner, just as a loving father would his own son.

"He used to tell us that the difference between man and God was this: If for ninety-nine days you have served a man well, but on the hundredth you do some wrong to him, he will remember the one bad turn and forget the ninety-nine good turns. But if you abuse God for ninety-nine days and for one day you say something in praise of him, He will forget the ninety-nine bad days and He will say: 'Ah! to-day this man has spoken something good of me.' Man forgets the ninety-nine good works and remembers the one bad one. God forgets the ninety-nine bad works and remembers the one good one."

How tenderly the Master cherished each dis-

ciple is disclosed by this touching incident told me by the one who bore the Master's name: One night when Swami Ramakrishnananda, then known as Sasi, was watching beside the Master's door, he heard him get up and walk across the room. "I entered quickly," Swami Ramakrishnananda related to me, "and I saw Gurumaharaj reaching for something hanging on a hook. 'What are you doing?' I asked in a scolding voice, 'the air is very chill, you should not be up.' The Master held out his own dressing-gown and said: 'I want you to have it.' " Swami Ramakrishnananda did not wish to take it, but the Master insisted. "What did you do with it?" I asked. Swami Ramakrishnananda replied: "I did not feel worthy to keep it so I gave it to Swami Brahmananda, who lost it when he was wandering in the Himalayas."

Pilgrimage to holy places constitutes a fundamental part of the religious life of India. No training in *Sannyas* or renunciation is complete without a time of wandering in homeless detachment from shrine to shrine. With this tradition before them, it was not possible for the ardent little band at Baranagore to continue intact. One by one they slipped away from the haunted house and the tangled garden to taste the freedom of the open road or the quiet solitudes of the high hills. The youngest disciple was the first to go. I shall tell of his going in Swami Ramakrishnananda's words:—

"Akhandananda was always a very bold boy.



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From his boyhood he had a strong tendency to become a *Sannyasin* (monk). Once when he was only nine or ten years old he went away with a *Sannyasin* and lived with him for one or two years. He would never allow any one to touch his food even as a boy. He himself would always cook it and serve it. It is the custom for orthodox Hindu boys at evening time to go to the Ganges, wash themselves and perform their *Sandhya* (spiritual practice). You will see thousands sitting thus along the banks of the Ganges. But Akhandananda did not like it when there were so many, so he used to swim a furlong across the river to a little island which came above the water at low tide. There he would meditate for half an hour or an hour and then swim back.

“He was the first to go out to wander after the Master’s passing away. One day he went out and did not come back. Every one kept asking, ‘Where is Gangadhar?’ but no one knew. He covered three or four hundred miles on foot and came to Benares. There he went to a great *Sadhu*. This man looking at the young boy, wondered how he could be a Swami, for he was only about seventeen or eighteen; and he asked rather sceptically: ‘What is your path?’ At once the boy replied: ‘I do not move. What path can there be for me?’ He believed that as soul he was immovable, unchangeable and everlasting. The *Sadhu* looked at him then with greater wonder.

“Akhandananda was very fond of the teachings of Sankara (the Indian leader of monistic thought), for from his boyhood he had a strong tendency toward Monism; and although he did not know Sanskrit, he used to learn hundreds of the verses from Sankara’s writings and stand up and recite them with great fervor.”

Swami Ramakrishnananda was the last to go out on pilgrimage. For many years he remained faithful and unremitting in his service in the Shrine; but, leaving his task to another, finally, he too set out to wander with his cousin Swami Saradananda and Swami Vivekananda. They went far, then came a moment when they were foot-sore and weary. For long hours they struggled on, the hot sun beating on their bare heads, their feet aching and blistered, no morsel of food, not a drop of water. When evening came they reached a village and hoped for rest and food; but instead, Swami Vivekananda the leader said: “Now let us sit down and meditate.”

Without a word they took their seat on the ground and plunged into deep communion. They remained thus for a long time. As they opened their eyes again, the two younger men saw Swami Vivekananda coming towards them with food in his hands. He explained that when he looked at their tired faces and the deep shadows under their sunken eyes, he could not meditate, so he had gone quietly to beg in the village and now he had something for

them to eat. I relate the incident as it was told to me by one of the three wandering disciples.

Narendra (later known as Swami Vivekananda) was the chief moulding influence in the group, but any sense of a public mission was wholly foreign to his thought. The first intimation of such a thing came to him when he was wandering in the Himalayas. He was attacked by diphtheria, there was no village or aid within thirty miles and his throat was closing. The two brother disciples with him went a little distance from the rude hut they had built over him and prayed in deep grief: "Lord, let him live and take our lives instead. His life is worth much more than our two lives." While they were praying Narendra heard a voice saying: "You will not die. You have a great work to do in the world." At the same moment the membrane forming in his throat broke and he was able to breathe freely.

Swami Ramakrishnananda remarked to me one day: "In the beginning we had no thought of mission. We believed that all we had to do was to realize the ideal the Master had set before us, which meant living and serving humbly. He never talked to us of special mission or special work. If we had believed we had some special work to do, probably we would have lived very differently. We would not have spent our strength in so many severe austerities."

Least of all did the disciple known as Latu

Maharaj think of any public work or public mission. He had joined the Master in a peculiar way. There was a rich householder who had become very devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and was in the habit of sending him many presents. They were brought always by the same servant. The boy carried them to the Temple with eager joy and lingered near the Master long after his errand was accomplished. He was so unlettered that he could neither read nor write, but Sri Ramakrishna perceived beneath the uncultured surface a rare devotion and understanding.

One day, when the householder devotee came to Dakshineswar, he said to him: "You are always asking to do something for me; why do you not give me that boy of yours to serve me?" The gentleman was delighted and at once sent Latu to the Master. Thus he came to live permanently at the Temple. He served Sri Ramakrishna with such ardor and selfless love that at the end of a month he attained *Samadhi* (super-conscious vision).

He always took the place of servant but in later years as Swami Adbuthananda he became an able teacher in his modest way. The light that shone through him could not be veiled. Swami Brahmananda spoke to me of his exposition of the Bhagavad-Gita as remarkable and illuminating. Latu Maharaj could not read the text, but he had some one else read and translate it, then he would

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explain it. His commentaries were invariably original and indicative of deep understanding and day after day at the evening hour his room would be filled with earnest young men eager to profit by his simple wisdom.

When I knew him, he was living at Calcutta in a large room beside the entrance door of Balaram Babu's house. Ever since Balaram Babu became an ardent follower of Sri Ramakrishna, the house has been used as a second home by all the disciples. The Master frequently had gathered his devotees about him in the large front room on the second floor, and all that portion of the house has been given over to the Order for its exclusive use. The room occupied by Latu Maharaj was austere bare,—a wooden bench, not unlike a kindergarten table, served as bed, a few glowing embers in a small open clay stove and a straw mat were all I could see through the door. I never entered the room. The Swami always came out to receive me.

Our first meeting was in the upper arcade of the outer court. I was just entering the large upper room to see Swami Premananda when Latu Maharaj made himself known to me. I was particularly glad to see him, as I knew how close he had been to his Master, but he would not let me show him any special honor or deference in my salutation. When I said to him: "I am so happy to meet you, Swamiji, because I know that Sri Rama-

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krishna felt a special love for you," he gave the quick, almost reproachful answer: "My Master loved all equally." He spoke in such simple gentle tones, however, I had no sense of rebuke from his words.

I saw him almost daily after that. I found he liked Occidental bread and butter, so I used to get it in an English shop now and then and carry it to him. He showed the same freshness of pleasure each time I brought it. His gratitude for the least service made the heart glow, it was so child-like and genuine. He also liked to make presents. Every little while he would send me a large orange or some other fruit. On the morning I was leaving Calcutta I carried to him a bunch of green cocoanuts tied together by their stems. On my return to the school where I was living, I found a boy waiting by the entrance with a bag of mangoes for me from Latu Maharaj. I sent back some bread and butter, and he returned some oranges. At this point the competition ended.

Some time after, he went to Benares and the closing days of his life were spent there. In his nature there was a rare combination of child and man, of gentleness and heroism. When he was nearing his end it became necessary to remove an infected piece of bone from his leg. He refused to take an anesthetic and as the surgeon cut and sawed the bone, Latu Maharaj lay perfectly still smiling with heroic calmness. His face was lighted



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by the same bright smile when he passed out of this world.

Swami Saradananda, another disciple, was one of the mainstays of the Order. He possessed exceptional gifts of mind and soul. When I knew him in Calcutta I was impressed constantly by his gentle dignity and loving-kindness. At the evening hour many ardent devotees of the Master would gather round the Swami at the house in the Bagh-bazar district where Holy Mother lived. They would sit on the floor about the small square room to the left of the entrance door and one of the number would read aloud some holy book.

From the floor above we could hear the rhythmic rise and fall of the voice, for it was a moment of silence with us. Always when the lights were brought at nightfall and incense was carried through the house, every task was dropped and grown-ups and children alike sat for a time in prayerful stillness, meditating or repeating the name of the Lord. Swami Saradananda has passed away quite recently.

Baburam Maharaj, known as Swami Prem-ananda, was exceptionally close to Sri Ramakrishna. He was also one of the mightiest factors in his Master's work. He lived chiefly at the Head Monastery on the Ganges and directed the course of the life there, but he never exercised his authority. He scarcely seemed to possess any, yet he had a way of wrapping each heart around with such



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tender love and sweetness, that it gave willing spontaneous obedience. He never asked anything of any one and was reluctant to take the place of honor. When he rendered service he did it almost stealthily, as if afraid some one might know of it. Once when he was nursing a sick man, the man, angry that he did not have certain food, kicked him on the chest and hurt him quite badly. Swami Premananda told no one and it was discovered later only by chance.

My association with the Swami was frequent and full of rich blessing. An injury to his eye forced him to come to Calcutta from the monastery to be under the care of an oculist. He was stopping in Balaram Babu's house where Latu Maharaj also was living. He had a special claim upon it, as his sister was Balaram Babu's widow. Every morning I went to see how he was doing and sit near him. Sometimes he would talk with burning fervor of his Master or of the joy of serving the Lord and His children; sometimes he would not speak at all; but always, whether silent or talking, there emanated from him a light and glow of spirit which impelled to fresh spiritual effort. His influence was too subtle to be analyzed and too powerful to be resisted.

His name discloses the dominating trait of his character. *Prem* is a Sanskrit word signifying "supreme devotion," and *Prem* or supreme devotion colored his life, his speech and his thought. It

enveloped him like a garment. His letters contain reiterated expression of it. One of them reads:—

“Dear Sister:

After Sri Gurumaharaj’s anniversary last year I took leave of Belur and it is after a period of about nine months that I have come back to this holy *Math* (monastery) again. My first sojourn was at Kankhal where Swami Turiyanandaji was. There we were joined by the Swami Shivanandaji and with three Brahmacharins we undertook a journey to Shrinagar in Kashmir. From Shrinagar we all started on the laborious and holy pilgrimage to Amarnath. Just imagine what a glorious experience it was to all of us—both the vision of that great white cave of Amarnath at an altitude of about eighteen thousand feet and the toilsome journey through the most enchanting and soul-stirring scenery in the world. . . .

It was only about a week before the Christmas that I hastened back to our holy *Math* here to find it resonant with life and joy at the advent of Swami Brahmanandaji from Puri. The happiness has been enhanced this year by the Lord having so graciously brought back the Swami Turiyananda amongst us again after the lapse of about eight years, spent mostly in the hills and jungles of the Himalayas.

So the above you see is a short account of how I have been engaged in the long interval that you

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have not heard from me. You may out of your goodness hesitate to claim a moment of what you suppose to be my precious time; but I assure you that to all servants of my Lord, wheresoever in the three worlds he or she may be serving Him, I feel myself absolutely sold forever. My only message to you all, is:

Be His, absolutely and forever. In body, mind, soul, be His. In that becoming, everything that religion means and is will be realized. By becoming His only, do you reach the goal of all human duties and responsibilities. So they sing:

‘Oh, thou my mind, resolve to live forsaking all  
desire and sense of name and fame.  
Die alive if you are to possess yourself of the  
Beloved.’

Have you not acquired in this life the right to love and serve the Lord? Value this right above everything, above the self even, over which a glory has been shed by the Divine right of love and service.

Reminding you that the relation in which you stand to us is a relation in the Lord and as such eternal and unchanging, I remain,

Yours affectionately

Premananda.”

A passage from another letter reads:—

“Let this prayer constantly rise in you that self-conceit, egoism may not creep into the soul. Real

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preaching, I say, consists in realizing Him, even more than in raising to Him thousands of Temples all over the world."

A wide catholicity was built into the nature of every disciple in the group. It was the inheritance they had received from their Master. Christianity, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, each had its place beside their own Vedic teaching. "I remember when the Salvation Army first came to India," Swami Ramakrishnananda said to me one day. "We were all boys and sometimes we used to follow the procession and even join in the singing, not out of fun but because we really liked it and believed their work was good."

Sri Ramakrishna worshipped before a Christian altar and several times Christian devotees came to visit him with sincere reverence at the Temple. Frequently on Christmas Eve also the members of the Order have sat round the flaming Yule log and listened to the story of the Christ Child; and a picture of Jesus hangs on the wall of many of the houses belonging to the Order.

It is not possible to draw a picture of every disciple in the band which in those early days gathered in the haunted house at Baranagore, but each has contributed a valiant part towards a work which has become one of the most powerful formative factors in modern India. These closing letters sound the dominant note of their mode of living and thinking.

“My dear Sister:

. . . I deeply regret to inform you of the sad news that our most beloved Swami Advaitanandaji has passed away day before yesterday. He joined Sri Ramakrishna about 1880 or 1881, followed him faithfully for a few years and took *Sannyas* under him. At Baranagore he underwent severe austerities along with other *Sannyasin* disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. After living there for a year and a half he went to Benares, where he used to live on a pittance doled out to him by charitable institutions without touching a single coin, as was the injunction of our Master. In those days he was a wonder and admiration to many. He was then advanced in age, yet he devoted the greater portion of the day and night in meditation, being unattached to world and worldliness—a saintly life. He lived in Benares for about seven years. He really felt hunger and thirst after God—to realize Him, to be one with Him.

He came back to Calcutta and settled down at the Belur *Math*. He was exact in business and could work out in detail any work he undertook. Gardening was his chief delight and he trained up young Brahmacharins to this and other works concerned with the management of the *Math*. Punctuality he observed even to the minute and he expected that of everybody. The last two or three years of his life he became practically a retired man and spent most of his time in devotion. Early

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in the morning he would meditate seated on his bed, then walk a little round the *Math*. Next he would take bath, then lighting incense and decorating the picture of Sri Ramakrishna with flowers, he would meditate for a long time with utmost devotion and serenity. After taking meal and resting for a time he would repeat the same works of the morning until late in the evening.

His passing away was a wonder. He suffered for six days. On the last day the doctor came at four P. M. With raised hands he tried to salute him. The doctor felt his pulse and declared that he would soon pass away. Within a few short minutes life was gone but the face was calm and serene, placid and full of devotion—a smiling face. The soul had gone out to live with his great Master.

May the Lord bless you and the holy band there. May He give you strength and devotion unto Him. May He lead you all unto Him to realize Him and work out His mission. May the Lord Jesus whose birthday has just been celebrated in the West bless you all and make you happy in your work.

With love and blessings,  
Yours in the Lord

Premananda.”

“Dear Devamata:

. . . We should never forget that our real object is to enshrine the Lord in the heart of every

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man in the world, for the real temple of the Lord is the human heart. There within the heart of every man the ground has to be consecrated, for it has been defiled by the profanity of worldly desires and pleasures. There on that consecrated ground let the temple of Divine Communion be raised and the overflowing bliss of the Supreme Good reign. Infinite Bliss from within, that is the idea. Let the devotee be flooded over by this Bliss from within. Preaching is real only when this Bliss provides for its own preaching. One devotee overflowing from within with this Divine Bliss is worth a million dollars of propagandist devices. One real temple raised in the human heart is worth dozens of temples built outside. Remember that our object is really to raise the temple from within.

I pray that our Lord may shower His blessings upon you more and more, as He is doing, till your life becomes pervaded through and through by a blessedness which is His love, which is He Himself. May you be submerged in the reality of His Presence. With loving blessings to all,

Yours in the Lord

Premananda."



## XVII

### AT CALCUTTA

My life in Calcutta brought me in contact with people rather than with places. Although I spent some time there, I saw little of what the casual traveller sees. Buildings, parks and driveways seemed to me of small value compared with the less usual opportunity of knowing men and women of eminence in Indian life and achievement. One I enjoyed meeting especially was the noted Bengali dramatist, Girish Chandra Ghose, familiarly known as Girish Babu. A gifted actor also, he is called the Garrick of the Bengali stage as well as the Shakespeare of the Bengali drama.

The measure of his gift as a player is given in this incident. Vidyasagara, the scholar and philanthropist, was at Girish Babu's theatre one night when the actor was depicting a profligate. In a scene where he was abusing a woman, Vidyasagara became so stirred by the vividness of the portrayal that he took off his slipper and threw it at the actor. It struck him and rebounded on the stage. Girish Babu picked it up, placed it on his head, and with a bow to the audience declared he had never received a more gratifying tribute.

His productivity was phenomenal. He wrote

in all seventy plays, some of them being composed, as it were, by one continuous stroke of the pen. One of the greatest, a six act drama entitled "Vilwamangal the Saint" was written in twenty-eight hours of uninterrupted labor. Another remarkable literary production is his play on Gautama Buddha. Both of these have been translated beautifully into English by Swami Paramananda. Many of his subjects are taken from the religious history of India and are so powerful in their effect that now and then a listener in the audience, moved to the depths by the life of some spiritual hero portrayed on the stage, has passed directly from the door of the theatre to the solitary seclusion of the forest, renouncing everything. I had personal acquaintance with two such instances and the impression in both cases persisted.

Girish Babu possessed a deeply religious nature; but as a boy he found no satisfying phase of faith to feed it and because of this he lived through many dark years of doubt and profligacy, during which the drama became his creed and the playhouse his Temple. It was Sri Ramakrishna who led him back to boyhood faith and requickered his spiritual ardor. This is the account of their meeting as Girish Babu himself gave it to me:—

"The first time I saw Gurumaharaj was in the house there at the end of the lane. He had just come out of *Samadhi* and he was asking, 'Is it evening?' I thought: This man must be either mad

or a fraud, for here is the lamp burning, it is dark outside and he asks, 'Is it evening?' The next time I saw him was at Balaram Babu's house. Then one day some one came and said the Paramahansa wished to come to my theatre and what would I charge. I told the person I would not take any money from him, but the disciples would have to pay. When he arrived at the theatre I meant to be at the entrance to receive him, but he had got down from the *Gari* (carriage) before I came. As he saw me he made *Pranam* (bowed down), then when I tried to make *Pranam*, again he bowed and so for two or three times. Then I thought: It is useless to keep this up with an insane man; so I led him to a box and as people said he had fits of unconsciousness I gave him a *Punkah* man; then I came away home and thought no more about him.

"But there had risen a great trouble in my mind. People said that one could not attain realization without a *Guru* (spiritual teacher), yet I did not see how any one could take initiation from a human being. It seemed as if God could be the only real *Guru*. I grew so disturbed about it that at last I prayed for help. One day Sri Gurumaharaj came to Balaram Bose's house and sent for me. I told him my trouble and he said to me, 'You have your *Guru*.' I was very much pleased and thought: I was right after all. I do not need any one outside. My *Guru* is inside myself.

"After that I felt an irresistible desire to go

to Dakshineswar. It was as if some unseen power were drawing me and one day I went there. Gurumaharaj was sitting alone in his room with Babanath. As I entered he looked at me and said: 'I was just talking of you to Babanath.' Then it came into my mind that any one who could take so much trouble to seek me out must be very good and after that I never had any doubt that he was my *Guru*. . . .

"He was a mother to me and a father to his disciples for sometimes he would scold them, but he forgave everything in me. From the time I was a little child I was very obstinate and whenever any one told me I must not do anything, at once I would want to do it. But he never forbade me to do anything. He took me just as I was. Somehow I could never do anything wrong, because the thought that he might be displeased held me back. But if he had told me I must not do it, I should not have felt that way.

"Once some one told me that unless a man was absolutely truthful he could not hope to realize the Truth. This troubled me because I did not always tell the truth, so I went to him about it. But the moment I mentioned it to him, he said quickly: 'You need not worry about that. Whatever you do now will be right.' . . . I did not go often to Dakshineswar but he came very frequently to my house and that was another proof to me that he was a real mother."

I had been in Calcutta only a short time when a note came from Girish Babu expressing regret that he was not able to call upon me because of illness and asking if I would not come to see him. The first time I went Swami Saradananda took me. They were close friends and Swami Saradananda paid him daily visits. We turned from the main street into a narrow lane running between high blank walls and closed at the end by Girish Babu's wide entrance doorway. We passed through this, went along a short hall, across a large court, up an outdoor staircase, over a roof terrace and into a narrow low-studded room on the second story. There between a window opening on the court and one over the entrance door, on a rug, half reclining against a round bolster, lay the great dramatist like a fallen giant, mighty even in his physical distress. He was a sufferer from asthma and his breath came in quick short gasps.

He was a man of powerful build, tall and stately in his bearing. His voice, though hoarse, was still deep and resonant; his enunciation, that of the trained and cultured actor. Swami Saradananda left us and Girish Babu plied me with questions—about Swami Ramakrishnananda, about Swami Paramananda and his work in the West, about my own religious experiences. Then he began to speak to me of Sri Ramakrishna. I have rarely seen such ardor of discipleship. His face shone with it, his breath grew deep again and

one could sense the burning glow in his heart. He told me of their meeting, of the indulgent mother-love the Master had always given him; how in the beginning when he had tried to shock him by a song or word, the Master had merely laughed, as at a wayward child.

Now and then as he talked, he would wave a greeting to some friend passing in the street at the end of the lane and I understood why he had chosen that small room above the entrance and the place between the windows. It kept him in touch with those who were still actively moving through the world while he had fallen by the wayside. Many a comrade, I was told, went out of his way to cross the little lane and give an answering wave of the hand to his, for he had many staunch friends and admirers.

Faith and genius created an extraordinary mingling of qualities in his character and lent to it impelling force. The strain of lawlessness that ran through it seemed merely to accentuate the high lights of productive power and unfaltering trust. His faith once restored could not be shaken. It triumphed over gasping breath, over death even. A description of his going came to me in a letter from Swami Premananda.

"The saddest news from India now is the passing away of Babu Girish Chandra Ghose," the Swami wrote. "This year his asthma was giving him trouble from the beginning of the winter. To-



wards the close of January some improvement was apparent, but on full moon day of the next week there was a relapse. The end, however, was evident only in the last two days—not even that, only for the last thirty hours. He himself gave up the struggle twenty-four hours before with the ejaculation: ‘Why still this clinging to matter! Thakur, remove this intoxication of the flesh.’ A short time after he had spoken these words, he grew quiet, then he went into a state of coma and passed out twelve hours later.”

The school where I was living was not far from Girish Babu’s house. It occupied a picturesque building near the corner of a lane and a wider thoroughfare. A narrow roofed balcony extended across the front and a broad arched passage-way at one end led under the second story to an outer court. Here an adobe staircase took one up to a large living-room behind the balcony. Pots of flowers stood on each step and beneath in an arched alcove was an open cement tank of water which gave the effect of a fountain. On the other side was an arcade enclosed by arches on square piers. This served as dining-room. Across the front and back of the court were schoolrooms. Another arched passage led to an inner court with another staircase. Around this was the kitchen, also the servants’ quarters.

Two servants slept in the school. One was very devout. Every day they sent fresh flowers from



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the Head Monastery for Holy Mother's altar and some were added for mine. Each morning the faded flowers were left for the servant to dispose of. He would never throw them away carelessly. He always walked to the Ganges several blocks away and threw them on the swift-flowing river. To him they were sacred. Every evening he and his brother, who worked elsewhere, would meet in the lower front schoolroom and chant the Ramayana, one of India's religious epics. For an hour or more the earnest singsong of their voices sounded through the house, but it never jarred on the ear.

A woman servant came in for the day to clean, also to conduct the children to and from school. The older girls were brought and sent home in the school carriage. There were seventy-five little girls and about twenty older ones; these were widows. The school had been larger, but it had been found difficult to give adequate care to so many, so the number had been reduced. The older girls divided their time between study and teaching the younger ones.

The real principal of the school was Sister Christine. Literary work absorbed Sister Nivedita too profoundly to enable her to take part to any extent in teaching. She was occupied also in assisting the famous botanist, Dr. J. C. Bose, in preparing a new book on plant life. He spent several hours every day at the school and some-

times lunched there, so I had a delightful opportunity to know him. I also enjoyed some pleasant hours in his home, meeting Mrs. Bose and seeing his laboratories.

Nivedita possessed a brilliant, insistent personality. She was a remarkably gifted speaker and writer. There was a radiating atmosphere about her words and herself which gave force to whatever she wrote, spoke or did. She exercised a strong influence over the Indian mind for some years and contributed a generous share towards rousing it. She never quite forgave me for my lack of interest in politics, which were of consuming concern to her; but it was a friendly feud.

Sister Christine had and has an exceptionally unselfish character with a rare spirit of service. Her assistant, Sudhira, was also an unusual girl. She took charge of the school when Sister Christine was absent. My association with her and with all the older pupils gave me great joy. There was a gentle poise and appealing sweetness about them which endeared them to the heart. Occasionally I conducted the English class, but I was absent too often during study hours to make it possible to have a large share in the work of the school.

Visits to the Head Monastery on the Ganges formed an important part of my Calcutta life. The monastery stands on a large plot of land at the river's edge, with many trees and the garden planted by Swami Brahmananda. Wide steps lead

down to the landing-ghat. A two-story verandah in the main building looks out on them. The building has a wide frontage. One enters a hallway where broad stairs lead to the upper verandah. From this one crosses a large roof-terrace to the Chapel which is on the second floor of a separate wing stretching towards the garden. The kitchen and refectory are on the first floor of this wing. The storerooms are under the roof terrace. In the main building are the library and sleeping-rooms.

The Chapel consists of three rooms, the Chapel proper, an adjoining room of similar size and shape where all the sacred things belonging to the Shrine are kept, and across the end of both an outer room where people pray and meditate when the Shrine is closed. The Chapel is long and narrow with a high ceiling, a tessellated marble floor and white walls. The only touch of color is the gold of the altar which stands in a recess approached by several marble steps. On the left side is a long row of very high arched windows opening on the balcony. In the half square formed by the wing and the main building stands a large banyan tree. It is here that the open air Shrine is placed on festival days.

My first visit to the monastery was made soon after my arrival in Calcutta. Sister Christine went with me. She had sent one of the servants to engage a boat and it was lying alongside the *Ghat* when we reached the river. It was my first real

view of the Ganges and it seemed very wide, very swift and very mighty to venture on in so small a craft. Now they have regular ferries that ply up and down the river. The boat we took was not unlike a rudely constructed Venetian gondola without the high sweep of the prow, also it was rowed not poled. We bent down, entered the little cabin-house and started up against the rapid current. There were boats of every size and variety, but I could imagine how much more peopled the river must be on a day of religious Feast at the monastery when fifty or sixty thousand devotees are going throughout the day to and from the Head House of the Order.

Swami Atmananda and several of the younger members of the Order met us at the landing-ghat. Swami Shivananda and Swami Premananda were waiting on the lower verandah to welcome us. I was a little disconcerted by Swami Shivananda's somewhat gruff manner of receiving my greeting, but I learned afterwards that it was his way of turning aside all show of honor or deference made to him. He was an uncompromising monist at that time and did not like any outward expression of feeling. Since then he has become so soft-hearted and loving that he would not rebuff any one. I did not see much of him while I was in India but since my return I have received many letters from him full of helpfulness and inspiration. At present he is Head of the Order and moves tirelessly

from Centre to Centre infusing new life into the work.

Swami Premananda was most gentle and hearty in his reception. As soon as we had exchanged greetings he took us to the Chapel, then to the library and over the monastery, after which we had tea in English fashion on a rear verandah looking out on the banyan tree. Others joined us and we all talked together for a long time. It was nearly nightfall when we got into our little boat once more and swept quickly down the river to Calcutta.

My chief companionship was with the devotees surrounding Holy Mother. Golap-ma—tall and powerful in build, conservative, orthodox and uncompromising—acted as gendarme to Mother, protecting her against intrusion, guarding her safety, even scolding her when she thought Mother was growing careless in caste observance and too indulgent towards her foreign children. She looked askance at the intimate place Mother gave me in the household; but in her heart I believe she was genuinely fond of Sister Nivedita, Sister Christine and myself, even though we were not Brahmins. She showed me always the greatest kindness. Kushumdididi was a very different type, reserved, quiet, dignified and highly educated. She often read aloud to Mother or wrote down her letters for her.

Yogin-ma was the most imposing figure in the group. She possessed unusual beauty of feature



INTERIOR OF THE GUEST HOUSE FOR FOREIGN VISITORS AT HEAD MONASTERY ON THE GANGES NEAR CALCUTTA, GANGES SEEN THROUGH THE WINDOW.





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and a nobility of carriage and breeding which revealed the high position she had held in the world. She was the widow of a rich *Zemindar* and had lived in great luxury. Through her husband's folly, their vast fortune was swept away in a night. When she was told of it and advised that she had a prior claim, before settlement was made with the creditors, she answered: "Let the fortune go. Poverty may teach him wisdom. I have no desire for wealth." She had come in contact with Sri Ramakrishna previous to this and the whole course of her thought had been turned into other channels.

Every morning she rose at four and went to bathe in the Ganges. Then she cared for her aged mother and at about half past seven she came to Holy Mother's house. Here she sat in the store-room under the stairs at the far end of the court and cut the vegetables for the day's curry. Later she performed the worship in Holy Mother's Shrine and served the noon meal to the household.

After this she returned to her mother, coming again at the evening hour to conduct *Arati* and serve the evening meal. She never neglected the least duty or varied her routine according to her mood. She seemed to have only one unchanging mood, which took outward form in fervent devotion to her Master and loving care of his children. She expressed little, but within was a glowing flame of spiritual ardor. She passed away quite recently.

Another faithful devotee was Balaram Babu's

widow. She came daily to Holy Mother, but always after nightfall, when she could slip through the streets unobserved. No lady goes abroad on foot in Calcutta; either she goes in carriage or palanquin or she stays at home. Yet to ride to see a holy person seemed to Balaram Babu's widow a lack of humility. She told me that when Sri Ramakrishna was living, it was the custom of her husband and herself to spend every Sunday at the Temple with him. They possessed great wealth, but so profound was their reverence that they were unwilling to go to him otherwise than on foot, so they would rise at three o'clock and walk the six miles to the Temple before any one was astir along the way. They would remain the entire day there, waiting until after ten at night to walk the six miles home again. At that hour the streets and roads were deserted once more.

Many others came and went daily at Mother's house. There was about them all a simplicity and gentleness which made irresistible appeal. They seemed quietly content with an obscure unvarying round,—domestic duties, worship, meditation, repeating the name of the Lord, rendering kindly service to a neighbor, nursing the sick and taking the unfailing bath in the Ganges.

I too felt the river draw me. Stronger and stronger grew the desire to join the never-ending stream of men, women and children which moved to and from its banks. An opportunity offered it-

self unexpectedly. I was left alone at the school for several days. Without saying anything even to the servants I rose at four, crept noiselessly out to the street and walked to the bathing-ghat which had been pointed out to me as the one where Holy Mother went.

There was a flight of steps leading down on either side to a paved landing and from this landing one broad flight led into the water. It was flood tide and the water was flowing with rushing swiftness over half of this lower flight. I looked with some misgiving at the surging current and the slippery steps, but there were bathers there before me and they called friendly encouraging words to me as I went timidly down into the river. I lost all fear when I felt the caressing softness of the water about me. The spell of the Ganges was upon me. There is a mysterious, irresistible charm about it. Mark Twain speaks of it in his books and other writers also refer to it. It is undeniable. And the veiled greyness of daybreak seemed to accentuate the charm and deepen the mystery of it.

I remained for some time in the water, for there was no sense of chill, but when I turned to come out I faced a serious problem. The Indian women go into the water in their *Saris* and show great deftness in removing the wet one and winding the dry one without uncovering their body. I, too, wore a *Sari*, but I lacked their skill. There were no bath houses and a small flat sign with

“Men” on one side and “Women” on the other was the only division on the landing. No one was paying the slightest attention to me. They were all busy with their prayers, their chanting and their bath; but I could not overcome a certain Occidental self-consciousness, so I made a screen of my rain-coat which I had brought, then changed my *Sari*. As I finished, I heard the familiar beggar cry of “Ma,” “Ma.” I looked up and on the wall just above my head was an old man waiting with calm unconcern for the right moment to ask for alms. The next day I came again to the river and was more adroit in putting on my dry *Sari*.

One day in August every one received an invitation to attend a religious celebration at Kankurgachi, a Temple erected in memory of Sri Ramakrishna by a householder disciple, who later had renounced his worldly life. The festival was to take place in September and Holy Mother was rejoicing that I would be in Calcutta for it when I reminded her I had announced my return to Madras before then. “Never mind,” was her answer; “we shall have a special party for you.” She invited twenty-five ladies for the following Saturday afternoon. Several gentlemen offered their carriages, each carriage had a young *Sannyasin* of the Order in orange robe on the box beside the coachman, and thus guarded we set out on our long drive to Kankurgachi.

A terrific rainstorm overtook us on our way

and some of the ladies crowded into the tightly closed carriages begged to return home, but Mother said: "No, go on; it will be all right when we get there." And it was. The storm was over and the trees and shrubs round the Temple were sparkling and fresh from the rain. We visited the different shrines and sat on the roof terrace of a house in the Temple compound for a long time listening to Mother, then we scattered for a while and Lakididi and I found a quiet spot in the garden. As we talked she told me this touching story:—

"When Thakur was in his village, every evening he was in the habit of sitting by the door of his mother's home, watching the people as they passed along the street outside. All the women had to go that way to bring water from the tank. They would come with their jugs and seeing him at the door, they would sit down in the little yard in front with their water jugs beside them and forget everything in the joy of hearing him talk or sing of God. Fearing lest they might be neglecting their duties he asked concerning them. One girl said: 'I have a cow. When I heard that you were coming I cut straw enough to last a month and filled my room with it.' To another he said: 'How is your baby?' 'Oh! I forgot,' she exclaimed, 'I left it with a neighbor.' She had walked more than a mile to come.

"One day Thakur said: 'Now, to-day, you must sing and I will listen.' They all remained si-

lent. Not one dared utter a sound. But there was one girl whom Thakur loved very much, so much that whenever she did not come, he would send for her. As soon as she saw that no one else would sing, she sang a song in a weak high-pitched quavering voice. All the girls began to laugh at her, but when she had finished Thakur was delighted. 'See how great is her devotion,' he exclaimed. 'Just because I asked her she has sung so frankly and simply. She alone among you has true devotion.' "

When I saw they were preparing to serve the fruits, sweets and other refreshments, I went off by myself and sat on the edge of a lovely Temple pool. In a few moments to my surprise I heard my name called several times. I looked up and saw Golap-ma coming towards me with a large leaf in her hand and on the leaf some food. I reached up to take it, but she moved away beckoning me to follow. I went as far as the steps of the *Mandapam* or open pavilion, where the party had gathered, and lifted my hand again for the leaf.

I knew the feeling some of the ladies might have about eating with a non-Indian. I understood the reasons for it and respected them, so when Golap-ma continued to beckon, I sat down alone by one of the enclosing pillars. Still she beckoned me to follow and led me to the hollow square of guests, with Holy Mother in the Centre. There where a gap had been left for me, she bade me take

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my seat and placed leaf and food before me. It was a triumph over caste and race and creed and showed the reality of Sri Ramakrishna's unifying influence.

We returned to Holy Mother's house for *Arati*. After it we sat in silent meditation before the altar. Then when the evening meal had been offered in the Shrine and served, I went back to the school and the party was over. Two days later I left Calcutta for Madras.



## XVIII

### THE POOR OF INDIA

There are two kinds of poverty in India, voluntary and enforced. The enforced permeates all castes, the voluntary transcends caste. Holy Poverty, as St. Francis calls it, so far exalts a man in Indian eyes that the king even comes down from his throne to bow at his feet. That one who gives up all for the sake of an Ideal holds the highest rank and receives the greatest honor. The fires of renunciation level and unify. How near the surface of the Indian mind they smoulder, ready to kindle into flame at a word, is shown in such incidents as these:—

At Conjeeveram, which is a holy place of pilgrimage, there lived a very rich man. He had massive bronze gates at the entrance to his estate and when they were closed at the evening hour their noisy clang could be heard a mile away. The priest, annoyed by it, sent him this message: "The noise of your gates disturbs the Lord in His Temple." The rebuke acted like a rousing blow. The emptiness and arrogance of his wealth rose before him in glaring reproach. Calling his steward he ordered him to sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor; then tying a small bit of

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cotton cloth about his loins, he passed through the offending gates for the last time and disappeared.

His wife had asked to accompany him into the wilderness, but as they walked along he noticed she was hiding something under her cloth. When he inquired what it was, she confessed she had brought a golden vessel to sell should they lack for food. "Throw it away or go back to the world," was his stern command. She threw it away and together they set out in search of higher Riches and a surer Shelter.

There was also a rich man in Calcutta who overheard a *Dhobi* (washerman) say to his wife: "The day is almost gone and you have not burned your banana stalk." The ash of the banana stalk is used for soap. The words "banana stalk" and "desire" are almost identical in Bengali and the gentleman understood: "The day is almost gone and you have not burned your desires to ashes." No more was needed. The smouldering fire leaped into flame. He tore a strip from the fine cloth in his hand, bound it about his loins and went to Vrindavan, where he led a life of selfless consecration and became a great saint.

Indian lore is full of such incidents and Indian highways are filled with such voluntary mendicants. Their duty is to carry blessing and wisdom as they go. If they fail to do so, the fault is with the individual, not with the state. Many mendicants passed my door. I watched with interest a number

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of a certain sect who were supposed never to stay their wandering steps except at night for sleep or at a Temple for worship. They must not stop at any door, but must go steadily on trusting wholly to God for food and shelter. They made their presence known by a chant or by the low clanging of two pieces of iron shaped not unlike fire-tongs. Their heads were shaven, their feet bare, their bodies were wrapped in an orange cloth and around their necks were many strings of rosary beads. They seemed to embody the spirit of restless search.

A little old man of Mylapore, beggar by circumstance not by choice, adopted the same method in his daily round. Just at nightfall he would walk slowly through the streets singing in a quavering voice: "Mother, it is evening. Give me food." And at many a door stood a loving housewife with food given in the name and for the sake of the Great Mother.

One day when I was sitting at work by a lower window I was startled by the stealthy tread of bare feet. I looked up; on the verandah outside stood a tall gaunt figure smeared with ash, a tiger skin around his waist, a huge white turban on his head and two large burning dark eyes looking out from an ash-covered face. The ash is used as an emblem of humility like the Ash-Wednesday cross on the forehead in Christian churches. For a moment I was frightened, then I realized that it was the ascetic living beside the Temple tank.

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Women too choose voluntary poverty, shave their heads, put on the orange cloth and wander from holy place to holy place. Some of them have become great teachers and great saints. The call to the open, the open of Spirit, fills the Indian air and it seems the natural culmination of life to yield to it. The innate reverence that is felt for one who hears that call we see in this experience. I give it in Swami Ramakrishnananda's words.

"Swami Vivekananda loved us all so dearly that he used to try to get away from us because, as he said, 'My love for you distracts my mind from God.' Once a number of the direct disciples of Sri Gurumaharaj (Sri Ramakrishna) were together in the Himalayas. One night Swami Vivekananda slipped away without letting any one know and disappeared entirely. Akhandananda was so devoted to him that he could never be content unless he was by his side; so when he found that he was gone he started out in search of him. He walked hither and thither but could get no trace of him. Finally he decided that he must have gone by the Gujarat side, so he set out in that direction. To go, however, he had to cross a very big desert and when he was just in the middle of it night came on.

"After a time he was surrounded by a band of decoits. He saw one of them draw a sword to kill him, but the others first began to search him. It was his custom to carry not even a quarter Anna with him. He got his meals where he could. All

he had was a small Gita. Finding nothing, the decoits said: 'What! A man alone crossing this desert without even a quarter Anna piece. Who can he be?' They struck a light and when they saw the orange cloth at once they stopped, begged the *Sannyasin* to forgive them and showed him the way across the desert, going with him to protect him."

There are many men at present who take up the life of renunciation through ambition or to escape from difficult conditions in the world, and the *Sannyasin* or religious mendicant has become discredited in the eyes of a large number, specially among the new generation. One of these remarked to Swami Ramakrishnananda one day that India was weighted and hampered by such an amount of unproductive material. The Swami's reply was: "The vocation is not to blame. If every man who wears the orange cloth were true to his vocation, a new India would rise. Renunciation is a fundamental factor in Indian life, secular and spiritual. Giving up is the basis of her entire social system. The individual is expected to sacrifice himself for the community, the community for the larger unit and he who gives up for the good of the whole becomes the leader and teacher of all."

When I turn from the voluntary to the involuntary poor my thought grows dumb. There is so much that might be said, so little that can be said. The poverty of India is so inevitable an outgrowth

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of existing governmental and social conditions that it appears as deeply rooted and as basic as the voluntary poverty of renunciation. The misery of penury is universal. It has invaded all ranks of society. There are families who live practically without money. They possess a small strip of land where they raise rice and rice becomes the commodity with which they procure the few other necessities.

Such was the case with the Brahmin family opposite. When the green vegetable vendor would come to their door, the grandmother would pick out a double handful of green things and in return give a handful of rice. By the exchange each got a complete meal. But this method provides no reserve for emergencies. One day I heard a terrible crash. I ran to the upper verandah and found that the whole front of the house across the way through lack of repair had fallen down. The family happened to be in the rear of the building so no one was hurt. The elderly Brahmin dug his way out from inside and cleared a passage through the wreckage. They entered through this and the house remained in that condition as long as I was in Mysapore. There was no money for rebuilding.

There are hosts of people in South India who live and work on one meal a day and the same meal every day in the year. It consists of a small boiled pulse mashed and rolled into little round balls, thrown into the mouth with a bit of red chili



to give it flavor. For breakfast the laborer buys his palm full of boiled kidney beans or a few peanuts from a vendor by the roadside. Rice is beyond him. So much is exported that the price becomes prohibitive for the poorer wage-earner and even the government has to make an extra rice allowance to its smaller employees.

Most of the poor women have only one "cloth." They wear a long piece of cotton material of varying width according to the height, draped about the body with remarkable grace. This is washed every day, half at a time while the other half is worn. Frequently one sees a woman standing with one end of her cloth around her, the other end fastened to the corner of a house or to a tree and, in between, a long strip of wet cloth steaming in the hot sun. The currency reveals the financial status of the people. They have a coin which represents one-sixth of a cent and in some places with this they buy little shells to create a smaller purchasing unit.

Idleness is not the cause of this penury. I was constantly amazed at the activity and industry of the people in that climate which induces to lethargy and laziness. There were men who sat round on their heels and did nothing, but the great majority were busy from sunrise to sunset. My sweeper woman was an example. She was a hard working widow. Twice every day she swept eight houses from roof to foundation; besides this she walked six or seven miles carrying on her head a heavy



basket, in which were brass vessels containing *Tiffin* for several school boys. Then when her daily labor was ended she would go home and prepare the evening meal for her little children.

There were two fishing villages on the beach near Mylapore and sometimes I went to one or the other for my daily walk. Every one in them seemed untiringly busy—mending nets, building boats, or going out for the day's catch. They constructed their boats in the shape of catamarans and I used to marvel at their balance and skill in launching their ungainly craft on the high, combing breakers. I was told that sooner or later nearly every fisherman meets his death in the sea, but they were none the less venturesome and fearless.

It was contrary to the law to carry fish through the streets during the hot hours of the day because of the strong odor, but after five o'clock a continuous line of fishermen and fisherwomen passed before my door. The men usually bore their load in two evenly balanced baskets suspended from a stout wooden yoke over the shoulders. The women carried theirs in a flat round basket on the head. It weighed sometimes forty or fifty pounds. Both trotted with short rapid step to lessen the time of exposing the fish to the air, still destructively hot even at that hour.

They kept up this quick pace with enduring persistence mile after mile, for the market was several miles from their village; and the women as

they trotted, waved long sticks over the baskets on their heads to keep the birds from swooping down and stealing the fish. It must have required great concentration of effort to make the feet trot, the uplifted right arm swing back and forth above the wide basket and at the same time to balance their burden in rhythm with the two motions. When they saw a bird called *Garuda*, which has a sacred symbolism, as the dove has in Christian symbolism, they would throw a fish into the air and the bird would catch it in its beak.

Still greater endurance have the vendors of sweet curds. They belong to a pastoral community and in order to procure pasturage for their cattle they have to live ten or fifteen miles from Madras. They set out at three in the morning, walk the long distance, distribute their curds and walk home, covering twenty-five or thirty miles before eating their first meal; and all the time they are carrying on their heads a heavy earthen jug filled with clotted milk, with a thick blanket in tent-shape falling down over jug, head and shoulders to protect the curds from the sun and heat.

The Indian poor are literal burden-bearers. Few have any means of transporting a load other than the head or shoulder or hip. One of the sights which used to touch me most was to see a man set down his own burden to help some tired woman lift hers to her head, then they would go on their way without a word. A frequent charity is to

build head-high tables by the roadside on which to unload or take up the bundle or basket.

An impression exists in the Occidental mind that the Indian woman carries the burden while the man walks with empty hands, but careful observation convinced me that the task is evenly divided. At Madras distances are great and there is little money for tramfares, so the poor go everywhere on foot. The number of miles they walk is phenomenal. As I watched them, again and again I saw husband and wife share their load. One mile the mother carried the babies and the father the bundles; the next mile the mother took the bundles and the father the babies. The caressing tenderness with which he held the wee ones was touching to see.

The poor have a part in nearly every feast and social ceremony. No wedding or funeral is complete without feeding the poor. A rich Brahmin of Mylapore died while I was there and at his funeral rites several thousand poor people were given food and a small silver coin. Gifts as well as food are distributed also at every wedding of the more prosperous. In Mylapore there were families who made it known that on a fixed day each week they would feed a certain number of hungry mouths. My landlord, a wealthy judge, gave a hearty meal on Friday to any indigent Brahmin who came.

Our religious Order has always been lavish in this form of charity. At the first festival held

at the Mylapore monastery after my arrival in Madras we fed eight thousand poor and at the next one the number rose to ten thousand. The food was served in a large market place which was built and presented to Mylapore by a philanthropic resident of the community. The market consists of a series of raised cement platforms roofed over, but open at the sides. About six hundred could be seated on these platforms at one time and when that number had been admitted, the gates were closed and ample time was given to satisfy the heartiest appetite. As soon as all had finished they were let out on the opposite side of the market and another six hundred allowed to enter.

The food was distributed by a band of students. When the people were seated, plates made of leaves fastened together by the stem were brought. Then rice in closely woven willow bowl-shaped baskets was served, a soup of pulses was poured over this; next a curry was passed around and a dessert of sweet curds closed the meal. The food was of the best and every one was given as much as he could eat. There was no stint in the quantity. Some were served four times. I saw children three years old helped two and three times to a large pile of rice and curry. The feeding began at ten in the morning and continued until two or three.

The preparation for the feeding was carried forward with great zest. Some of the workers did not eat for twenty-four hours and their leader, the

founder of the Students' Home, who was known familiarly as Ramu, in his ardor of service took no food for thirty-six hours. In India public festivals nearly always fall on Sunday. On Saturday morning early the boys from the Students' Home came to the monastery to prepare the vegetables. They peeled and sliced hour after hour until long rows of bushel baskets were filled. Swami Ramakrishnananda had begged the rice and I remember that that first year five hundred pounds were contributed.

About ten o'clock when the road was comparatively free from traffic and the quiet of night had fallen on the community, all the provisions were carried by hand or hand-dray to the market a half mile away. Here a long trough had been dug, logs laid in it and huge copper cauldrons placed on its two edges. By the time everything was in readiness to begin, it was long after midnight. There are special cooks whose trade it is to prepare these mammoth feasts. They arrived about one. A little later Swami Ramakrishnananda who with his fervor had been the impelling spirit in all the preparations, conducted a short religious service, after which the fires in the trench were lighted and the cooking began with the blessing of the Lord upon it.

As the rice was cooked it was piled on clean boards in an open shed. When it was all done, the huge pile reached from floor to roof. It kept itself hot. It was steaming still at noon and it re-

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quired no little fortitude to stand beside it, as one of the workers did, and fill the serving baskets. The curry was kept warm in the cauldrons and the curds stood in enormous earthen jars. This feeding on so large a scale takes place twice a year.

The Order of Ramakrishna finds many channels through which it deals with poverty and suffering. When I was in India, there was a terrible famine in Orissa due to drought. Members of the Order hurried to the afflicted area, dug a canal many miles long for irrigation, made large tanks for water, helped the stricken farmers till their sun-baked fields, gave them seed to replant them; and while waiting for crops to bring respite from misery, fed thirty villages.

India is not lacking in philanthropists or in philanthropic organization, but the disease of poverty is epidemic. It requires new conditions to cope with it. India has had great helpers of the people. There was one in Bengal, Vidyasagara, who was not only an "ocean of learning" as his name signifies, but also an ocean of sympathy and service. He would pick people up from the roadside with malignant cholera or other infectious diseases and carry them in his arms to the hospital. There was not a branch of benevolent work in which he was not active and his loving-kindness was boundless. We in the West with our passion for organization too often convert our philanthropy into a huge mechanism, at one end of which a "case" is



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inserted to come out at the other clothed and fed. We have over-systemized our charity. There is too much of the card index about it. India has perhaps too little system, but she relieves with a more tender touch. East and West both have something to gain and to lose.

At one time practical interest in social service led me into an extended study of the wage-earner. As I look back over that experience and around me at present-day conditions, then turn my eyes to the East, I confess to a great confusion of conviction. In the West we have given to our laborer finer clothes, richer food, more luxurious homes, but idealism is dead in his heart. The fruit of material betterment has been unrest, selfish ambition, greed and discontent.

The Indian laborer is weakened and numbed by poverty, but a ray of idealism still glimmers in his consciousness. He recognizes the inevitable working of the law of action and reaction and does not doubt Divine justice. He knows he is where he is by his own deserts and that by the same law of cause and effect he can earn another place in life.

In South India they put the mark of their religion on their foreheads. The monist draws a band of white ash across it as a symbol of oneness, the dualist has another sign, the qualified non-dualist still another. Every morning the burden-bearer of society stamps his face with this reminder of his



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faith. It may have become a mere habit or tradition, but it is indicative of a state of mind containing within it possibilities of higher unfoldment which materialistic, acquisitional progress cannot offer. India in dealing with the problem of the poor may have certain outward lessons to learn from America, but also she can be the teacher.

## XIX

### THE TRUE SIGNIFICANCE OF CASTE

Caste is not an institution, it is a fact—a universal fact in the cosmic social order. I have been told that the present method of sifting powdered bicarbonate of soda is to place a rapidly revolving fan in a room with shelves of varying heights and the particles of soda are blown on the different shelves according to their specific gravity. So the fan of human society, revolving ceaselessly, blows men and women into different strata according to their inherent tendencies.

India is not peculiar in having the caste system. It exists in every race and nation. What differentiates her is that caste with her has been made hereditary. Whenever this occurs, crystallization takes place, social rigidity follows and values are distorted. An artificial measure of things is set up and social relationships become forced and unnatural. This is true whether the unit of division is money, rank, power or learning.

Among the earlier Indo-Aryans there were but two castes,—the Brahmin or God-knower and the non-Brahmin. As society became more objective and the avenues of social expression more varied and numerous, the divisions, representing different

occupations or vocations, multiplied. When the element of heredity entered in, more definite lines of demarcation grew necessary and countless sub-castes were created. Four main castes still remain, however, as the basis of the social constitution. The first is the Brahmin or priestly caste; the second is the Kshatriya or military caste; the third is the Vaishya, the merchant or trading caste; and the fourth the Sudra or serving caste. It is a natural division of labor which might occur in any one family. At first the three upper castes were "twice-born" and wore the holy thread, the mark of the second or spiritual birth. Later only the two higher castes wore it and now in some places only the Brahmin wears it.

Primarily the Brahmin was the teacher and was expected to devote himself to the pursuit of knowledge. As this was incompatible with the pursuit of riches, he was exempted from the struggle for existence, being subsidized by the ruler and the people. Service or gifts offered to a Brahmin counted among the acts which acquired special merit. For every religious ceremony, every wedding or funeral, he received offerings of food or a new cloth, or money; sometimes all three; but he must not seek remuneration. Because he was highest in social rank, greater denial was demanded of him. Importance and denial move hand in hand in the Indian measure of things. The Brahmin was supposed to lead a life of austere simplicity and cultivate holiness.

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The Bhagavad-Gita declares: "Control of mind and senses, austerity, purity, forgiveness and also simplicity, knowledge, realization and faith in God, these are the duties of Brahmins. Bravery, energy, firmness, skill, not flying from the battle, generosity, lordliness are the duties of the Kshatriya." The Kshatriya was the ruler and protector of the people. Being more outward in his vocation, greater latitude was allowed him. The duties of the merchant class were "agriculture, rearing of cattle and trade" while "service was the duty of Sudras."

The balance of power was with the Brahmin. He made and unmade social regulations. The lowest castes were afraid even to have him come to their houses, so powerful was he supposed to be; and wherever he went, he was given special distinction. It is told that the great Sankara had one non-Brahmin disciple to whom he showed exceptional favor. The Brahmin disciples asked their Master one day how he could so honor a non-Brahmin. The Master replied: "To-night go and steal from him, then linger near and hear what he says in the morning."

The man was away from home that night and when he returned at dawn he noticed that one-half of his wife's costly jewels were gone. He asked the reason and she gave him this explanation: "Thieves entered our house last night and started to take my jewels. I was lying on my side and

when I saw they were holy Brahmins, I dared not turn over lest I frighten them and they should drop what they had taken and run away empty-handed." The husband rebuked her sharply saying: "It is a great blessing when a Brahmin honors our house by his presence. You should have risen and given them all your jewels."

With a smile Swami Ramakrishnananda once related to me a mythological legend illustrative of the esteem in which the Brahmins were held. "There was a great meeting of sages in the Himalayas to decide who was the greatest, Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver or Siva the Transformer. They argued and argued but could reach no conclusion. At last the Brahmin, Brighu, wanting to settle the question, left the assembly and went to heaven. He was the mind-born child of Brahma, so he went first to his father. 'Well, Brahma,' he said with no show of respect, 'how is your creation getting on?' Brahma, incensed that his son should thus treat him as an equal, replied: 'You good-for-nothing boy, how dare you come and talk to me like that?' and he drove him away.

"Then Brighu went to Siva. 'What do you mean, Siva,' he exclaimed, 'sitting here all day as if there were nothing else to do?' Siva grew very indignant and Brighu ran away because Siva's wrath could destroy. Then he came to Vishnu. Vishnu was sitting on his throne. Brighu in order to test his patience said to him: 'Vishnu, you who are

the Preserver of the universe, have you nothing else to do than sit here idly?' and he struck him with his foot. At once Vishnu came down from his throne and said with concern: 'Have you hurt your foot?'

"Not stopping for further conversation Brighu went back to the assembly of sages and declared that Vishnu was the greatest of the trinity because he had conquered anger. Brighu was a Brahmin and Brahmins were very powerful at that time. In honor to him, Vishnu, it is said, has ever since worn the mark of the Brahmin's foot on his breast."

As time went on the Brahmin found himself handicapped by his poverty. To reinforce his authority he tried to sequester his knowledge by shutting it up within the iron-bound barriers of hereditary caste, just as during the middle ages in Europe the Church shut away her learning within monastic walls or cathedral close. All other castes by logical sequence became hereditary and a new order began.

To safeguard his position still further, the Brahmin multiplied ceremonials; and in reaction the other castes began to depend on elaborate rituals and sacrifices rather than on nobility of action as a means of acquiring merit for this life and the next. The social fabric deteriorated steadily and it became necessary for a mighty teacher like Gautama Buddha to come and restore it. Buddha's mission was not to proclaim a new faith, but to reconstitute the existing religion which had been

suffocated by formalism and priestcraft. The voice of the reformer sounds through all his counsels and instructions.

One of the first abuses he struck at was heredity in caste. A Brahmin or Brahmana is a Brahmin who lives like a Brahmin, he declared; a Kshatriya is a Kshatriya who lives like a Kshatriya, and so with all the castes. To give it in his own words:—

“A man does not become a Brahmana by his platted hair, by his family, or by birth; in whom there is truth and righteousness, he is blessed, he is a Brahmana.

“I do not call a man a Brahmana because of his origin or of his mother. He is indeed arrogant, and he is wealthy; but the poor who is free from all attachments, him I call indeed a Brahmana.

“He who is thoughtful, blameless, settled, dutiful, without passions, and who has attained the highest end, him I call indeed a Brahmana.

“Him I call indeed a Brahmana who does not offend by body, word, or thought, and is controlled on these three points.

“Him I call indeed a Brahmana who, after cutting all fetters, never trembles, is free from bonds and unshackled.

“Him I call indeed a Brahmana who, after cutting the strap and the thong and the rope with all that pertains to it, has destroyed all obstacles and is awakened.



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“Him I call indeed a Brahmana who, though he has committed no offense endures reproach, stripes and bonds, who has endurance for his force, and strength for his army.

“Him I call indeed a Brahmana who is free from anger, dutiful, virtuous, without appetites, who is subdued, and has received his last body.”

Buddha's teaching abounds in further definitions of a true Brahmana or Brahmin. It is possible to give only a few of them here. They run:

“Him I call indeed a Brahmana whose knowledge is deep, who possesses wisdom, who knows the right way and the wrong and has attained the highest end.

“Him I call indeed a Brahmana who is tolerant with the intolerant, mild with the violent, and free from greed among the greedy.

“Him I call indeed a Brahmana from whom anger and hatred, pride and hypocrisy have dropped like a mustard seed from the point of a needle.

“Him I call indeed a Brahmana who utters true speech, instructive, and free from harshness, so that he offend no one.

“Him I call indeed a Brahmana who is bright like the moon, pure, serene, undisturbed.

“Him I call indeed a Brahmana, the manly, the noble, the hero, the great sage, the conqueror, the indifferent, the accomplished, the awakened.”

For a time Buddha was able to break the tyr-

anny of hereditary caste and Indian society regained its ancient grandeur and vitality. But Buddhism in turn fell under the weight of priestcraft and overpowerful monasticism, still greater social degeneration swept over India and another readjustment became inevitable. The leader of this was Sankara. His uncompromising monism seemed to make differences in caste impossible, and his followers did something towards loosening caste rigidity; but with the disastrous results of the later Buddhistic movement before them, they remained moderate in their efforts. Lord Gouranga, a great spiritual Manifestation at the time of Luther, again successfully broke down caste barriers; and even to-day his followers are very free from caste prejudice among themselves.

The phases of social expression which I have described are not confined to India. Mediaeval Europe passed through many of them, without the counteracting influence of religion which modified the Indian attitude. In Europe the Church supported inflexible class distinctions, whereas in India the most rigid caste restrictions stopped short at the Temple gate and at the threshold of the monastic life. All castes were supposed to meet as equals in the Sanctuary of the Lord.

“You know the story of Terupanalwar, the Pariah saint,” Swami Ramakrishnananda once said, in speaking of this. “One day he was sitting in deep meditation by the roadside when a priest from

the Temple wanted to go to the Kavery river to get water for worship. Seeing the Pariah he tried to drive him away, but the man did not hear him. At last roused from his meditation the man looked up and when he saw the priest he apologized most humbly and ran away. The priest got the water and returned to the Temple but he found the door locked.

“Thinking that one of the priests was within meditating, he knocked and called. No response came. Then he found that all the priests were outside, so he knew that only the Lord Himself could have locked the door. The Lord had not been offered food and this meant that the priests could not have their meal, so they all prostrated at the gate and begged the Lord to tell them what wrong had been done.

“This went on until evening; then a voice from within was heard saying: ‘I cannot open the door because to-day you have scorned and ill-treated Me.’ The guilty priest cried out: ‘We are Your servants, Lord. How can we have ill-treated You?’ The answer came: ‘This morning you ill-treated My devotee the Pariah Terupanalwar. He is the same as Myself.’ The priest asked again: ‘What can we do?’ The Voice replied: ‘I shall not open the gates until you take him on your back and carry him seven times around the Temple before every one.’

“When the priest went to get the saint, he tried

to run away saying: 'Oh, I am not worthy. Please do not take me up.' Only when the people caught him and put him on the priest's back did he consent. The priest carried him seven times around the Temple, then the gates opened. So we see that wherever there is goodness there is God, and we must bow down and worship Him there, even though it be in a Pariah."

The Pariah is the non-Aryan, the inhabitant indigenous to the soil of India, whom the Indo-Aryan found when he crossed the Indus and entered a new country. Racial purity was then and has always been the ideal of the Indo-Aryan. They knew that when a more highly civilized race mingles with one of lesser culture, the higher civilization loses more than the lower gains and social deterioration takes place. This is true both in individual and racial intercourse. To prevent this certain restrictions against too free intermingling of the original settlers and the Indo-Aryans were formulated. As caste became more defined, those who were outside the four fundamental Aryan castes were accounted out of caste or outcaste. The more emphasis was laid on caste, the wider grew the gulf between caste and outcaste.

That racial purity and the upholding of the higher Aryan ideals was the motive of the Indo-Aryans in excluding indigenous tribes from too close association is proved by their eagerness to mix freely with the Dravidians. The Dravidians

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possessed a superior culture and it was they who held aloof from the Indo-Aryan. The Tamil-speaking people of South India are the remnant of the Dravidian civilization. Tamil is a Dravidian tongue and possesses a very rich literature of its own.

In the general disorganization and reorganization that is taking place in India to-day the problem of caste has had its part. Nearly every modern movement has tried to solve it. The Arya-Samaj was founded to create greater social flexibility. The Brahmo-Samaj under Keshab Chunder Sen also gave insistent attention to the question. Some groups in this Samaj have continued to observe caste, but the tendency of the great majority has been to abolish it. These movements undoubtedly have had a liberating influence on Bengali society, but some of the ultimate results of their efforts at reform have not proved wholesome. I say nothing of Mahatma Gandhi as I had no personal contact with his noble efforts at social reconstruction. I prefer to let those tell of his work who have direct knowledge of it.

Sri Ramakrishna handled the problem with gentler hand. He did not attempt to eliminate caste. He left the fundamental idea untouched, but he strove to make caste distinctions pliable and receptive of change, in rhythm with the inevitable change which goes on naturally and continuously in every social body. The wisdom of this course

is already apparent. In the Order, which he founded, great caste elasticity is manifest. All classes, all creeds, all grades of mankind are served and helped, with such consideration for the feelings of each and with such inclusiveness of sympathy that not one is left out, nor is any one offended. In the festivals at the Head Monastery on the Ganges, fifty or sixty thousand people take part. They all mingle freely, eat, sing and pray together with exuberant spontaneous fellow-feeling.

Nor is this wholly exceptional. In the universities students of different castes mess together; in Government offices, in business, there is a free mingling of castes. The same is true in all social service and philanthropic work. Only in marriage and in more intimate social intercourse are the divisions maintained. This is a wise precaution, for men and women of like tradition and like training will always be more harmonious in their association than those of varying standards.

Caste is inevitable. When it is kept flexible and susceptible of modification, it will hold aloft the best instincts of society, just as division of labor maintains a higher level of efficiency. When it becomes rigid and inalterable, it will always smother the higher social aspirations of man.



## XX

### EASTERN AND WESTERN RELIGIOUS IDEALS

When we talk of East and West we must remember one great fact,—that spirituality has no geographical limits. Truth is the same at all points of the compass: the law of gravitation does not function more in Europe than in Africa or Asia, the facts of chemistry are as true in an Indian as in a German laboratory, the heavens are as visible through a telescope in Tokyo as in Cambridge.

God's truths are vast, so vast that they transcend the limits even of this earth. How then can they be confined within the boundary lines of one country? How can they be limited to the words and tenets of one creed? They are universal; and as man becomes more universal, is he able to gather in and make his own more and more of the one all-pervading Truth. But in our present manifestation as human beings we cannot hope to grasp the whole of It at once.

Manifestation means diversity—diversity not merely in expression, but diversity in power. As different individuals possess divers gifts and grades of ability, so throughout the world the different nations have evolved varying gifts and powers. Were it not so, human society would be dull and colorless; for civilization depends for its beauty



and richness on limitless variation, just as the beauty of nature lies in its endless play of variety.

Experience has also proved that division of labor increases skillfulness. In a primitive society everybody does everything; but as social organization advances, it is found better for one group of men to devote themselves to one task and learn to do it extremely well, while another group takes up some other definite department of work. In the great cosmic economy the same rule obtains. No one nation or country is meant to be an isolated self-sufficing unit. Each is expected to contribute its share of efficiency in some special direction; and that direction is determined by climate, soil, the topography of the country, by many different inner and outer conditions—the same conditions which shape the animal and plant life of any region. As the oak flourishes in one latitude and the banyan or the fig tree in another, so certain racial tendencies attain their highest development in one nation or country, while others of equal value reach a fuller fruition elsewhere.

When the Aryan race began to migrate from Central Asia, one branch turned towards Persia and pushed its way westward to Greece. There the mountains and rivers were small, all nature seemed amenable to man's will; so the ever-active Aryan began to bridle and use her, developing a wonderful objective civilization, which has its direct continuation in the Occident of to-day.

The other branch made its way into India. Here Nature was too mighty to be conquered. The mountains towered so high that even up to the present time some of them have not been scaled; the rivers flowed in such swift current that man could not hope to stem them; everywhere Nature in her grandeur and power seemed to defy man; and the Indo-Aryan, awed by the marvel of it all, sat down and began to study her.

Gradually he awoke to the conviction that never would he be the master until he found within himself the equivalent of those powers which were rushing through Nature with such irresistible force. In his effort to accomplish this, he gave to his mind a strong subjective bent. How to know the Ultimate, how to develop the faculties by which the First Cause might be apprehended—these became the vital aims of life to him. “Is Brahman (the Absolute) the cause? Whence are we born? Whereby do we live and whither do we go? O ye who know Brahman, tell us at whose command we abide, whether in pleasure or in pain?” Such are the questions asked in one of the ancient Vedic Scriptures, the Svetasvatara-Upanishad. They show that even as early as 2000 B. C., when the West was still in savagery, the Indo-Aryans had penetrated to the inner depths of Nature and were pushing their researches beyond the changing play of phenomena back to the unchanging and indestructible Noumenon.

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As time went on, more and more did they specialize in the study of these fundamental life-problems, until in the realm of philosophy and metaphysics they developed a power of vision never since surpassed by any other nation. The proof of this lies in their language, an unmistakable measure of the culture of a people; for not only is Sanskrit still regarded as the richest of existing languages, but it contains a wealth of terms describing man's spiritual and psychological constitution for which no corresponding terms are to be found in any other tongue.

Thus the science of God-knowledge became India's special contribution to the world; and it is because of this that in speaking of Eastern religious ideals, we are forced to deal chiefly with Indian teaching. Japan may be called the body of the East. She has the greatest possible facility in all the arts; her whole country is an expression of beauty in external things. The senses are delighted at every turn and all of life runs with grace and deftness, in perfect harmony and order.

China, on the other hand, represents the intellect of the East—the intellect and moral sense. Confucianism is essentially a religion of reason and pure morality. India stands as the soul of the East. Out from her went the great spiritualizing wave of Buddhism, giving to more than half the world a new religious vision. Contact with her lifted Mohammedanism to the greater height of

Sufism; while it is now recognized that she laid her touch even upon Christianity through those Buddhist monks, who, settling in Palestine, strongly influenced the Essenes.

As in the slow process of manifestation, the body evolves first, the mind next and the soul last; so in this re-awakening of Asia, it was Japan who stirred first and amazed the world by her victory over Russia; then came the quivering of new life in China, with the establishment of a republic and the Nationalist movement; now India is rousing herself from her sleep of centuries. But through the long night her spiritual treasures were safely guarded, and to-day they are being gradually drawn from their hiding and offered once more to the world.

Efficiency necessarily implies a carefully developed system of training; and the higher the plane of efficiency, the more inclusive must the training be. It was therefore an inevitable result of the Indo-Aryans' persistent striving for ultimate knowledge that they should develop the most complete and comprehensive system of education known. To this they gave the name of Yoga (union), because it taught man by precise and scientific methods how to gather up all his physical, mental, and moral energies, unite them into a dynamic whole and make them carry him to the fullest attainment.

Man must first be ruler of his body, they said, since this is the instrument with which he must

work; so we find in Hatha-Yoga an exhaustive study of bodily control,—what man shall eat, how much he shall sleep, what postures he shall take; how, in a word, he shall regulate his entire physical life so as to make his body the most potent and perfect instrument possible. But this was only the beginning. Within was a finer instrument, the mind, the use of which he must master if he would pierce the veil of matter and perceive the essence within.

They did not spend their time in inventing lifeless instruments. “Why not take this living instrument out of which the others are born?” they asked. “Why not tame the mind, unfold all its inherent possibilities and through it apprehend Truth directly?” So in Raja-Yoga they evolved a wonderful system of mind and nerve-control, which gave to them such command of their mental energies that they were able to arrive at a subjective knowledge of the universe no less precise than that which modern science has reached by its more objective processes.

They realized that even the finest material instrument could not uncover the subtler facts of Nature; whereas the mind, when focused, because of its incalculably swift vibration, had such penetrating power that it could lay bare her innermost secrets. By turning the concentrated mental vision on air or earth or water the astute observer would be able to perceive, not merely the constituent parts, but the

actual chemical or physical action by which the substance was produced;—why two parts of hydrogen and one of oxygen made water; or how nitrogen, oxygen and carbonic gas formed air. Nor could one by any other way enter the causal realm.

Mere observation of effects can never lead to the First Cause, they declared. The microscope or telescope can only suggest an hypothesis which a stronger lens may disprove. Truth is infinite, while all these things are finite. The study of countless finite phenomena will not bring us knowledge of the Infinite, any more than travelling around the circumference of a circle will acquaint us with its centre. That which is within the heart of the atom must be perceived by that which is within the heart of man.

That central point where all law and life converge, has its counterpart in the human consciousness; and only by going there can we hope to touch the Source of existence and know the Ultimate. For this, concentration is not enough. Man must go further,—into the still depths of meditation. He must train his thought to flow in steady unbroken current as oil from one vessel to another. He must be able to sit hour after hour, day after day, penetrating deeper and deeper into the hidden chambers of his being until he touches its primal cause.

The great Indo-Aryan sages possessed this power in supreme measure. But it could only come as the result of intense specialization. They sought



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in the quiet of some mountain forest to form a pure spiritual centre, where those who were yearning for the highest knowledge would find the proper environment and conditions for study. Those who had gained the power to explore the secret places of God, when they returned from their long inner journeys, would relate to their pupils what they had seen in their wanderings, as fathers and mothers to-day tell their children of Paris or London; and these true stories of spiritual investigation and discovery, handed down from generation to generation, became what we know in our time as the Vedas.

The Vedas are actual authentic records of scientific research in the realm of Spirit. And no Scriptures lead man to such heights of metaphysical perception, none speak with such certainty about the ultimate facts of life, none make God more real, none picture the unity in variety of Nature more vividly. Thoreau writes: "What extracts from the Vedas I have read fall on me like the light of a higher and purer luminary, which describes a loftier course through a purer stratum,—free from particulars, simple, universal."

In defining the Supreme, they declare: "He is the one God, hidden in all beings, All-pervading, watching over all works, the Witness, the Perceiver, the only One, the Eternal among eternal, the Thinker among thinkers. He is the Inner Soul of all existences, the Ruling Power of all creation; and



all creatures become one in Him. He is the Cause; unseen, but seeing; unheard, but hearing; unperceived, but perceiving; unknown, but knowing. There is no other seer, hearer, perceiver or knower than He."

The Indo-Aryans' idea of the *Pranava* or Sacred Name, mentioned in every religion, illustrates the fundamental and penetrating character of their processes of thought. They said, the ultimate name of God must be universal. It must be comprehensible to every living being, therefore it cannot belong to any one tongue. It must lie behind all language, behind all individual expression, at the very root of articulate sound. What is the first sound man or beast can utter? they questioned. The first articulation of any creature, as it opens the throat, is "A." What is the last sound possible? When the lips close to pronounce "M"; and between these, as the sound rolls, it passes through "U," forming the word A-U-M.

On this primordial word all articulate sound rests; all language, all names must spring from it. This must be the *Logos*, the Word that was in the beginning, the final and most sacred name of God. In such manner did they sift all thought and carry it to its ultimate conclusion, back to the very boundary line of existence itself; for in their conception of life, as in their language, Existence and Truth are identical; the one is *Sat*, the other *Satya*.

In thus dwelling at such length on the religious

ideals of the East, there is no desire to minimize those of the West. Both have their place and value, but always the special task of Western nations seems to have been to apply rather than to discover Truth. While the East joins the ideas of Truth and being, the West more often connects Truth with doing. Beauty for beauty's sake, work for work's sake, love for love's sake: this is the Eastern point of view. Beauty, work, love for man's sake is the Western.

In Western cosmology, mineral, plant, animal exist for man, even God is in his heaven to protect and gratify him; but the wiser man of the East sees the human form only as one in a long succession of manifestations through which the soul is passing in its march to perfection or liberation, and the different forms are like so many railway stations along the journey. Each form exists for the whole, not for some other part. The West is concerned with the practice of virtue; the East strives rather to rise to the realm of virtue. The West is interested in the scenes and events of the journey, the thought of the East is fixed on the journey's end. The Western man in his religious life works from the outside in; the Eastern, from the inside out. He seeks the kingdom of God first.

Yet there is no question of right and wrong in this divergence in method and point of view. The two merely mark different stages of growth, being related as youth to manhood; and each has its use

and purpose. The highest vision must always be subjective; yet unless it is translated into action and made objective, it cannot benefit the world. The balance must be kept between the outer and the inner, the objective and the subjective. Extreme specialization on either side will produce inevitable deterioration, just as an overdose of medicine instead of curing, poisons.

We see it at the present moment in both East and West. While nowhere as in India has there been evolved so lofty an idea of universal oneness, probably nowhere to-day is there such division among men. In America, on the contrary, freedom, individualism is the cry; yet men are so closely bound in groups, so entangled in the meshes of organization and legislation, so held by public opinion, that they can scarcely draw a free breath. This shows that both are over-balancing in one direction and that each needs the other as a corrective.

But there is a deeper reason why the old Indo-Aryan teaching should come to the Christian world. The people of the West are in the anomalous position of being Aryans with a Semitic religion. The form of Christianity prevalent to-day is Paulism; what is taught is chiefly St. Paul's interpretation of Jesus' teaching; and St. Paul was strongly Judaic in his trend of mind. The questions on which he dwells at such length in his epistles,—circumcision, bodily resurrection, sin, are all essentially Jewish.

Christ's message on the contrary was more dis-

tinctly Aryan in its form. The idea of the Fatherhood of God, so emphasized in His teaching, came through Hellenic influence; yet when it was first preached in Palestine by Rabbi Hillel fifty years before the birth of Christ, the Sanhedrim pronounced it blasphemy. Christ laid insistent stress on renunciation, but the Jew went away sorrowing when he was asked to sell all he had. His ideal was to keep the moral law, to fulfill faithfully his duty as a householder and to live long in the land of his fathers.

Baptism was an ancient Indian rite, brought into Palestine probably by Buddhist missionaries. We read in Ernest Renan's "Life of Christ," where he speaks of John the Baptist, known to have been an Essene:—

"He led there a life like that of a Yogi of India. . . . We might imagine ourselves transported to the banks of the Ganges, if special features had not revealed in this recluse the last descendant of the grand prophets of Israel. . . . The teachers of the young were also at times a species of anchorites, resembling to some extent the *Gurus* (spiritual teachers) of Brahmanism. In fact might there not in this be a remote influence of the *Munis* (sages) of India? . . . We may believe at all events that many of the external practices of John, of the Essenes and of the Jewish spiritual teachers of this time, were derived from influences then but recently received from the far East."

The same influences are again apparent in the early Christian Church, especially among the followers of the Alexandrian schools, where East and West mingled freely. Also in the writings of the oldest Church Fathers we find a restatement of certain of the ancient Vedic teachings, such as reincarnation, evidently prevalent among the Christians as late as 538 A. D. when Justinian proclaimed: "Whoever shall support the mystical presentation of the pre-existence of the soul and consequently wonderful opinion of its return, let him be Anathema."

The more we analyze the words of Jesus in the light of Aryan teaching, the more we realize how strongly Aryan is His message. If then the Western world to-day is to understand and live the Christ teaching, it must regain its Aryan point of view, return to its own racial tendencies in religion. But not only is Christianity Aryan, it is also strongly Oriental; and he who would enter into its true spirit must strive to cultivate in some measure at least the Oriental consciousness. Nowhere has the Aryan tradition been preserved in such purity as in India, nowhere has the Oriental consciousness found such full expression; and if at the present moment India is touching the West, it is in response to a yet unspoken, almost unconscious call for a new spiritual vision within Christianity.

Dr. Cuthbert Hall, President of Union Theological Seminary of New York, recognizes this in his "Christ and the Eastern Soul," where he says, ad-

dressing the Indians: "Cling to the contemplative life—your glorious heritage, your peculiar strength. It has given you elements of personality of which the West stands in need and shall one day come seeking at your hand." And again: "As I grew to apprehend the qualities of the Oriental consciousness, I saw their potential value for the higher interpretation of the Christian religion."

Every word spoken by Christ came from a whole and perfect vision of God, and only when man can reach that same height of God-vision will he be able to grasp their meaning. He cannot hope to attain this height, however, without systematic spiritual education—without training his super-conscious faculties. The real Truth-seeker, in religion or science, opens himself to the light whether it shines from the East or the West. As students in the past have gone to Paris to study art and to Germany to study music, so they will in time turn to India to acquire, not a new form of religion, but the most efficient method of developing the religious consciousness.

Behind India "lies the long Indian summer of the soul, thousands of years of the contemplative life," to quote Dr. Hall again, and it is this which has given her "qualifications for world efficiency" in the higher realms of education. When this is generally acknowledged, then the Aryans of East and West may once more join hands and out of the reunion must come a new and richer civilization.





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