

Swami Ramakrishnananda

The Apostle of

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

To The South



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BY SWAMI TAPASYANANDA

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH

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PREFACE

This book published in connection with the Platinum Jubilee of the advent of Swami Ramakrishnananda to South India as the torch-bearer of the message of Sri Ramakrishna, is not the first work of its kind on the great Swami. This Math had brought out a book on him under the title *The Story of a Dedicated Life* in connection with the Golden Jubilee of the same event. The justifications for a new book on the subject are as follows : (1) The Reminiscences by various disciples and devotees of the Swami published as the Second Part of this book are both interesting and important in themselves. They were originally published in journals more than three decades back, and they are not easily available to readers now. So it was thought necessary to collect them all as the Second Part of the book so as to preserve them for posterity. (2) When this is done, much of the Golden Jubilee publication on the Swami will become a superfluity, as a very considerable part of it consists of the language and material of the Reminiscences. (3) Hence arises the necessity of a new biographical sketch, made considerably smaller in size by the elimination of passages from the Reminiscences.

The biography, comprising about hundred pages, contains no new material. It is based entirely on the information gathered from *The*

Story of a Dedicated Life and the Reminiscences, supplemented by the very valuable material contained in the conversations of Swami Ramakrishnananda as recorded by Sister Devamata in her works, *The Days in an Indian Monastery* and *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, from both of which many interesting quotations have been incorporated in this biographical section.

As Appendices we have given short accounts on the writers of the Reminiscences, all of whom were close devotees and disciples of Swami Ramakrishnananda, and also a collection of the sayings of Swami Ramakrishnananda gathered from sources mentioned in the body of the book.

The book thus provides in one volume all recorded information about, and available literature on, this great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

August, 1972.

Madras.

THE PUBLISHER.

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Swami Ramakrishnananda
A Biographical Sketch

श्रीमान् राजेश्वरदास
A Historical Sketch

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

MANKIND has always accorded a unique place of distinction to outstanding spiritual personalities by classifying them as Incarnations, Prophets, World-teachers and Divine manifestations. While individual greatness is undoubtedly a distinguishing feature of theirs, they are also marked out from saints and ordinary spiritual men by the fact that they do not come single. In a Divine advent, the central figure is accompanied by a group of extraordinary spiritual personalities who help Him in working out His mission and in transmitting His teachings to succeeding generations. For example, Sri Krishna appears as a central figure in a community of associates and devotees standing in various relationships with Him, and it is through the forms of affection subsisting between Him and these associates that the different aspects of Bhakti or loving devotion to God are expounded and illustrated. Some of them like Arjuna and Uddhava also become the chosen instruments for the accomplishment of His work and the delivery of His message. If we examine the lives of other incarnations like the Buddha, Jesus etc., this generalisation will be found to hold good. The disciples and associates formed the various facets of the unique gem that the Master

was, and for a full comprehension of the Master, a study of the disciples also is necessary.

This is true in a very real sense with regard to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples. Adverting to this point, Swami Vivekananda says in a conversation: ¹ "Sri Ramakrishna was a wonderful gardener. Therefore he has made a bouquet of different flowers and formed his Order. All different types and ideas have come into it, and many more will come. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Whoever has prayed to God sincerely for one day, must come here.' Know each of those who are here, to be of great spiritual power. Because they remain shrivelled before me, do not think of them to be ordinary souls. When they go out, they will be the cause of the awakening of spirituality in people. Know them to be part of the spiritual body of Sri Ramakrishna, who was the embodiment of infinite spiritual ideas. I look upon them with that eye. See, for instance, Brahmananda who is here — even I have not the spirituality which he has Similarly Premananda, Turiyananda, Trigunatita, Akhandananda, Saradananda, Ramakrishnananda, Subodhananda and others. You may go round the world, but it is doubtful if you will find men of such spirituality and faith in God, like them. They are each a centre of religious power and in time that power will manifest."

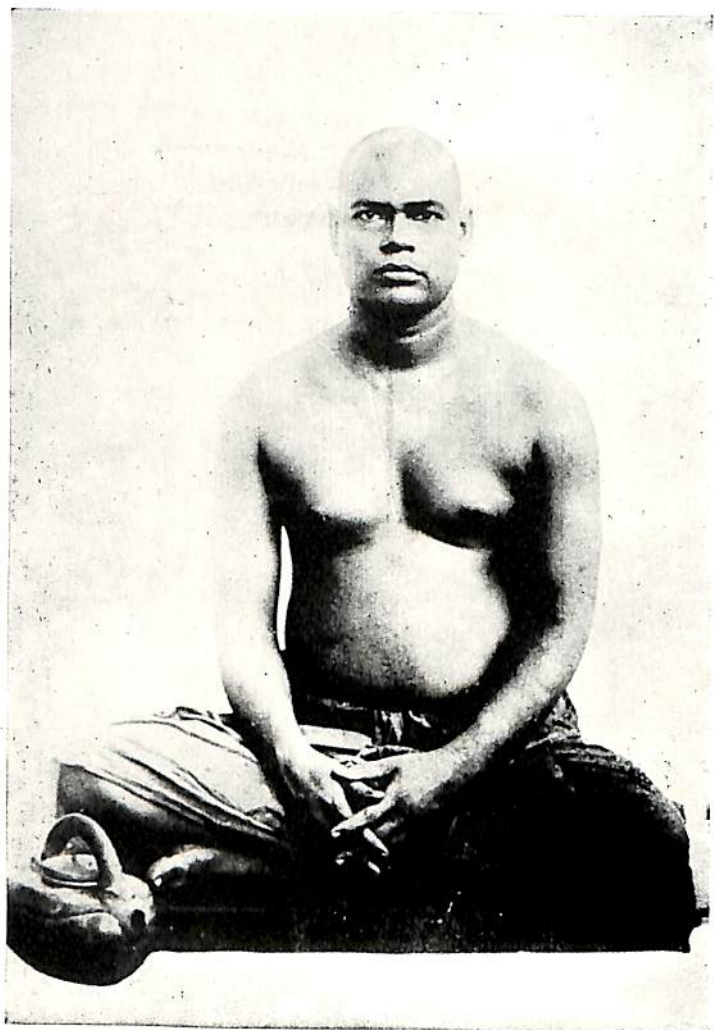
In the list of Sannyasins mentioned above as branches of the great tree of Ramakrishna, the

¹ *Swamiji's Message to a Disciple*: Advaita Ashram Edition, pp. 296.

name of Swami Ramakrishnananda, the subject of the present study, is prominently mentioned. Taken up by the dazzling splendour of Swami Vivekananda's personality and achievements, the awareness of the general public regarding these great co-disciples of the Swami and their place in revealing and in spreading the message of the Great Master, is rather hazy. This is partly due to lack of information provided through literature. With regard to some of them at least — and Swami Ramakrishnananda is one such — there are sufficient biographical details available as also records of speeches and writings that are sufficient to give an adequate understanding of their greatness. In regard to Swami Ramakrishnananda we are also fortunate in having recorded reminiscences of several devotees and disciples which help us see him at close quarters through the little incidents of life and through the impact he made on those very cultured and critical minds in the course of their very close association with him.

The picture we get of him through all these is — of a great devotee who felt the presence of God everywhere ; of a great Guru Bhakta who felt no distinction between God and the Guru and devoted every moment of his life to the service of God and the Guru ; of a great Sannyasin who practised the ideal of renunciation to the very letter ; of a great scholar who was at home alike in ancient and modern studies, in Sanskrit and in English, in sciences and in philosophies ; of a great Vedantist who had a comprehensive grasp of Indian thought

in all its phases and took a non-partisan and synthetic view of it; of a great humanitarian who shared the sufferings of the poor and did his best to relieve them; of a great missionary who felt it was nobler to share one's spiritual treasures with all than enjoy them oneself and who accordingly spent himself in the effort to preach the Gospel of Ramakrishna, far and wide and bring the Great Master into the lives of countless devotees in different parts of the country.



SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

CHAPTER II

EARLY LIFE

SASHI BHUSHAN, as Swami Ramakrishnananda was known in his pre-monastic days, was the eldest son of Iswar Chandra Chakravarti (1837-1902) of Ichchapur in Hooghly District. The family, which originally had its home at Majilpore in the district of 24 Parganas, had the surname of Bapuli, but after their migration from their original village, some of the members seem to have changed it into Chakravarty. Iswar Chandra, the father of the Swami, was a great devotee of the Divine Mother and noted as a specialist in various forms of Tantric worship and spiritual practices. He was a close disciple of Swami Purnananda Avadhuta, a famous Tantric scholar and saint of Bengal, and was also the court Pundit of Raja Indranarayana Singh of the Zamindar family of Paikpara. The Raja seems to have looked upon Iswar Chandra as his spiritual teacher. He was a full-fledged Tantrika worshipper, and had in his palace garden a place where all paraphernalia for Tantrik worship like Homakunda, Yupa-kashta, Panchamundi Asana, etc. were kept in readiness for use by his Guru, Iswar Chandra, and himself for periodical worship of the Divine Mother. On all auspicious days specially holy to the followers of the cult of Shakti, Iswar Chandra, whether he was at his

village home or at Calcutta, used to devote whole nights to the worship of the Divine Mother, accompanied with Japa and meditation, at spots considered particularly sacred for such practices by the Shaktas like the cremation ground, banks of rivers, and the foot of holy trees like Bilva, Nimba, Vata and Aswath. He was held in such high esteem as an adept in the cult of Shakti that in much later times even noted spiritual personages like Swami Saradananda and Yogen Ma were directed by the Holy Mother to take the Purnabhisheka of the Tantrikas from him. Robust in body and with long hair, flowing beard and broad forehead smeared with red sandal paste, Iswar Chandra had a Rishi-like appearance that matched very well with his devotional outlook.

Sashi Bhushan was born in July, 1863 as the eldest son of this learned and saintly Brahmin and his wife, Bhavasundari Devi (1846-1925). It requires no saying that the household of so holy and learned a person as Iswar Chandra was regulated by the rules and rigours of religious orthodoxy and was permeated by an atmosphere of genuine piety. Sasi Bhushan started his life on earth with such rare hereditary and environmental advantages which found their fulfilment in his later association with Sri Ramakrishna and in his becoming one of his chosen apostles. His case is perhaps one of the striking illustrations of the truth propounded in the Gita that those who have striven assiduously in the previous life for spiritual perfection alone are born with such advantages.

Says the Gita : "Having attained to the worlds of the righteous and dwelling there for everlasting years, he reincarnates in the homes of the pure and the prosperous. Or else he is born into the family of a wise Yogin itself. Verily a birth such as that is very rare to obtain in this world. There he is united with the intelligence acquired in his former body and strives more than before for perfection." (Gita VI—41 to 43)

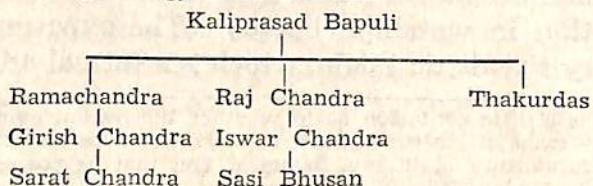
Not much is recorded about Sasi's boyhood, but one habit of his in his boyhood gives sufficient indication of the deep spiritual culture he had been absorbing from his holy domestic environment. Every year during the Navarathri, the autumnal season of Mother worship, Sasi used to engage himself one day in the ritualistic worship of the Divine Mother for a whole period of twenty-four hours. On such occasions he would sit from 6 a.m. to 6 a.m. on the next day on the same Asana without moving even once from there, engaged in worship, meditation, hymning, etc., overcoming all demands of physical Nature on him.¹ Such a feat of endurance is not possible through mere physical discipline. Only a sense of deep spiritual absorption and a sense of inner bliss arising from it, can explain an achievement of this type. In Narada's Bhakti Sutras one of the definitions of devotion is that Bhakti is absorption in worship (Pooja). The experience of ordinary ritualistic Pooja, which is a formal affair

¹ There is a little confusion as to whether the Swami evinced this capacity even in his early days, or only when he was staying at the Baranagore Math as a Sannyasi. But that he possessed this power is known from his own evidence.

at its best and a mechanical set of observances at its worst, could leave one puzzled how it could be identified with such an exalted state as Bhakti. Examples like that of Sasi are required to convince one that the rituals of a real worship are the expression of an ecstatic sense of exaltation which raises a man above the body sense. It is remarkable that such extraordinary devotional sense should manifest in Sasi at a very young age. It was a portent of what Sasi was to become in his more mature years.

For his school and college education, Sasi was sent to Calcutta where he stayed in the house of Girish Chandra, his father's first cousin, who was running a medical store. Girish Chandra had a son by name, Sarat, a little junior to Sasi in age, who became his associate in his school days and also later on during his discipleship under Sri Ramakrishna. For like Sasi, Sarat also became well-known as Swami Saradananda, one of the great apostles of Sri Ramakrishna. It is strange to contemplate that both the great men, who have contributed so immensely to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement, came from the same family,¹ grew up together, both in the period of

¹ The genealogy is as follows :



their secular and their spiritual education, and became chosen apostles of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sasi was a brilliant scholar and won a scholarship in the Entrance Examination from the Calcutta University. He passed his F.A. examination at the Albert College, Calcutta, and studied for the Bachelor's Degree at the Metropolitan College which has since then come to be known as Vidyasagar College. At college he had a brilliant record of academic distinction, his special subjects of study being Mathematics, Sanskrit, Philosophy and English. He did not, however, appear for the B.A. Degree examination, as he cut short his college studies before that, preferring to engage himself in the service of his great Master.

As an undergraduate of the Calcutta University, Sasi, like most of the young men of his times, including several of the other great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, was strongly influenced by the Brahmo revivalistic movement headed by Keshab Chander Sen. Those were the early days of the impact of Western culture and religion on the Indian mind after the firm establishment of British political power in the country. The first reaction of the Indian mind to this political and cultural impact was embodied in the Brahmo movement, which started with Raja Rammohan Roy, a brilliant leader with a mind well-versed in both oriental and occidental languages and culture. The conservatism and closeness of Hindu society, the restrictions and groupism of caste, the deplorableness of the status of women, the excesses of Tantricism,

the polytheistic tendencies of image worship etc., were the targets of attack for the reforming zeal of the Brahmos. The loss of political freedom and a sense of new dimension that Western intellectualism brought, were in themselves sufficient to fill the Indian mind with an inferiority complex, and when the Brahma leaders drew attention to definite issues as causes of India's degeneracy, they were heard in a receptive mood by the forward-looking youth of Bengal. The influence of Christian religion, not so perceptible at the time of Raja Rammohan Roy, became more and more conspicuous as leadership passed to the new generation, especially to Keshab Chander Sen. Keshab was an ardent devotee whose spirit found more kinship with Christianity than with Hindu systems of thought and worship. Though it did not lose its Hindu moorings completely, Brahmoism took more of an eclectic shape in which Christian forms and sentiments played a very dominant part. By his brilliant oratory, his genuine devotional fervour, and the general charisma of his personality, Keshab was able to cast almost a spell on the mind of Bengalee youth of his time. Young men flocked to his Samaj in large numbers, until it became almost a fashion for educated men inside and outside the University to be enrolled as Brahmos.

It was in such an intellectual climate that Sasi entered the University. In spite of a very orthodox upbringing, he too was swept away by the Brahma current. But while Brahma devotionism found some sort of response from his heart, he stuck on

to his Hindu observances in the matter of purity of food and to his strict and instinctive vegetarianism, which was uncommon even among the strictly orthodox Hindus of Bengal. To what an extent his devotional attitude towards Hindu ideals and practices like image worship etc. was corroded by Brahma influence, cannot be ascertained from any existing sources of information. That it could not have gone far, is evident from the fact that from the first contact with Sri Ramakrishna it did not involve any conflict or struggle for him to adopt full-fledged forms of Hindu devotionalism. His association with Brahmoism, however, had a meaning in his life. For it was through Brahma influence that he came to Sri Ramakrishna.

Paying a high compliment to Keshab Chander Sen, Sasi said to Sister Devamata in later days, "It was really Keshab Chander Sen who may be said to have revealed Guru Maharaj 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 almost impossible not to be moved by him. When he stood in his church dressed in his white robe, and talked with God, tears streaming down his face, there was not a dry eye in the congregation. He was a really great soul and a devotee."¹

¹ *Days in an Indian Monastery* by Sister Devamata, pp. 239.

CHAPTER III

AT THE FEET OF THE MASTER

THE most significant event in Sasi Bushan's life, namely, his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, took place when he was preparing for the F.A. examination. He first came to know of the Master from the speeches of Keshab Chander Sen published in the *Indian Mirror*, paying glowing tributes to the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. Sasi and his cousin, Sarat, were both followers of the Brahma Samaj of Keshab Chander Sen, and must have got corroborations of Keshab's tribute from some of the fellow members to whom the Master was already familiar. A group of fifteen young men of the Samaj, of whom Sasi and Sarat were possibly leaders, decided once to celebrate the anniversary of their Samaj at Dakshineswar on a day in October 1883. On arriving at Dakshineswar, Sasi and Sarat with some of their companions went to see the Master, whom they found seated on a small bedstead in his room. They were cordially received and given a mat to sit upon. A conversation ensued, mostly addressed to Sasi who was the eldest of the group. In the course of it, the Master said, "Bricks and tiles, if burnt after the trade mark has been stamped on them, retain their mark for ever. Similarly one should have the stamp of spirituality before one enters the



SRI RAMAKRISHNA

world. Then a person will not get attached. But now-a-days parents marry their boys young, and even before their education is over, they are fathers of children. They then hunt for jobs which often fetch them salaries insufficient to feed several mouths. Under such circumstances, when will they have the time and facility to think of God ?” “Then, Sir,” asked one of the boys, “is it wrong to marry ? Is it against the will of God ?” Thereupon Sri Ramakrishna asked the boy to take a book from the shelf and read aloud a passage which ran thus : “For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb ; there are some eunuchs which were made eunuchs of men ; and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive, let him receive.” And further St. Paul’s words, “I therefore say to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry ; for it is better to marry than to burn.”

It is indeed strange that Sri Ramakrishna had a passage of this kind read from the Christian Bible in place of any Hindu text, setting before Sasi and Sarat an ideal that was to have far-reaching consequences on the lives of the young men ! Did he at first sight itself understand that they were bringing with them strong Christian Samskaras (tendencies) from past births ? For the Master used to say that both Sasi and Sarat were the followers of Jesus Christ in a former incarnation.

The conversation continued and a question was raised by a young man, "Do you mean to say, Sir, that marriage is against the will of God? How can His creation go on if people cease to marry?" To this the Master replied with a smile, "Don't worry about that. Those who like to marry are at liberty to do so. What I said just now was between ourselves (meaning Sasi and Sarat). I say what I have got to say. You may take as much or as little of it as you like."

The Master further asked Sasi at that first meeting whether he believed in God with form or without form. And Sasi replied with his characteristic frankness: "I am not certain about the very existence of God. So I am not able to speak one way or the other!"¹ The reply pleased the Master immensely. For it was the reply of a live soul hankering for a conviction about the Divine mystery and not that of a conventional believer or theoretical philosopher.

Referring to this first meeting with the Master and his experience in subsequent meetings, Sasi told Sister Devamata in much later years: ² "I talked a great deal that first day, but never again. After I had listened to Ramakrishna, I had nothing more to say. I did not have to talk. Often I would go to him with my mind full of some doubt which I wished him to clear away; but when I

¹ The quoted passages are from *Life of Ramakrishna* published by the Advaita Ashram (4th Edition) pp. 472-73.

² *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples* by Sister Devamata, pp. 95.

reached the Temple I would find his room full of people and would feel very much disappointed. As soon as he saw me he would say, 'Come in, sit down. Are you doing well?' Then he would return to his subject, but invariably he would take up the very doubt that was troubling my mind and would clear it away completely."¹

For nearly three years, from October 1883 to August 1886, Sasi lived in intimate contact with the Master, at first as a visiting disciple and, during the last eight months, as a constant attendant. We have not many definite recorded incidents connected with the early days of Sasi's association with the Master. We shall therefore give here an extract of what Sasi himself said about his days with the Master to Sister Devamata, as recorded in her book, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples*. Says Devamata: How they passed their days is told in these words by the disciple Sasi: ¹ "It was only on Sundays that there was a crowd at the temple; on other days Guru Maharaj (Sri Ramakrishna) was left alone with his few chosen ones. Not every one could stay with him, only those whom he chose to have. And why did he keep them? In order that in one night he might make them perfect. Just as a goldsmith gives shape to a lump of gold, so he would mould them so that their whole life would be changed and they could never forget the impression he had stamped on them.

¹ *Sri Ramakrishna and his Disciples* by Sister Devamata, pp. 99.

“He possessed the peculiar power to discern at once whether a man was fit or not. Sometimes people would come and want to stay with him but he would tell them with childlike frankness, ‘You better go home.’ When now and then there would be a feast and Guru Maharaj would be sitting with his disciples, a man would sometimes come who was not really good but who by sitting with him wanted to appear good; at once Guru Maharaj would make him out and would say, ‘Here is a man who is not pure. He will spoil my children.’ Without hesitation he would send him away.

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

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

The special disciples referred to above were a group of young men like Sasi, several of them being undergraduates at college. They were drawn to the Master by a close feeling of affection and affinity, and later they became his Sannyasin disciples, leaving hearth and home. The most

prominent among them was Naren, who became Swami Vivekananda. The names of the others who became Sannyasins afterwards were: Rakhal (Brahmananda); Baburam (Premananda); Yogin (Yogananda); Niranjan (Niranjanananda); Tarak (Shivananda); Latu (Adbhutananda); Kali (Abhedananda); Gopal senior (Advaitananda); Sarat (Saradananda); Hari (Turiyananda); Sarada (Trigunatita); Gangadhar (Akhandananda); Subodh (Subodhananda); Hari Prasanna (Vignanananda); and Sasi (Ramakrishnananda). Sasi became intimate with all of these, as also with most of the lay devotees of the Master.

Regarding certain personal incidents connected with Sasi in these early days of discipleship, Sister Devamata quotes his words: ¹ "He (Sri Ramakrishna) was extremely fond of ice. One day when it was very hot I walked from Calcutta to Dakshineswar (six miles) to carry him a piece of ice wrapped in paper. It was just noon time and the sun's rays were so strong that they blistered my body. When Guru Maharaj saw me, he began to say 'Oh! oh!' as if he was in pain. I asked him what was the matter and he said that as he looked at my body, his own began to burn. Strange to say the ice did not at all melt on the way."

Further Devamata says: ² "Sasi made no compromises in his discipleship. He was devotion embodied. Once at the temple when he was studying Persian in order to read the Sufi poets in the

¹ & ² *Days in an Indian Monastery* by Sister Devamata, pp. 96.

original, the Master called him three times before he heard. When he came, Sri Ramakrishna asked him what he had been doing and Sasi told him about his new line of study. 'If you forget your duties for the sake of study, you will lose your devotion,' Sri Ramakrishna remarked quietly. Sasi sensed the deeper significance¹ of his words. He had bigger things to learn. He took his Persian books and threw them into the Ganges.

"He had heard of the beauty of Sufi poetry from Naren (later Swami Vivekananda). He and Naren and Sarat were inseparable. They spent long days together at the Temple and their discussions and conferences were unending. Sasi told me of one night when the three walked back from Dakshineswar together. Reaching Calcutta they could not bear to separate, so Naren went home with Sarat and Sasi. The two cousins lived under the same roof. Then Sarat and Sasi walked to Naren's house. Still the discussion was not finished, so Naren came back with Sasi and Sarat, and Sarat and Sasi returned with Naren. This kept up till two in the morning, then none of the boys dared go home. While they were debating what to do, an old house collapsed in the neighbourhood. They ran to the rescue of the

¹ The service of God and the service of the Guru are far more important than all theoretical studies of religion and philosophy. They are the direct means of spiritual realisation. Sasi was then staying at Dakshineswar with the Master to serve him, and learn spiritual Truths directly from him. The mistake he committed was to forget this and concentrate on books, which he could do elsewhere also. Hence the Master's admonition.

occupants and in the excitement no one noticed their return."

Beyond a few incidents of this type, we do not have records, as in the case of some other direct disciples of the Master, of mystic events and high spiritual experiences produced by the Master's grace. But the incidents cited are sufficient to show the intimacy of Sasi's contact with the Master and his other great disciples as also the thoroughness with which he absorbed his ideals and his teachings. But it was in the last phase of the Master's life, when, afflicted with cancer of the throat, he was removed first to Shyampukur and next to Cossipore, that Sasi's life got the special direction distinguishing him from all other disciples. Running an establishment for the Master and nursing him became a responsibility of the lay and monastic disciples. While the lay disciples raised from among themselves the necessary funds, the young men formed into a group to take up the responsibility of running the establishment and attending on the Master. Many of them, including Sasi, were attending college, but the service of the Master seemed to them more important than the pursuit of their individual careers. Sasi was one of the first to give up college study and he became the twenty-four-hour personal attendant of the ailing Master. This self-imposed discipline of personal service of the Master became thenceforth the dominant note of his life. The service which he performed to the Master's living body became, after his lifetime,

converted into the Service of his picture, with the feeling of his living presence in it. Even when he was fully engaged in the active work of propagating the Master's message in the world, personal Service (Seva) of his living presence in his likeness was a feature of his daily life.

Whereas all the other disciples were spending much time in the practice of meditation and similar devotional practices, it is said that Sasi had hardly any time for all these. His time was mostly taken up with the bedside service of the Master done with a zeal that overlooked all considerations of rest and sleep for himself. And by this service he gained the Master's abounding grace and, through that, devotion and knowledge of the highest order. Hindu tradition holds that there is no higher Sadhana than the service of the Guru. The Chandogya Upanishad mentions the case of Satyakama Jabala who, ordered by his Guru, went about tending the cattle of his Master and in the course of it attained to illumination. The Svetaswatara Upanishad closes with the clarion note that the truths of the Vedanta will shine only in one who is full of devotion to God and equal devotion to the Guru.

In fact the Indian spiritual tradition maintains that there is only one Guru for all, and that is God. God, manifesting as Anugraha Shakti (redeeming power of love), is the Guru. This manifestation may take place in many ways in relation to different individuals, giving them the spiritual stimulation that uplifts them. Generally the

human agency through which it manifests is called the Guru, but this deeper meaning of the Guru concept is often forgotten and he is taken as just a person.

Sri Ramakrishna, whom Sasi served, was not an ordinary manifestation of Guru Shakti. He was a world teacher, a Divine Incarnation, through whom the redeeming power of God was fully manifested. To serve him was the veritable service of God. Sadhanas are after all means for communion with the Divine. The term Bhakti, derived from the root 'Bhaj', means service. True service is born of love. The months that Sasi spent at Cossipore form a unique expression of such loving service. It was perhaps a much more potent means of spiritual realization than any practice ordinarily known as spiritual Sadhana.

The devoted personal service that Sasi rendered to the Master has received a glowing tribute from Ramachandra Datta, a prominent house-holder disciple of the Master. Ramachandra Datta, in his *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*¹ in Bengali, says: "Sasi's service is incomparable and inimitable. If selfless service in the proper sense be there in the world, Sasi knew it fully well. If there be any untiring attendants, worth the name, Sasi should be termed the foremost of them all. If any one wants to see motiveless love, then Sasi is the model. Sasi had only merits, no faults. But

¹ *Life of Ramakrishna* (in Bengali) by Ramchandra Datta, pp. 186-187.

there is a proverb that none can be absolutely free from faults.

“Sasi served the Paramahansa Deva heart and soul without any question, without any murmur and without any consideration of personal inconvenience. If this may at all be called a fault, then Sasi had this fault in full. We have only heard of Hanuman’s matchless devotion as a servant to his Lord. Sasi showed the perfection of such devotion before our very eyes. No devotee of the Paramahansa can surpass Sasi in this respect. My statement is not at all exaggerated. All those who approached Paramahansa Deva had some ulterior motive or other. They had asked, ‘How shall I be saved? How shall I progress in spiritual life? Or how shall I walk on the path of Yoga?’ But Sasi had no such motive whatever. He surrendered his humble self completely to the Master and learnt only the religion of selfless service from him. The practice of that religion in full has made him blessed beyond comparison. There is no doubt that whosoever will hear the thrilling story of Sasi’s loving service to the Master will attain devotion to the Master. Brother Sasi, you are indeed blessed! You mastered the secret of real service. To the full satisfaction of your heart, you have done service to the Guru which is the most meritorious act in religious life. Brother dear, born as a man, you understood the duty of human life. That is why you have been the object of the Master’s special grace. By his grace, you stand at the head of the circle of his attendants. You are

his chosen son and servant and is second to none in service of him.”

This chapter of Sasi's life closed with the passing of Sri Ramakrishna in the early hours of Monday, the 16th August of 1886. The account of his passing as narrated to Sister Devamata by Sasi, his personal attendant at the time, is worth quoting. Said Sasi :¹ “We all thought the Master was better because he ate so much more supper than usual, and he said nothing of going. In the afternoon he had asked Yogin to look in the almanac and see whether it was an auspicious day. Also he had been telling us for some time that the vessel which was floating in the ocean was already two-thirds full of water, soon the rest would fill up and it would plunge into the ocean. But we did not believe that he was really going. He never seemed to mind the pain. He never lost his cheerfulness. He used to say that he was all well and happy, only there was a little something here (pointing to the throat). ‘Within me are two persons,’ he would declare. ‘One is the Divine Mother, the other is her devotee. It is the devotee that has taken ill.’

“When Sri Ramakrishna gave up his body, I think it was the most blissful moment of his life. A thrill of joy ran through him. I myself saw it. I remember every incident of that last day. Our Master seemed very well and cheerful. In the afternoon he talked for fully two hours to a

¹ *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples* by Sister Devamata, pp. 161.

gentleman who came to put him some questions about Yoga. A little later, I ran some seven miles to bring a Doctor. When I reached the Doctor's house, he was not there. I was told he was at a certain place, so I ran another mile and met him on the way. He had an engagement and said he could not come, but I dragged him away just the same.

"On the last night Ramakrishna was talking with us to the very last. For supper he had drunk a whole glass of Payasam and seemed to relish it. There was no doubt a little heat in the body, so he asked us to fan him and some ten of us were all fanning at once. He was sitting up against five or six pillows which were supported by my body, and at the same time I too was fanning. This made a slight motion and twice he asked me: 'Why are you shaking?' It was as if his mind was so fixed and steady that he could perceive the least motion. Narendra took his feet and began to rub them, and Ramakrishna was talking to him, telling what he must do. 'Take care of these boys,' he repeated again and again, as if he was putting them in Naren's charge. Then he asked to lie down.

"Suddenly at one o'clock he fell towards one side, there was a low sound in the throat and I saw all the hairs of his body stand on end. Narendra quickly laid his feet on a quilt and ran downstairs as if he could not bear it. A doctor, who was a great devotee and who was feeling his pulse, saw that it had stopped and began to weep aloud. 'What are you doing?' I asked, impatient with him

for acting as if the Master had really left us.

“We all believed that it was only Samadhi, so Naren came back and we sat down, some twenty of us, and began repeating all together ‘Hari Om ! Hari Om !’ In this way we waited until between one and two the next day. Still the body had some heat in it, especially about the back, but the doctor insisted that the soul had left. About five the body had grown cold, so we placed it on a cot, covered with garlands and carried it to the burning ghat.”

It is said that at the passing of the Master, Sasi became unconscious, paralysed by unbearable grief. He, however, came round quickly and his grief expressed itself in a flood of tears. But when the funeral pyre was lighted and flames began to consume the body, Sasi joined his loud voice with that of others in the triumphant cries of ‘Jay’ to the Master’s name. After the cremation was over, Sasi carried the Relics of the Master on his head to the Cossipore garden house.

At the Cossipore crematorium a large horizontal tablet on a high rectangular base marks the spot beside the Ganges where Sri Ramakrishna’s body was cremated.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER THE MASTER'S PASSING

THE new chapter in the life of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, including Sasi, began with a sort of dispute about the disposal of the Relics of the Master. The young disciples wanted them to be deposited in a plot of ground near the Ganges, but the plot could not be had for want of funds. But Ramachandra Dutta, one of the very prominent householder disciples of the Master, insisted that they should be interned in his garden house Yogodyan at Kankurgachi which the Master had visited in his lifetime and which was being used for devotional purposes. As the lease period of the Cossipore garden house would be ending soon, a decision was formally taken that they should be interned at Yogodyan. Sasi, however, removed a good portion of them into another container and carried the rest on his head to Yogodyan.¹ There

¹ The portion of the Relics that was retained, was kept in the Math Shrine during the days the Math was temporarily situated at Baranagore, Alambazar etc., until Swami Vivekananda's return from the West. As earnestly desired by the young monks from the start, a plot on the banks of the Ganges was procured and the present Belur Math founded. The Relics were transferred to it carried by Swami Vivekananda himself on his head, and deposited in the old Belur Math Shrine in 1898. Later, along with the Shrine it was transferred to the new Temple built at the Math premises in 1938.

The portion of the Relics interred at Yogodyan had a temple built centering it, by Ramachandra Datta who founded an Ashrama there. He had some disciples also. The Ashram with

they were interned in a deep pit. As the pit was filled up and rammed, Sasi wept profusely and swooned in sorrow, for so close was the association in his mind between the Master and his Relics.

For a short time, after the Master's passing, many of the young disciples went home at the persuasion of their parents, but three of them who had already abandoned their homes in the Master's lifetime itself — Tarak, Latu and Gopal (senior) — continued to stay at Cossipore garden house itself for a time till the lease of that building expired. Surendra Nath Mitra, one of the householder disciples of the Master, agreed to continue the financial help he was giving during the Master's last days, and a dilapidated building at a very cheap rent was found at Baranagore to house the first monastery of the Ramakrishna Brotherhood. Very soon the young men who had gone home under parental pressure, returned mainly through the persuasion of Narendranath and joined the three at the new Math at Baranagore. When the Brotherhood was thus formed, all the young men, under the lead of Narendranath, went towards the end of December 1886 to the neighbouring village of Antpur at the invitation of the devoted mother of Baburam. It happened to be

the Relics continued to be in the care of Ramachandra Datta's disciples till recent times, when the Ashrama was given over to the Belur Math in 1943. Afterwards when some renovation of the Shrine was done, it was found that the old container in which the Relics were kept was earthen and that water had percolated into it. It has since then been put in a proper container and deposited in the Shrine Yogodyan at Kankurganchi is now one of the branch centres of the Belur Math.

the Christmas Eve. The young men lit a sacred fire, meditated for a long time sitting round it, and took the vow of renunciation. It is true that Sri Ramakrishna had distributed ochre clothes, the symbol of Sannyasa, among them, and asked them to collect Bhiksha (alms) as a token of their fitness for monastic life. But it was at the Baranagore Math that they finally embraced the monastic life and adopted the Kashaya (ochre) dress and new monastic names. The name given to Sasi was Ramakrishnananda. Narendranath, the leader of the young men, would himself have liked to assume that name, but he conceded it to Sasi in token of the latter's unsurpassable devotion to, and service of, the Master.

Sasi, now Swami Ramakrishnananda, soon proved to be the main pillar of the newly formed monastery. All the young monks, spurred by an ardent spirit of renunciation and longing for the Divine, spent most of their time in meditation, devotional singing and study of scriptures. They had hardly time or inclination for anything else. But there were the common affairs of the monastery — the Service at the Shrine, the preparation of offerings, feeding of the inmates etc. With his characteristic spirit of service, so magnificently displayed during the Master's illness, Swami Ramakrishnananda voluntarily came forward to look to these things. Not that he was in any way less than any of the other brothers in devotional ardour, in his capacity for meditation, or for study of scriptures, but his notion of spiri-

tuality seems to have been much more broad-based and much wider in scope than is ordinarily understood. He was one who found the joy of self-abandonment as much in selfless service as in meditation, and so he devoted for the usual spiritual practises, only whatever time was left to him after attending to the Service of the Master and the monastic community.

The life of the small monastic community of which Swami Ramakrishnananda was the humble servant, was unique in many respects. The house itself was old and dilapidated. Though two-storeyed, its ground floor was dark and damp, and sometimes snakes were found to crawl in its rooms. The first floor, which alone was habitable, housed the Shrine in one of its rooms and the remaining space comprising a multi-purpose hall with mats spread in it, was used for reception of visitors, sleep, devotional music, scriptural study, discussions etc. The provision stock in the monastic store was always scanty, for the contributions that came from Suresh Mitra and a few devotees were insufficient to pay the house rent of Rs. 10 per month and feed so many mouths. To supplement the resources the monks often went out for Bhiksha (alms), and though some food materials were got that way, they became the target of the criticism of some and the pity of others. Sometimes they had to go with mere rice for their food. But for them, their stern spirit of renunciation, their fervent yearning for the Divine, their joy in meditation and Bhajan were more than a compensation for rich

repast and comfortable living. Those who have inner reserves of joy, need very little of contactual joys.

One day, it is recorded, the monks had no provision in the store, nor did they get anything by way of alms. The brethren, caught up in the deep spiritual joy of meditation and devotional singing, were unmindful of the precarious situation. But not so Swami Ramakrishnanada. Some cooked offering had to be offered to the Master. The cooking in the Math was a part of the Service of the Master, and it was therefore his responsibility. So he went to a neighbouring house, the members of which were not generally well-disposed to the monks. There was at least one in the house who was somewhat friendly to Swami Ramakrishnananda. On an appeal being made to him, he gave some quantity of rice, potatoes and ghee, which the Swami cooked, offered to the Master, and distributed in the form of balls to the brothers lost in devotional singing. The hungry brothers seem to have exclaimed in thankfulness, "Sasi dear, where have you procured such sweet balls from?"

After a time the monastic community was seized by wanderlust — the urge the monks feel for going from pilgrimage to pilgrimage, practising austerities in lonely sacred spots, forests and river banks. So several of them including the leader, Naren, began to go away singly or in groups to other parts of the country as Parivrajakas (wandering ascetics), and the resident strength of the monastery began to grow lean. There was,

however, only one person who never left it, and that was Swami Ramakrishnananda. Being responsible for the Service of the Master in his Relics, he was bound to stay in the monastery and attend to the continuity of its functioning. It is said that the Swami therefore never went even to Banaras on pilgrimage, but day after day continued to do the Service of the Master over his picture and Relics as he had been attending on him in his lifetime. This discipline constituted his main Sadhana.

In later days Swami Vivekananda paid the following high compliments to the contribution of Swami Ramakrishnananda to the success of the monastery they started: "Sasi was the main pillar of the Math. Without him life in the monastery would have been impossible. Often the monks would be lost in prayer and meditation, with no thought of food, and Swami Ramakrishnananda would wait with their meals or even drag them out of meditation."

Swami Ramakrishnananda's Service in the Shrine should be distinguished from ordinary worship. It was Seva and not mere Pooja. The latter is ritual-bound and formal. At its best it is of the nature of adoration. Seva is more informal and intimate. It is service rendered as to a living person, the image being looked upon as the very Divinity and not merely a symbol. Though there may sometimes be a modicum of rituals in it, the stress is on feeling the living presence of the Divine in the image and in ministering to it as to

an honoured and beloved person. In the consciousness of the devotee it is an immediate loving service of the very Divine, and not a mere worship of a symbol by sacred incantation and ritualistic performances.

The accounts given by persons who had witnessed Swami Ramakrishnananda's service at the Shrine at Baranagore and later at Madras, give the impression that he was one of the very few in our age to rise to this Seva conception of worship, as conceived in Indian devotional philosophy.

In this connection an extract from the reminiscences of Swami Bodhananda, one of the earliest to join the monastic Order, about what he saw of Swami Ramakrishnananda at Baranagore Math, will be revealing. Having come to know of the monastic brotherhood of Sri Ramakrishna from his Professor, Mahendra Nath Gupta (M. of the *Gospel*), he with several young friends, went to the Baranagore Math. He writes :¹ "One afternoon we went with M. to Baranagore monastery. I saw Swami Ramakrishnanandaji. You know, he had never for once left the Service of the Master and had stuck to the spot even when all his comrades had gone on pilgrimage to different parts of India. He was very vigilant about his daily worship. We were four — Virajananda, Vimalananda, Atmananda and myself. Ramakrishnanandaji asked us what we liked to do. Hearing that we were students, he asked us not to neglect our studies. He examined

¹ *Vedanta Kesari*, 1924, pp. 125.

us in our subjects. He gave us some Prasad as also some Nirmalya (offered flowers). When we were ushered into the Shrine, we felt the atmosphere simply transporting. It was so holy. The Shrine room was a very small one. The picture of Sri Guru Maharaj was on the bed. In front of the bed-stead was his Paduka (wooden sandals) and Kauta (casket) containing his ashes. We saluted them. Swami Ramakrishnanandaji prayed to Guru Maharaj to bless us, that our bondage may be cut off. . . . As we began to visit the Math from time to time Swami Ramakrishnanandaji allowed us some privileges. When the day was too hot, he would ask us to take the fan and fan Sri Guru Maharaj.¹ What a wonderful spectacle it was to see Swami Ramakrishnanandaji serving the Master! Day and night the Swami had no thought but that of the Master. If he felt hot, he would get up and fan Sri Guru Maharaj. In fact to him the Master was a living personality who could be seen, felt and served. His services were simple. He would get up at 4 a.m. and washing his hands and changing his clothes, he would enter the shrine, raise up the curtain from the bed-stead and rouse the Lord from his sleep. He would then offer water for washing. Then the Bhog (food offering) consisting of a coconut Laddu (sweetened coconut ball) would be offered ; next tobacco to

¹ Fanning the Master was a part of Swami Ramakrishnananda's Service of the Master. On hot days he was often found to fan the Master all through night, standing by the side of the cot where his picture had been put to rest. So vivid and real was his sense of the presence of the Master.

smoke was offered. He would then sweep the room. He never allowed even his brother-disciples to help him. Next he would collect flowers for worship and then go to the bazaar for buying vegetables. He would select the best the market could offer. He himself would dress the vegetables for cooking. Then he would go for his bath in the Ganges. While returning to the Math, he would carry with him a pitcher of holy Ganges water for Pooja. He would then sit for worship. It was very simple . . . a few flowers devotionally offered. After Pooja, cooked offerings were made and Prasadam distributed. Now and then he would give us the privilege of preparing sandal paste for worship. We enjoyed these so much."

The evening worship and Arati that Swami Ramakrishnananda conducted at the shrine in Baranagore Math is described by Swami Virajananda, who along with Swami Bodhananda mentioned before, was in the first batch to join the Order after the direct disciples of the Master. He became the President of the Order in later days. Says the Swami: "Oh, how wonderful was the Arati (Vesper Service) of Sasi Maharaj! It was really a sight for the gods. Enveloped with the smoke of burning incense and drowned in the music of the drums and cymbals, he would wave Chowrie (feathery fan) towards the end of the Arati. Intoxicated with God-consciousness, he would repeat, 'Jai Guru Dev! Jai Guru Dev!' in a crescendo of divine abandon and would dance from one side of the hall to the other rhythmically

pace the floor. What unique feelings of ecstatic love would course through the hearts of men witnessing it can better be imagined than described. The whole building would be in a tremor. With a heavenly glow on his face, he looked the very embodiment of the God of Fire. The hands of the drummer would get benumbed and would refuse to move. The spectators would watch from the adjoining room and join him, all repeating in chorus, 'Jai Guru Dev! Jai Guru Dev!' They would also dance in rapturous fervour. Then all would prostrate themselves before the Deity and recite in chorus verses from the Guru Gita :

"I bow down to the adorable Guru (Teacher) who by the collyrium of knowledge, opened my eyes, blinded by the disease of ignorance."

After this the last part of a hymn composed by Swami Abhedananda was sung :

"Let our salutations be to Ramakrishna, the taintless, eternal, of universal form, God incarnate out of condescension for devotees, and worshipful Lord of all."

"Finally with the words 'Jai Sri Guru Maharaj Ki Jai' the evening Service would close."¹

¹ It is also stated elsewhere that during the Aratrika, the Swami used to chant the choral lines sung at the Banaras Siva Temple at the evening service: "Jai Siva Omkara! Bhaja Siva Omkara!" In later times the Aratrika chants in the Shrines of Sri Ramakrishna Math and its centres have been standardised into the present three hymns:

'Khandana Bhava Bandhana'

'Om Hrim, Ritam' and

'Sarva Mangala Mangalye'.

The first two are the compositions of Swami Vivekananda, and the third is from Devi Mahatmya.

There are some minor pieces of information about this period of the Swami's life, showing his extensive knowledge and wide interest. He translated the Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna from Bengali into Sanskrit verses and got them serially published in a Sanskrit journal called Vidyodaya. Though learned and devotional, the Swami was not a gloomy ascetic. He was full of cheer and had a keen sense of humour. When after noon meal he was resting, he would sometimes read humorous books like Mark Twain's *Innocents at Home* and *Innocents Abroad*. He would read these aloud, dramatising them and make all present roar with laughter. He was a mathematician by taste and training, and often at this time and afterwards it was one of his pastimes to solve difficult mathematical problems. Often he used to read the *Bhagavata*, and the episode of Rishabha Deva was one of his favourite sections of that great scripture. He used to describe the state of Rishabha Deva to have been that of a real Paramahansa.

Swami Ramakrishnananda continued to live in this way from August 1886 to March 1897, first at Baranagore and afterwards at Alam Bazaar to where the Math was transferred in 1892. He had no other ambition in life than to serve the Master, and he might have spent his whole life round the Relics, if he had not been disturbed from his pious engrossment by the call of his respected and beloved leader, Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji drew his attention to the higher implications of the service of their divine Master. The Master was not a mere

person, nor even a God-man, but a Divine Cause. While service can be done to him in the Shrine in truth and reality, he has to be served in the wider world by bringing him and his saving message to a larger humanity; for the Master came not merely for a few immediate disciples of his. The uniqueness of Swami Vivekananda lies in that he was the first to realize this world-wide significance of the Master's life and teachings, and identify activities in furtherance of them as a significant service of the Master. In later days it was after much heated discussion and persuasion that Swamiji could bring most of the other brothers to his ways of thinking and bring them together into an integrated missionary body with a definite scheme of preaching and works of service.

It is, however, strange that the one whom he could convert without any difficulty was Swami Ramakrishnananda. After he started the Vedanta movement in the West, he was in need of a competent assistant, and Swamiji wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda to start to the West to take up the work of preaching Vedanta. The Swami, who was till then considered to be a paragon of cloistered virtue, whose sole occupation was attention to the duties in the Shrine, who had never moved even to a neighbouring centre of pilgrimage like Banaras all those ten years, readily agreed to this proposal. Apparently both the choice and the response might look strange; but not so on close scrutiny. For Swami Ramakrishnananda, along with Swami Vivekananda himself and Swami

Abhedananda, was among the most scholarly and intellectual disciples of the Master, being proficient in both Sanskrit and English, and in the humanities and the sciences. Swami Vivekananda knew his brother-disciple very well. But the ready response of Swami Ramakrishnananda, accustomed to orthodox ways of life and to continued service in the Shrine, may look a bit surprising. Does the explanation consist in what his Master called his Christian Samskaras¹ (tendencies) of past life?

¹ It will be relevant to quote here what Sister Devamata writes in her book, *Days in an Indian Monastery* (pages 22-23) on Swami Ramakrishnananda's affinities with Christian teachings. She writes: "He (Swami Ramakrishnananda) 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 6 p.m. he held a class at the Hindu Theological High School. When Good Friday came he talked on the Crucifixion. The depth of his feelings and 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 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 have been a religion. Otherwise Christ simply would have died like 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 rekindled in the tomb.

"It was the glorious example which Christ gave on the Cross that made the Christians such willing martyrs..... Peter, when he was to be crucified, had but one thing to ask: 'Let me be placed with my head downward. My Master died honourably with His head up. It is proper that His servant should die with his head in the dust.

For in no other religion, except perhaps Buddhism, has the idea of serving the World Teacher (Christ) through the service of all and by carrying the Good Tidings of his advent and his message far and wide, played so dominant a part as in genuine Christian piety. That Swami Ramakrishnananda could concentrate on the service of the Master and the community of monastic brothers, even to the exclusion of cherished Hindu ideas of absorption in Samadhi, worklessness, pilgrimage, asceticism etc. shows the affinity of his spirit with the pattern of devotional life developed according to Christian ideals. It required only the genius of Swami Vivekananda to inspire his mind with the world-wide significance of the Master and his message, and convert all the ardour of his spirit from a cloistered conception of service of the Master into a world-wide application of it.

His proposed departure to the West, however, did not materialize. The Swami had a kind of dry eczema that troubled him off and on. He was advised by a great authority in homoeopathy that such persons should expose their body to sunlight and air as far as possible, and life in the West, where one has to cover the body always, would have a very adverse effect on his health. He was therefore

"The ways of the Lord are unfathomable. When Christ's disciples were scattered and over-powered 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".

advised to stay in a tropical climate only. So the idea of his going to the West fell through, and Swami Abhedananda was asked to go to the assistance of Swamiji in the West. But Swami Ramakrishnananda was not spared to continue his retired life for long. In 1897 Swami Vivekananda returned from the West, and the first thing he did on reaching Calcutta was to send Swami Ramakrishnananda to Madras to start a permanent centre there in continuation of the deep interest he had created in the city by his lectures and contacts. In Swamiji's eyes, his scholarship in English and Sanskrit combined with his orthodox style of living made Swami Ramakrishnananda pre-eminently suited to work in so intellectual yet so intensely orthodox a city like Madras. The Swami readily consented.

So in March 1897, Swami Ramakrishnananda, along with Swami Sadananda, left Calcutta by steamer¹ for Madras.

¹ In those days railway communication between Calcutta and Madras had not yet been established.

CHAPTER V

SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA AT MADRAS

THE Reminiscences of close disciples and devotees of the Swami published as the Second Section of the book give full information about his activities in Madras and present vivid accounts of his life of renunciation, devotion and service as they witnessed it in the course of their long and intimate contact with him. In order to avoid repetition we shall give here only a brief outline of these activities so as to present an integrated view of the facts given in the Reminiscences.

On his arrival at Madras by steamer, the Swami was received by Sri Alasinga Perumal, Dr. Nanjunda Rao and others of the circle of devotees and friends that Swami Vivekananda had formed. He was at first accommodated for a short time at Flora Cottage, a building on the Ice House Road, and later at the Ice House itself. The Ice House, otherwise known as Castle Kernan and situated in the Triplicane sea-beach, is a three storeyed structure owned then by a prosperous advocate, Sri Biligiri Aiyangar. It was there that Swami Vivekananda had stayed on his return from the West when he was given a historic reception by the citizens of Madras. Sri Aiyangar, who was a good devotee, now placed the ground floor at the Swami's disposal until it was auctioned away, most proba-

bly towards the close of 1906 or early in 1907. Afterwards the Swami had to accommodate himself with great difficulty in one of the out-houses of Castle Kernan, until the new Math building under construction at Mylapore was completed in November 1907.

The first thing that the Swami did was to establish a Shrine at this new residence and install the small picture of the Master he had brought with him and start his Service in the same way as he was habituated to doing at Calcutta. He could conceive of his life only as a series of activities centring round the Master. Service of his living presence in the Shrine was for him an absolute necessity. But unlike during the Baranagore life, the scope of this service was extended to preaching and teaching the Master's message in the city and outside as far as he could reach. His preaching activity consisted of weekly classes in several parts of the city on scriptural texts like the Gita, the Upanishads and the Bhagavata and lectures at the invitation of different religious associations in the city. The classes were held in different parts of the city, and often there were more than one a day. The schedule of his classes in the latter half of 1900 was as follows :

SUNDAY : Gita at Purasawalkam — 7 to
8-30 a.m.

Gita at Egmore — 4-30 to 6-00 p.m.

Bhagavatam at Chintadripet — 7 to
8-30 p.m.

MONDAY: Gita at Komaleswaranpet — 7 to 8-30 a.m.

Upanishads at Castle Kernan, Triplicane — 7 to 8-30 p.m.

TUESDAY: Gita at Y.M.I.A., George Town — 5-30 to 7-00 p.m.

WEDNESDAY: Gita at Triplicane — 7-30 to 8-00 p.m.

THURSDAY: Upanishads at Castle Kernan, Triplicane — 7 to 8-30 p.m.

FRIDAY: Upanishads at Castle Kernan, Triplicane — 7 to 8-30 p.m.

SATURDAY: Upanishads at Mylapore — 7 to 8-30 a.m.

Gita at Saidapet — 6-30 to 8 p.m.

The schedule of classes is formidable, there being three of them on certain days. And considering the wide distances separating many of the localities where classes were held and the insufficiency of means of travel, it must have been a hard job for him to meet all these demands. To get a Jutka, a narrow, inconvenient, horse-drawn vehicle, he had to travel a mile and a half from his residence and from there reach the venue of the classes three or four miles away. These difficulties are adequately described in the Reminiscences. The immensity of his difficulties will be realized when it is known that in the earlier period of stay at the Ice House, he was his own cook and servant, there being not even a Brahmachari to assist him. Some of the classes were very well-attend-

ed, but some not so. The Reminiscences mention that there were occasions when the Swami was the only person in a class. But not the least perturbed by it, he would spend an hour in meditation at the place, and return! Only a Vedantin with a very high degree of equanimity could do this. The classes distributed in different parts of the city, helped him to be widely known in Madras and several genuine spiritual seekers were gradually drawn to him. The earnest students attending the classes met him afterwards at the Math and received instruction from personal talks and, what was much more, inspiration by observing his glowing example of renunciation and devotion.

Besides holding these weekly classes, he used to hold periodical lectures either at the Math itself or under the auspices of some religious and cultural associations in the city. Two series of lectures he gave at the Math were first published as books under the name 'The Universe and Man' and 'The Soul of Man'. The names of some of the other associations under whose auspices he lectured, as far as could be gathered now, are the Aryan Association, Mint Street, the Young Men's Hindu Association, and the Triplicane Literary Association. There must certainly have been several others. In the course of his thirteen years' ministry the Swami must have delivered, besides the talks at his scriptural classes, a very large number of lectures in the city of Madras itself as also in other cities like Bangalore, Mysore, Trivandrum, Rangoon, Bombay etc., which he visited from time

to time. Of these we have at present only sixty-seven lectures collected and published in the form of books under the titles, 'The Message of Eternal Wisdom', 'Sri Krishna, the Pastoral and the King-Maker', 'For Thinkers on education', 'The Ancient Quest', 'God and Divine Incarnation', 'Path to Perfection', and 'Consolations'.

An equal number of lectures must have gone unrecorded. Of the published speeches, the two series of lectures entitled 'The Universe and Man' and 'The Soul of Man', now included in one volume entitled 'The Message of Eternal Wisdom', were originally published by him in 1910 and dedicated to Swami Brahmananda. This publication may be regarded as the inauguration of the Publication Department of the Madras Math, which can now claim to be the biggest publication centre of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. It publishes three magazines in English, Tamil and Telugu, and different books in these languages. The published works of the Swami are sufficient in themselves to establish his claim to be one of the ablest exponents of the devotional and philosophic thought of India known as Vedanta. He was a student of modern science, especially Mathematics, as also of Hindu scriptural and philosophical literature in the original Sanskrit. Above all he had had the occasion to see the great spiritual ideals manifested in their perfection in his great Master Sri Ramakrishna. He was himself a whole-time servant of God and the Master, who had gained spiritual insight through such service. With

a combination of such advantages, the authenticity of his expositions is unmatched by anyone unless it be by his own brother disciples, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda.

Another type of activity that the Swami started was the annual celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, to which was later added the birthday of Swami Vivekananda also, after Swamiji's passing away in 1902. The first Sri Ramakrishna celebration that the Swami organised does not seem to have been held at the Math building at the Castle Kernan, but at the residence of Babu Kali Prasad Ghose, a lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who happened then to be the Agent of M/s. John Dickinson & Co. and stayed near the Madras Municipal Office. The celebration was of the 67th birthday of Sri Ramakrishna and was held on the 16th March 1902, some six years after the Swami came to Madras. It is hard to believe that the Swami would not have observed the Master's birthday all these years. It may be that the 1902 celebration was the first to be observed in a public manner with a fixed programme and issue of invitations. No reason also is forthcoming as to why it was held at the residence of Sri Ghosh and not at the Math. It was a whole day function attended by more than three hundred of Swami Ramakrishnananda's students and devotees. There was Bhajan all through the forenoon. The Swami himself performed the Pooja, Homa and other religious ceremonies. About 7000 poor people were fed. In the evening there was

a Harikatha, and a meeting presided over by Prof. M. Rangachariar of the Presidency College, one of the most reputed Sanskritists of his time. The Swami delivered a learned lecture on 'Unity in Variety' on that occasion.

This public celebration set the pattern for succeeding years for the celebration of the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna and of Swami Vivekananda. Thenceforth the celebrations were observed by the Swami in the Math premises. These birthdays were split into a two-day observance — the first a private and purely religious function on the actual birthday, and the second on the succeeding Sunday which took the shape of a public celebration. On the first day close friends and devotees attended the purely religious function. The Sunday public celebrations, being whole-day functions attracted large crowds. The arrival of Sankirtan parties from different parts of the city and their collective singing and dancing before the decorated portrait of Sri Ramakrishna on a special altar, formed an important feature of these celebrations. Swami Ramakrishnananda himself took an important part in these Bhajans and often formed the centre of interest and inspiration for the participants.

An occasion like the above is vividly described by Sister Devamata in her book, *Days in an Indian Monastery* (Pp. 96-97). Writes the Sister: "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 praise 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 the 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 on violin and Tambura, tuned drum or 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 everyone in the larger hall was dancing. There was one boy of twelve who danced with special grace and ardour. On more than one occasion Swami Ramakrishnananda 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. Everyone 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 altar, a sudden consciousness of many eyes roused him; he left the hall quickly and did not return for an hour or longer."

These Bhajans and Sankirtans generally continued till 2 p.m. During the same period the feeding of all the devotees assembled as also of the poor in general took place. The feeding of the poor, who in the terminology coined by Swami Vivekananda were called Daridra Narayanas (Narayana or God in the form of the poor), was one of the most important parts of these celebrations during Swami Ramakrishnananda's days and even afterwards. Often 3,000 to 7,000 poor people were fed according to the availability of collections in cash and kind. After 3 p.m. there would be a Harikatha Kalakshepam, which the devotional traditions of South India held in high esteem. This was followed in the evening with a public meeting presided over and addressed by some of the leading men of the city. Among the participants as presidents and speakers on such occasions may be mentioned the names of Hon'ble V. Krishnaswamy Iyer, Sir S. Subramania Iyer, Hon'ble P. R. Sundaram Iyer, Prof. M. Rangachariar, Dr. Nanjunda Rao, Justice C. Sankaran Nair,

Hon'ble L. A. Govindaraghava Iyer, Sir P. S. Sivaswamy Iyer and several others — all men of light and leading in the Madras of those times.

The pattern of celebration laid down by Swami Ramakrishnananda continued to be followed for several decades. Not only did the celebrations help to spread the name and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda among the people, but they became occasions for the leading men and scholars of Madras to study their teachings well and interpret them against the background of their culture and learning. The idea of holding such public celebrations spread to the mofussil also. For example, in the old volumes of the *Brahmavadin* it is stated that in 1901 a birth day celebration of Sri Ramakrishna was held at Vaniambadi.

Another line of work that the Swami initiated during his Castle Kernan days was the relief of indigent students. The beginning was very humble and unostentatious, but like a good seed sown in proper soil at the right season, it has developed today into that huge educational complex known popularly as the Ramakrishna Students' Home and allied educational institutions. Moved by the pitiable condition of a few boys who had lost all their relatives in a plague epidemic, Swami Ramakrishnananda felt that something must be done for the relief and rehabilitation of this type of orphans. He therefore induced his young and earnest devotees and assistants, Ramu and Ramanuju, to take up this responsibility of running an orphanage

under the name of Students' Home to give protection and education to such indigent orphans.

A humble beginning was made on 17th February 1905, when a Students' Home with seven indigent orphans was opened in a small rented house at Mylapore. The orphanage was maintained with contributions got in cash and kind from the begging expeditions of Ramu and Ramanuju. Swami Ramakrishnananda in his opening speech said: "Annadanam (gift of food) is spoken of as Mahadanam and is considered very sacred in our country. Vidyadanam is greater. But the greatest is the offering of spiritual knowledge. The harmonising of all the three must be the aim of this institution. May Sri Ramakrishna bless the undertaking with all success!"

And Sri Ramakrishna did indeed bless this institution! By the Lord's grace and the untiring efforts of Ramu and Ramanuju, the institution steadily grew up, and it, together with allied institutions stemming from it, forms today the most important educational complex in the city. The Home has at present 325 students who receive free boarding, lodging and education in the residential school maintained for them. There is a Technical Institute also attached, giving training in Mechanical Engineering. Distinct from the Home, three high schools and three primary schools have sprung up with about seven thousand students in T. Nagar, another part of the city, under the initiative of the same group of people who drew inspiration from Swami Ramakrishnananda. In addition

there are girl's schools with more than 5,000 pupils. Above all, the Vivekananda College, one of the premier colleges in the State with post-graduate courses of study and a strength of 2,280, has also come up under the impulse of the same inspiration.

At the time he opened the Students' Home, did Swami Ramakrishnananda have any inkling of the tremendous nature of the work he was initiating ?

CHAPTER VI
CONSOLIDATION OF THE WORK
AT MADRAS

IT has been already stated that from the time of his arrival at Madras in 1897 till 1907, the Swami had no permanent building to house the Math. The Castle Kernan was his temporary Math building, and the most strenuous part of his teaching and preaching work had to be done from there. His difficulties were enhanced by the fact that he was left without any assistant for considerable periods of time. Between the period from 1897 to 1910 Swamis Sadananda, Atmananda, Bodhananda, Achalananda, Paramananda, Sharvananda, Swaprakashananda, Dhyanananda and Madhavananda had stayed with him from time to time, but often, especially in the Castle Kernan days, he was alone at the Math and had to be his own cook and companion and the Poojari all in one. The Reminiscences of his disciples will show how on certain days after travelling long distances for his classes, he had, on his return to the Math, to send a student of his to some neighbouring shop to get a loaf of bread for his night meal.

The financial condition of the Math also was far from satisfactory in the early days. When Swami Vivekananda was in the city, many big men

of the place had shown great interest and had requested him to send a Swami to start permanent work at Madras. But the interest of such top men, if it is to materialise into financial terms, has to be actively tapped by persistent contact and approach. A great Sannyasin like Swami Ramakrishnananda was not the man to do that. Following his Master's example, he never touched money. It is said that the funds of the Math, which were not much, would be put in a drawer and some student or other, if there was no monastic staying with him, would be asked to disburse the same to those that had to be paid. When he travelled by jutka, some one would tie the jutka hire at the end of his wearing cloth, which the Jutka man would untie and take at the destination. He would never ask any one for any help.¹ His attitude in this respect was conveyed to Sister Devamata who, when she was about to leave Madras, asked the Swami to excuse her for leaving him at a time when there were very few to help him. "The answer that came from him was direct and uncompromising," writes the Sister. 'I do not need any one to help me,' he said, 'I am 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 too. I know that whatever He sends

¹ He did however go on house-to-house fund collection work for construction of Math buildings at Madras and Bangalore. This is in line with the Sannyasins going for Bhiksha, and the Swami held that this was a good antidote to egotism. What he seems to be objecting to in this context is seeking personal help from others.

is for my good and is the best thing for me.'"¹ He stuck to this sublime outlook on life always. Now and then, there were times when there was no food stuff in the Math store to make the next offering to the Master, or when on the eve of the Sri Rama-krishna celebration day, there was no provision for poor feeding. The reader will find in the Reminiscences authentic accounts of how the Swami reacted on such occasions, and how, miraculously, as it were, his needs were supplied. These examples seem to confirm and fulfil the Lord's statement in the Bhagavad Gita : 'In the case of those who think of Me with single-minded devotion and meditate on Me and worship Me, and are thus ever united with Me, I myself bear the burden of procuring their needs and preserving their interests.'

As time went on, the financial difficulties were solved by the efforts of the young devotees who gathered round the Swami, especially Sri Ramaswamy Iyengar and Sri C. Ramanujachariar, familiarly known as Ramu and Ramanuju. They had the zeal and the aptitude to mobilise all the goodwill that the Swami had generated in the city and effectively solve the problems he was up against. The Swami also seems to have got a few monastic assistants. So from 1903 we find the Swami extending his missionary activities to other towns in the South like Bangalore, Pudukottah, Trivandrum and so on, and also undertaking

¹ *Days in an Indian Monastery* by Sister Devamata, pp. 30.

preaching tours to distant places like Bombay and Burma. We shall however take up this part of his work after the full story of the consolidation of the work at Madras is told.

Although he had started the work at Madras in 1897, he could not have a permanent building to house the Math till 1907. The Castle Kernan, otherwise known as the Ice House, provided him with a convenient temporary residence, so long as Sri Biligiri Iyengar, a close devotee, was alive. But after his death the Ice House came up for auction in 1906 with the possible threat of eviction of the Swami if it fell into some unsympathetic hand. To avert this, a devotee, Dr. Nanjunda Rao, bid for it upto Rs. 16,000 but it was knocked down to a Zamindar for Rs. 17,000. Subsequently the Swami had to stay in a small outhouse of Castle Kernan. Fortunately this was only for a short time.

The thought of a permanent building for the Math had always been actively engaging the attention of the Swami and the devotees from as early a time as 1902. At a public meeting held that year at the Pachaiyappa's College a resolution for the construction of a permanent building for the Math, as a memorial to Swami Vivekananda, was passed and an appeal issued. The Swami himself took part in the collection, going from house to house, with two young devotees, in Mylapore and Triplicane in the spirit of a Sannyasin going on his rounds for Bhiksha. Even after two years the collection amounted only to Rs. 1,700, too meagre to start construction work even in those days. With a fresh

appeal issued by Sri V. Krishnaswamy Iyer, more vigorous efforts were made at collection, and in 1906, probably just about the time the Ice House was auctioned, the actual construction of a Math building was started on a small plot on the Brodies' Road, gifted by Sri Akul Kondiah Chettiar, a close student and devotee of the Swami. By November 1907, Sri A. S. Balasubramanya Iyer, who was in charge of the construction, reported that the building was ready for occupation. The total construction cost came to Rs. 5,500 but the collection upto then amounted only to Rs. 4,100, and the deficit had to be made up afterwards with considerable difficulty.

The Swami moved into the new building on 17th November 1907. Great was his joy at being able to provide at last a "fine house for Sri Guru Maharaj to stay in". "Till now I was in Triplicane," the Swami remarked humorously, "and Parthasarathy subjected me to many trials. But now Kapaleeswara has drawn me to Him. You know He is the Lord of Bhikshus as his name means, and He is sure to protect me hereafter." Pooja, Vedic chanting by Pandits, poor feeding and a public meeting addressed by Sri P. S. Sivaswamy Iyer were the various items of the programme with which the opening day of the Math building was observed.

This Math building constructed by Swami Ramakrishnananda no longer exists.¹ We, how-

¹It was unfortunate that within two years after its construction, extensive cracks developed in the roof of this build-

ever, get a description of it as given by Sister Devamata in her book, *Days in an Indian Monastery*. "The Mylapore Monastery as I knew it," says the sister, "had been recently constructed. It was an unobtrusive one-storey building of tinted stucco, on high foundation, with a large roof terrace, an enclosing stucco wall and a wide green gate. The outside wood work 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 whose stairs led to the roof terrace. The court had a solid wooden gate at either end, and near one was running water where they washed and polished the cooking pots, trays and other vessels used at meals. On the far side was another building containing dining room, kitchen, store room and bath room. The sleeping rooms were in the main building." In fact these were not sleeping rooms. At the two ends of the hall there were four rooms. Two on the eastern side were the Shrine

ing. As will be seen in the Reminiscences, one of the cracks was above the Shrine Room, and when there was sudden rain-fall one night, Swami Ramakrishnananda held an umbrella over the Master's photo in the Shrine for the whole night. Soon after Swami Ramakrishnananda left Madras and Swami Sharanananda took charge in 1912, the building was demolished and the present two-storeyed building with a spacious front hall was constructed by 1917 in the same premises as the old monastery, but with the compound much extended by additional acquisition. The old monastery stood in front of the present building, closer to the compound wall and adjoining the present gate.

of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and one on the west was used by Swami Ramakrishnananda as his personal room. The hall served as office, reception room, class room etc., and at night, as sleeping place for the other inmates of the Math.

Glimpses of the life at the Math while it was situated in Castle Kernan are given in the Reminiscences of Swami Sharvananda published in the second part of this book. We also get some vivid pen-picture of its working in its new setting in Sister Devamata's *Days in an Indian Monastery* (Pp. 56 to 67.) Says the Sister: "Swami Ramakrishnananda did not let any one forget the sanctity of the monastery. More than once when a thoughtless visitor took his paper and began to read, I heard the Swami say to him, 'Put away your paper. You can read it anywhere. When you came here you should think of God.' He did not hesitate to administer even a 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 and then he said quietly, 'I wonder what God did before you were born!' 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 Mahat-

mas. Several others were present and there was some discussion. Swami Ramakrishnananda brought it to a close with the incisive words: 'If you want an invisible guide, why not take God?'

.....

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

"He realises 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 the inner, between the material and the spiritual; so he creates a special home for God in the household. God's permission is taken, His blessings 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. The Service is as real and genuine as would be the care of a very dear father or mother.....

“At the monastery all food was prepared as an offering, and that it might be the more carefully made ready, Swami Ramakrishnananda himself prepared and cut all the vegetables for the daily curry. He sometimes spent two hours of the morning on this task. The household was a small one in the beginning of my stay at Madras, — the Swami, a novice and a Brahmin cook. Many fruits and sweets brought by visitors were offered in the Shrine. Everyone who came to the monastery was given some blessed food (Prasad) — even a coolie who brought a bundle.

“By five in the morning Rudra, the Brahma-charin, was up and out in the neighbour’s garden picking flowers for the day’s worship. On his return, the Shrine was opened¹ and the first offering of the day carried there. Then the Shrine was cleaned and everything made ready for the main of the three Services which were held daily. At all the three, food, flowers and water were offered and incense burned. At the monastery they did not eat until after the main Service, which was held when the offering was ready.

“ . . . 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. . . . When the lights were brought in the monastery hall, Swami Ramakrishnananda

¹ Evidently there is a mistake in the Sister’s account. The Shrine is always opened before 5 a.m. and the flower-gathering takes place afterwards, when the day has broken.

invariably saluted them with clasped hands as symbols of the light of Divine wisdom or illumination and then 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 . . . At first there was no 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 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 fervour of spirit. Such power of devotion radiated from him that it lifted the thought entirely above the world and material concerns.

“An hour or two after Arati was the time

Swami Ramakrishnananda most often gave his teachings. 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. Little was done after evening meal. 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."

To the description given by the American Sister, may be added some further details about the Swami's mode of life and worship. As at Baranagore and Alambazar, at Madras too he spent almost the whole forenoon in the worship of the Master. Very rarely did he delegate this work to an assistant. After bath he would not look in any other direction but hasten straight to the Shrine Room, changing his clothes on the way. The wet cloth had to be picked up from different places on the way to the Shrine. While making salutation to Sri Ramakrishna, he would either prostrate himself on the ground with palms folded and outstretched or stand folding his hands together over his heart and pressing his teeth together so hard as to produce a chattering sound. At that time his whole frame would become stiff and his head down to the neck would show a slight tremor. His eyes would be slightly reddened, and his face beamed with a heavenly glow and blessedness. He would forget himself while conducting worship. "From his movements and manners", Swami Dhyanananda, one of his assistants at Madras remarks, "it appeared that he was dealing with

the living personality of the Master." An assistant waited on him all attention to supply immediately whatever he asked for. He could not brook any delay for any requisite at that time. As long as he sat for Pooja, he kept on uttering 'Jai Guru' in order to have an unbroken current of thought. He served the Master, realising his living presence in the picture — living and real like his own self.

This was a lesson that he impressed on all the inmates, and it constituted the chief part of the training he gave them. He would constantly impress on the minds of his assistants that the picture in the Shrine was not a mere picture but a centre in which the Master's spiritual presence was manifest. The monastery was his household, as it were, and every activity conducted in it was a form of direct service of him. The monastic inmates must therefore do it with all attention and devotion. Thus the ethics of the Shrine Room was linked with the daily life and activity of the monastery, and the inmates were taught to live in a constant sense of dedication and Divine Service. Swami Ramakrishnananda set himself as a striking example of this unified conception of devotional life. Devoted Service in the Shrine went hand in hand with the vigorous work of teaching and preaching. In the early days these works were confined to the city of Madras, but with the improvement in the general condition of the Math and the availability of more monastic assistants, he got time to turn his attention to other parts of the country.

CHAPTER VII

FOUNDING AN ASHRAMA AT BANGALORE

THE State of Mysore had extended a warm welcome to Swami Vivekananda during his days as a wandering ascetic, and public meetings also were held there to commemorate his success at Chicago Parliament in 1893. But it was not till 1903 that the citizens of Mysore established contacts with Swami Ramakrishnananda who lived so close to that State. On the invitation of the Vedanta Society of Ulsoor, Bangalore, Swami Ramakrishnananda reached that city on 19th July 1903, and was given a rousing reception. (See Reminiscences of M. A. Narayana Iyengar for details.) During a fortnight's stay in the city the Swami addressed more than a dozen meetings, held question classes in the mornings and evenings, gave interviews to large numbers of visitors and had an audience with the Maharaja Krishnarajendra Wodayar, the well-known ruler of Mysore State. This was followed in October of the same year by a visit to Mysore City where the Swami delivered four public lectures at Rangacharlu Hall and an address in Sanskrit to the Pundits at the Sanskrit College.

The result of these lecture tours was a demand for a permanent centre of the Math at Bangalore. So in August 1904 the Swami went to Bangalore again at the invitation of the Vedanta Society,

delivered three lectures, and left Swami Atmananda, who had accompanied him, to organise a permanent centre in the city. Swamis Atmananda, Vimalananda and Bodhananda carried on the work in succession till 1906 under Swami Ramakrishnananda's guidance.

In June 1906, when Swami Abhedananda came back to India after ten years of Vedanta work in the United States, Swami Ramakrishnananda went over to Colombo to receive him. After about a month's stay at Madras, the Swami took him to Bangalore. Both the Swamis delivered a series of lectures in the city, which roused a keen interest in the minds of all leading men, including the Dewan Sir V. P. Madhava Rao. Consequently the Government gifted an area of two acres of land in Basavangudi for building a permanent Math centre, and the foundation stone of the Ashrama was laid by Swami Abhedananda. Having got a good plot of land, Swami Ramakrishnananda was naturally anxious to put up a permanent Math building. For raising funds he himself went about from house to house, accompanied by Sister Devamata. Generally there was generous response, but there were rebuffs too. Recalling a notable instance of the latter type of experience, Sister Devamata writes in her *Days in an Indian Monastery* (p. 128): "We went a long distance to the house of a high official in the Maharajah's service and waited for 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 speak of his Master with such impelling fervour 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 a contribution to the new monastery building'."

The Sister continues: "The Dewan of Mysore (Sir V. P. Madhava Rao) showed the keenest interest in our project and was eager to have the monastery under way. After we had been begging for a month he sent us a request to meet him at the site for the new Ashram, 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 cornerstone had been laid sometime 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 wallet 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 construction of the Ashram building was completed by the end of 1908 and its opening was performed on 20th January 1909, by Swami Brahmananda, the Head of the Monastic Order. The opening went off with all the grandeur of a State function, thanks to the keen interest evinced by the Dewan. To quote again Sister Devamata's account of it from her *Days in an Indian Monastery* (p. 142) : "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 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 lined the drive way. 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 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 Ramakrishnanada spoke. After them came several others, and I was the final speaker. The key was then handed over to Swami Brahmananda, who unlocked the door 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 Vedas. 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 fragrant petals almost hiding the sacred picture behind it. 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.....”

Very soon after its opening, the Bangalore Ashrama had the rare good fortune of according a warm reception to Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, who was taken by Swami Ramakrishnananda to Bangalore after she had completed her pilgrimage to Rameswaram in February 1910. Swami Nirmalananda, who had succeeded Swami Atmananda in the middle of the year 1909, was the President of the Bangalore Ashrama at that time. The Swami and the wide circle of devotees organised a grand reception to her, and it is said, as her conveyance passed along the road, heaps of rose petals were thrown on her by the adoring crowds. Swami Ramakrishnananda personally attended to all her needs. During her stay she consecrated a small hillock at the back of the Ashrama, sitting on it and meditating. An enclosure has now been made to mark the place.

CHAPTER VIII

PREACHING IN OTHER STATES

THE Swami visited several other places, too, where active centres of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement came into existence, although not in his own life time. Of these, Kerala is one of the important regions where he roused keen interest in the message of the Master. A detailed account of his visit to Trivandrum in 1904 will be found in the Reminiscences of Sri K. Padmanabhan Tampi published in the Second Part. The Swami stayed there for a month as the guest of Sri Kalipada Ghosh, a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who was then the Agent of M/s. Dickinson & Co. at Trivandrum, and delivered four public lectures and conducted regular classes on the Gita. Trivandrum had already a group of admirers of Swami Vivekananda and these rallied round the Swami and formed a Vedanta Society with the idea of developing it into a full-fledged Ashrama. But this was not to be in the Swami's lifetime. In 1905 he visited Alleppy and Ernakulam, and in both these places he delivered several lectures and received addresses. It was, however, long afterwards that permanent centres developed in Kerala. Swami Ramakrishnananda retired from the South early in 1911. About one and a half year earlier Swami Nirmalananda had been

appointed President of the Bangalore Ashrama. He continued and extended the contacts that Swami Ramakrishnananda had established in Kerala, visiting those parts of the country every year, and eventually established several centres there. Today there are five well-developed centres and several unaffiliated Ashramas all over Kerala, besides a considerable number of monastics hailing from the region.

In 1904 and 1905, the Swami went on lecture tours to Tirunelveli, Sholapur, Masulipatam and Pudukkottai. Though in all these places considerable interest was aroused by the learned lectures of the Swami, no permanent centres have come into existence due to the want of a continued and sustained contact.

Another part of the country to which Swami Ramakrishnananda carried the message of the Master was Burma, a region which was a part of India at that time. One of Sri Ramakrishna's lay devotees, Sri Akshay Kumar Sen, the well-known author of the metrical Bengali work on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna called Sri Ramakrishna Punthi, was in Rangoon in 1900, and under his influence an association called the Ramakrishna Sevak Samiti had been formed in Rangoon. The Samiti invited the Swami to attend the celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary in March, 1905. The Swami arrived at Rangoon on the 20th March and stayed for about five days as the guest of Rai Saheb Nibaran Chandra Banerjee, an engineer in Burma service. During this period,

besides the address at the celebration and daily conversations, he delivered four public lectures on : 'What is Soul?', 'The Veda and the Vedanta', 'Bhakti or Divine Love' and 'Comparative Study of Religions'. On the celebration day, there was Sankirtan, followed by worship, poor feeding and a public meeting at the premises of the Samiti. In the manner quite characteristic of Swami Ramakrishnananda, he took a very active part in the worship on the occasion. Hearing that Nageswara Champa flowers, which Sri Ramakrishna used to like very much in his life time, were available in a neighbouring garden, he himself walked three miles in the morning to collect these flowers, and afterwards decorated the portrait of Sri Ramakrishna tastefully with these as also with various other kinds of flowers and garlands.

There is on record an interesting interlude connected with that day's worship. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, a petty unknown employee in Rangoon then, who in later years became one of the most celebrated novelists in Bengali, was noticing Swami Ramakrishnananda going to a distance for collecting flowers, decorating the Master and spending much time and effort on the worship. Sarat Chandra went upto the Swami and entered into the following conversation :

Sarat Chandra : Why do you worship so much ?

The Swami : Because I derive immense delight from it.

Sarat Chandra : Is ritual worship then the highest form of adoring God ?

The Swami : To see God everywhere is the highest worship. Meditation is the next best. Prayer and repetition of the Divine Name are lower than that. External worship is the lowest.

Sarat Chandra : Why do people display so much pomp during worship ?

The Swami : The worship is not at all an external affair. It is almost wholly internal. Ordinary people perform worship either to escape from displeasure of God or in expectation of fulfilling some desire. All these are low motives. Real worship is not done till devotion overflows from the heart and tears roll down from the eyes for a glimpse of God. Worship, austerity and repetition of the Name performed by the worldly-minded are no sooner done than forgotten. Afterwards they do not remember God in the midst of their daily pre-occupations. A true devotee takes God's name with every breath, is filled with sincere devotion and offers flowers, leaves and water to God without any selfish motive, saying : 'O Mother Divine, worship and prayer are nothing but opportune moments to call on you.'

After a stay of five days the Swami returned to India. No centre came up in Rangoon immediately, although the contact with the Swami enlarged the circle of devotees in the city. Some years later the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram, a noted hospital in the city, was founded in Rangoon. Until the military Government took it over a few

years back, it functioned as one of the most important centres of medical relief in the city.

Bombay is another metropolitan city of India that received Swami Ramakrishnananda's attention. In fact the Swami returned to Madras from Rangoon on the morning of 29th March, 1905, and that very night left for Bombay. The same house-holder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Babu Kalipada Gosh, who has been mentioned earlier in this narrative, had opened a branch of M/s. John Dickinson at Bombay. He played host to Swami Ramakrishnananda when he visited Bombay. As there was a Shrine of Sri Ramakrishna at the place where he was accommodated, he insisted on his carrying on regular worship during the days of his stay there. An eye-witness of his worship describes it thus: "It was a heavenly sight for even a man of little faith to witness with what deep devotion he offered worship. He seemed to be unconscious of his environment and his body glowed in keeping with the transformation that took place in his mind and soul."

The 72nd birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated in Bombay on 1st April, 1905 at Famji Cowasji Hall with Sir Balakrishna Chandra in the chair. Besides the address on this occasion, the Swami delivered three lectures¹ in Bombay, at one of which Bala Gangadhar Tilak, the great patriot and political leader presided. Tilak pleaded for the starting of a permanent centre at

¹ The topics were: "Bhakti Yoga"; 'Universal Religion' and 'Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings.'

Bombay. But this was to materialise only some two decades after. Bombay is now one of the very important centres of the Ramakrishna Mission, and the activities of the centre embrace cultural work, medical service, distress relief and preaching.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE SERVICE OF GREAT ONES

THE many missionary tours of Swami Ramakrishnananda described in the previous chapters took place before the opening of the Bangalore Ashrama (1909), though they have been described later for the sake of continuity. In fact the opening of the Bangalore Ashrama was the last big act of his public life, and simultaneously with it, he also fulfilled his cherished desire of bringing Swami Brahmananda and the Holy Mother to the South and taking them to places of pilgrimage. But the fulfilment of this desire had to wait for eleven years from his arrival at Madras i.e. till he could put up a building for the Math in Madras and at Bangalore.

It was in 1908 in connection with the opening of the Bangalore Math that he brought Swami Brahmananda to the South. Among the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Brahmananda held a unique place. Sri Ramakrishna had looked upon him as his spiritual son, and Swami Vivekananda had called him the Raja, the King, of the monastic community. He was therefore known in the Order as Maharaj (some times written also as Maharaj-ji). Swami Ramakrishnananda shared intensely the reverence the Order had for him. He persuaded Swami Brahmananda to agree to stay in the South

for a period of six months, and towards the close of 1908 himself went to fetch him from Puri where the Swami was then sojourning. Before leaving, he charged his assisting Brahmachari Rudra and Sister Devamata, "Remember, Swami Brahmananda was like his (Sri Ramakrishna's) 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 from the Divine source."

Describing Swami Brahmananda's stay at Madras, Sri C. Ramanujachariar, a close friend and devotee of the Math, writes: "The stir that was created in the small monastery at Mylapore, the serious concern and thought that were spent upon the arrangements for his reception and the provision for his comforts and conveniences, and the personal and meticulous attention paid by Sasi Maharaj, led us to an insight, beforehand, of the great personality and of the high esteem which the head of the Madras Math had for this august personage. When Maharaj-ji arrived, it was a day of quiet, joyous festivity in the small Math. When we met him at the Railway Station and at the Math, we felt we met a majestic prince among monks and had the benediction of his loving presence. In the evening the leading men of Madras dropped in one by one to see the Swami. Prominent among them were the late Hon'ble V. Krishnaswamy Iyer and Justice P. R. Sundaram Iyer."

During his stay at Madras, Swami Ramakrishnananda accommodated him in his own room, and

himself stayed in the hall and waited there as his humble attendant. He asked Sister Devamata once: "Sister, what do you think of our President?" She replied: "I think he is wonderful, but I am a little afraid of him." Swami Ramakrishnananda leaned on his chair and whispered: 'So am I'.¹

Sister Devamata found Swami Brahmananda absorbed in Samadhi one evening while attending Arati. Such Samadhi was frequent with him. Writes Sister Devamata: "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 his pulse or a breath to indicate he was living."²

In December when Christmas came, Swami Brahmananda asked Sister Devamata to get up a Christmas party in Western style in her residence opposite the Math, and invite the members of the Math and close devotees to it. After the Service and the reading from the Bible, Prasadam was distributed. While partaking of it, the Swami remarked to the Sister: "I have been very much blessed in coming to your house — 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."³

1, 2 & 3 Sister Devamata's *Days in an Indian Monastery*.

The opening of the Bangalore Ashrama in January 1909 by Swami Brahmananda has already been described. It was probably after this function that Swami Ramakrishnananda took Swami Brahmananda on pilgrimage to Madura and Rameswaram. An account of this will be found in the Reminiscences. It is particularly relevant to note that in the Shrine of Meenakshi at Madura he found the image living and advancing towards him. He fell into Samadhi, standing, and was in that state for more than an hour, with Swami Ramakrishnananda supporting him. Swami Brahmananda returned to the Belur Math after a few more months of stay in Madras.

In quick succession to Swami Brahmananda's visit came the fulfilment of another cherished desire of Swami Ramakrishnananda, namely the visit of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, to the South, and her pilgrimage to holy places there. In January 1910 she arrived at Madras with a party of eight and was accorded a very cordial welcome by Swami Ramakrishnananda. She stayed in Madras for about a month, and then proceeded to Madura and Rameswaram, accompanied by Swami Ramakrishnananda. She stayed at Rameswaram for three days as the guest of the Raja of Ramnad, who was highly devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and had played an important part in sending Swami Vivekananda to the West and in according him a great reception on his return.

Recounting her experiences at Rameswaram, the Holy Mother said afterwards: "Sasi (Swami Ramakrishnananda) procured for me one hundred and eight Bael leaves made of gold to worship Siva at Rameswaram. When informed of my coming, the Raja of Ramnad ordered his officer there to show me his buildings and treasures. He further gave the order that if I liked anything, it should be presented to me. But what did I need there? Unable to make any decision, I said, 'Sasi has arranged for everything I require.' But unwilling to hurt the feelings of the officer, I added, 'If Radhu wants anything, let her ask for it.' I said to Radhu, 'You may take whatever you need.' Then as diamonds and other precious stones were shown, my heart began to tremble. Eagerly I prayed to the Master, 'O Lord, please see that Radhu does not crave for any of these things'. Radhu at last said, 'What shall I take! I do not care for any of these things. I have just lost my pencil. Please buy one for me.' I heaved a sigh of relief. Coming out I bought her a pencil for half an anna from a shop in the street."¹

Returning to Madras, she went on a visit to Bangalore in February accompanied by Swami Ramakrishnananda, an account of which has been given earlier.

In the course of this narrative it has been stressed that the most dominant characteristic of Swami Ramakrishnananda was his devotion to the

¹ Sri Sarada Devi. *The Holy Mother*, pp. 233.

Spiritual Teacher. His devotion to the Master was as extensive as it was intensive. It extended to all the disciples of the Master, too, as he looked upon them all as expressions of the Master's spiritual Essence. It was this reverence that made him resolve to bring Swami Brahmananda and the Holy Mother to South India, the sphere of his work, and to serve them by arranging for their pilgrimage to holy places in that region and to have them bless the Maths he had started at Madras and Bangalore. But this depiction of the Swami's devotion to the associates of his Master will not be complete without a reference to his worshipful reverence to Swami Vivekananda. He regarded Swami Vivekananda as the chosen instrument of Sri Ramakrishna and looked upon his instruction as the Master's command. It was in this spirit that immediately Swamiji commanded him to go to the South, he gave up his resolution to carry on life-long service of the Master's Relics at Alambazar Math and agreed to come to the South and work in a larger field. We have seen elsewhere that once the Master had chided him for his engrossment in the study of Persian while he had spiritual duties to perform. The Swami had from that time given up his studies in obedience to the Master's command. Now to take up work in the South, where preaching activities would require a lot of learning and proficiency in English, he got absolved from his earlier vow by Swamiji's command, and resumed his intellectual pursuits in which few could excel him.

After he came to the South, he could see Swamiji only once, and that was when Swami Vivekananda was going to the West in 1899 for the second time along with Swami Turyananda. The ship coming from Calcutta halted at the Madras harbour, but as there were quarantine regulations because of plague in Calcutta, no one was allowed to go in, and out of, the ship. So Swami Ramakrishnananda and the devotees went in small boats with offerings upto the ship and talked with Swamiji who was leaning down from the railings on the deck to meet them. While returning, he asked the boat to go round the ship as an act of circumambulation of the two great souls.

Other instances are related indicating his intense personal feeling and allegiance towards Swamiji. One day he had returned from his classes dead tired and was fanning himself. Suddenly he was found to throw away the fan, and clenching his fist, address an invisible figure : "It is for you I am suffering so much. See, how painful I feel !" But the next moment he was heard to exclaim, prostrating on the carpet, "No brother ! no brother ! Excuse me. What you have done is perfectly right."¹ Evidently he had Swami Vivekananda in mind.

A monk reports that once at Madras he saw Swami Ramakrishnananda kneeling in front of the portrait of Swami Vivekananda and addressing him in words full of feeling : ² "O my beloved Brother,

¹ & ² *The Story of a Dedicated Life* : Ramakrishna Math Madras, pp. 139.

you are verily the true representative of the Master. You it was that sent me over here to propagate his message. I am only carrying out your commands. I beseech you to see that no pride or self-esteem enters my heart, nor thirst for name and fame overcomes my mind. All the burden and responsibility you have placed on me are verily yours. Bless me that I may work out the Mission of our Master as an instrument in His hands and that I may offer all the fruits of my work unto Him. Guide me always in the right path."

The two Swamis seem to have been always *en rapport* with each other. That alone can explain how Swami Ramakrishnananda could instinctively, without any persuasion, take to an entirely new mode of life as an active preacher and teacher when Swamiji commanded him to do so. This is further illustrated by a remarkable psychic event in Swami Ramakrishnananda's life. One day when he was sitting in meditation, Swami Ramakrishnanada heard a bodyless but familiar voice declaring "O Sasi, I have spat out the body". And within a short time he got the sad news that Swami Vivekananda had passed away.

The Swami's adoration and appreciation of this illustrious brother-disciple are embodied in the following Sanskrit verses he composed on 28th of January, 1911 at Madras.

अनित्यदृश्येषु विविच्य नित्यम्

तस्मिन् समाधत्त इह स लीलया ।

विवेकवैराग्यविशुद्धचित्तम्
 योऽसौ विवेकी तमहं नमामि ॥ १ ॥

विवेकजानन्दनिमग्नचित्तम्
 विवेकदानैकविनोदशीलम् ।
 विवेकभासा कमनीयकान्तिम्
 विवेकिनं तं सततं नमामि ॥ २ ॥

ऋतं च विज्ञानमधिश्यत् यत्
 निरन्तरं चादिमध्यान्तहीनम् ।
 सुखं सुरूपं प्रकरोति यस्य
 आनन्दमूर्तिं तमहं नमामि ॥ ३ ॥

सूर्यो यथान्धं हि तमो निहन्ति
 विष्णुर्यथा दुष्टजनान् छिनत्ति ।
 तथैव यस्याखिलनेत्रलोभम्
 रूपं त्रितापं विमुखीकरोति ॥ ४ ॥

तं देशिकेन्द्रं परमं पवित्रं
 विश्वस्य पालं मधुरं यतीन्द्रम् ।
 हिताय नृणां नरमूर्तिमन्तम्
 “विवेक-आनन्द” महं नमामि ॥ ५ ॥

नमः श्रीयतिराजाय विवेकानन्दसुरये ।
 सच्चित्सुखस्वरूपाय स्वामिने तापहारिणे ॥ ६ ॥

1. I salute that Viveki (discriminating one), whose mind was purified by renunciation and discrimination, and to whom it was only play to separate the eternal from the non-eternal and concentrate his mind on the former.

2. I salute always that Viveki whose mind was ever merged in the bliss born of discrimination, whose pastime was to bestow the power of discrimination on others, and who wore that attractive effulgence which the power of discrimination had bestowed on him.

3. I bow to that boundless Bliss embodied, who was the repository of truth and knowledge, and who scattered joy and beauty wherever he went.

4. Just as the sun dispels darkness, just as Lord Vishnu destroys the wicked, so his enchanting personality destroys the threefold misery of man.

5. I salute Vivekananda, the great Sannyasin and Teacher, the supremely pure, who was honoured by the whole world, and who became embodied for the good of mankind.

6. Salutation to the sage and seer Vivekananda, the prince among Sannyasins. Salutation to the embodiment of Sat, Chit and Ananda, and the remover of all sorrows.

CHAPTER X

THE END

THE reception of the Holy Mother and the arrangements for her southern pilgrimage may be described as the last public acts of Swami Ramakrishnananda. He had by that time established two permanent Math centres at Madras and Bangalore, carried the message of Sri Ramakrishna to various regions of South India, and prepared the ground for the opening of more centres in other towns.

Though he was aged only about forty-eight, his health was declining by this time owing to the onset of diabetes, and in the middle of 1910 he fell very seriously ill. He went to Bangalore for change and rest in the bracing climate of that place, but got no relief; for, as the doctors at Bangalore diagnosed, he had contracted galloping consumption for which there was very little effective treatment in those days. Hard and incessant work at Madras, insufficient attention to nourishment and rest, and his diabetic tendency must have all conspired together to make him prone to this fell infection.

As his brother disciples wanted him to go back to Calcutta for rest and treatment, he left South India towards the middle of June 1911. On the way Swami Brahmananda, who was then at Puri, met him at Khurda Road Railway Station. At Calcutta he was accommodated at the Math centre

known as Udbodhan Office at Baghbazar, and was from time to time put under the treatment of most noted physicians like Dr. Bepin Bihari Ghose, Dr. Nilratan Sarkar, Dr. Younan and Kaviraj Durga Prasad Sen. But all treatment was of no avail. Dr. Ghose declared he would not survive for more than three months. He had to pass through much physical suffering, including insomnia and incapacity to take any food. To Swami Saradananda who always sat by his sick bed to persuade him to eat, he said, "My eating is being gradually stopped. Mahamaya, the world-enchantress does not allow me to eat anymore." He was therefore gradually reduced to a skeleton. Sometimes he took his Master's photo and addressed him impatiently, asking why he should be subjected to so much suffering. But his mind was always on the Lord, and even in delirium his unconscious utterances were only the names of Durga, Siva and the Master.

One day he was resting quietly on his bed when he suddenly said to his attendant Brahmachari, "Sri Guru Maharaj, the Holy Mother and Swamiji have come. Spread a mat for them." When he found the attendant confused, being unable to see the presence of any one, he again called out: "Don't you see? They are standing." Then the attendant spread the mat. The Swami saluted the invisible Presence with folded hands and after sometime said to the attendant, "Now they have gone away. Remove the mat and pillows."

Just a few days before his end, the Swami felt

eager to see the Holy Mother who was then at Jayarambati. The Mother could not, however, come to Calcutta at that time, but blessed him with a mystic vision of herself on the last night of the Swami on this earthly plane. On the following morning the Swami communicated this vision to Pulin Behari Mitra, a devotee and musician, and asked him to compose a song on his experience, for which the Swami himself gave the first line. Not being himself a composer, Sri Mitra hastened to Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great actor-dramatist and an intimate disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and got a song composed by him on the lines suggested by the Swami. The English rendering of the song is as follows: "The night of misery is at an end. The terrible nightmare of 'I' and 'Mine' is gone. The illusion of life and death is no more. Holding the tokens of grace and protection in Her hands, She blesses us. Raise the voice high and sing the glories of the Mother to the beat of the drum. The earth is full of the Mother's name that removes the fear of death. The Mother says, 'Do not weep, my child. See the lotus feet of Bhagavan Ramakrishna before you. Then all worries will vanish, all pain will go'."

The song was sung several times before the Swami by the master musician, Pulin Behari Mitra. Afterwards at the Swami's request, the Hymn of Samadhi composed by Swami Vivekananda was sung. From the morning the Swami went into Samadhi frequently and in the last three hours of his life he was completely absorbed in that state.

At about 1 p.m. on 21st August, 1911 he entered into Mahasamadhi.

The body was taken in a long procession via Cossipore Garden and the cremation ground at Cossipore, both being holy to the Ramakrishna Order because of their association with the Great Master, to the Ganges bank, and thence by boat across the river to Belur Math. At the Math it was cremated on a spot south-east of the Vivekananda Memorial Temple. No monument was erected at that time, but today there is an enclosed space with a tablet bearing the names of Swami Ramakrishnananda and the other direct disciples of the Master who were cremated on that spot from time to time.

The following is an elegy on the Swami by Frank G. Alexander, an American disciple of Swami Vivekananda :

Realisation, Infinite, Supreme,
 Above the world, whose region is the Soul,
 Where lives Eternal Truth Supreme
 As Boundless Freedom, like a shoreless sea,
 That hath this sage become.
 With the passing of the body unto death
 His soul on purest thought did rise
 To that height where thought is dead
 And sage's wisdom doth alone endure.
 It rose, emancipated from his form,
 On Argent Wings of great Celestial Peace
 Into that vastness of the Everlasting Self
 Whose form is Radiance Eternal,
 Whose soul, Realisation Infinite ;

It rose above the world to God.
 Scattered are the many earthly bonds
 Which made the personality of him —
 Now stands he, Self-revealed, as God.
 In life he taught 'Tat Tvam Asi'
 Whose Consciousness is Everlasting Life
 Now — the Truth, 'Tat Tvam Asi'
 With him 'Aham Brahmasmi' is verily become.
 He, the Bhakta, in Bhakti has been merged.
 The Bhakta and the Lord are now made One
 In the Light which is Nirvana's Height
 Above the ignorance and darkness of the world.

At Madras a well-attended meeting of the citizens was held at the Pachaiappas' Hall on 4th September, 1911 under the presidentship of Justice P. R. Sundaram Iyer. Among the leading citizens present were Messrs. P. S. Sivaswami Iyer, L. A. Govindaraghava Iyer, M. Rangachariar, T. V. Seshagiri Iyer, C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, C. V. Kumaraswamy Sastriar, V. Masilamani Pillai, G. A. Natesan and Dr. M. C. Nanjunda Rao. The following condolence resolution, moved by Sir P. S. Sivaswami Iyer, was passed :

"That the Hindu community of Madras in this meeting assembled do place on record the deep sense of loss sustained by them in consequence of the demise of Swami Ramakrishnananda, and also the high and respectful admiration of his pure, noble and absolutely unselfish life spent in labouring incessantly and unostentatiously for the moral and spiritual welfare of the people of South India."

CHAPTER XI

EPILOGUE : SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA IN RETROSPECT

THE story of Swami Ramakrishnanada's life, which we have finished narrating, is a unique story that illustrates the great principle of the Vedanta and the Bhakti Sastra. In concluding this great life let us take note of those principles. Swami Ramakrishnananda stood for the idea that Seva (Service) is the basis of all spiritual development. It is also its best fruit in its final reaches. Meditation and other higher forms of Sadhana are beyond the capacity of a soul that has not been chastened by continued, painstaking and reverential service of the Lord as a living Presence. The concept of the Divine as the Incarnate World Teacher is very helpful for the practice of this discipline of Seva. In Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna modern man has got such a World Teacher, who could be served. Swami Ramakrishnananda conceived the World Teacher not merely as a historical person but as the Eternal Being who manifests in history repeatedly with the saving message for mankind, the latest manifestation being Sri Ramakrishna whom he personally served in life. The physical death of his Master did not mean for

Swami Ramakrishnananda his spiritual disappearance also. Wherever he is invoked in faith and devotion he is present and he can be served in his picture or image in a literal sense. It should be specially noticed that what he did with the enshrined likeness of the Master was not worship, but Seva, not something ritualistic but actual ministration to a living spiritual Presence.

The realism of this attitude is testified to by the extreme care and vigilance he showed in such Seva and by the readiness with which he stood privations that came in the way of performing this Seva to perfection. Examples of this are recorded in the Life and Reminiscences. And for him this Seva was the most potent form of Sadhana. Meditation and other introspective disciplines usually considered as spiritual practices came to him only next, if there was time after the service of the Master and the monastic community of his disciples, who formed a part and parcel of the Master's being according to him.

A superficial observer may be inclined to find an element of superstition in the Swami's conception of Seva. But that it is not this kind of Service, but the criticism of it, that is uninformed and therefore superficial, will be evident when it is remembered that the highest teaching of the Vedanta is to see God in everything, and that if His presence is actually felt in the centre of worship, seeing Him everywhere is not a far distant ideal for a Sadhaka. Thus Swami Ramakrishnananda's life proves that real and sincere Seva is a direct

means to this Vedantic realization. It is the practice of the presence of God everywhere.

Renunciation, another important aid to realization, is illustrated in a remarkable way in his life. It is true that he never touched money. But that in itself is inconsequential when it is remembered that he eliminated every form of ambition and pursuit of personal achievements. Left to himself he would have spent his whole life in the Service of the Master's Relics without the least thought of personal recognition of any kind. This was not due to any passivity or dullness or incapacity. Physically and mentally he was a man of great capacity, as his later life amply demonstrates. He was an intellectual of the highest order with pronounced scholarly tendencies. Not satisfied with Mathematics, Sanskrit and English, he was studying Persian also when his Master warned him that even study can become a pitfall in spiritual life. From that very day he gave up his studies, until, some ten years after preaching work in Madras again forced him to resume it. For an intellectual of a very high order like Swami Ramakrishnananda, abandonment of scholarly pursuits is an unimaginably harsh privation — probably more than what it is for a rich man to forego his wealth. We hear in history only of another outstanding intellectual who abandoned scholarly pursuits the moment he felt they stood against the development of Bhakti, and that is Sri Chaitanya.

The later part of Swami Ramakrishnananda's life is only an extension of the ideal of Seva (Ser-

vice) he was till then following, not a break from it as it might look superficially. At the behest of Swami Vivekananda, it was easy for him to realize that if the Master was the Universal Spirit manifest for the good of mankind, then Service of him in a wider field than in the Shrine is the necessary implication of such a faith. To bring the Master's name and message to all in need of them, is his veritable Service. It was the quick realization of this that made Swami Ramakrishnananda expand from the devotee-recluse into Sri Ramakrishna's Apostle to the southern regions of India, exemplifying that in a true Vedantin realization should end in communication.

* * *

It may not be inappropriate to conclude the study of this great saint, scholar and missionary, with a pen-picture and appreciation of him by Prof. P. N. Srinivasachariar, a close disciple and admirer of the Swami and at the same time a noted academician of the Madras University in the Faculty of Philosophy. Writes the Professor in his Introduction to *The Story of a Dedicated Life* : "In his monastic life in the Ice House and the Math, the Swami was austerity itself. The worship of the Master was the centre round which his whole life revolved. Like his Master who communed with Kali in the Dakshineswar temple, he felt the Master's living presence in the Shrine. The picture of the Guru was Guru himself, and not a likeness, a mental construction or a symbol. The Pooja transcended

the conventions of prayer and praise, as it was personal communion leading to devotional ecstasy. It was a spiritual education to see the Swami with his big bulky body doing the worship of his Guru. He never touched money, shunned worldlings delighting in fault-finding and flippant talk, and avoided the company of women. He was a strict disciplinarian especially in the training of the inmates in the monastic Order and at the same time he was full of love and laughter to them . . .

“ . . . He was, true to his Master, an integration of the three traditional paths to perfection — Jnana, Bhakti and Karma. But the overtones in him were those of Bhakti. The attitude of ‘Not I, but Thou’ was the predominating note of his personality.

“In his religious and devotional mood, he showed how deeply he was moulded by Bhakti as taught by Gauranga and Ramanuja. Religion, he said, takes man to God by making God of a man, and such godliness is every man’s birthright. His devotional exaltations and ecstasies very often burst the bounds of conventional religion and they were like a storm after a calm. He was generally self-possessed and had the philosophic serenity of a Sakshin (Spectator), viewing things with detachment. But when Bhakti overpowered him, the scene completely changed, and he became God-intoxicated. Self-stripping leads to infilling by God. At one time when he stood before the image of Dakshinamurti in Tiruvanmayur temple, his feelings gathered momentum and changed into

fervour and frenzy. The manifestation of Krishna-prema, like tears pouring down the cheeks, tremor all over the body and thrills, were fully evident in him. The devotees were visibly moved and irresistably drawn into the current and also began to sing and dance. Thus in religion he preferred Bhakti to Jnana, and he became an ardent admirer of Ramanuja whose life and teachings he expounded in Bengali. He specialised in the study of Bhagavata, and his work, *Sri Krishna: The Pastoral and the King Maker*, brings out the intensity of his Krishna-prema.

“ He was a model teacher according to modern standards, and with his deep psychological insight he could discern the aptitudes of his pupils and students and adjust his teachings to their needs. But it was in his public lectures and classes to the young intelligentsia of Madras and in his published works that he was at his best as a Mathematician-Metaphysician. In his teachings which tended towards the monistic idealism of Advaita he often utilised the methods of Berkely, Kant, Descartes and Sankara. It is a transition from the worship of ‘Thou’ to the realization of ‘I’, and samples of his subtle thinking are given below : (1) The universe of space and time or Nama-rupa does not exist apart from our sensations. (2) They are only forms of the mind, sensations unified by the mind, the ego or ‘I’. (3) I think, therefore I am. The Atman is therefore self-proved. (4) There is only one ‘I’ in the world and it is infinite, and there cannot be two infinities. The ‘I’ is thus One without a

second. (5) Zero and infinity are one, and so the smaller than the smallest is the same as the bigger than the biggest. (6) Every one seeks happiness in the senses, but it is only in us. It is eternal and the Self is eternally happy or Bliss itself. Reality or Brahman is thus Sat-Chit-Ananda or eternal life, infinite wisdom and absolute bliss.

“The Swami was fond of solitude and silent meditation, and he used to say now and then that congregational worship is a contradiction in terms. As a contemplative or a Jnani he would retire into the inner sanctuary and think of Godhead as Sat-Chit-Ananda. He used to say that aloneness led to fearlessness.

“Swami Ramakrishnananda's life was thus a model of Bhakti and Jnana in the personal and impersonal aspects. To him Iswara (God) is the Impersonal personalized by love. When Sat-Chit-Ananda is solidified by love, it becomes the Personal God and there is no difference between Para Bhakti and Jnana. Sugar is sweet, and it is immaterial whether one wants to taste sugar or be sugar itself. To him dualism and non-dualism could exist side by side and live at peace. Each kind of Mukti is perfect in itself. While enjoyment is the ideal of dualism, freedom is the ideal of non-dualism, and both are sublime. The Swami practised all the Yogas and found that they led to the same goal. Bhakti is Mukti concretised, and enjoyment and freedom are the same. He was a conservative liberal. In outer life he conformed to the tradition, in inner life he was a revolutionary,

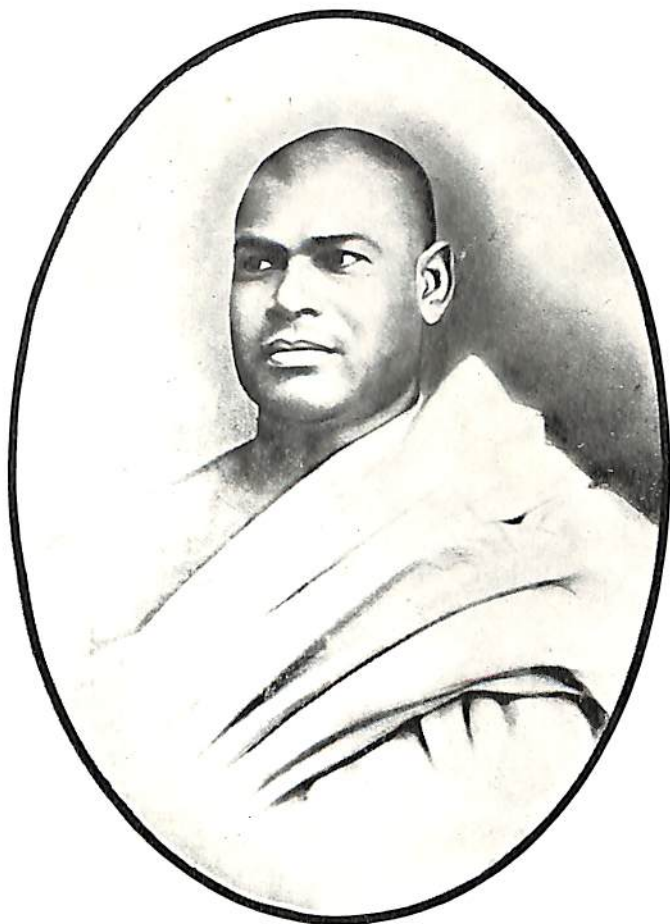
and he regarded Buddha, Jesus and Mohammad as Avataras of God.

“With a simple unostentatious nature, ascetic austerity and inwardness and intuitive contact with Guru and God, he was essentially a saint who radiated spirituality wherever he went. But at the same time he worked incessantly for the welfare of humanity, and spent himself in their service. His life was thus a harmony of asceticism and activism, theism and monism. Swami Vivekananda and he were in some respects complementary and contributed to the many-sidedness of the Mission. The former was a brilliant orator who moved large audiences, but the latter was at his best in classes and debates. The former disseminated Vedanta to all people but the latter confined his teachings to a few people and adapted them to their requirements. The former was a Jnani without and Bhakta within, but the latter was a Bhakta without and Jnani within. But both taught the same truth, though they differed temperamentally, and both were chosen by the Guru and accepted by him. The strength of the Mission consists in the practice of the principle of unity in variety and of a healthy understanding and acceptance of other points of view, which are indeed the desiderata of modern life and thought.”

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Reminiscences
of
Swami Ramakrishnananda
By
His Disciples and Devotees

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SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA



Swami Brahmananda and Swami Ramakrishnananda (*sitting*).
Swami Ambikananda (*standing*).

CHAPTER XII

REMINISCENCES¹

By

C. RAMASWAMI IYENGAR²

FIRST SERIES

I HAVE been asked, as one who had the good fortune to come under the direct influence of Swami Ramakrishnananda during the period of his stay at Madras, to detail my experiences with this great saint. But what am I to say of one 'the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose'!

To me it seems that the Swami was one of those great souls who form the salt of mankind. It is a unique pleasure and privilege on the part of any one to have been under his personal influence for any length of time, however short. His wonderful devotion to the Lord, his sincerity of heart, his great enthusiasm for work, the sympathy he felt for the 'lowliest and the lost' — all these form traits in his nature which are never to be forgotten. What supreme control he had over the senses and what a worthy representative he was of the most ancient Order of monks in the world, I cannot adequately describe!

¹ From *The Vedanta Kesari* of May 1922, August 1928 and September 1930.

² See Appendix I for a short account of the author.

The circumstances that led to the Swami's arrival at Madras are themselves of great interest. After Swami Vivekananda returned from his successful mission in America, he travelled from Colombo to Almora and preached on his way the great truths of Hinduism to all the common people. To this day several of us remember the great enthusiasm with which he was welcomed in Madras and the excellent use to which he put it. He was never tired of speaking about the life of Sri Ramakrishna and his greatness and his universality. His lectures and addresses were so impressive that there was a genuine desire on the part of the people here to learn more of the teachings of the Paramahansa. So, some of the citizens approached him with the request that he should kindly send some one of his brother-disciples to this city to carry on the work of propaganda and to establish a Math for carrying on religious and philanthropic work. Chief among those who took interest in the establishment of such a centre here were the late Mr. V. Krishnaswami Iyer, sometime member of the Madras Executive Council and the late Mr. P. R. Sundara Iyer, Judge of the High Court at Madras.

To meet the wishes of the people Swamiji replied—the scene is still fresh in my memory, for then he was coming down the staircase in the Ice House where he was accommodated during his stay here—“I shall send you one who is more orthodox than your most orthodox men of the South and who is at the same time unique and unsurpassed in his worship and meditation of God.”

Accordingly the next steamer from Calcutta—in those days there was no direct railway communication between Calcutta and Madras — brought Swami Ramakrishnananda along with Swami Sadananda to assist him in his work.

Both of them were received kindly by the late Sri Alasinga Perumal and a house was rented in the Ice House Road where arrangements were made for their comfortable living by a few devoted disciples, prominent among whom was Bhaskara Sethupathi, the late Raja of Ramnad.

As one who came constantly in contact with the Swami for a period of nearly fifteen years, I had many opportunities of observing the daily routine of his life and of noting how complete was his self-abnegation. I can recall many instances of his overflowing kindness, his abounding sympathy, and his childlike nature above all.

I first went to see him one evening on my way from college. As I peeped into the room where the Sannyasin was remaining, I beheld a figure, sturdy and strong, fair in complexion, with a brow showing depth of intellect, and a mind absorbed in the supremest concentration. He was then reading Scott's *Ivanhoe*. As I bowed, he asked me to take a seat and made kind enquiries of me and said that he was brushing up his English—as that was the language in which he was to teach and preach to the people of South India. The first few months were occupied in preparation for his great task and in the meanwhile he was picking up friends and gathering round him a circle of devo-

tees. The fact is that his whole life was one of meditation and worship of the Lord at Calcutta Math until he was literally dragged by Swami Vivekananda from his peaceful repose to the scene of his activities at Madras.

Gradually his name became widely known and several study-classes were arranged. At one time he was holding as many as a dozen of these classes. In Saidapet, in George Town, in Triplicane, in Mylapore—wherever there were men eager to learn about religion and religious truths, he was willing to hold discourses, and in his inimitable manner he was expounding to his eager hearers the deep truths of the Panchadashi, the Gita, the Bhagavatham and other Sacred Books from the treasure-house of Hindu religious lore.

As days passed by, his following became larger and larger, and his name became a house-hold word in the city. And that which endeared him to all was his regularity and punctuality in coming to these classes. He would always be five minutes before time in the class room and he would go on with the class even though the attendance was very small. Some times, there would be none present except him; even then, he was not disappointed; he would sit through the whole hour in meditation and go home quietly afterwards. The resignation shown by him on such occasions was truly a lesson in patience and forbearance more eloquent than the best preachings of others!

His method of teaching was unique. It was more or less conversational — instead of being stiff

or formal — and it appealed direct to the heart owing to the sincerity with which it was uttered. Time flew past ; the minutes grew into hours ; but we who were listening to his sublime discourses were enjoying a supreme happiness and felt not how time flew away. Great truths, complicated questions, controversial problems and all the heights and depths of ethics were discussed, but in the most simple manner possible so that even a child might understand them. He had the great knack of disentangling the truth from the unnecessary details in which it remains shrouded and thus of presenting it in all its aspects to the amazement of the audience. For, as he taught us to perceive old truths in a new light, we thought we were under the influence of one who talked not like the Scribes, but like one with authority.

Once, for instance, there was a discussion between him and Mr. Eric Drew, sometime Principal and Professor of Philosophy in the Pachaiyappa's College, about religion and politics, during the course of which the Swami summed up the whole by saying that "politics is the freedom of senses while religion is the freedom *from* senses". For coining such condensed expressions he had a happy knack which was evinced also in some of his discourses.

On one occasion, for example, comparing the dualistic with the monistic systems of philosophy, he said in words pregnant with meaning : "In the dualistic method enjoyment is the ideal ; in the monistic method freedom is the ideal. By the first

the lover gets his beloved at last, and by the second the slave becomes the master. Both are sublime. One has no need to go from one ideal to the other."

Apart from these classes and discourses, the hours in the Math were spent in incessant worship — a worship so deep and so heartfelt that he forgot himself and the world completely. He worshipped his Guru as one who felt his living presence always. It was a sight to see how with tears glistening in his eyes and lips quivering with emotion, he was chanting verses in praise of Sri Ramakrishna.

As regards his meals, he would not take anything unless it was first offered to his Lord. And he would take scrupulous care in seeing that the offerings were all well-prepared. The least carelessness in this respect he would not tolerate. Similarly it was with greatest care that he performed his Puja.

If there were any visitors or friends present at the monastery, he would not allow them to go away unless they took some of this Prasadam, and this practice he continued almost to the last day of his life.

With what devotion he performed Service to the Lord may be gathered from the following incident. One morning, a certain gentleman who was then holding the highest position in Government service, called at his place to pay his respects to the Swami. It was 10-30 a.m. and after finishing his morning worship he was fanning the portrait of his Guru, which is still preserved and worshipped in the Madras Math, for a couple of hours and more,

uttering along the names of the Lord — Sivaguru, Satguru, Santana Guru, Parama Guru and so on. Our friend was struck with awe and reverence ; so he could do nothing but prostrate before him and return home with the idea of seeing him some other day.

It was he that started the birthday celebrations of his Guru in Madras ; and as Sri Ramakrishna's great delight was in the relief of the poor, he instituted the custom of feeding the poor, which is today attracting thousands every year. The sincerity with which he undertook this task can be understood by the fact that he went to everyone of his friends with the request that they should help in making the celebrations a success.

During the Bhajana, he moved freely with all classes of people. The sudden impulse with which he would begin to chant Slokas in praise of the Lord induced all to partake in the dance and completely forget themselves. The only analogy which could probably be compared to this is the famous dances of Sri Chaitanya, the great Vaishnava reformer of Bengal. This was a feature peculiar to him and many that have enjoyed this dance still talk with wonder and admiration of this ecstatic condition of the mind.

The evening lectures to the public at the celebrations he arranged, not with the idea that people should show off their learning or eloquence, but that they might thus be furnished with an opportunity of studying and learning something of the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

He undertook an extensive tour to several parts of this Presidency and it was mainly through his influence that centres were established at Vaniyambadi, Bangalore, Trivandrum, Pudukotah, Dharmapuri and other places. Work and worship were his highest ideals in life and he was always for humble and sincere beginnings.

The various discourses that he delivered on various occasions have now been collected and published in the form of books, the most popular among them being *The Universe and Man* which treats of the message of Sri Ramakrishna and of the deepest truths of Vedanta; *Sri Krishna the Pastrol* and *Sri Krishna the King Maker* both of them dealing with some of the aspects of the life of Sri Krishna; and *The Soul of Man* which is highly philosophical in its essence. His one great ideal in life was Bhakti or Devotion to God and an embodiment of that ideal he found in Sri Ramanuja. It was his ambition to compose a life of this saint and with this end in view he visited the various places in which Sri Ramanuja had lived. He conversed with many Vaishnavite scholars and thus gathering material at first hand, published *The Life of Ramanuja* in Bengali for the benefit of his countrymen in North India. Those who have read this book remark that he goes deep into the spirit of Sri Ramanuja and has therefore given a sympathetic account of the great religious reformer.¹

¹ An English translation of the book has been published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

Besides this he was attempting a book in Sanskrit reconciling the three great systems of philosophy propounded by the three Acharyas ; but ill-health caused by over-work made him abandon the idea.

His love for humanity as a whole was admirable. He found out that, owing to the plague at Coimbatore, a whole family was swept away, leaving only a few helpless children to eke out their livelihood as best as they could. Seeing their pitiable condition he took them under his loving care. This was the humble beginning of what today is known as the Sri Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home—an Institution which boards and lodges a number of poor boys and at the same time gives them an effective supervision in their conduct of life.

In the Math the training he gave the Brahma-charins was so good that those who were with him have proved to be models of patience and self-sacrifice. He made them efface all trace of egotism and equipped them for a life of simplicity and devotion. An American lady — now known as Sister Devamata — came under this great influence, and it is due to this that she is doing such good work in the West, preaching the tenets of Eastern Philosophy and its ideals. She it is that has recorded every word of what he spoke and took notes of his class lectures ; and it is to her that we owe the preservation of his invaluable teachings which are so original and soul-stirring.

One of his chief objects in life was to take those disciples who were most beloved of the

Blessed Lord on a tour to the holy places of South India. It was through his endeavour therefore that Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, alas, now no more, and the Holy Mother were made to come here ; he accompanied them in the pilgrimage to Rameswaram and after his return he proclaimed that he had finished his work in the South.

Diabetes had already taken hold of him. The cough ended in consumption, and for the sake of better Ayurvedic treatment he went to Calcutta. Information reached Madras that his condition was critical and so I had been to see him there. It was the last occasion that I had the fortune of meeting him in person. He was very gentle and tender to me and made many enquiries of his friends here. On many occasions, he expressed the desire to come back to Madras and die in the birth-place of the great Acharyas. Then he gave me his blessings and bade me depart.

I can recount many more incidents in his life but want of time forbids me from doing so. Suffice it to say that the only other occasion that I touched his feet afterwards was in a dream. I thought I was walking along the Beach when I met him with a disciple of his. At once I prostrated and my open eye-lids touched his feet and lo! the dream was over!

South India has been always famous for its Sannyasins, but even here there have been only rare instances of men who for unselfishness, for sincerity in work and devotion to the Lord can surpass this great BHAKTA.

CHAPTER XIII

REMINISCENCES

By

C. RAMASWAMI IYENGAR

SECOND SERIES

I

WHEN Swami Ramakrishnananda came to Madras in 1897, he was first lodged in a small building on the Ice House Road, rented by a few admirers of Swami Vivekananda. They also undertook to defray the Swami's expenses. Some-time later, he moved into an apartment of the Castle Kernan, popularly known as the Ice House, which Swami Vivekananda himself had occupied during his stay in Madras and which therefore carried with it the memory of his holy association.

The Castle belonged originally to Mr. Biligiri Aiyangar, one who had been able to endear himself to Swami Vivekananda. He was one of the supporters of the Math in its early days and he made a provision in his will for the payment of Rs. 12 a month to Swami Ramakrishnananda.

On his death, the Castle came up for auction. We felt that if it passed into the hands of a stranger, the Swamiji was likely to be put to the necessity of looking out for another place to live

in and so we were anxious and desired that if possible some friend of the Math should purchase it. Among the bidders was such a person in Dr. M. C. Nanjunda Rao. He had an idea of establishing a hospital and nursing home there. He offered upto Rs. 16,000 for the house and then gave up. It was knocked down for Rs. 17,000 or so to a Zamindar.

As the auction was proceeding, the Swamiji sat unconcerned in a far end of the compound, on a long backless bench, away from the crowd that had gathered. I was watching the bidding and occasionally went up to him to tell him how it was progressing. He looked up and said, "Why do you worry about it? What do we care who buys or who sells? My wants are few. I need only a small room for Sri Guru Maharaj. I can stay anywhere and spend my time in talking of him."

As we had anticipated, Swamiji had subsequently to vacate the portion he had occupied in the main building. He was then lodged in a small out-house in the compound where he lived till he moved to Mylapore.

When Swami Brahmananda came to Madras, he heard from us the story about the Ice House. He then remarked, "You were not wise in allowing it to pass into other hands. That is a place where Swami Vivekananda had stayed and if you had acquired it for the continuance of his work, it would have been very nice and a fitting memorial to him. If you had only told me, I would have somehow found the money and would not have let slip the opportunity that presented itself. Sasi is

naturally indifferent to such things. You all ought to have done something."

Though the incident shows two eminent god-men seemingly different in their outlook, it reveals unmistakably the greatness of each. Swami Ramakrishnananda was so absorbed in the realm of the Spirit that he did not care very much for institutions or organisations. But on the other hand, Swami Brahmananda, in spite of his child-like simplicity and the giddy height of spiritual illumination which he had reached, possessed a keen judgement in business matters. This is what enabled him unerringly to pilot the work of the Mission as its first President for over a quarter of a century.

II

Swami Ramakrishnananda was shy of appearing in public or making speeches. His method of teaching was conversational. But whenever he did deliver a lecture, it made a profound impression. If I remember right, the very¹ first public lecture he delivered after his arrival was on *Sri Ramakrishna and His Mission*, under the auspices of the Y.M.I.A., Justice Sir S. Subrahmanya Aiyer presiding. The effects of the address were far-reaching. Swamiji had prepared with great care the manuscript of the address which he handed over

¹ There seems to be some confusion about the date of this lecture. In the edition of it published by the R. K. Math it is described as delivered by the Swami in 1900 at a birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna at Castle Kernan.

to me. I preserved it for nearly ten years, after which it was published by Mr. P. R. Rama Aiyer.

The name of Swami Ramakrishnananda became well known in the city and his work was appreciated on all sides. In 1902, a public meeting was held in the Pachayappa's Hall to devise measures for giving the Mission a permanent footing in Madras. The meeting was largely attended by the citizens of Madras and they resolved "to perpetuate the memory and continue the work of the late Swami Vivekananda by establishing an institution in the city for the study and propagation of Hindu religion and philosophy." Then an attempt was made to collect funds and in this Swamiji did not spare himself. He used to say, "Begging is a test of egotism and you can measure how much ego you have by how much you mind it." He took the lead and accompanied by one or two young men, went from door to door in Triplicane, Mylapore and other parts of the city. It took two years to realise Rs. 1,700.

Then Mr. V. Krishnaswami Aiyer issued a fresh appeal. He wrote : "The Order of Sannyasins to which these disciples of Ramakrishna Parahahamsa belong, is the noblest in the world for the work of philanthropy untainted with any consideration for the promotion of selfish ends. It has been resolved to found an institution in this city where men will be trained to preach the Vedanta, not for a salary or other remuneration, but for the love of humanity. Pandits and scholars will be invited to assemblies periodically held for

the discussion and elucidation of Vedantic truths. Agencies for the relief of the destitute poor and the instruction of the masses would be organised under the control of this institution. . . . Funds will be needed for carrying out this noble undertaking. Shall we lack them in this land of a thousand charities? Devotion to duty, singleness of purpose and a faithful discharge of duty voluntarily undertaken must convince the people that their contributions will be well and nobly spent. The reproach will be great if the opportunity is neglected. Under the blessing of God and the immortal sages of this ancient land, success shall be ours."

III

The appeal had a steady response, though slow. With the collections made, the construction of a building was undertaken in 1906 on a small site on the Brodie's Road obtained through the kindness of the late Akula Kondiah Chettiar, an ardent admirer of the Swamiji. On an auspicious day, Swami Ramakrishnananda conducted the religious ceremonies. It was his desire to bring Swami Brahmananda to inaugurate the function but it could not be arranged. Some friends requested Swami Abhedananda who happened then to be in our midst after his first visit to the West, formally to lay the foundation.

Mr. A. S. Balasubrahmanya Aiyer took charge of the work. The building was completed in November 1907 and he wrote to the Secretaries of

the Memorial Fund, "The final bill for the construction and completion of the building comes to Rs. 5,500; the subscriptions hitherto collected amount to Rs. 4,100; so the deficit has to be met by collecting further subscriptions. The Home is ready for occupation, and I understand the Swamiji moves into it on Sunday, the 17th November, 1907. I await your instructions as to what should be done on that occasion, etc."

Early on the morning of the day chosen, Mr. A. S. Balasubrahmanya Aiyer's carriage waited at the entrance to the Ice House. It was drizzling. Swamiji took the picture of Sri Guru Maharaj. He asked me to hold the umbrella carefully to protect it from the rain till he got into the carriage. We had a quiet drive and soon arrived at the new building.

It was a simple one-storeyed building tinted red. It stood on a high foundation and had a large roof terrace. Inside, there was a spacious hall and four rooms. From the hall, a door led to an open court where was another building containing the kitchen, dining room and bath room.

Swamiji was elated like a child to be inside the new building. He said, "This is a fine house for Sri Guru Maharaj to live in. Realising that He occupies it, we must ever keep it very clean and very pure. We should take care not to disfigure the walls by driving in nails or otherwise. Do you see?"

Sri Guru Maharaj was installed in the Shrine and worshipped. Abhishekam and a special offer-

ing was made to Sri Kapaleeswara. Swamiji said humorously sometime later on, "Till now I was in Triplicane and Parthasarathi subjected me to many trials. But now Kapaleeswara has drawn me to Him. You know He is the Lord of the Bhikshus, as His name means, and He is sure to protect me hereafter." Poor people were fed and an assembly of Pandits was called to chant the scriptures and converse on holy subjects. In the evening, a public meeting was held and the Swamiji requested Mr. (now Sir) P. S. Sivaswami Aiyer to address those who had assembled. With Aratrikam and distribution of Prasadam, the day's function came to a close.

IV

During the first days in the Castle Kernan, Swamiji was "his own servant and his own cook." When he removed to Mylapore, he had with him a Brahmacharin and a cook. The live-long day was one of constant service to God.

Swamiji held classes in several parts of the city and the visitors at the Math were many. Whenever anyone came in from outside, he had to wash his feet and enter the precincts with great reverence. If a stranger ignorant of the observance happened to come in without doing so, after he left, Swamiji would make it a point to have water sprinkled over the place trodden by him and thus purify it. On such occasions, I would remember the words uttered by Swamiji about the sanctity of the place on the day he first came into it. He always took

great care to see that every one who came to the Math, even a coolie, received a share of Prasadam and for this he ever kept ready sweet, cocoanut laddus offered to the Lord.

Swamiji was very regular in all his habits. To give but one instance out of many, he would never miss reading the Gita and the Vishnu Sahasranamam early every morning. Once in 1906, when Swami Premanandaji was in Madras, accompanying his mother to Rameswaram, Swami Ramakrishnananda spent a night with them both in the house where Swami Premanandaji's mother was accommodated. That night he had not with him the Gita and Vishnu Sahasranamam. He asked me at a late hour to procure them from a neighbour. He kept them by his side and then only went to bed.

He reduced the wants in the Math to the barest minimum. He would often say that Bhikshannam is the best for a Sannyasin and ask some of the young boys devoted to him to beg food for him from a few houses nearby. In doing so, he had two objects in view — to keep the ideal of poverty ever before him and also to train the young to feel its glory and be purified by begging. He gave me also ample opportunities of such service.

Whenever he needed some help, he would feel shy of expressing it to any one. "If we cannot get on altogether without help, then why not ask the Lord Himself? Why go to others?", he would say. Once the birthday of Sri Guru Maharaj was near and no money had been received for the feeding of the poor which was an important item

of the celebration. It was midnight and I was sleeping in the Math, when I suddenly woke up, roused by strange sounds in the hall. Looking about, I could see Swamiji pacing up and down like a lion in a cage, humming heavily with every breath. I was afraid to see him in that condition, but I understood later that it was his prayer for help to feed the poor. The next morning money did come. A large donation was received from the Yuvarajah of Mysore who had begun to admire Swamiji, having read a copy of the book, "Universe and Man," just then published.

Swamiji's ambition while in South India was to harmonise the philosophical systems of the three great Acharyas in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. His life of Ramanuja written in Bengali is a classic work on the subject and it contains ample proof of the veneration in which he held the Vaishnava teachers.

His respect for Sankara was exceedingly great. When he was in the Castle Kernan, a rich merchant who used to frequent the Math, spoke of Sankara irreverently. Swamiji flared up in anger and the gentleman received a rude shaking. Those who stood by thought that he would withdraw the help he was giving to the Math and later on pointed it out to Swamiji. He said, "Let him withdraw if he will. Do you think the Lord's work depends on the mercy of men such as these?"

A similar incident happened another time in Mylapore. He had been invited to a gathering held for discussing religious topics. In the course of

the talk, one of the organisers of the meeting happened to refer to Sankara in a slighting manner. Swamiji could not brook the insult offered to the Acharya. He stood up, and saying, "I have no place where Sankara is not honoured," he quickly walked out.

Many young men approached the Swamiji in those days seeking to join the Order. I was acquainted with some of them.

One was an intelligent Brahmin youth who had lately returned from Japan. He stayed in the Math for some time and all those who saw him thought he was ardent in his devotion and would stick on to the monastery. But Swamiji was always severe and exacting in his tests for admitting any one into the fold permanently. He would frequently ask the novice to sweep the floor or wash the utensils or do some other menial work. The gentleman above referred to could not stand it. One day, he remarked, "I did not come here to learn all these things." And immediately, Swamiji asked him to clear out.

Another was a Vaishnavite Brahmin youth. When Swamiji found that he was married and had his old parents to support, he refused to give ear to his request in spite of all his importunities. He strongly advised him to return to where duty called him away.

A third was a keen sportsman who had shot up to eminence in his line. He was a bachelor and possessed strong inclinations to a monastic life. He approached the Swamiji several times, but he

always said, "What am I? You should go to our President and ask him if you want to join the Order." So he went to Belur. And there the President said, "If you are earnest, you must go and serve Swami Ramakrishnananda and come through him." When he returned, he was permitted by Swami Ramakrishnananda to stay in the Math. He would always seem meditative and would never share in the ordinary work of the monastery. A truly religious life is not so easily attained. One day he quietly left the Math and went to live in a wayside hut in Royapettah. Later on he went and stayed in Tiruvottiyur where he passed away. He was no doubt a struggling soul, but Swamiji did not see him yet fit to wear the orange robe of the Sannyasin.

These are only random instances out of scores of similar ones. And it remains a fact that out of all these, Swamiji never admitted even one to Sannyasa. The reason is, he held the Ashrama rightly far above the reach of ordinary men, conceiving it, as has been declared by the scriptures, "sharp as the edge of a razor, hard and difficult to tread." It is sometimes said on this account that his stay in Madras was barren of results. But it must be remembered that he never cared for a following and that he only wanted to take men where he found them and give them a push upward. In the lives of hundreds of men in all stations of life his influence is flowing silently, still leading them ever on the forward path. I should like to quote from two letters I have recently received, which bear

testimony to the abiding nature of this influence.

One devotee writes: "Every big thought brings to my mind our own beloved Sasi Maharaj's face and his gentle smile. It was a blessed time those days, and that makes me proud that we of all people had come into contact with that spiritual giant; only we did not know it then."

Another writes, "Those who have taken the dust of the feet of Swami Ramakrishnanandaji have been turned into gold. A mere touch of his has changed sinners into saints. I can myself see well how his touch has affected me and is keeping me up in my spiritual struggle in spite of the many weaknesses and failures in me. But for him, there would not have been a spiritual side to my life at all. We met first at his feet and we shall meet again at his feet."

V

Towards the end of 1908, Swami Brahmananda came to Madras. When he arrived, Swami Ramakrishnananda accommodated him in his own room which had been renovated for the purpose. He would himself stay out all the time in the entrance hall, saying, "Guru Maharaj and his son will stay inside; I will stay out here and serve them. What more do I want?" I have often seen him bow unobserved at the entrance to the room where Swami Brahmananda stayed. Such was his reverence to Maharaj-ji (Swami Brahmananda was so addressed by his brother disciples.)

Soon after Swami Brahmananda's arrival, Messrs. V. Krishnaswami Aiyer and P. R. Sundra Aiyer came with presents of fruits and flowers to pay respects to him. Swami Ramakrishnananda introduced them to Maharaj-ji. Before taking leave, Mr. V. Krishnaswami Aiyer said to Swami Ramakrishnananda, "Will he deliver a lecture? I shall arrange everything. When will it be convenient to him?" Swamiji smiled and replied, "What is there in lectures? He never gives lectures. Men such as he, can give religion by mere look or touch."

Sometime later when Swami Brahmananda went on a pilgrimage to Rameswaram, Mr. V. Krishnaswami Aiyer came forward to arrange for all conveniences. Mr. T. V. Seshagiri Aiyer, (Sir) K. Srinivasa Aiyengar and a few other friends also subscribed for the trip. Maharaj-ji and Swami Ramakrishnananda were accommodated in a first class compartment. Four young Swamis and myself accompanied separately. Mr. V. Krishnaswami Aiyer had specially commissioned me to go with the party to take proper care of the Swamis and look after all their wants.

On the way, when the train stopped at a station, I went to see Swamiji. I saw him peeping out of a window with a cigarette in his hand. He took a puff from it, raised it to his head and reverently dropped it down. I was surprised at it, for I had never before seen him smoke, though smoking is very common in Bengal.

He told me, "This is holy Prasadam." He had

taken the cigarette end from the hands of Maharaj-ji after he had smoked.

In Rameswaram, the palace of the Raja of Ramnad had been arranged for our stay. But before going there, Maharaj-ji and Swamiji went to the temple. They drove in a double bullock coach. When they returned, they still found us busy with the luggage. Maharaj-ji said reprovingly, "Cannot these things wait? You came here to worship the Lord and that is what you should attend to first."

We stayed in Rameswaram for three days. On the second day, the young Swamis and myself went for a sea bath. For Maharaj-ji and Swamiji we carried the holy water in a vessel. Abhishekam was performed to Lord Siva with the Ganges water which had been brought by Maharaj-ji from Benares.

On the way, we had stayed in Madura also for three days. A noteworthy feature of the stay was the deep Samadhi into which Maharaj-ji entered in Sri Minakshi's temple, seeing the image of the Mother living and moving towards him. There was a large crowd and Swami Ramakrishnananda held him up there for nearly an hour, himself all the while in an ecstatic mood with tears flowing from his eyes, singing Mother's praise over and over again.

When coming out of the Shrine, in an outer hall, Swami Ramakrishnananda saw the image of Adi Sankara. He was seized with a longing to touch the feet of the image with his head. But the

priests would not allow him. Nevertheless, he pushed them aside, saying "Who can prevent my worshipping the Great One?" He went near and had his desire fulfilled.

CHAPTER XIV
REMINISCENCES

By
C. RAMASWAMI IYENGAR

THIRD SERIES

I

REFERRING to Swami Ramakrishnananda, it will be remembered that Swami Vivekananda had said to his admirers in Madras, "I shall send you one who is more orthodox than the most orthodox men of the South and who is at the same time unique and unsurpassed in knowledge and devotion." I shall, in what follows, try to exemplify the truth of this observation.

First, of his regard for the Gita and the Ganga. "The Gita and the sacred waters of the Ganges constitute the Hinduism of the Hindus," declared Swami Vivekananda. "Is it merely patriotism or the impressions of childhood? Who knows? What wonderful relation is this between Mother Ganges and the Hindus? Is it merely superstition? May be. They spend their lives with the name of Ganga on their lips, they die immersed in the waters of the Ganges, men from far off places take away Ganges water with them, keep it carefully

in copper vessels and sip drops of it on holy festive occasions." All this applies word for word to the faith that Swami Ramakrishnananda had in the purifying power of Ganga.

When he first came to Madras, he had not brought Ganges water with him for worship and he longed to have it at the earliest opportunity. In 1899 when Swami Vivekananda started on his second voyage to the West with Sister Nivedita and Swami Turiyananda, he brought a fairly big earthenware jar full of Ganges water for Swami Ramakrishnananda. When the steamer in which he came reached Madras harbour, quarantine regulations owing to plague in Calcutta at the time prevented the ingress or egress of visitors and passengers. The steamer anchored far from the wharf. Friends and devotees who had gathered in large numbers to meet the Swamiji, went in small boats to the sides of the vessel. The presents they had carried were drawn up in baskets and the jar of Ganges water was got down the same way. I was in the boat in which was Swami Ramakrishnananda along with a few others. He had prepared and taken with him several sweets and nice dishes, which he knew were to the liking of Swamis Vivekananda and Turiyananda. These were also sent up. We saw over us leaning on the parapet of the deck the two Swamis in uniform and Sister Nivedita, full of joy and gladness. Swami Turiyananda expressed himself inclined to land in Madras and stay there. He said to Swami Ramakrishnananda, "I am not much enamoured of

America and am going on compulsion. If you can go there in my stead, I would prefer to be here." When it was time for us to return to the shore, Swami Ramakrishnananda said to me, "Please ask the boatman to take us right round the steamer. Let us at least make a Pradakshinam of the two great souls whose feet we have not been able to touch today." The boatman grumbled, but Swamiji insisted on our going round saying, "Let us pay the man a few annas more if necessary."

As for the Gita, the Swamiji made a point of reading it first regularly every morning ; he would never miss it. In his *Life of Ramanuja*, what he records as Alavandar's attitude to the Gita, is his own too. "Let urgent business remain or not, I have learned that the reading of the Gita is the most meritorious and glorious of all actions. Recitation of the Gita should be attended to first." And again he adds, "How can he who has enjoyed and understood for a time at least the cardinal truths of the Gita, be attracted by the paltry things of the world? Really to enjoy the sweetness of the Gita, one should possess the force of Bhakti and the untainted wisdom of a pure heart. Nevertheless, even the mere repetition of the holy words that fell from the lips of the Lord cannot be without efficacy ; it will surely arouse in the reader an unflinching sense of purity and devotion."

The Swami often used to quote the couplet meaning : "How can death frighten one who has read a little of the Bhagavad Gita, drunk a few

drops of Ganga water and worshipped God at least once."¹

Not only in these but in all matters of traditional religious observances and beliefs, Swamiji was very scrupulous. For example, he would never begin a piece of important work without consulting the almanac ; he would never undertake a journey on certain days or Tithis and he attached great importance seemingly to omens and signs and premonitions.

When engaged in writing the *Life of Ramanuja*, he visited Conjeevaram and Sriperumbudur and collected from several sources interesting stories and incidents relating to the lives of the Vaishnavite saints. When he learnt of the importance attached to Thoothu Valai, a medicinal herb, as a Satvic food and what part it played in leading to the renunciation of Yamunacharya, he took a great liking to it. He planted it in the Math, tended it with care and made it an article of his diet. A Swami, who was in the Math as his assistant, removed it one day, mistaking it for some ordinary weed, and this made Swami Ramakrishnananda very sorry.

II

His early training had been of the most orthodox type and when later on as a Sannyasin, he was free from all social obligations, he still con-

¹ भगवद्गीता किञ्चिदधीता गंगाजललवकणिकापीता ।

सकृदपि यस्य मुरारिसमर्चा तस्य यमः किं कुरुते चर्चाम् ।

tinued in his orthodox habits — like Sri Ramakrishna, he held that these little things, though in themselves not of much intrinsic value, were like the chaff over the grain, which, if removed would take away from the grain its power of sprouting. So these things were necessary to keep the vitality of religion. Next, of the esteem in which he held his Gurubhais, which almost bordered on worship. He used to consider himself like a true Vaishnavite, “the servant of the servant of His servants.” Once he was in Ernakulam and there he was accommodated in the house of a prominent lawyer by name Mr. Duraiswami Aiyar. As soon as Swami Ramakrishnananda went into his house, he said, “I have heard that Swami Vivekananda stayed in your house in his Parivrajaka days. This is a *thirtham*, a holy place. I wish to see first the exact place or room where he stayed.” Mr. Duraiswami Aiyar replied, “He was seated, when he came in, even where we stand now.” At once Swami Ramakrishnananda rolled on the floor and kissed the ground, for to him the very dust of the place whereon his leader had trodden was sacred. In Madras and in other places too wherever he heard that Swami Vivekananda had halted, he used to bow down at the sight of those places as at a Shrine.

Of his regard for Swami Brahmananda, late President of the Mission, I have given several instances elsewhere. Here is another which might be of interest. One day in 1908 when he was in Madras he asked me to procure the photograph of

a South Indian dancing girl. I wondered what he could want it for, and when I came to the Math the next evening with the photo, I asked Swamiji if he knew anything about it. He was equally in the dark as to the need for this curious requisition and felt that whatever might be his object, if the visitors to the Math should see it or hear of it, they might misunderstand him. So Swami Ramakrishnananda took the photograph from me, asking me not to mention anything about it to Swami Brahmananda unless he enquired about it again. Soon after he did ask me, and I had to tell him that the photo had been handed over to Swami Ramakrishnananda. It became evident that he did not approve of my act or the interference of Swami Ramakrishnananda in the matter. Whenever the latter came before him afterwards, Swami Brahmananda would turn away his face and would not talk to him. After a few days, he called for the almanac to choose a day for leaving Madras. Swami Ramakrishnananda could bear this no longer. He rushed into Swami Brahmananda's room and lay prostrate before him, saying, "Pray, be not angry with me. I am an unworthy and insignificant servant. At a mere nod of your head, a hundred Sasis will come forth." (Sasi was the name by which Swami Ramakrishnananda was known to his intimate friends). Immediately the countenance of Swami Brahmananda was lit up with a smile and the cloud passed away. One cannot help admiring the simplicity and candour of both. Swami Brahmananda was as magnanimous and ready to

forgive as Swami Ramakrishnananda was humble and childlike.

What Swami Brahmananda's intention in asking for this photograph was, I understood later on. He had desired to send it to a devotee in Bengal who had been somewhat loose in morals. What effect would the receipt of such a picture from his Guru have on him? Every time he looked lustfully afterwards on a woman, the all-renouncing Sannyasin would appear in his mind's eye and melt away the lust. We can remember similar situations in the life of Sri Ramakrishna and how he used to tell some of his householder disciples in lower rungs of the ladder of spiritual life, "One may go to the most objectionable place but only let him take the Divine Mother also with him. One may drink wine, only let him offer it to the Divine Mother first and take it and so on." Not of course that Sri Ramakrishna permitted these things but this was a stage in the process of weaning out weak-minded followers. And Swami Brahmananda like his Great Master, led his disciples in the upward path in new and original ways, and even those who moved closely with him could not fully understand at the outset the meaning of many of his actions.

III

Thirdly, of Swami Ramakrishnananda's devotion to Sri Ramakrishna: The Swamiji's life was one of continued austerity and privations. He

never spoke to any one of his difficulties. At times he would speak out his mind, standing before the picture of Sri Ramakrishna which he worshipped.

One evening a few devotees came to the Math to meet the Swamiji and they understood that he was in the Shrine. Presently they heard him calling out in loud and angry tones, "You have brought me here, old man, and left me helpless. Are you testing my powers of patience and endurance? I will not go and beg hereafter for my sake or even for yours. If anything comes unasked, I will offer to you and share the Prasadam. Or, I will bring sea sand for offering to you and I shall live upon that." The devotees who were waiting outside did not quite understand his words and they guessed he was quarrelling with some one. With whom was it? It was with his Master. Such was the intensity with which he felt the abiding presence of his Guru and God.

Another incident comes to my mind. The first building of the Math had cracked in several places soon after its construction, and during the rains water would come down through the fissures in the ceiling. At such time, he would go into the Shrine to make sure that no water entered there. One night it began to drip inside the Shrine too, and right on Sri Ramakrishna's picture. Swamiji stood there holding an umbrella till the night wore out and the rain stopped. Any one else would have removed the picture to a safer place and gone to sleep but to Swami Ramakrishnananda it appeared that if he did so, he would be awakening his

Master from his rest at an untimely hour, and that would be wrong.

His spirit of devotion was contagious and several men who saw him even for a short while caught it, though he accepted none as his disciples. I heard recently from a friend that the present Mridangam expert in the Mysore palace is a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. He happened to play on the day Swami Ramakrishnananda opened the National Girls' School in Madras and the meeting with the Swamiji on that occasion brought about a change in his life. He remembers that as a blessed day in his life.

Another friend, who is an orthodox Vaishnavite, told me that after his meeting with the Swamiji, whenever he opened the *Tiruvaimozhi* for his daily reading and thought of Nammalwar and other saints, there stood before him the figure of Swami Ramakrishnananda. The greatness of the teacher whom he had seen, helped him to realise the greatness of the saints whom he had not seen.

So is he with us all to-day, who had the good fortune' of meeting him.

CHAPTER XV

REMINISCENCES¹

By

P. MANICKASWAMY MUDALIAR²

FIRST SERIES

I HAVE been asked to note down my recollections of Swami Ramakrishnananda, which I do with much pleasure. I came in contact with him about a quarter of a century ago when he was conducting a religious class in Chintadripet, Madras. For the first one or two years I was a severe critic of his exposition of the Vedanta Philosophy, of which I had previously a smattering knowledge. In putting questions to him I was implacable, and I had many a tussle with him in which, of course, I was ultimately defeated. This attitude of mine towards him was not to be long, and one day when I was going headlong in my discussion with him, there issued forth from his lips thundering words and outpouring of spirit, which pierced through and through my heart and made me spell-bound. The next evening I ran up to the Math, which was then located in the Castle Kernan or Ice House as it is more familiarly known. Despite my rude handling of him he was gracious

¹ From *The Vedanta Kesari* of July 1922 and September 1946.

² See Appendix I for a short account of the author.

enough to give me a warm welcome at which I felt a contrition in my heart for my past behaviour to him. With a penitent heart I sat before him and drank deep the explanations he gave to my difficulties—difficulties which were not cleared in his class lectures — and there was such a loving exchange of heart that I ever afterwards became his humble adherent and follower. My acquaintance with him grew closer and closer, and I got such an insight into his method of life and thinking that I was able to give a satisfactory explanation to such of my friends as used to remark, “What sort of a Sannyasin is he? He lives in a palatial building, sleeps on cushioned cots and lives on rich food!”

In the early period of his work in Madras, he was his own servant and his own cook. His classes were scattered in the different parts of the city and to many of these he used to go on foot for a long time. On certain days of the week he had to lecture more than twice or thrice, and would return to the Math quite tired, unfit to cook his food even. I have known days when a loaf of bread purchased from bakeries was his simple meal for the night. That was because there was little energy left in him for cooking or there were no food-stuffs in the Math. He would not say a word about the difficulties he was contending against, and not a second person was thus aware of his plight. It was only a few students of his who happened to frequent the Math that came to know of his bodily wants and volunteered to supply them. The proffered

help he would not easily accept. He would advise such of his students as came forward to help him, to live a little more comfortably. Most of his students were poorly paid men, and he did not want them to undergo any kind of sacrifice for his sake. So magnanimous and broad-hearted was he! Questioned as to how he was supporting himself, he would with a striking composure reply, "God sends me whenever I want anything." One day there was not in the Math even a drop of ghee to fry Chapati. He was simply pacing up and down the Veranda not knowing where the help would come from. Immediately a student of his approached him gently and whispered into his ears his intention to contribute his mite to the Math, as he had a lift in his office and implored him as to the form the help should take.

Swamiji, as was characteristic of him, demurred, but on the student insisting, said, "Let me have one viss of ghee", which he received monthly ever afterwards regularly. The difficulty of meeting his bodily wants disappeared when the stuff of which he was made had come to be widely known in Madras.

He tried to spread the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna among the students who flocked to his classes and among the general public, by delivering lectures in different centres of this Presidency, without favour or fear. At the top of his voice would he declare that Mammon and God could not be worshipped simultaneously, that Kamini and Kanchana i.e. woman

and gold should be renounced before any one could become really religious, that spirituality and worldliness reside at opposite poles, and that Gita taught Tyaga. In a word he taught Renunciation, pure and simple. This made a few bigwigs of the city nervous. They were afraid that the young students upon whom many a family built their hopes would take an aversion for family life and become ascetics. They therefore implored Swamiji to alter the character of his teaching on pain of withdrawal of their support. At this Swamiji's indignation knew no bounds. Referring to this incident I heard him say in a private conversation, "Am I to preach other than what I learned from my Master? Certainly I won't do that. I care a fig for the bigwigs. They are at liberty to do whatever they like. If I am ousted today from this Castle, I shall very gladly find accommodation in a pial of one of my students' houses. I am a Sannyasin and do not know where my next meal would come from."

His devotion to his Guru was unique and unparalleled. He revelled and lived in the idea that his Guru was not dead. He had with him a photo of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa which he kept constantly with him. During the long period when he had no Brahmachari to help him in the Math work, he received invitation from other parts of the Presidency for lecturing purposes. He would then carry his Master's photo with him. He felt the living presence of his Master so strongly that

he considered himself blasphemed if he did not offer him food and serve him in sundry other ways. One day I happened to go to the Math after 10 or 11 a.m. and stayed there enjoying his company till about 2 o'clock. I wanted to take leave of the Swamiji when he said, "Wait, Guru Maharaj is taking his tiffin. I shall give you a little Prasad." So saying he sat a little while as if he was waiting till his Guru had finished taking his tiffin, and then going to the Puja room, returned from it presently with a few fruits and sweets which he put into my hand as Prasad with loving grace.

This appeared rather very queer to me and threw me into a derisive mood. I ventured to pooh-pooh him for thinking a dead man as alive, for carrying his photo whenever he (the Swamiji) left Madras, these being actions which indicated a certain aberration of his mind. Then ensued a hot discussion between us and although in the end I was discomfited, I was amazed to see the depth and genuineness of his devotion to his Master. Bhaktas' eyes and mind, he went on to say, were very peculiarly transformed, and if others had not such eyes and mind, it was not their (Bhaktas') fault.

He even went to the length of saying that the images in temples were not simply dull, dead, inert matter, but were living Gods who could be spoken to. He was found indeed to talk from a high altitude of spirituality which was entirely beyond my comprehension; but the conviction somehow

stole on me that what he said could not but be true. Whenever he chanced to see any temple Gopuram he would at once lift his hand in salutation of God. His Bhakti was unfathomable.

He was very orthodox, yet he possessed a tolerant heart. Once he had occasion to go to Saidapet in response to an invitation by a student of his for dinner. Swami Paramananda and myself accompanied him. After partaking of dinner towards the evening, we went to St. Thomas Mount which was not far off from Saidapet. We ascended the mount and saw a church at its summit. The pastor of the church, who was informed of the Swamiji's desire to see it, was courteous enough to open its gates. We all entered the church and to our amazement Swamiji went straight up to the altar, knelt before it as a Christian would do and prayed. My impression of Swamiji prior to this incident was that he was a very orthodox Hindu, possessing little or no sympathy for Christian missionary propaganda. Swamiji used to say that all that Vyasa, Yagnavalkya and Manu did and wrote were all correct and true, for they were men in whom not a vestige of selfishness could be found. He was a staunch supporter of all that was Hindu and could be found not infrequently defending even some of its worst superstitions. His chief object apparently was to restore and strengthen our tottering faith in the scriptures and the sages. For such a Swami to pray in a Christian church adopting the kneeling posture was to me inexplicable. Perhaps the explanation could be found in his

favourite saying, "Behave like a bee and not like a dung-hill fly."¹

The people of the Madras Presidency have a notion rightly or wrongly that a true Sannyasin is he who has no property of his own, who devotes all his time to meditation, taking little or no interest in mundane activities of any kind, and remains in a retired place from which he comes out only for food when pinched by hunger and for water when troubled by thirst. But Swami Ramakrishnanda's life was entirely different. He considered work as worship and consecrated his life to carrying aloft the message of his Master to the door of the rich and the poor alike. He thought that his salvation consisted in the salvation of humanity, and with this end in view, he toiled and moiled to remove the misery of people who had fallen from the high ideal of life enjoined in the Scriptures. Himself observing the round of all religious festivities in strict accordance with Shastras, by keeping fast, by making Japams, by bathing in the sea on eclipse days, etc., he made people turn away, from their much-vaunted neglect of good old customs, the meaning and genesis of which they began to enquire.

His theoretical knowledge of the Hindu religion and philosophy was profound. When expounding Shankara's philosophy he would take his students to such great heights that they would feel themselves lost in the Absolute, and lest they

¹ For the correct explanation reference may be made to pp. 13 & 38 of the biographical section.

should go away with the idea of non-existence of God, he would at once place Bhakti in the forefront so that to a careless observer it would appear that the Swami was blowing hot and cold in the same breath.

He was a strict disciplinarian though he heeded not external respect and regard. He used to correct such of the habits of students as are obstructive to spiritual progress. Once a student was found sitting in his class with his chin resting on the palm of his hand. He at once said: "Do not sit like that, it is a pensive attitude." Another day one student was found gently shaking his legs while sitting on a bench, and Swamiji said to him, "Stop shaking, it is not good and conducive to well-being." Whenever any student drank water standing, he would enjoin him to sit and drink. He was taking so much interest in the spiritual welfare of his students and regulated their habits even!

In Madras real devotion was a rare commodity. Owing to missionary propaganda and Western education which made its recipients agnostics, sceptics and haters of Hinduism, Swamiji's task here bristled with apparently insurmountable difficulties. He deplored that the people of these parts had no heart, though they were strong in intellect. Whenever opportunity presented itself, he deprecated the existence of feuds between Vaishnavites and Saivites and between Thengalai and Vadagalai, and preached to the people the Hindu religion in its pristine purity and glory. He did not fail to

impress that the chief end of man, nay even of society, should be to know and assimilate the essentials of religion, leaving the non-essentials to adjust themselves according to the needs of the times. He had a rocky soil to till and his labours were not rewarded or did not bear fruit as richly as they deserved. But it cannot be denied that he did sow many good seeds which are beginning to bear fruit slowly and gently.

CHAPTER XVI

REMINISCENCES

By

P. MANICKASWAMY MUDALIAR

SECOND SERIES

SOMETIME in the year 1897 I heard that an English-educated Swami was holding religious classes in Chintadripet. I was told that the Swami, at the end of the class, welcomed questions which elicited answers revealing the vast erudition and religious fervour of the Swami. I got interested in the Swami's classes, and was gradually drawn to him by his sweetness, scholarship and spiritual zeal.

Before I touch upon the spiritual stature of Swami Ramakrishnananda, let me try to give you an idea of how he looked externally. Sasi Maharaj had an attractive personality. He looked younger than he was. He appeared only about twenty-five years of age ; but he was really thirty-four. The smiling and tender face was very winning ; his face was long and round with a strong and firm chin. His lips were thick, and his eyes, though not large, were beaming with intelligence and sweetness. He had a broad chest, and a good round belly. He had strong and stout limbs, and his walk

was majestic. When going to classes, he would put on a long coat which would come below the knee, and a turban with its long end hanging over his shoulders. I have not seen him with shoes on, nor was he in the habit of carrying a stick with him. He was a man grand to look at.

Sasi Maharaj was well-versed in Eastern and Western philosophy and his method of teaching was unique. He knew that the students were new to religious subjects and so would scrupulously avoid technical terms. He made it his point to express his thoughts in simple language so that even a beginner could follow him. I remember the Swami devoted many classes to explain fully the implications of the Sloka in the Gita, *Matrasparsastu-Kaunteya*. Without some knowledge of psychology this Sloka cannot be fully understood and so the Swami was particular to give it in the class. There was a thoroughness about his explanations. And when occasions arose the Swami did not hesitate to differ from the author or the commentators. I remember how, when the *Panchadasi* was being taught, the Swami criticised some points in it, and as a consequence two of his students stopped coming.

Sasi Maharaj taught only principles and studiously refrained from referring to either Sri Ramakrishna or Holy Mother who were the embodiments of these principles. He did so lest he should lay himself open to the charge of founding another 'ism'.....The Swami would lose no opportunity to picture to the students the glory

that is in Hinduism. In the class he would often stress on Jnana and Bhakti coupled with Vairagyam or renunciation, so much so that the students began to ask him whether to lead a religious life, renunciation of family, home and all was absolutely necessary. It would appear that his preaching of renunciation to youths got him into trouble. One day when I had gone to the Math to meet the Swami, I heard him say with a leonine heart, 'What do I care for these bigwigs? I am a Sannyasin and can live on the pial of one of my students' house. Am I to teach what I learned from Guru Maharaj or what these bigwigs like!' I could not quite follow the Swami. Later on I learnt that some bigwigs threatened to withdraw their financial support if the Swami continued to teach renunciation to the young men and spoil their minds as well as spoil the hopes the parents were building on these young men. The public of Madras perhaps wanted that the Swami should give instruction on Yoga and such other Sadhanas which could be followed without prejudice to family life. But the Swami used to say, "God and Mammon cannot be simultaneously worshipped." So in the long run the public of Madras was apparently not satisfied with the Swami's teachings and hence attendance in the classes began to dwindle. Whenever the students pressed for some practical instruction, the Swami would say, "Next time". But that next time was never to come. Was not the Swami aware that the soil was not ripe for the spiritual seedlings?

When the Komaleswaranpet class was closed, three of us went to him and pressed him for practical instruction. We went on a day fixed by him when he made Homa and made us take some pledges before the Homa fire. But the Swami did not initiate us in any Mantra. Even to those students who were very devoted and useful to him, for instance, the late Rao Saheb Ramaswamy Iyengar and his cousin brother, Rao Bahadur Ramanujachariar, the untiring Secretary of the Madras Branch of the Mission, he did not give initiation. Apparently the Swami did not want to assume the role of a spiritual Guru or perhaps he thought that the ground was not yet ripe.

I now pass on to picture to you the odds the Swami had to face in going to his classes. At the time of Sasi Maharaj's sojourn in these parts, there were no buses and tram cars. There was a peculiar type of Jutka, not of the type we have now. It was a sort of small box into which three would have to squeeze themselves: one would have to sit at the entrance, and the other two opposite to him, just at the back side of the driver's seat. The entrance into Jutka was very narrow and the box was fitted in a slanting way so that the passengers had always to learn the lesson of alertness not to slip and knock against one another. It was a funny sight to see Sasi Maharaj entering the Jutka with his stout and robust body, squeezing himself and bending his head. These Jutkas were not available near the Ice House and often the Swami had to walk up to the Jutka stand, a mile off in

the Triplicane bazaar. Nor had he the requisite money to hire one. He had therefore to go all the way on foot to Chintadripet which could be reached only through Mount Road. Mount Road was then a low lying place and was often under water, and the Swami had to wade through knee-deep and some times hip-deep water to go to the classes. Through the grace of his Guru whose protecting arm he always felt and on which he fully depended, a Jutkawalla, who was a Harijan, came forward to take the Swami, and ever since used to appear at the appointed time, take the Swami to the class and bring him back to the Math.

The Swami would return from the classes dead tired to cook his own food. In the early days there was none to help him in the management of the Math affairs. He was his own cook, his own servant. He was also the Pujari and the teacher. There were days when he returned to the Math after a day's hard work to find that there was not a drop of ghee to fry the Chappattis. There were days when on his way back from the class he had to ask one of his students to get a bread for his night meal. In short the personal difficulties he had to undergo were many. But through all these he waded, with unimaginable fortitude, and serenity of mind. In fact the circumstances were such that he would not have come for blame if he had shifted the centre of his activities to some other place in the Province. But he was a great Karma-yogin and had such a great faith in his Guru that he was quite confident that all difficul-

ties were sure to disappear soon and so he stuck to his post of duty assigned to him by the leader, Swami Vivekananda. Yes, the difficulties did vanish. Some students came forward with monetary help. One student took him to the optician and purchased a pair of glasses for him. A Brahmachari was sent to assist him in the Math work. Then came Ramu and Ramanuju who shouldered the full responsibility and thereafter the Swami's life was free from anxiety. My idea in stressing this aspect of the Swami's life is to impress upon you the ideal of devoted service and strenuous work which the Swami has placed before us by his exemplary life. Sasi Maharaj was a man who had given up everything. He would at the same time strain every nerve of his to carry on the work entrusted to him by Swami Vivekananda, his trusted leader.

About six years passed in this wise and Sasi Maharaj was still in the Ice House. How long could Guru Maharaj continue without a habitation of his own? One Konda Chetty, a student of his, came forward with a gift of land in Mylapore for erecting a Math. On that plot, just where the Vilva tree of the Math now stands,¹ a small building was put up with public subscriptions and Sasi Maharaj moved into it with Sri Guru Maharaj. His joy in getting a house for Guru Maharaj was reflected in his face and became manifest slowly in his actions also.

¹ The tree perished several years back.

I remember with extreme gratitude the solicitude the Swami used to bestow on me. Especially I can never forget the way of serving Sadhus into which he initiated me. Whenever I used to visit him at the Ice House, I would simply salute him with folded hands with the words, Namaskaram. The Swami would return with the words, Narayana. Perhaps he was observing the manner of my salutation. One day when I had sat down for conversation, he said, "Will you shampoo my legs a little?" I did so very willingly and derived the greatest happiness. I understood him as teaching me how to do service to a Sadhu. On another occasion I heard the Swami using the word 'Susrusha' in his talk to the attendant who was then fanning him. The Swami was very careful to give instruction to his students in matters of daily habit. Thus he exemplified in his life the great maxim that the spirit and not the letter of the law is to be followed.

The Swami would never allow any visitor to leave the Math without giving him Prasadam. I used to go to the Math at odd hours of the day just to see what the Swami would be doing then. One day I engaged him from 12 noon to 2 p.m. I was about to take leave when he said, "Wait, Guru Maharaj is taking his tiffin, I shall give you a little Prasadam."

This made me discuss with him the value of Prasadam. I held diametrically opposite views regarding Prasadam. But he instanced to me the case of Swami Vivekananda who had no faith in the efficacy of Prasadam and would refuse to

accept anything that was given him by Guru Maharaj as Prasadam. Sri Guru Maharaj therefore used to thrust a grain of rice from Puri Prasadam in a plantain and give it to Swamiji. Prasadam, Sasi Maharaj used to say, has got such great efficacy. I have ever since reposed great faith in Prasadam.

Sometimes I have heard the charge being placed at his doors of not having made Sannyasin disciples. Those who had been fortunate to receive his transforming touch, might not have through some reason or other, changed the colour of their clothes, like myself, but are carrying with them the fire of his ideas and working out his ideas in their own humble way.

Some of my friends who saw Sasi Maharaj in the Math remarked that he was not a Tyagi, but one living in luxury, equipped as he was with a few chairs, tables and cots. I was requested by them to ascertain from him whether and, if so, what Sadhana he was practising. When I put the question to Sasi Maharaj, he replied, "Tell them that my Guru had done all Sadhanas for me." What a bold and quick repartee!

Sasi Maharaj was a strict disciplinarian and yet he was not slow to forgive and forget when forgiveness would result in good. I know the case of a Bengali young man who somehow fell in the company of wandering Bairagis and could not get away from them. When this group of Bairagis happened to sojourn at Triplicane, this young Bengali, having heard of Sasi Maharaj, broke loose

from them and sought Sasi Maharaj's protection. His name was Jogen. Sasi Maharaj with his mellow heart granted it and allowed him to stay in the Math. But a few days afterwards the truant in Jogen made him run away without Sasi Maharaj's permission. He soon returned to the Math, repenting bitterly of what he had done. Sasi Maharaj forgave him and admitted him in the monastery. Jogen in due course was accepted as a monk of the Ramakrishna Order.

I give below some of Sasi Maharaj's familiar utterances which were original :

Man is not three and a half cubits body.

Mind is matter-mixed spirit.

Pleasure and pain are a contradiction.

In the division of time as Present, Past and Future, the Present is Parabrahma.

Mammon and God cannot be simultaneously worshipped.

Maya is like a famished harlot appearing on the stage. The moment she is detected to be an old woman, she gives up her tempting coquetties.

A true Bhakta is greater than God, for he is a giver and not a taker.

A Jnani is like a spring full of water ; but a Bhakta is like an overflowing spring.

A Jnani wants to become sugar but the Bhakta wants to taste sugar.

A man fully under water cannot see the bank, but a man with the head above surface sees

it. So while immersed in Maya, what is outside it cannot be known.

Mind's real nature is dull and inert i.e., *jada*.

The present birth pre-supposes previous existence.

If you grant and believe in your existence, you must grant the existence of all other things.

Desire concretised is body.

Desire to be desireless is harmless.

Pleasure and pain are contact born.

Do not be overconfident that you can withstand the impact of Kama in the company of women.

Who are you to set things right in the world ?

Does not God know when and how to do it ?

Man is Samvid, consciousness Absolute.

You are first and then others follow.

To remove the eye trouble, put on green spectacles instead of painting the whole world with the green paint. So set the mind right and not attempt to right the world. Religion is not in churches, mosques or temples but in the mind. Creation, preservation and destruction are done by Maya in the presence of God and not by God, just as the hair grows in the body not at the wish and instance of the man but in his presence.

Memory is always about past things that we have experienced, and when we say we slept well, it is a thing of the past and therefore must have been experienced. In sound sleep

the mind was active, but it was not engaged in comparing thoughts as it does in the waking state but was witnessing darkness or ignorance. Behave like a bee and not like a dung-fly. Respect and honour the rich not for his riches but for the Punyam or meritorious acts which got him the riches.

Naked we came and naked we have to go.

Sasi Maharaj consecrated his life for the service of the South Indians whose spiritual welfare was his sole and anxious concern. He worked disinterestedly and very hard, content with what providentially came his way for keeping the body and soul together. He had no thought of the morrow, and stuck doggedly to his post, preaching without fear or favour. For fourteen years he toiled hard, taking classes, undertaking lecture tours, starting Maths in Bangalore and elsewhere. He dexterously tilled the rocky soil entrusted to him for cultivation, made it alluvial, manured it, leaving the sowing of the seeds to his successors. His neglect of physical necessities, and the hard and exacting life he led, brought on serious ailment. The doctors diagnosed and declared it consumption. In spite of his illness he did not seek a change until he was pressed by the Belur Math authorities to go over there for treatment. As befitting a true Karma-Yogin, he obeyed the call, and went to Calcutta. Though the best medical aid was summoned he shuffled off his mortal coil in 1911 to enjoy eternal peace and happiness at the feet of

his beloved Master. His passing away has created a void in the hearts of his admirers and devotees in Madras — a void which still remains a void and will remain so till the world lasts.

His successors have sown the necessary seed in the ground prepared and kept ready by him and we see before our very eyes the rich harvest they are reaping. All credit to Sasi Maharaj. All Glory unto him.

CHAPTER XVII

REMINISCENCES¹

By

M. A. NARAYANA IYENGAR²

ONE of the most important chapters in the life of Swami Ramakrishnananda relates to his work in the Mysore State. Swami Vivekananda had visited Mysore in 1892 before proceeding to America to represent Hinduism at the Chicago Parliament of Religions, and was the guest of its famous Minister, Sir K. Seshadri Iyer, for about a month. He had seen His late Highness Chamaraj Wodeyar, and created a profound impression on the value of religion wherever he went. While he made a name for Hinduism in America by his wonderful presentation of Indian thought, Bangalore held a public meeting in September 1894 in the Swami's honour and congratulated him on his splendid work. But for the next nine years there was hardly any activity in Mysore in the direction of understanding the leaven of thought introduced into the modern world by Sri Ramakrishna Deva.

But in July 1903, Swami Ramakrishnananda accepted an invitation from the Vedanta Society of

¹ From *The Vedanta Kesari*, May 1922.

² See Appendix I for a short account of the author.

Ulsoor in Bangalore and stayed there from the 19th July to 9th August. About four thousand people, including fifty-three Bhajana (Sankirtan) parties, received him at the Cantonment Railway Station and conducted him in a procession of three miles to his residence. During this period, he delivered about a dozen public lectures and held question classes morning and evening.

His lectures were attended by crowded and eager audiences of not less than a thousand persons, and his classes were attended by scores and sometimes by hundreds. His lectures included the following subjects: "Message of Sri Ramakrishna to the World", "What is Yoga?" and "What is Vedanta?", and were presided over by the highest officers of the State, who appeared to vie with each other for the honour. The Swami appeared so inspired during the whole period that he actually electrified his audiences into a newer and more forceful appreciation of the grand truths of the Religion Eternal. A strong wave of spirituality was raised by the force of the Swami's personality and teachings, which left an impress over the place and established the Dharma once again on broad and unsectarian, yet deep and abiding lines.

In October of that year, the Swami carried the message of Sri Ramakrishna to Mysore and delivered five lectures. A notable address was his Sanskrit speech to the Pandits of the place assembled in the Sanskrit College, defending the views of his Master Sri Ramakrishna on the diver-

gent interpretations of the Vedanta and the Prasthanatraya as expounded by the great commentators. The address was a scholarly production and evoked a mild surprise, but the Pandits, champions of orthodoxy though they are, hardly realized its earnest import and courteously refrained from seriously contesting his conclusion. The interest thus created in Bangalore in the teachings of the Swami was kept alive by the Vedanta Society. In August 1904 the Swami was again invited to found a permanent centre, and this time he went there with Swami Atmananda. He delivered a series of lectures again, opened some classes and left Swami Atmananda in charge of them to continue the work and went back to Madras. Swami Atmananda and, in his absence, Swamis Vimalananda and Bodhananda continued this work till 1906, under the guidance of the Swami.

In August 1906 the Swami again visited Bangalore and Mysore with Swami Abhedananda, who had recently returned from America after preaching Vedanta there for ten years. The two Swamis together delivered several lectures and consolidated their Vedanta work in Mysore. The appearance of Swami Abhedananda gave a fresh impetus and the elite of Bangalore wished to commemorate his arrival by the opening of a permanent centre of the Mission with a suitable habitation of its own. The Dewan Sir V. P. Madhava Rao gave the Mission about two acres of land in Basavangudi, Bangalore Town, and Swami Abhedananda laid the foundation stone of the present Ashrama.

Swami Ramakrishnananda got a building erected there and invited His Holiness Swami Brahmanandaji, the President of the Mission, to open it. In August 1908, the public of Bangalore gave Swami Brahmanandaji a grand reception when he opened the Ashrama at the instance of Swami Ramakrishnananda. The Swami went to Bangalore as often as he could and actively managed the Ashrama and the Mission work in Bangalore and Mysore, as long as he stayed in Madras, chiefly with Swami Atmananda in charge of the Branch. Bangalore is thus associated with the Swamiji's work for about 8 years. During this period he may be said to have fully established the beginnings of Ramakrishna Mission in Mysore, overcoming the many difficulties initial to all pioneer undertakings.

The Swami's great Bhakti for Guru Maharaj, his love of God, his love and regard for Swami Vivekananda and Swami Brahmananda, his love and feeling for devotees and the poor, his vast Sanskrit and philosophic learning, his scrupulous purity, Brahmacharya, simplicity, forgiving nature, his caution and care in worldly affairs, his higher realizations evident in every utterance and act of his, are all matters on which my pen is too feeble to express anything adequately.

CHAPTER XVIII

REMINISCENCES¹

By

K. PADMANABHAN TAMPI²

IT is almost twenty years ago since Swami Ramakrishnanandaji visited Trivandrum as the guest of the late Mr. Kalipada Ghosh, one of the well-known householder devotees of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. Kali Babu was a well-known personage in Travancore. About the end of 1886 he had visited Travancore for the first time as a tourist and had created a favourable impression. A few years after, he came to Trivandrum as the local agent of Messrs. John Dickinson & Co. who had taken up the contract for the supply of stationery and other sundry articles to the Travancore Durbar. We met several times in those days and I remember a conversation we had at the Trivandrum Beach. The talk turned on Keshub Chunder Sen and his lectures. Kali Babu then told us that Keshub was nothing compared to a great Hindu saint, at whose feet Keshub had sat, and imbibed his lessons in spirituality. This was the first time I heard the blessed name of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, a name quite unknown at the time in Southern India. Mr. Ghosh was naturally

¹ From *The Vedanta Kesari*, May 1922.

² See Appendix I for a short account of the author.

unwilling to go into details with a casual acquaintance at a casual meeting. As I had a keen interest in the Brahma Samaj movement since my college days and was familiar with a good deal of the Brahma literature, I was naturally anxious to know more about the personality behind the Brahma leader. But my curiosity had to remain unsatisfied for years. I was unfortunately away from Trivandrum in December 1892, when Swami Vivekananda, wandering as an unknown Sannyasin, visited the place and stayed a few days with Professor Sundararama Iyer and left a profound and lasting impression on all persons who met him. When the news of Swamiji's reception at the Parliament of Religions was published in the papers, Professor Sundararama Iyer said he was sure that Swami Vivekananda was the unknown Sannyasin who had stayed with him. Sometime after, I heard that an educated Sannyasin, Swami Niranjanananda, had passed through Trivandrum on his way to Cape Comorin and had spent some days in a well-known hill retreat in South Travancore. The return of Swamiji from America fixed public attention on the movement, and the reading of his Madras speeches, followed soon after by a study of his Raja Yoga, whetted the spiritual appetite and a perusal of "Colombo to Almora" led to a keen desire for spiritual instruction direct from a man of realization. The desire became soon very intense and I had almost stumbled into practices of a dangerous character when I read the announcement in the local papers that Swami Ramakrishna-

nandaji was coming over to Trivandrum and would be staying with Babu Kalipada Ghosh as his guest. I at once wrote for an interview and getting a prompt reply went to Trivandrum, and met Swamiji one afternoon in a small bungalow, west of the public gardens where Kali Babu was living at the time. Swamiji was then in the full bloom of health, his benign countenance beaming with love and tenderness. He received me kindly, asked me whether I had read Swami Vivekananda's books and after some conversation, was gracious enough to give me spiritual instruction. After a long talk on religious subjects and religious practices, I took leave of Swamiji. For several weeks my mind was in a state of blessedness and the heart was roused to intense sympathy, rising at times almost to pain at the sight of distress. Swamiji was holding regular classes on the Gita in a small building in the heart of the city, but I was stationed at a place a dozen miles from Trivandrum and could not leave my jurisdiction without special permission, and hence was unable to attend any of these classes. Next time I saw Swamiji one morning about a week later. Swamiji read to me a portion of the Bhagavatam and explained the meaning. A week or two later I was again called to Trivandrum on urgent business and I took hold of the opportunity to visit Swamiji in the afternoon. We had a long talk and I drove with Swamiji to the Town Hall where he delivered a lecture on Bhakti. My business prevented me from attending the lecture. In the next week Swamiji went to Cape Comorin for

worshipping the Goddess, and on his way he was kind enough to accept my hospitality. I had made orthodox arrangements for his food. On hearing of this, Swamiji said, "You will have the honour of having Guru Maharaj as your guest." Swamiji offered the cooked food to Guru Maharaj and then partook of the Prasad. Swamiji declined to take ghee, as it was not included in the offering. Later on I also partook of the Prasad. Swamiji left soon after, travelling in a bullock coach. I used the place rendered holy by his offering as a place of meditation next morning and found the mind rose with ease to a state of intense calmness. On his way back from the Cape, Swamiji again halted for a few hours, and there was a long talk on religious matters. Some of my friends who took interest in religion were also present. One of those present brought a few Slokas of Sankaracharya (Soundarya Lahari) for explanation. Swamiji after looking at the Slokas referred him to a Pandit. Swamiji stayed at Trivandrum for a month, and besides the Gita classes, he delivered four public lectures. The last lecture was given in the Padmavilas Palace in the Fort (the town residence of the Dewan) and was presided over by the Dewan Mr. Krishnaswami Row. Swamiji during his stay made the acquaintance of the leading Hindu officers, and a large number of persons interested in religion visited Swamiji who had long talks with them on these subjects. Among them the old judge. Mr. Vedadri Sadara Mudaliar was a frequent visitor. Hearing Swamiji was leaving Trivandrum, I came over to

pay my respects a few hours before his actual departure. I reached Mr. Ghosh's Bungalow at about 8 p.m. and we had a long talk. Swamiji was anxious to open a permanent centre of work at once and promised to send a Sannyasin to take up the work. A few months after his return to Madras, Swamiji went to Bangalore. No centre was opened at Trivandrum, as Swamiji probably thought the number of persons who took real interest in the movement was too few to justify a Sannyasin being spared for the work. As a result of the Gita classes, a small Vedanta Society was started in Trivandrum soon after to keep up the spirits of the few who took interest in Vedantic culture, and matters went on like this until January 1912 when Swami Nirmalanandaji of the Bangalore Math came to Haripad, a village in middle Travancore, where I was stationed at the time, on the invitation of the local Vedanta Society and began the work which is now making such steady progress throughout the length and breadth of the remote hill and sea-girt land of Kerala.

CHAPTER XIX

REMINISCENCES ¹

By

SISTER DEVAMATA ²

I

THE real portrayal of Swami Ramakrishnananda was given in my book, "Days in an Indian Monastery" and in my subsequent volume, "Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples", but these portraits were drawn with long brush-strokes, eliminating all that had not universal appeal for West and East alike. As the perspective lengthens, however, and the living figure grows dim, each discarded detail gains new value and demands recording. This is the reason for these belated memoirs. They are offered as gleanings from the field, gathered up after the main harvest has been garnered.

My close association with Swami Ramakrishnananda counts among my most precious Indian memories. Apart from our official relation as superior and member of the rank and file in the Religious Order to which we both belonged, the warmest friendship existed between us — a friend-

¹ From *The Vedanta Kesari*, 1932. This long series of nine articles originally appeared under the title "Swami Ramakrishnananda — Sannyasin and Teacher."

² See Appendix I for a short account of the author.

ship mellowed on my side by profound reverence and on his side by a mother-like solicitude for my well-being. He shared the riches of his thought and living with me unstintingly and he gave me a most generous confidence. When a turn of circumstance forced me to open a letter bearing his name and I explained the incident to him, his reply was: "You are free to open all my letters. I have no secrets from you."

No words define more aptly Swami Ramakrishnananda than those of Lord Gouranga, "Lower than a blade of grass, with endurance like a tree, seeking not honour, but giving honour to all." He possessed an uplifted quality in his bearing, a mightiness of stride, which by the unknowing could be interpreted as haughtiness; but in reality he was the humblest of men. Humility was fundamental with him. It was more than mere absence of pride. It sprang from complete self-forgetting. There was no place in his consciousness for anything but his Master. What St. Paul declared in his Epistle to the Galatians — "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" — described perfectly Swami Ramakrishnananda's attitude toward himself and toward that one whom he called Guru. He was dead wholly to himself and alive only in Sri Ramakrishna.

His coming and going, his eating and sleeping, his labour and his teaching, his entire living, took their rise in the will of the Master, never in his own desire or convenience. Those who saw him carry his Master's picture — pressed close to his

heart, his body bent over it in protection, as he walked through the rain from the carriage to the entrance of the new Math at Mylapore, when he moved the Shrine there from the Ice House, could appreciate the tenderness of love, the power of devotion for his Guru, which transfused his being. He could say of his Master as truly as did St. Paul of his, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith in the Son of God."

His feeling was shown in these words spoken to me one day: "If we are caught in a labyrinth and some one comes and says, 'I can show you the way out,' what do we do? Follow him. And the gratitude we feel is what we call worship and devotion. This person is the Guru and we should follow him implicitly, if we want to escape from the labyrinth. Sometimes, however, we think: 'Why should I follow him? Let me find my own way.' So we go off by ourselves. But he is always so patient and loving that he waits until we grow weary trying to find the way alone and come back to him."

"The work of the Guru is done in a very few minutes," he said again as we sat together one evening in the Math at Mylapore. "By a few simple words the Guru gives a new turn to the life — just as when a man is riding a bicycle, some one sees that the road he is taking will lead to danger, so he turns him round and starts him in another direction. The man keeps on pedalling as before and the bicycle keeps on moving, but now the man is moving away from danger instead of

toward it. Similarly the Guru sees that the direction you have taken is dangerous, so he turns you round. All your activities may go on as before, you may keep on pedalling just the same, but now you are riding in a safe direction. The Guru's work is to give the turn in the right direction."

Swami Ramakrishnananda was too essentially a disciple in spirit to take the position of Guru. He had many devoted followers, but he never spoke of them or thought of them as disciples. Nor was he willing to assume the direction of a life. He gave encouragement, hope, ready forgiveness for failures and mistakes, but he believed it was good for a man to solve his own problems and make his own decisions. He set a very high standard for those about him. He expected them to face situations like men, — no whining or complaining, no striking back when rebuked, no idleness, no weakness and no giving up the fight. "Man is a hero so long as he struggles," were his own words.

Above all, the Swami gave no quarter to egotism or selfishness. To him spirituality meant self-abandonment. Those who were leading the spiritual life must make no compromises with the ego. "When man asserts himself in man, he commits all sorts of atrocities," he once declared to me. "When God asserts Himself in a man, then the man is good, pure and virtuous. It is true that every soul, so long as it is in a body, has a little bit of ego. If there were no ego, there would be no soul; for take away the ego and what remains? Only God."

“A Sannyasin can never afford to be selfish. He should be as willing to help his worst enemy as he is to serve his best friend. It is for this we have become Sannyasins — to bring help to every living being without regard to what he does or does not do to us.”

One evening several visitors were gathered with the Swami in the hall of the old Mylapore Math. I too happened to be present. Some one spoke of a certain Sannyasin who had exceptional strength and vigour, but spent little of it in service to others. Swami Ramakrishnananda remarked with a note of scorn in his tone: “It is easy for the selfish man to be strong and healthy. Perhaps it is raining, and some one comes to say such and such a man is ill with fever. The selfish man says: ‘It would not be prudent for me to go out in the rain. I might fall ill myself. Tell him I am sorry, but I cannot come. When it stops raining I may come!’ The unselfish man tucks his cloth up, wraps a chuddar around his shoulders, and hurries out through the rain to the sick man, not stopping to calculate risk or discomfort. Swami Vivekananda, if he heard that a friend was suffering from fever, would rush out and go to him even in the worst storm. He was willing to give his life to save the life of another. A selfish man will not venture out in stormy weather even if his own wife is ill. He says: ‘If she dies, I can always marry again; but if I die, who will marry?’ Such a man is sure to enjoy good health.”

“So long as we are selfish our work must be fruitless. We may deliver fine lectures, we may gain name and fame, but the actual results will be nil. The moment, however, our little self disappears, at that moment our real work begins. Then we may live an obscure life and go nowhere, but we shall accomplish wonders.”

“When we drop the ego from our consciousness and live in God, we have unlimited power. God is the only existence that is real, all other existences are unrealities behind which God exists as the reality. This Maya is so irresistible and it is this Maya which makes us selfish. Only when God is gracious to us can we lift the veil and get a glimpse of Him. Then all selfishness drops off.”

“The word ‘selfishness’ is not always understood. When by ‘self’ I understand the body or the little self and I do something for that self, I am selfish. But there is a Self which is beyond this physical body; when I do something for that Self, that is worshipping God. The man who lives in that higher Self is never selfish. Try to feel God inside yourself and you will overcome all selfishness. When you live constantly in the presence of Divinity, the ego loses its power; but so long as the ego rules a man, he is a bond-slave. All your anxieties and worries come from egotism and selfishness. Let go your little self and they will all disappear.”

To find favour in Swami Ramakrishnananda’s eyes one had to be genuine. The Swami showed little patience with the Pharisaical type of spiri-

tuality that "fasts to be seen of men." For a time there was a boy at the Mylapore Math whom I liked very much. He had a pleasant disposition and a friendly manner. Swami Ramakrishnananda was kind to him and seldom rebuked him, but accepted very little service from him. I wondered at it. Only later did I understand. One early morning the boy left the Math and did not return. He was tired of work and wished to meditate. Swami Ramakrishnananda smiled and said: 'He will not go far in the religious life. He is not sincere. When he claimed to be fasting, he would slip off by himself and eat something; and when after his bath he would sit in meditation, he would lie down on his mat and sleep. He thought I did not know. That way you cannot get anywhere. You must be genuine if you would advance in the spiritual life. You may cheat a man for a time, but you cannot cheat God. Nor can you deceive the world for long. Your face, your tone, your manner will betray you.'

II

With the great majority who take up the religious life renunciation is a reiterated process. They drop the world and pick it up again, again drop it, until renouncing, by force of increasing repetition, becomes a daily act and a daily struggle. The reason of this is, they do not renounce that in themselves which ties them to the world. This was pre-eminently untrue of Swami Ramakrishnananda. He made one sweep-

ing act of renunciation and all the cords that bound him to family, social relations, pride of caste, ambition and desire for name and fame, hung loose and severed. He cut the innermost cord. He renounced himself. His detachment was complete. I saw him meet disappointment, criticism, condemnation, antagonism, waxing and waning of his work, even loss by death, with a smile on his face. He would sit cross-legged on a rug near the north door of the monastery hall in the earlier Math at Mylapore, his powerful body bare to the waist — as was the custom under the burning skies of Madras — one hand holding his foot, and rocking gently back and forth with rhythmic regularity. Thus he would sit and tell me quite casually of some blow that had been struck at his calm and his courage.

He was not unfeeling. "If we cannot love others, if we cannot serve others, what are we here for?" were the frequent words on his lips. His heart was large and generous, overflowing with dispassionate love; but he was a Sannyasin, one who had renounced; and that meant he must be even-minded in praise and blame, honour and dishonour, victory and defeat. "When a man is vilified, yet shows no resentment or even annoyance," he said one day, "you may be sure he has conquered his ego and is completely detached."

It must not be imagined, however, that Swami Ramakrishnananda possessed a placid personality. He was too powerful, too positive in his reactions, to be placid. Placidity is passive, negative, the

absence of disturbance, not the result of a struggle lived out. True serenity, on the contrary, is the fruit of storm. It is the quiet of the harbour after riding the gale. It contains a depth, a latent force, which could spring from nothing less. All great souls who labour for humanity are storm-swept at times. Christ drove the money changers before His wrath. He dealt scorching rebuke to the Pharisees. Swami Ramakrishnananda too had his moments of righteous indignation. The cause never lay in himself. Any attack or hostility directed against him left him unmoved. It was disloyalty to the Ideal, negligence or carelessness in the Lord's Service, disrespect toward that which was sacred and holy, hypocrisy, insincerity — these were the things that roused him, as they did the prophets of old.

The Swami rarely discussed worldly affairs. He did not read the newspapers. To the lay mind he might have seemed lacking in human interest, but in reality he was keenly concerned for his fellow-men. He believed however that true interest consisted not in remaining human with them, but in helping them become Divine. "Those who give up the world for the spiritual life are giving up the uncertain for the certain, the passing for the permanent," he reiterated. It was inevitable from this attitude of mind that he should dwell with great insistence on the value of renunciation. "All our power comes from renunciation," he declared again and again. "Only when we have given up our life, do we begin to live. At present we are like

prisoners. We may get a glimpse of freedom now and then but the world falls upon us when we are off our guard, and drags us back once more into our prison cell. As soon as a man finds out, however, that these little pleasures of the flesh are nothing compared with the infinite pleasures of the spirit, he wants to renounce; not for the sake of renunciation, but because he has found something better. He has realised the hollowness of the enjoyments of the world and can be satisfied only with higher enjoyment. Renunciation means giving up a lesser thing for a greater."

I saw Swami Ramakrishnananda very seldom during the heated hours of the day; but when the evening coolness began to fall, tempering the sun-scorch of midday, I would go across to the monastery, accomplish the simple duties I was allotted there, and assist at Arati. Then I would take my place on the rug near the Swami in the monastery hall and listen — listen so intently that I was able to go home and write down later all that I had heard. Sometimes others were present, sometimes we were alone, but always the Swami talked with the same ardour of feeling. On one evening that is vivid in my memory, he spoke at length of the illusive spell which the world casts over us: "As long as there is intense struggle," he said, "there are still desires which tie us to the world. We have not realised yet its complete hollowness. When we realise that, the way is easy. The world is a place where the unreal appears to be real and the real appears unreal. Maya makes us believe something

to be where there is nothing, and nothing to be where there is something. It makes weakness seem all-powerful and the powerful seem weak. The poor sage in the forest, whose loin cloth is of bark and whose bed is the bare ground, appears to the world as a weakling ; while the king on his throne in a glittering palace appears to it strong ; but in reality it is the sage that is powerful. Compared to him the king on his throne is nothing. Recognising this, kings in ancient times, when a sage came to their court, would come down from their throne and prostrate in the dust before him."

"The charm of Maya is so irresistible, it is only when God is gracious to us that we can lift the veil and get a little glimpse of Him. All Maya is localised in ego. Pull out the foundation and the whole house will collapse. Take away the ego and the whole structure of Maya will fall. Then you will realise a state of perfect calmness. Maya traps us through the senses. He who has conquered his senses has conquered the whole universe."

"If a man should see God, what would he ask for ?" Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master, said once: "Houses and lands ? No : God-vision. Nothing less would seem worthwhile." So was it with Swami Ramakrishnananda. He had no quarrel with the world. He recognised its charm and beauty, but he knew that the charm was ephemeral, that beauty fleeting ; while beneath them lay hidden the unchanging and everlasting. "Seek that and that only," was his constant cry. "Do not be content with the little finite things of this

world. Do not be satisfied with anything short of infinite. Let your ambition be infinity. Give up, because you know that what you throw away is perishable, what you gain is imperishable and eternal. The more you can fix your mind on God and forget yourself, the more quickly will this be done." These words strike the keynote of the Swami's teachings. They were a continuous call to infinitude.

As it was through our desires that the world held us captive, he waged relentless war against the tyranny of desire. "It is not easy," he said one evening as we talked together, "to free the mind of desires. God alone can do it. A man who has no idea of God will never get rid of desires. He will say: 'If I have no desire, what difference will there be between me and the wall? It is desire alone that gives me enjoyment. For every desire, there is satisfaction in the world. Why, then, should I give up desire?' The man who has devotion for God, however, sees that instead of bringing enjoyment, these desires are the source of all his unhappiness. He realises that in God alone can he find satisfaction for all desires. God is infinite bliss and all other happiness is finite and perishable. Hence nowhere but in Him can true happiness be found — a happiness that has no break."

III

The story is told that a great sage once came to the Temple of Dakshineswar on the Ganges, and when he prayed before the sacred image in the

Shrine, the whole Temple shook with the fervour of his prayer. So it seemed when Swami Ramakrishnananda conducted worship. As he intoned the holy texts, such pulsating ardour of devotion swept out from the Shrine on the waves of that chanting voice, the very walls of the monastery seemed to tremble. At Mylapore he did not always perform Puja. Sometimes out of courtesy he would pass the privilege to a visiting Swami, or he would let Rudra take it. Rudra was the Brahmacharin who served him, and as the eldest son of a Brahmin widow, he was carefully trained in the rites of worship.

When the Swami himself took it, he would call for his chuddar, throw it around him with a wide gesture, and stride into the Shrine, erect and stately as a sovereign. There was, however, no arrogance in his kingliness. It was the natural outcome of his lofty heritage. He was the disciple of a mighty Master, son of the great Mother of the Universe; could there be a more royal tradition to shape life or bearing? "Divine Mother does not like us to call ourselves Her servants," he said to me more than once. "We are children to Her, not servants. Always think of yourself as Her child."

Swami Ramakrishnananda was a worshipper by right of birth. From his earliest years he had the influence and training of an orthodox Brahmin home. His father was a learned Sanskrit scholar, deeply versed in the Scriptures, rigid in observance of the traditions and religious usages of his caste, devout and austere. It was natural for the son to

follow the same habit of life. If, under the more radical influence of the Brahmo Samaj, he reacted against it for a brief period, he returned to it with renewed ardour after he came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna. The devotional fervour of the Master kindled a flaming fire of devotion in the heart of the disciple. He took his place once more before the altar in the Shrine, and neither scoffing nor ridicule could drive him from it. His less orthodox brothers bantered him for his old-fashioned, bell-ringing ways, but he remained unmoved. Not that he considered rites and ceremonies of primary importance ; he knew they were only secondary, but they were to him hallowed channels of religious expression and as such should be preserved and honoured.

It was not strange that with this strong bent of mind, the Swami should deplore the secularising trend of the modern world. "At present no one really worships the Divine Mother," he exclaimed one day. "We are all worshipping the little mothers of this world and have forgotten the Divine Mother. We all want these little finite pleasures and do not care for that infinite pleasure. We are like the bird hopping about on the tree, while the other bird sits calm, serene and motionless. The tree is full of luscious fruits and the bird, seeing a specially tempting one, thinks, 'Oh ! If I could only taste that one !' So he goes near and even though he may have to thrust his head through thorns, he takes a bite ; but alas ! the fruit is bitter. So he tries twenty or thirty and finds

them all bitter. He is just about to give up, when he happens to taste one that is sweet. This gives him new expectation and he starts again to look for another sweet fruit. After tasting ten or twelve more bitter ones, he gives up and joins the other bird on the top of the tree. So we try to find our happiness in wealth, in the little mothers of this world, in power, in name and fame, but when we discover their bitter taste, we turn to God and worship Him."

While the Master was living, the disciple made himself His personal servant ; when the Master had gone, he made himself the servant of His memory. Year after year Swami Ramakrishnananda guarded and served the Sanctuary where his Master's ashes and image were enshrined. His brother disciples wandered and came back, made pilgrimages and returned, but he went the quiet round of the monastery at Baranagore, devout and prayerful. He carried water from the Ganges for the Lord's bath, he swept and cleaned the Sanctuary, he polished the Puja vessels and performed the Puja, he cut the vegetables and cooked the offering. He lived as the servant of the Shrine and of the house. Yet he was still the disciple of a mighty Master, the son of the Mother of the Universe ; and as he stooped by the Ganges side to fill his water jar and lifted it to his shoulder, there was something in him which stirred unspoken respect in the servants who jested with him, taking him to be one of them.

If Swami Ramakrishnananda was a conservative in his mode of worship, he was essentially a

liberal in his religious conviction. Tolerance, universality of outlook, freedom from all prejudice, these formed the keystones of his thought structure. Religion he defined as "the struggle of spirit against matter," and he gave welcome to whatever helped in the struggle. When some one came with words of condemnation on his lips, I heard him say: "Never find fault with any form of religion. Differences are all in the external customs. That which makes up the external is the shell. It may be hard and rough and perhaps not to our liking, but it holds a valuable kernel. The kernel of every religion is God. To whatever religion a man belongs, he has to worship the same God. The essential parts of religion are everywhere the same. It is only in the non-essential parts that differences are found. Various religious beliefs and doctrines are merely partial reflections of Truth, but because they have that little reflected light of Truth in them, we take them to be the whole Truth. Religion may be defined as giving God His due. 'God alone is the proprietor of this universe, God alone is the proprietor of myself' — recognising this and then giving up all to Him, that is religion. Wishing to keep all for yourself is irreligion. Throw away the idea of 'me and mine', giving up all to God — this is the essential of every religion. This is what Christianity teaches, this is what Mohammedanism teaches, what Hinduism and Zoroastrianism teach, what every religious sect teaches."

On no subject did the Swami talk more frequently or more at length than that of Deity. If a visitor began to read a secular book or a newspaper he would chide him, saying, "You can do that anywhere. Here you should try to think on God." His own mind was saturated with God thought. He exemplified in himself what he once said to me, "A man who has realised God must keep on realising him all his life." He believed that "to realise God is the aim of every human being whether he knows it or not." "No man," he said "who has not true love toward God can be religious. Religion begins with attraction to God and no soul will ever find real satisfaction until he has reached God. All bondage comes to an end when man realises Him. As a matter of fact all men are loving God; for every man loves eternal life, all knowledge and all blissfulness, and these are God. But few men know they are loving God. They are like a man who has been hearing of mangoes all his life but has never seen one. He may eat a mango and not know it, unless some one comes and tells him. So all men are loving God; but only when some one comes and tells them, do they know it. If they can once realise that God is the most lovable being in the whole universe, they will learn to love Him consciously; all their thoughts will flow toward Him and they will be naturally religious."

"The realisation of God cannot be attained in a haphazard way," the Swami continued. "There is a regular method. First you must hear, then you

must understand what you hear, and from understanding you go on to realization. You must know the light is there, otherwise you may go in the opposite direction to find it. Next, you must hear from a teacher how to do it. Then you must understand clearly just what it is ; and when you have understood, realisation will come. So long as it does not come, you must go on discriminating and trying to understand."

The bigness of his thought swept him for a moment into silence, then he went on : "It is true, the average man is not ready to perceive Truth. You must be Truth to know Truth. You must live it and make it a part of your experience ; otherwise you cannot know it. The finite can never know the Infinite, but we can have some intellectual perception of what it is. If that were not the case, why should we be so eager to attain it ? One must get everything from inside or from Nature. Nature is God's book, and blessed is the man who knows how to read it."

IV

A somewhat bombastic Pundit spent an hour at the monastery one late afternoon. When he had gone, Swami Ramakrishnananda remarked with a shade of displeasure in his voice : "When a man is vain on account of his learning, what does he gain ? Even if he has read all the Vedas, he is not qualified to know the Truth. Real learning is that which will enable a man to realize the Truth. As

our Master used to say, repeating 'Sadam', 'Sadam' (rice, rice) will not appease your hunger; so repeating the texts of books will not appease your spiritual hunger. Your hunger will be satisfied only when you see God. Intellectuality and spirituality are diametrically opposed to each other. Intellectuality is based on ego and spirituality is based on annihilation of ego. A man who is very shrewd and clever and asserts his opinions will never realize God; for that means he is full of egotism, and until egotism is destroyed, he cannot begin to be spiritual."

The Swami did not undervalue the use of intellect; but he showed little tolerance toward that superficial form of intellectuality which consists in mere information about things and knowledge borrowed from books. He believed a man's knowledge should rest on his own experience, not on the experience of others. He was a deep student of the human mind, regarding it as the pivot on which the spiritual life swung. "There is no difference between the purified mind and the true Self of man," he declared. "The mind is pure when it is single, that is, when it is devoted to one object. If you wish to see God, the only way is to get rid of all selfish desires and make the mind single."

Some one asked, "How can we make the mind pure?" "Try to get rid of the ego by cultivating a sense of oneness," the Swami replied. "Think you are in no way superior to any living being, that the smallest insect crawling there is just as you are, and has just as much right to live. When we

lose all sense of separateness, egotism will go, the mind will become single or pure, and only God will be there. The mind is like a mirror. When it is clean, it gives a perfect reflection ; but if it is covered with dust, it gives no reflection at all. The more you can wipe off the dust, the better the reflection you will get. Every mind can be a reflector of eternal Truth, but the simple mind reflects it more clearly. To such a mind Truth is much more conceivable and visible than to a mind which has been given a definite shape by much reading and study."

Swami Ramakrishnananda himself was gifted with a remarkable mind. He possessed the power of original thought to an unusual degree and had also many intellectual attainments ; but he made no display of his learning, nor did he allow it to overshadow his spiritual vision. Religion was his vocation ; his intellectual pursuits were his recreation. He was an able mathematician and would solve a problem in trigonometry as he might sit down to a game of chess ; and a difficult passage in a Sanskrit text was to him what a book of adventure would be to a young boy. He was one of the best Sanskrit scholars in the Order and could converse in it, when no other medium of communication was available. I myself heard him talk in Sanskrit with some South Indian Pundits one afternoon at the monastery.

His knowledge of the language made it possible for him to acquire an exceptional understanding of the Vedas and all Indo-Aryan sacred literature. One

evening in speaking of the delight of Scriptural study, he exclaimed with enthusiasm ; "The Upanishads are the most wonderful books. One should learn Sanskrit in order to be able to grasp their true meaning. They are a concise statement of all the great truths of the universe. Every line is the expression of a mind that has realised. Those who gave them out had realised God, and he who has realised God is the same as God Himself. Those great Seers were the embodiment of purity, so they were able to perceive all Truth." The Swami, however, did not limit himself to Indo-Aryan Scriptures. He knew well the Scriptures of other peoples and other faiths, and felt profound reverence for all alike. "Every nation," he declared, "has its Scriptures through which God has pointed out how to reach Him."

Swami Ramakrishnananda always believed that it was his knowledge of Sanskrit which constituted his chief qualification for the South Indian work. "It was because I knew a little Sanskrit and was a strict vegetarian that Swamiji sent me to Madras," he said to me one day. He often talked to me of those early days. They were full of hardship, but he seemed to glory in the self-denial they demanded. He lived alone in a small house he had hired for the work. It was barren of furniture and sometimes almost barren of food. In the rainy season the last stretch of road leading to it was so bad that bullock-cart drivers would refuse to travel it, when, for a small fare, they brought him from some distant point in the city. After a long day of lectur-

ing and teaching he would have to walk in a drenching rain, wading at certain places through water more than knee-deep. When he reached the house, wet and tired, he would cook the evening offering and perform Puja, before eating his own meal and lying down to rest. Later he moved to the basement of the Ice House, which had been converted into a dwelling; and from there to the monastery at Mylapore. Although severely plain and simple, both in structure and furnishings, it seemed almost luxurious compared with what had gone before.

Whether on his way he met hardship or ease mattered little to the Swami. He never relaxed his ardour. With the same unflagging devotion he continued to meditate and to pray, to serve and to teach, to worship and to study. His study was more interior than outer. The book he read most frequently was the book of his own mind. He delved into its depths and forced it to yield up its secrets. Thus he was able to reach his own solution for "many psychological problems." The results of these direct observations were mostly wordless, too subtle to put into words; but occasionally he spoke of them. I remember one evening, when several of us were present in the monastery hall, he began: "Why do we want to know? To satisfy something in ourselves. The end of all knowledge is satisfaction and this satisfaction is always one. There are three kinds of knowing, — first instinctive knowledge, then reasoning, and then inspiration. The lower animals have instinct; much of our knowledge also is instinctive. Then man begins to reason, and

as long as he reasons, the ego must be there. From reasoning he can pass on to inspiration, when all knowledge will come to him — not through the process of reasoning, but by direct illumination. All slavery comes to an end when man realises Truth.”

“Remaining in the mind, you will never get away from doubt,” he continued. “How long do you think? As long as there is a doubt in your mind. When you have reached a definite conclusion about a thing, you cease to think about it; so thinking and doubting are synonymous. If you make much of mind, you make much of doubt. People are sceptics, why? Because they make much of this little mind. But the mind never directs a man properly. Go beyond the mind and you will go beyond all doubt. Inside the body there is desire and greed; inside the mind there is doubt; inside the world there is change, there is death. Go beyond these and you will find peace and bliss. Until you go beyond them, you can never realise what peace and bliss mean.”

Some one asked, “If we go beyond the mind, do we give up the habit of discrimination?” “To be able to go beyond the mind is the result of the highest discrimination,” was the Swami’s incisive answer. Another visitor asked, “Do we go beyond the mind in sleep?” “In sound sleep, yes,” the Swami replied. “How do we remember our dreams?” was asked again. “When you fall asleep and dream, you lose the consciousness of your physical body, but you do not lose consciousness of your Self. That occupies your consciousness and

records the dream." "How can we overcome the restlessness of the mind?" "By fixing it on God. As long as it goes out to the world through the senses, it will be restless and the mind will be weak. The more a mind is restless, the weaker it is; the more it is calm, the stronger it is." Then he added with emphasis, "Light the fire of wisdom in your mind and heart, and nothing weak or impure will dare approach you. When that fire is kindled all imperfections and impurities are burned to ashes."

V

Swami Ramakrishnananda was not a philanthropist, yet his whole life was consecrated to the service of humanity. He did not carry food to the hungry or clothe the naked, yet he gave to men with bountiful hand. His delight was in service and whatever he did, glowed with the warmth of his own fervent spirit. I remember still the light that shone in his face as he moved about supervising the preparations for a festival day at the monastery, during which thousands of poor people were fed. Yet there was nothing in his manner which indicated that he thought he was "doing good." His attitude towards such forms of practical service was not the usual one. "Work for others is self-amelioration," was the way he defined it to me one day. Helping others was an opportunity for the giver and laid no weight of obligation on the one who was helped. "We need to serve others," he claimed, "in order to lift ourselves up out of the

state of degradation and selfishness into which we have fallen. We should be grateful to the needy for making it possible for us to raise ourselves. That is the only real good that comes out of all that we do for others, we merely better ourselves.

To seek commendation for a kindly act invariably drew forth a caustic response from the Swami. He showed little mercy toward anyone who was vain of his good deeds. The merit of service in his measure of values lay, not in giving, but in giving freely—without a sense of giving. "Swami Vivekananda was right," he declared "when he said, 'Let the receiver stand up and permit; let the giver kneel down and give thanks that he has been given a chance to unfold himself.' This is no exaggeration. It is literally true; for what happens when you do good to another? You expand your own heart and grow more unselfish. But suppose there were no needy or unfortunate souls, what would happen? You would become a selfish brute." And he added, "If you do anything to make a man happy, no matter what it is, be glad of it. You have done well. But try never to bring misery to any living being. This is the only sin."

One sultry evening a number of friends had come directly from their offices to the monastery, as was their frequent custom, and had gathered round the Swami near the north door of the monastery hall. As he talked to them his face was alight with a radiant smile and his body rocked back and forth in rhythm with the rise and fall of his voice. One of the gentlemen asked: "Is it possible really to

work for man until you have realised God ?” The Swami replied : “ Work ! What do you mean by work for others ? You can do nothing unless you have the commandment of God. Without that, if you try to work for others, you are sure to be lost in the meandering paths of the world.” Then after a moment’s pause he continued : “ If you would help others, you must look on the bright side of every one. Every man has his weaknesses, but you must overlook them and see only his good qualities. You must give up all fault-finding or if you find fault, let it be with yourself.”

Swami Ramakrishnananda was at his best in this informal mode of teaching. He never counted his audience. Whether he was speaking to two or two hundred or two thousand, the same ardour gave force and warmth to his words. He did not measure out his inspiration according to the number of his listeners. It came from within and came abundantly, however few were present. Once when he had talked long and impressively on a lofty subject, I exclaimed : “ Swami, you talk to me as if I were an audience of a thousand.” “ You are,” he replied quietly. But whether he spoke from the platform or in conversation, his message was always peculiarly his own. He admitted to me one day that his Master had entrusted to him a certain special message to convey to the world which he did not give even to Swami Vivekananda. “ Swamiji was given the big, all-round message but a little message was kept for me,” he said. That he transmitted it faithfully and forcefully, none can doubt. He sought no

glory for himself in doing it. He rarely referred to his own experience in his lectures and classes. His Master was the paramount authority cited at all times. The Swami was not an eloquent speaker, not even a fluent one, but what he said carried. It had the weight of realisation behind it. He never resorted to oratorical subterfuge to stir his listeners or hold their attention. His sole concern was by simple, unobtrusive means to create a new and higher point of contact for their thought. He sought less to help than to awaken, that those who heard might help themselves.

His was a voice from the heights. He never defined his method or intention to me, but he held, I believe, that as he had chosen the highest vocation, what he gave the world must be on the same lofty level. His appeal was always to man's soul-nature. "You are pure, you are perfect, you are divine by your nature," were reiterated words on his lips. "A man may mistake a rope for a snake, but any amount of imagination will not turn the rope into a snake. So you may think you have committed many sins or been guilty of wrong-doing, but nothing can change your pure, divine nature. That remains always the same and you are always that.

"Without the help of God, no one can realise his eternal nature, however indestructible it may be. Sri Krishna says plainly in the Gita: 'This Maya with which I cover Myself, no one can pierce through. They only can penetrate it who take refuge at My feet.' And again: 'If you would gain wisdom or the knowledge of your infinite nature,

you must go to one who has realised his infinite nature and serve him ; then bring forth your doubts and you will be illumined'. That means, you must be humble. Knowledge of the Atman or higher Self comes only through humility."

To the man who was absorbed in his material problems, the Swami may have seemed too transcendental, but in reality he was pre-eminently practical ; for the one sure remedy for anxiety, he claimed, was vision. "When worries and perplexities rise in our mind," he said, "it shows we have ceased to believe in God and in that He is caring for us. If we have real faith in God, we can never grow anxious." He knew too well that solving a problem did not bring release ; that out of that solution would spring a new problem. The only way of escape lay in cutting the endless chain of perplexities by rousing in man that which was superior to all outer material conditions."

"Why should you throw away your perfect nature and take an imperfect nature ?" he asked. "Why do you give up your infinite life for this perishable life of a few years ? You have degraded yourself. The omnipotent, omniscient, immortal eternal being is imagining that he dies ; that he is limited, ignorant, weak and helpless. You are pure, you are spotless. Do not give way to false imagination. This false imagining will make you what you are imagining yourself to be. You are like a man who hears the false news that his entire fortune has been lost and begins to lament and ask, 'What shall I do ? How shall I live ?', while all the time

his lands and money are there as before. So you are imagining that you are miserable and helpless ; but you have not lost your infinite glory. You are absolutely perfect, all-blissful, immortal.

“This outer body of yours is only an instrument and cannot limit you, except as you give it the power. You have actually need of nothing ; you are already complete, but you have forgotten it. You have thrown away the real jewel and are making much of the pebble in the street. Do not be content with the little things of this world. This universe is a baby's toy. Throw it away. Claim your infinite heritage. This little span of life is not yours ; your life has no beginning and no end.”

VI

The Spanish Carmelite monk and mystic, St. John of the Cross, declares in his *Spiritual Maxims* : “Faith is the greatest shelter of the soul.” It was in this safe shelter that Swami Ramakrishnananda sought refuge. If storms of doubt ever overtook him, he weathered them in silence and alone. He never made them known to others. His faith seemed impregnable, whatever the stress of circumstance. As a youth, when he was frequenting the Brahmo-Samaj, he had been assailed by vague questionings ; but the touch of Sri Ramakrishna's thought had dispelled them, almost without words. Tests he had, and severe ones. There were moments in his public life when it seemed as if the Master had abandoned him, leaving him to

the mercy of an indifferent multitude, but he did not waver. One occasion I recall, which tried his trust so bitterly that he buried his face in his hands and as he cried aloud for release, great heroic tears trickled through his fingers ; yet he never doubted the one on whom he called.

Faith was to Swami Ramakrishnananda the basic support of all spiritual living. Without it, he believed, there could be no true devotion, no higher vision, no life even. "Faith in God is the foundations of all life, both spiritual and physical," he said one day. "If you should put faith in God on one side and the Lord of the whole universe on the other, I would take faith in God. Blessed is the man who has faith. He is the happiest of men, because he is free from all anxiety. We are all only puppets in the hands of God. When we understand this, all pride and ambition, all vanity and egotism will go. For that reason is the man blessed who has faith, because he has realised his puppet nature."

One evening when there were several visitors at the Mylapore Math, one of them asked : "How can we get such faith as Prahlada had ?" The Swami replied : "The more you can purify yourself, the more that faith will come. Although Prahlada was put into boiling oil, although he was thrown under the feet of a mad elephant and over the highest precipice, he was not hurt because of his faith. But it was not blind faith that he had. It was a faith based on realisation ; and if you have the same faith, you will be more powerful than the whole universe. Nothing can put you down.

“Our faith is too faltering. Few of us believe in God all the time. As long as we have three or four rupees in our pocket, we think we can depend on ourselves. Only when the last anna is gone and we do not know where to get another, do we begin to trust in God. But the man who depends on himself is never safe, while the man who has perfect faith in God is never in danger.”

A kindling devotion was the natural outgrowth of a faith such as Swami Ramakrishnananda possessed. His name, which was that of his Master, bore witness to it. By his own fervour was he baptized, a baptism of fire. It burned through and through him. One felt the glow of it even at his approach. Detached he might be, but never lukewarm. He gave no quarter to indolent indifference. Man must love God with his whole soul and mind and heart if he would love Him at all. To give his own words : “If you would find that Supreme Reality which lies behind all these hollow unrealities, you must be wholly devoted to It. You must worship the living God with your whole heart and give up the worship of things that die. You must feel the utter hollowness of everything but Truth, as Nachiketas did. Wealth, kingdoms, enjoyments, power, were to him nothing — less than zero. He wanted nothing but Truth and Truth was bound to come to him. You must have the same firm conviction about the hollowness of the material world and seek God with undivided devotion ; then He will surely come to you.”

The Swami accepted no compromise and asked

none of God. There could be no bartering for the treasures of spiritual vision and union with the Divine. One avenue alone lay open to their attainment. "There is but one Yoga and that is devotion," he said to me one day. "The Karmi may say that he attains the Supreme by non-attachment or Vairagyam; the Jnani, that he gets there by the path of discrimination; and the Raja-Yogi, by the path of concentration. But if the Karmi has no devotion in his practice of non-attachment; or the Jnani, in his discrimination; or the Raja-Yogi, in his concentration — he will not realise his Ideal. Devotion is the only means for all."

Some one asked: "What kind of devotion takes us to God?" The Swami replied, "The child's devotion to the mother." "But is that a rational way to reach Him?" "How long do you reason? So long as you have not arrived at a conclusion," was the Swami's quick answer. "Why does the baby go to the mother? Because it has reasoned out that she is the best friend it has. And why do you go to God? Because you have reasoned out that He and no one else can help you. So as the baby goes to its mother, you turn to God."

Another person present put the question: "What is meant in the Gita by steadfastness in devotion?" "Steadiness in devotion," the Swami said, "means that though you may be busy with many things, still your mind is always turned toward God. You may not feel the same ardour always, but so long as the hunger for devotion to God is there, you are steady in devotion."

Swami Ramakrishnananda's ardour of devotion appeared unvarying, and it carried him with irresistible force to complete surrender. He yielded himself utterly to the Ideal and never was there a more willing captive. Surrender meant to him the culminating triumph of all spiritual effort. "Sri Krishna and other great Teachers have taught many different ways of going to God," he declared, "but in the end they threw all aside and said simply : 'Have complete self-surrender.' Without absolute self-abnegation no one can realise God. You must know that, of yourself, you can do nothing. Until you recognise this, realisation of God will not come. If a man is able to see things as they should be seen and to analyse himself properly, he will understand that he is wholly in the hands of a Higher Power. Then he says : 'When man's vanity is puffed up by name, fame, importance, wealth, he has no hope to reach Thee, O Lord. Thou comest to those who have none else to call their own. Thou belongest to the poor, the lowly, to those who have nothing in this world. Come to me, O Lord ! All I have is Thine. It never was mine. Thou art all my wealth.'"

Surrender was a favourite theme with the Swami. He recurred to it constantly and whenever he talked on it, his words burned deep into the heart. Spiritual fruition would come, he believed, only to him who had the desire and the power to yield himself up wholly captive. All must be given if all was to be received. "Man is too often afraid to surrender," he said to me one evening. "He thinks he will lose something ; but he is never a

loser when he gives himself absolutely to the Lord. Only when he is guided by God does he cease to blunder, because then God works through his hands, sees through his eyes, speaks with his tongue, and he becomes a perfect instrument in the hands of God. He is directed by God in everything.

“Pray to God constantly : ‘O Lord, grant that I may know my own nothingness and that Thou art all in all. Help me to realise that I am a mere instrument in Thy hands and that all is done by Thee.’ When a man comes to understand this, he is truly happy, because he feels secure. He knows all his actions are guided by God, who will never misdirect him. The man who acts on his own responsibility is sure to make mistakes, but the man who surrenders everything to God always acts wisely.”

VII

Medieval records tell us of a young monk who went to Brother Giles, one of the first followers and closest companions of St. Francis of Assisi, and complained that in his day's schedule there was too much labour and too little prayer. Brother Giles looked at him and replied dryly : “If you would beg of the Lord, first work for Him.” These words might have been spoken by Swami Ramakrishnananda, so perfectly do they express his mood and attitude of mind. He had a strong belief in prayer, but not as a way of escape from work. Once I heard him admonish a devotee to pray every day and to

make his prayers reach the Lord by their sincerity and earnestness ; but never in my hearing did he offer to pray for anyone, or did others ask him to pray for them. If they had, they might have received the same answer that Brother Giles again gave to someone who came and said with lament in his tone, "Pray for me!" "Why don't you pray for yourself?" was Brother Giles' retort.

The Swami had little sympathy with those who made complaint to the Lord or begged of Him. Prayer must make one heroic, not beggarly. It must be an act of praise and thanksgiving, a communion, not a recital of needs to be provided. Contact with God should strip one of all sense of need or to use the Swami's own words, "If a man will be selfish and beg of the Lord, let him be thoroughly selfish and demand the biggest thing he can think of — God Himself."

The Swami asked for nothing less. Heaven and even salvation were rewards too paltry to pray for. "Heaven," he said, "is a place created by Maya to bribe man and to entice him. We have heard of the Sirens in mid-ocean, who are very beautiful to look at and who sing so sweetly that the sailors are irresistibly drawn to them ; but as soon as the Sirens touch them, they are transformed into beasts. So these heavenly pleasures and the senses are like Sirens which entice poor sailors sailing on this ocean of life ; and when they hold them in their clutches, they transform them into brutes. The scriptures say : 'Sleeping, eating, and propagating—these we have in common with the lower animals.' And how

many of us do more than that? We have been transformed by the Sirens of Maya until we are little superior to animals."

"Heaven should never be our ideal," the Swami declared, "not only because it is too small a goal to strive for, but also because it holds no promise of further attainment. The constant pursuit of celestial pleasures crowds out all spiritual effort." "In heaven," to quote the Swami, "there is no leisure; in hell there is no leisure; only here on this middle plane where the two meet is there leisure in which a soul can try to realize God. If a god (Deva) wishes to attain salvation, he must come down and be born as a man. Heaven is only a place of continual festivities and enjoyments, but the Scriptures tell us that we must be absolutely detached from enjoyments of this world and from enjoyments of the next world."

An error common in the Occident, but rare in India, is to confound salvation with heaven; to regard them as synonymous. The confusion arises in the West from the fact that there happiness is looked upon as the goal, while in India it is liberation. Swami Ramakrishnananda was very definite on this point when we were talking together one afternoon. "Salvation," he explained, "does not consist in going to heaven. It is realizing that 'I am God's child,' if you are a Vishishtadvaitist; or that 'I am one with God,' if you are an Advaitist. Both are one and the same." After a moment's pause he added: "So long as a man is struggling for his rights and believes he is the doer, he cannot

feel the attraction of God. Only when he sits down and becomes perfectly surrendered does he begin to be drawn upward. Then he says with full conviction: 'I can do nothing. Lord, do Thou act.' At once that Higher Power begins to exert its influence. That man who can throw himself at the feet of the Lord and say: "All this is Thine. This body, mind, and soul all belong to Thee; of myself I am utterly helpless; do Thou take me, — the Lord takes that man and makes his hands, his feet, his eyes and ears, His instruments. He speaks through his mouth; He works through his hands; He walks with his feet; and the man becomes a living representative of God. This is salvation."

Again he paused, swept into silence by the swift current of his thought. Then came these closing words: "Fill your heart with devotion, and your mind will turn naturally to God. The true devotee never thinks of himself. He is so full of the thought of God that his own self is forgotten. That is the best way to attain salvation."

Find God and forget yourself — this was the Swami's rule for gaining salvation, and the surest way to find God was by surrendering all to Him. Thus surrender and liberation became almost identical terms in the Swami's vocabulary. "Be wholly surrendered," he said. "The moment you can give up everything and know your own nothingness, at that moment God-vision will come and you will be free."

At another time he said, "It is possible for a man to attain salvation suddenly, by the special grace of God; but it can only be done if he can realise that God is all in all and that he is nothing. If he can realize this, then Mukti comes easily. What keeps us from seeing God? Selfishness, egotism, ambition, vanity, pride. The more we can minimise these, the sooner will we come to the goal. If we can get rid of them altogether, then freedom is ours.

"The more we try to fix our mind on God, the more quickly shall we forget ourselves and the more quickly shall we reach freedom..... The best way to do this is not to think of ourselves in any way, and try to keep our minds on the presence of God."

"The man who has realized God will never lack for anything," he continued. "Whatever he needs will come to him. That is what Christ meant when he said, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom or Heaven, and all things else will be added unto you.' This is literally true and it has been verified by history. Those men who have given up everything for the sake of the Lord and have felt no other attraction but God, are honoured and worshipped by the world.

"Surrender yourself completely to the Lord, then freedom will be yours. A smile will always play on your lips; your face will be shining, and your mind will be calm and peaceful."

VIII

Thoroughness in all his thought-processes was characteristic of Swami Ramakrishnananda. He never left a problem half-solved. He carried it into his conversation, into his reading, into his meditation; he lived with it, until he found a solution for it. I remember when he was striving to discover a demonstrable point of contact between physical space and spiritual space, how insistent was his effort. He read the latest books on astronomy, he talked with those who were versed in the science of physics, he spent long hours searching the spaces of his own inner consciousness. Death alone was able to check the ardour of his seeking.

The solutions he reached were always definite. There was no vagueness in his mode of thinking. His thought was bold and convincing. Those who came to pay him homage often returned day after day, drawn by his power and the unflinching courtesy of his welcome. It was not his custom to rise when visitors entered, but from his seat on the rug at the far end of the monastery hall he would greet them with a gracious smile and a friendly wave of the hand, as he requested them to take their places in the group already gathered round him. There were certain devotees who came daily on their way home from their offices, and this led to a continuity of thought in the conversations of succeeding days. One simple question would provide the theme for many gatherings. So it was when

a devotee asked : "What constitutes morality ?" The Swami's answer was : "All that takes man to God is morality ; whatever takes man away from God is immorality."

"There is a social law and a religious law," the Swami continued. "God commands us to punish those who disobey Him. Why should we punish them ? To make them obedient servants. It is true that Christ says, 'When a man strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other' ; but this is meant for those who have given up the world, not for the householder. He must punish the wrong doer in order to protect society ; otherwise there will be general depredation, the good will be destroyed and the wicked will prevail. For instance, a man desires nothing but God. He may have a house and another man may ask for it. The man who cares only for God can say : "Yes, take it. I do not want it." But that would not be possible for a man who still wishes to live in the world.

"Punishment is not a bad thing. If by punishment you help to rectify a man, really you have done good to him. You should not allow the wicked to thrive. In a field there are weeds, but if you want to reap a good harvest, you must pluck them out. A revengeful spirit, however, is bad. Satan always tries to revenge himself, but God never felt the least anger toward Satan. They say God sent him down below, but that is not true. Satan went of his own accord, because he could not have what he wanted in heaven. The attitude

of God toward Satan was that of pity. The attitude of Satan toward God was that of revenge, jealousy, hatred. These feelings are always Satanic. Vengeance is based on egotism and malice."

The following evening the conversation turned on the origin of evil and one of the habitual group asked the question: "How has evil come?" Swami Ramakrishnananda replied: "The dualists say that all the good in man belongs to God and all the bad belongs to the man himself. The monists say that all belongs to God, both good and bad. In reality all is God. It is He who actuates the evil-doer as well as the saint.

"A man has sugar candy to sell in the shape of a mango or a bird or a dog. A little boy says to his father, 'Please buy me that bird.' He thinks it will taste sweeter than the mango or the dog, whereas in reality they are all alike. In the same way man looks at the world and calls this good and this bad but as a matter of fact it is all made out of the same substance. God has created both good and evil, but He is beyond both. He has created the two parties and set them warring against each other, while He looks on as the Witness. All this warring of good and bad, pleasure and pain, is merely the play of God; this creation is His laugh. Some one said to Sri Ramakrishna, 'When God could make all people good, why did He create evil? Why did He not make every one good?' Sri Ramakrishna's answer was, 'Then with whom would He play?'

“It is because we are mistaking the real for the unreal, the unreal for the real, that all this seems so serious to us. We are taking the play to be the real thing and the Player to be unreal: whereas the Player or God is the one reality and the play of creation is absolutely unreal. If you will analyse your own life, you will find out how vague and uncertain it is—a birth, a death and a little space between. Out of darkness you have come, into darkness you will go, and you call the space between life. There was no dream, then you dreamed, and again there was no dream. A dream you look upon as unreal, but this little span of life is just as much a dream, just as unreal as the dream that comes to you in sleep. At any moment death may call you away.”

Swami Ramakrishnananda spoke with great earnestness. The unreality of this outer life with all its perplexities and distresses was a subject on which he felt deeply. The outer world never grew real to him. He was never trapped into looking upon the play as the serious thing and giving a lesser place to the Player. At all times the Player stood in clear outline before him. He never forgot his Divine origin. “Man is made in the image of God; that is, man possesses all the powers of God, but in miniature form,” he declared. Evolution is a process of ‘rolling out.’ As we evolve spiritually, the inner powers become more and more manifest.

“Evolution means wanting something more. It implies a craving. A craving for more of God makes

us evolve spiritually, a craving for outer things or earthly powers brings material evolution. The same craving is in the ant, in the angel, in man and in the Siddhas (Seers). Man worships the gods to satisfy this craving. But Bhagavan Sri Krishna cautions every one against worshipping the gods. 'Those who worship the gods go to the gods,' he says, but My devotees come to Me'. Which is desirable? Is it desirable to go to the gods or to the Supreme Being? Sri Krishna answers this explicitly: Those who depend on Me, I provide for them, I take care of them, I become their servant."

The question was asked, "Can a man ever do as he likes?" The Swami's answer was: "Sometimes he thinks he is doing as he likes, but in reality God is guiding all his movements. God is the only Doer, nothing is done by man." The devotee asked again: "Then what is the use of man's making any effort to be good or to realize God?" Swami Ramakrishnananda replied: "Your very nature is to act. Can you remain perfectly quiet even for a moment? This body is born to act. Your hands, your feet, your eyes and ears have a natural tendency to action. As long as you must act, you will want to do that which will bring the most desirable results; so long as you act, you will have to try to be good, to be virtuous, to be unselfish, in order to get the desirable results you are seeking; and since God is the most desirable result to be attained, you will have to strive to realize Him."

IX

An atmosphere of aloneness enveloped Swami Ramakrishnananda. It was not created by lack of companionship. His intervals of solitude were few, except for those he stole from his sleep at early dawn or in the quiet hours of the night. There was a constant coming and going in the monastery hall where he sat. Members of the household moved back and forth, visitors came and went, servants brought offerings of fruit or vegetables. Rare were the solitary moments in the day, yet the Swami seemed alone. The impression sprang, I believe, from his unconditional detachment. It was so complete that it insulated him. I do not know whether he was conscious of it or not. We never spoke of it specifically, but one day I made a passing reference to it and his decisive reply was: "I am full of God; what need have I of any one else?"

He said no more, but the thought must have lingered in his mind; for a few days later he recurred to it again, saying: "Aloneness means singleness. When there are two, there is always fear. We think we need a companion to protect us. If we have to go out on a dark night or if we have to enter an unlighted house, we want another person with us. We say, 'Let Gopalan come. I do not like to go alone.' In reality fearlessness exists only when we are alone. When we are alone we can dance or sing or make faces, do whatever

we like ; but let a friend come and at once we begin to be careful about what we do. There comes a sense of constraint. We grow self-conscious. Fear exists when there is duality, fearlessness exists when there is only One. Since we cannot be happy so long as we fear, we shall not be able to find peace until we can say, 'I am alone. I need nothing'."

These words reveal Swami Ramakrishnananda's perfect freedom from human dependence. His being was complete in his contact with God. Yet there was no lack of love for mankind in his heart. He was pre-eminently generous in his attitude toward humanity. To condone or to forgive cost him no effort. He made little of mistakes. If he spoke of a person's failings, as he did quite frankly, it was without malice. His heart was filled with loving kindness for every living being. "No love is really love that has for its opposite hate," he said to me one day. "True love is always inclusive and universal. So long as a man has an enemy and cannot bear to have any good come to that man, he cannot know what real love is. That is why Christ tells us, if some one strikes us on one cheek, we should turn to him the other ; if he takes our cloak, we should give him our coat also, no matter who it is. Until we are willing to do this, we cannot feel true love. Real love must be all-embracing".

Not long after, the question was asked one evening by a visitor : "How can we cultivate love for God ?" "The nature of love is to love the beautiful," the Swami replied. "When you see a beautiful person, your heart goes out to him spon-

taneously. God is the most beautiful being in the whole universe, so it should not be difficult for you to love Him. Now it seems to you easier to love the world than to love God. That is because the ego blinds our sight so that we cannot perceive the beauty of God. This ego must be conquered. It is always a falsifier. It places itself on the throne, which belongs to God, and tries to hide God. So long as the ego is on the throne, we can never hope to see or love God. Hatred and anger are signs of ego. If a man hates anyone or gets angry with anyone, you may be sure he has not conquered his ego and cannot feel true love in his heart. What is the ego? A mere soap-bubble. One blow will break it and reveal its hollowness. We must get rid of ego and reach the state where we can say sincerely, 'Not I, not I, but Thou'. When you have been able to put down the ego, love of God will come of itself".

Swami Ramakrishnananda was peculiarly inexpressive regarding his feeling for outer things. I heard him voice very rarely a personal like or dislike. His judgements were not formed by the reaction a person or object created in him. They were measured by their relation to an ideal or to the universe, by the largest unit of measure. The whole fervour of his being flowed out when he talked of God or his Master; but for lesser things he showed something akin to unconcern. Even the beauties of Nature did not always move him. I recall one evening when I tried to draw his attention to an unusually wonderful sunset. His response

was : " This is the hour when one should think on God, not on His creation " .

This apparent disregard of outer beauty arose, not from insensibility to Nature, but from intense inwardness. The Swami's thought was centred in central beauty. That alone was real to him. " What are the Himalayas ? " he exclaimed once, " just rock piled on rock. Look at all that is outside — the countless solar systems and the galaxies. The earth in the vastness of the heavens is only a minute point. Of what significance is it ? The only reality in this universe is God. "

With this chapter the covers of my note book close. The teachings they contain were spoken by Swami Ramakrishnananda in 1909, during the early days of my contact with India. The Swami passed away in 1911. Through the years since then, I have treasured these records of his thought, awaiting an opportunity to share them with the world. Some of them have appeared in my previous writings. Those that remain have been set down in these Reminiscences. A mighty voice echoes through these pages. The mighty one to whom it belonged can have no worthier memorial than his own words. His message has been given. My task is done.

CHAPTER XX
REMINISCENCES ¹

By
SWAMI VISUDDHANANDA ²

MY days with Swami Ramakrishnananda are never to be forgotten. They are still fresh in my memory at this distant date. I consider myself thrice blessed in that I could come in contact with such a great personality in the early days of my monastic life.

I was quite young when I was sent to Madras to work under him. On coming to Madras the first thing that struck me most was the way he was leading his life. It was a life of complete self-surrender and dedication to God. The be-all and end-all of his existence was Sri Ramakrishna. To be guided by such a lofty life is in itself an object lesson of highest spiritual worth. It was indeed a rare privilege for any one to be by his side and to be able to mould and elevate one's character after such a living example of purity and holiness.

I found in him a happy synthesis of work and worship. 'Whatever thou doest, O Arjuna, do that as an offering unto Me', says Sri Krishna in the Gita. This teaching was fully reflected in every action of his. Once I saw him praying before an oil painting of the Swami Vivekananda after his

¹ From *The Vedanta Kesari*, August 1948.

² See Appendix I for a short account of the author.

return from a lecturing tour. I over-heard his fervent prayers as he bowed down before him : ' O my beloved brother, thou art verily the accredited representative of Sri Ramakrishna and it is thou who hast sent me over here to propagate His message. I am only carrying out thy commands. I beseech thee to see to it that no pride or self-esteem enters my heart, no thirst for name or fame disturbs my mind. All the burden and the responsibility that thou hast placed upon me are verily thine. Bless me so that I may carry on the work of our Master only as an instrument in His hands and that I may offer all the fruits of work unto Him. Guide me always in the right path '. What a glorious example of self-surrender and dedication to God and His work !

He would often forget himself while conducting the worship of the Master ; so great was his love and devotion to Him. How vividly he realised the living presence of Sri Ramakrishna in the photograph before which he worshipped daily ! The picture, indeed, was as living and real to him as his own self.

In the Shrine of the Math in Madras he had installed Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. He used to conduct worship daily in that Shrine with single-minded devotion and utmost regularity. That was before Swami Brahmananda came to Madras. When he had Swami Brahmananda with him in Madras (1908) he was seized with a desire that the latter might, even for once, conduct the worship of Sri Ramakrishna in the Shrine

so that the real object of the installation might be fulfilled and that the living presence of the Master might be invoked 'for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many.' But he found no opportunity to make that request to Swami Brahmananda. One day while Brahmanandaji was passing by the Shrine just after his bath, he stood in his way with folded hands and beseeched him to enter the Shrine and offer worship to the Master. All the protests that Brahmanandaji could make, namely, that he was not accustomed to conduct ritualistic worship in the orthodox fashion and all that, was of no avail. He had to comply with the request of his beloved brother monk. And when he entered the Shrine, Ramakrishnanandaji quietly closed the door. What passed inside the Shrine was not known to the world outside.

"He who hath seen the Son hath seen the Father." Ramakrishnanandaji verily looked upon Brahmanandaji as the spiritual child of Sri Ramakrishna, and as such he made no distinction between them. During the latter's stay in Madras (1908-09) every evening after Aratrikam, Ramakrishnanandaji would go and prostrate himself before him. He himself attended to all his personal needs and comforts and often exhorted us to serve him with unswerving faith and devotion. He used to tell us : "Remember always that by serving him alone you can truly serve the Master and easily attain the *summum bonum* of life without any austerities (Tapasya) whatsoever. In him our Master shines forth in all His glory and splendour and through

him He is looking after the well-being of our Sangha." One day a certain devotee brought some fresh fruits as offerings to the Master, but Ramakrishnanandaji offered them to Brahmanandaji instead, and told the devotee that the Master had accepted his offerings through him. "You see, your object has been rightly fulfilled."

In the company of these two great Swamis I learnt that even a Sannyasin, while in a Math, should follow correct business methods in monetary affairs. I was at that time placed in charge of cash and the cash safe happened to be in Brahmanandaji's room. I had often to take out money from the safe, and when he saw me doing this often, he observed, "I find you taking out cash off and on. Do you keep proper accounts and for that matter obtain receipts for the advances you make?" I was rather inexperienced then and said, "No Maharaj, I simply make advances to Ramakrishnanandaji at his bidding and I don't keep proper accounts for them." "That won't do," he said, "you should obtain receipts for the advances you make!" So I went to Ramakrishnanandaji and reported to him what Brahmanandaji had said. He fully agreed and thenceforth I used to obtain a receipt from him on every occasion I made an advance. When it was time for me to leave for Bangalore, I said: "Revered Maharaj, here are the keys of the safe. I gave you a total advance of six hundred rupees during the period I was in charge." "Will it be so much as that?" he said "Oh no! I think it will be two or three hundred at the most."

But don't worry. Whatever there is in the safe, hand it over to Brahmachari Rudra Chaitanya." "I have," I said, "receipts for all the advances." "That is true. Show them to me." So I tallied the accounts with the help of those slips to the satisfaction of the Swamiji as well as of mine.

Throughout his stay in Madras (1897-1911) Ramakrishnanandaji worked vigorously to spread the message of the Master. Besides daily worship, he held weekly religious classes in the Math and also in different parts of the town. He had often to go out on lecturing tours on invitations from various societies and organisations in the Presidency. In these lectures he said what he had to say with care and candour, but he was regardless of their effect on the audience. He would not mind if the attendance was poor. Once I had the good fortune to accompany him to one of his class-talks at Triplicane. There were only a few students present and most of them were clerks, quite jaded after the day's work at the office. While Swamiji was lecturing I observed two or three of them were dozing. On our return to the Math I asked him whether he had noticed that some of his students were dozing. He replied at once, "I do not care so much to see whether my students hear me or not. I am always a student myself and I myself listen to my own talks. I feel refreshed and elevated thereby and that is my highest reward."

We learned from him, towards the end of his life's journey, that he had two great desires in his life — one to bring the President (Swami Brahma-

nandaji) to Madras and arrange for his tour upto Rameswaram so that the people of the Presidency might be blessed by his presence and contact. The second was to bring Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, also to Madras and to arrange for her pilgrimage to Rameswaram. By the grace of God both his desires were fulfilled.

In the Holy Mother he saw nothing but divine Sakti incarnate. During her sojourn in Southern India, which was entirely planned and managed by him, she went to the Bangalore Asrama also. While she was staying there, Ramakrishnanandaji lived in a tent outside and himself attended to all her personal needs and comforts. Every morning he used to pluck some fragrant flowers from the garden and offer them at her feet. How often he was seen prostrating himself before her and earnestly craving for her blessings! One evening she had gone to a hillock just behind the Asrama accompanied by some junior Sannyasins and had sat there watching the sunset. While looking at the play of variegated colours in the sky, she fell into a deep meditation. Presently Ramakrishnanandaji appeared there and stood before her with folded hands. With tears in his eyes he bowed before her in humble reverence and prayed: 'Oh Mother, Oh Girikumari, Thou art verily the daughter of the Himalayas. Thou art Uma, the Mother, that residest in all as Power and opens the gate to Truth. Bless me, bless thy children who have taken refuge in Thee, so that they may be freed from the fetters of the world.' The Holy

Mother opened her eyes and softly placing her hand on his head blessed him. And great was his comfort and solace !

After the Holy Mother's departure from Madras in 1911, Ramakrishnanandaji again came to Bangalore to recuperate his broken health, not suspecting that he had already contracted tuberculosis. He had been the Holy Mother's personal attendant during her pilgrimage in Southern India and himself accompanied her to Rameswaram and other places, paying no heed what-so-ever to his health, although he had persistent fever and cough all through. He did not even get himself examined by any doctor so long as the Holy Mother was there, lest the same should cause her any inconvenience or he might be interrupted in his unremitting service to her. It was only when he came to Bangalore after her departure for Calcutta that we got him examined by an eminent specialist and found that the fell disease had far advanced by that time. The doctor told us plainly that there was practically no remedy for it and advised us to send him immediately to Calcutta so that he might pass his last days cheerfully amongst his brother-disciples there. This time, while staying in Bangalore, he spoke to us very often of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, and of his unbounded love and grace. One day he told us with great emotion and with much emphasis about the Master's infinite mercy in that he had fulfilled a long-cherished desire of his. He gave out that his only desire in life had been to bring both the Holy

Mother and Swami Brahmananda to the South, to personally serve them and to take them on pilgrimage to Rameswaram and other holy places with the sole object that all the devotees and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna and many others might get the chance of meeting these personages and be blessed by their holy touch. He felt supremely happy that, on the eve of his departure from this world, the Master had granted this prayer of his and he could now die in peace.

In conclusion I might very well say that Swami Ramakrishnanandaji was to his Master as Mahavir Hanuman was to Sri Ramachandra. Dasya Bhakti or the mode of worship in which the devotee looks upon himself as the servant of the Lord, was truly manifested in his noble character. May he ever guide us in his foot-steps!

CHAPTER XXI
REMINISCENCES¹

By
SWAMI SHARVANANDA²

IT was sometime in the latter part of February, 1906, that I first came to Madras from the Belur Math with a letter of introduction from Swami Shivanandaji to Swami Ramakrishnanandaji. Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj had also written to him about me. So when I reached the Math from the Beach Railway station, I found Sasi Maharaj (Swami Ramakrishnanandaji is called Sasi Maharaj in the Brotherhood, as it was his former name) standing at the portico outside the main building, as if expecting me. The Math at that time was located in the ground floor of the main building of the Ice House, Triplicane. The first impression that I got of Sasi Maharaj, with his huge bulky body and a touch of sternness on his face, was one of awe and deep reverence. There was something in his personality that was really commanding.

It was late in the evening when I arrived at the Math, and after preliminary enquiries, he asked me what I had brought for Sri Guru Maharaj. When I told him that I had no idea that I should bring something for Guru Maharaj, nor had anybody told me anything about it at the Belur Math,

¹ From *The Vedanta Kesari*, August 1948.

² See Appendix I for a short account of the author.

he said mildly, but in convincing tones, "Whenever you come from outside to the Math, you must bring something for Guru Maharaj." That was my first lesson from him. I was abashed. He then asked, "What is there in your basket?" I said there were some mangoes and sweets which I had got for the journey and that they were what remained after my use. He was very glad to hear that and burst out, "Never mind, bring those mangoes, and offer them to Guru Maharaj." When I made a mild objection to his proposal by saying that I had already eaten from the lot, he asserted, "That does not matter. Fruits can be washed and offered, even if its Agrabhag (first portion) has been used by others." So according to his direction those mangoes were offered to Guru Maharaj along with the night offerings.

At that time there were only three inmates in the Math, Sasi Maharaj, Vasanta (Swami Paramananda) and Yogin (Umananda), and I was the fourth. From the very next day of my arrival certain duties were allotted to me, the main portion of which was the cleaning of the Shrine and also preparing the offerings in the Shrine.

At that time the daily routine of the Math was of this wise: All inmates used to get up early at 5 a.m. and, after morning ablutions, each used to go to his own room, for some meditational practices. But Sasi Maharaj would first go to the Shrine Room, make the morning offerings to Sri Guru Maharaj and then close the doors of the Shrine Room. Next, he used to come to his own room and read Chandi

and Gita every day. After half an hour or so, I would come out, remove the offerings from Sri Ramakrishna's Shrine and place them before Sri Swamiji's picture, which was installed in another room. Subsequently both the Shrine Rooms used to be swept, wiped and cleansed thoroughly. In the meantime Yogin would prepare tea for us. Then we all would sit in the order of seniority on a carpet, for breakfast. First it would be served to Sasi Maharaj and then to others. After tea Sasi Maharaj would sit to cut vegetables and would ask me to read a book. I first started with Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. I used to read the text and he would explain it after each aphorism. Others would be simply listening to his discourse. An hour or more would go in this way and then we would go to perform our respective duties or attend to any other business. Punctually at 11 O'clock Sasi Maharaj used to go to the Shrine Room to perform worship and at about half past eleven the noon offering was made to Sri Guru Maharaj. By the time the offerings were brought from the Shrine, it used to be half past twelve, when the Shrine Room was closed and we sat for our lunch. After the meal Sasi Maharaj and the inmates used to take rest for some time. At about 3 O'clock in the afternoon he would call all of us to him. We all would sit on the floor and Vasanta used to read 'Chaitanya Charitamrita'. In the course of the reading, Sasi Maharaj used to give us parallels from the life and sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. He would also on such occasions speak of the religious practices that

Swamiji and Sri Ramakrishna's Sannyasin disciples performed in the early part of their monastic life. He would speak of all these with a fire and emotion which was peculiar to him. Punctually at 4 p.m. the doors of the Shrine Rooms were opened and the afternoon offerings were made. Be it noted here that he was extremely keen on observing punctuality in making offerings to Sri Ramakrishna. He would not allow the deviation of even a minute in the matter.

In the evening sometimes he would go out to give religious discourses in different parts of the city. We would attend to our individual work or go to the beach for a short recreation. At dusk we used to assemble in the Shrine Room and attend to the Vesper Service. In his time no regular Aratrikam was done. At about 8-30 p.m. the night offerings were given to Sri Ramakrishna and after half an hour the Shrines were closed for the night. Thereafter we used to sit for supper. After meals we would gather round Sasi Maharaj and do some personal service to him, while he would be relating to us some of the incidents of Sri Ramakrishna's or Sri Swamiji's life. After a while he would go to sleep and we also used to retire for the night.

Within a few days of my stay in the monastery I found out what Sasi Maharaj wanted of us: he wanted us to be very precise, punctual, regular, quick in action and all attention in our work, particularly in our duties in the Shrine Room and Services to Sri Guru Maharaj. On the very second day,

while doing some work in the Shrine Room, he told me, pointing to the likeness of Sri Ramakrishna, with a firmness of tone that was peculiarly his own, "Look here, my boy, don't consider that as a mere picture of Sri Ramakrishna. He is actually present here. Try to feel his living presence and do your services accordingly." That was my second lesson from the great saint.

On the following day I was somewhat inadvertent in my Shrine Room work and that brought a severe scolding from him. Not being accustomed to that type of scolding, and that too for such a trivial fault, I broke down. Seeing me weep, he at once softened and began to say in a very endearing tone, "Do you know what Sri Ramakrishna used to say? A blacksmith first puts a lump of iron into the fire and when it becomes red hot, then he puts it on the anvil and beats it into shape. That's how an unformed lump of metal is shaped into a useful article; you are all like that unformed lump and it is for your good that you are put to forge and beaten to shape on the anvil by such scoldings. It is all for your benefit." His relenting voice was somewhat heartening to me. The very next day after this incident, while we were all sitting at our meals, nice Malgova mangoes were served. It was first offered to Sasi Maharaj. As soon as he tasted a little bit of a big one given to him, he exclaimed "Oh, how sweet! It is exceedingly nice. Take it, my boy." With these words, melting almost in motherly affection, he put that biggest of fruits on my plate. That single act of affection revealed his

inner heart to me, and from that moment onwards none of his scoldings and chastisements did hurt me or wound my pride, in as much as I could always feel that behind those stern words and grim face, reposed a most loving heart and tender affection that even a fond mother could not harbour.

His method of training was certainly violent and even at times harsh. But his whole heart was set upon the central point as to how to unfold the spiritual nature of the disciples or the novitiate. He would not brook any contradiction or questioning, much less a refusal from us. Indeed, his method was that of the sledge-hammer blow of the blacksmith. He who could stand it, would get a form that could stand the stress and strain of all vicissitudes of life and be fit for the realisation of the higher ideals. Many came but few could stand his test. During my stay with him I found that he did not lay much stress on such spiritual practices as meditation or Japam ; his chief care was to see how precise and accurate, neat and devoted we were in our duties to Sri Ramakrishna and to him. Indeed therein lay the seed of self-control, concentration and devotion that a true spiritual life requires. When one has these disciplines, one can easily progress in devotional practices, if one so chooses. One thing he would constantly harp upon, in season and out of season, that Sri Ramakrishna was actually present in the Shrine Room, nay, in the whole monastery, that every one of the things of the monastery belonged to him and that all our activities in life should be directed towards him or his services.

That is the one Sadhana we should adopt. Whenever he would stand before the picture of the Master and cry out in a sonorous voice, 'Jai Guru, Jai Guru', the feeling of the living presence of the Divine would be so deeply stirred up in one's heart that it has better to be felt than described. If spirituality means the awakening of the consciousness of the spiritual verity that resides not only in the depths of our being, but also outside as the basis of the phenomenal universe, then certainly the method of training of Sasi Maharaj was spiritual par excellence.

He was very orthodox, nay at times it verged on superstition. But it was all due to his unflinching allegiance to the commandments of the scriptures and the sayings of his Master. But he was no stickler to the letter of the law; he was highly intelligent and scholarly enough to understand the noble spirit of the scriptures and follow it scrupulously. He would not stir out of the Math, nor write letters on Thursday afternoons, or in Aslesha and Magha Nakshatrams, as his Master had observed those restrictions. At times he used to say in fun, "That old fellow has injected these superstitions into me".

In teaching scriptures and in philosophical discussions he used to assume the attitude of a cold logician and there he would not exhibit any of the fanfare of emotionalism of a Bhakta. His basis always used to be the Advaita Vedanta, although for practical life he laid great stress upon the devotional aspect of dualism. He would not

encourage us much in argumentation and philosophical discussions. He would repudiate all arguments for argument's sake. He used to assert that the right attitude of a student should be strictly that of an enquirer, eager to learn from elders, not by mere logical disputations and ratiocinations, but by the devout unfolding of the mind to the light of the truth which the teacher might shed, even as a budding flower receives the rays of the sun and brings itself to full blossom.

In those days our monastic life in Madras was rather even and stern, quite uneventful, yet full of that calm repose and inner joy which the presence of a truly great spiritual saint could bestow upon the surroundings. Though across the span of forty years, the very memory of the serenity of that life stirs in us even today an emotion that is incomparable.

The days thus glided by for sometime, when a great event occurred that arrested my attention and deepened my devotion to him. One day, it so happened that there was nothing edible in the store to offer to Sri Ramakrishna in the afternoon. The financial condition of the Math in those days being very poor, the coffer was quite empty. Generally the afternoon offering was made punctually at 4 p.m. and it was at 3 o'clock that the fact was discovered that there was nothing to offer. When the matter was brought to Sasi Maharaj's notice, it sent him into a consternation. He took it as a test the Master was putting him to. Like a true saint, he knew it positively that nothing could

happen in the universe without God's will, 'Not even a blade of grass can move without His will'. And so, if such a dire eventuality could take place, it could not be without His cognizance. What is man, but a piece in His chess-board, as he often said, quoting a saying of Sri Ramakrishna. So he was neither angry with us nor on any one else for not noticing the fact beforehand; his ire and grievance were solely turned against the Master Himself. He burst out with a terrible growl, "You want to test me! I will eat sand and do Swamiji's work here! Sirrah! You are testing me, I know. But you should also know my grim resolve. I shall rather die and perish here than budge an inch from this place! Do your worst, if you will!" His face became ruddy and glowed in terrible anguish and fervour, anguish for not being able to offer anything to the Master at the right time, and fervour in the belief of the omnipotence and omnipresence of his divine Master. He went on in this way for sometime and paced up and down the hall. It was a tense half an hour. We youngsters were entirely dumbfounded, not knowing what to do to mitigate the direness of the situation. Just then some soft knocks were heard at the door outside. Some of us went out and opened the front door. Mr. Kondiah Chetty, an old student of Sasi Maharaj, had come. He was ushered in and was found to have brought with him some wheat flour, ghee, sugar candy and dried fruits. He placed them before Sasi Maharaj, and also five rupees in coin. It was so unexpected at

that dire psychological moment that we could not but see the hand of Sri Ramakrishna in the whole affair. It was half past three; there was half an hour still to make the afternoon offering. Sasi Maharaj burst out in childlike glee and a joyous roar, bade us to bring two stoves and made sweetmeats and other nice preparations for the offering. There was great stir among us all, every hand was engaged to finish the task quickly, and so when it was just 4 p.m., several courses were made ready for the offering. The joy of Sasi Maharaj knew no bounds when he himself offered them to his Master.

Another incident that occurred sometimes about this time is fresh in my memory even now, and I must present it to my readers, as it would give a real glimpse of the inner mind of Sasi Maharaj. It must have been in the latter part of April of that year. On one very sultry evening, after supper, Sasi Maharaj laid himself down on the cot and I was massaging him as usual. It must have been about 11 o'clock in the night and the heat was oppressive. He suddenly got up, tied his cloth round his waist and went into the Shrine Room. He bade me also to follow. He stood with a fan near the cot on which Sri Ramakrishna's picture was laid for the night's rest and began to fan him, asking me to fan Sri Swamiji's picture which was kept on a pedestal. He went on fanning for nearly an hour and then slowly laid down the fan and gently walked out of the Shrine Room. He asked me also to do the same. His whole behaviour could not fail to engender the feeling in my heart

that Sri Ramakrishna was actually present there, sleeping there on the cot and we were serving Him! Then he went out of the room and stood in the verandah outside the building. It was all open and we were facing the sea. I brought a chair for him and he sat on it. I started fanning him. Though the night was deep and oppressive, the stillness of the hour, the rhythmic murmur of the breakers of the ocean and the vast expanse of its glistening waters before our eyes, all wove an idyllic charm on our mind. Sasi Maharaj did not speak a word, as if his mind was soaring high to some transcendental region. His attitude indicated it. So naturally I maintained perfect silence and went on fanning. When some time had passed in this wise, he suddenly turned towards me and exclaimed: "You see, my mind is soaring in the heights. If I sit now, I can fall into Samadhi immediately." I kept quiet and wondered at the sublimity of the situation. Probably more than an hour rolled away in that tense mood and then he relaxed. It must be about 2 a.m., when he got up and said, "Now let us go and retire." It was a memorable night for me to witness such a sublime spectacle.

Smiles has truly said that "the little acts of daily life are loopholes of character." To understand a great mind we need not go to their great achievements, but observe their little acts of daily life. It is these that would really reveal their true greatness. The more you live with a great soul, the deeper becomes the revelation of his utter selflessness, non-attachment, purity of mind,

resignation, and constant consciousness of the Divine presence. The very atmosphere around him is felt to be suffused with the aroma of a bliss that is really supra-mundane and the influence he radiates is felt to be truly uplifting. Those incidents mentioned above and many a daily happening in the monastery drew me closer to Sasi Maharaj and filled my mind with awe and admiration, the like of which I never felt before. Though I had the privilege and the fortune of seeing Swami Vivekananda and some of the most distinguished disciples of Sri Ramakrishna before my coming to Madras, and also of knowing many great spiritual saints outside the pale of the Sri Ramakrishna Brotherhood, that was the first occasion I was blessed with the opportunity of living closely with such a great saint and of observing all the minute workings of his daily life.

In the beginning of July I left Madras on a pilgrimage to the South and Malabar and came back to Madras in September from Bangalore. I found Sasi Maharaj was busily engaged at that time in making plans for collecting the necessary funds for the construction of the new building of the Ramakrishna Math in Mylapore. I found on my return that the life of the Math was going on as usual, only Swami Paramananda had not come back. I heard that Swami Abhedanandaji intended to take him to America to assist him in his New York work.

Shortly a small incident happened that perturbed the equilibrium of my mind a great deal.

Those were the Bengal partition days, and we young men of Bengal took the vow to fast on the 16th September (that being the actual date when Bengal was partitioned) and to make the necessary demonstration to annul the injustice done to Bengal. The vow was taken before my joining the Mission; so on 16th September of that year I wanted to keep up my vow of fasting. When Sasi Maharaj came to know of it, he was full of wrath and chastised me severely for having political leanings even after joining a religious brotherhood. He said that the salvation of India can never come through mere politics, that I would be doing greater service to the country and to humanity at large, if I could build up my life in the spiritual line chalked out by Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Swamiji, that making political demonstrations was Western in spirit and fitted ill with the spiritual ideals of India, and so on and so forth. His repugnance for the political activities of the country was very marked; but I could not be convinced by his arguments and I insisted upon my keeping the vow to observe fast on that day. Of course now I understand the justification of his attitude. He held that when a young Brahmacharin comes to the elders for training and guidance, there should be absolute obedience on his part to the behest of the elders. Without absolute self-surrender, discipleship is never complete and nothing good and great can really be transmitted by the Master to his disciple. That is the spirit of the Hindu ideal of discipleship. And Sasi Maharaj

was very strict on that point. But unfortunately I was too ignorant and full of the revolutionary spirit of modernism to be able to understand him at that time. So when I heard him say, "If you don't hear me, you have to quit this place; I cannot allow any disobedience here,"—I at once collected the few articles I had and was ready to depart. Just then Swami Vimalanandaji called me out and took me to the beach and argued with me for nearly two hours over the matter. He was a very loving soul, exceedingly intelligent as well as sympathetic. He understood my sentiment thoroughly, yet with all sympathy and spiritual insight he made efforts to enlighten me in the higher principles of the spiritual ideal where human politics has no meaning. Both are incompatible to a great extent. If I had chosen the realisation of God, he said, as the goal of my life, I should concern myself solely with that pursuit and should not fritter away my energy in small political activities. His arguments were very convincing and his tender feeling at once assuaged my spirit and soothed my mind. So I returned to the Math with him and fell at the feet of Sasi Maharaj and begged his pardon for my seeming revolt. Sasi Maharaj was very glad to hear of the change of my mind and began to speak of the different sayings of Sri Ramakrishna about the popular notion of political activities and blessed me to have a true insight into the ideal of life. In passing, I may mention here that it was the practice with Sasi Maharaj never to allow us to discuss politics and speak on political

topics in the Math premises, nor would he allow any newspaper to be brought in. One day somebody brought a newspaper and left it on a bench in the Math verandah. When Sasi Maharaj saw it, he asked me at once to throw it away into the dustbin and sprinkle some water on the place, saying, 'Ganga, Ganga' to purify the defilement. He often used to say that Sri Ramakrishna could not bear the sight of a newspaper in his place.

Time rolled on and the sacred Navaratri season arrived. Sasi Maharaj himself performed the Puja in the usual Durga Puja style and the whole ceremony was brought to a close on the ninth day by the performance of Havana. It was all done before the picture of Sri Ramakrishna.

Then came the Deepavali day. On that night the Mother Kali is worshipped everywhere in Bengal as well as in all our Maths. Sasi Maharaj kept a fast on that day and asked me and Yogin to do the same. The Puja began at about 10 O'clock in the night. Sasi Maharaj did not go through the whole of the lengthy process of Kali Puja that is usually done on such occasions. He performed it, so to speak, in an abridged style. The sacrificial light was lighted at about midnight and he asked us to sit around it. After performing the preliminaries of the sacrifice, he began to chant Mantrams and the vows that a Brahmacharin should take for being initiated into a Brahmacharin's life, and asked us to repeat them after him. After chanting such Mantrams and vows,

offerings were made on the sacrificial fire to Sri Ramakrishna invoking his blessings and support for our maintaining the vows. Swami Ramakrishnanandaji himself had compiled this whole process of initiation into Brahmacharya from ancient scriptures and wanted the Ramakrishna Order to adopt the same for its Brahmacharins, like the usual Vedic ceremony of Sannyasa. It is very different, both in spirit and form, from the Upanayana ceremony. So Yogin and myself were the first to be initiated as regular Brahmacharins after the ancient ceremonial fashion. Before this there was no Brahmacharya ceremony in our Order.

At about the beginning of November, I was asked to go to Puri where Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj was staying at that time. So I had to leave Madras and to bid good-bye to the blessed company of Revered Sasi Maharaj, not knowing at that time that I would have to come back exactly after five years to take upon my young and weak shoulders the heavy burden of the work that Sasi Maharaj had so nobly and magnificently inaugurated and expanded in the South. Though my actual stay with Sasi Maharaj was hardly for six months, the impression he left upon my youthful mind within that short period was so deep and indelible that even to-day after two score years, it appears to me quite fresh and green. He gave a specific mould to my religious life and deepened the spiritual values in my consciousness. So the debt I owe to him in that respect is inestimable.

Sri Ramakrishna used to speak often of his spiritual life as a 'basket of many flowers', meaning thereby that in him there resided in perfect harmony various religious moods and spiritual attitudes, spoken of in the Hindu scriptures as Bhavanas, just like a beautiful bouquet composed of many flowers of variegated hues, yet producing a charmingly harmonious effect on the eyes. And we find these variegated 'colours' of his spiritual life very well represented and fully expressed in his disciples. No two disciples of his were alike; every one had his own unique personality and spiritual mode of living. Yet all of them drew their inspiration of life from the same Master. This was indeed peculiar and remarkable in Sri Ramakrishna's method of training his disciples. Each of them developed, according to his own innate nature, to the fullest extent, one of the many spiritual moods the Master had developed in his devotional practices. Swami Ramakrishnanandaji was the very embodiment of that devotional spirit portrayed in the life of Hanuman in the Ramayana by the great poet Valmiki. He had the same unflinching selfless devotion to his Master, coupled with a solid puissance that would strike terror in the hearts of his opponents. He had a huge body, a powerful personality, a keen wit and a heart more tender than that of a loving mother, and a face always glowing with the spiritual fervour and radiating an atmosphere of tremendous strength and utter resignation. He was essentially a Bhakta, but there was nothing of that weeping type

of effeminate emotionalism of the Bhakti school in him. He was all strength. His scholarship in the Hindu scriptures was next only to that of Sri Swamiji in the Brotherhood. Yet he was simple and unostentatious like a child. Indeed his was the rarest type of devotional life, a glorious gift of Sri Ramakrishna to modern India.

CHAPTER XXII
REMINISCENCES¹

By
SWAMI MADHAVANANDA²

IN the year 1909 I had the good fortune of spending eight blessed days with Srimat Swami Ramakrishnananda, the first President of the Ramakrishna Math, Madras, and one of the pillars of the Ramakrishna Order. I had read Sjt. Ramachandra Dutt's impassioned eulogy of him in his *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, in which he describes young Shashi's (as the Swami was then called) untiring, selfless service to the Master during his last illness at Cossipore as simply unparalleled. I had also heard much about his singular devotion to the Master both then and since then in the monasteries at Baranagore and Alambazar, from the senior Swamis of the Belur Math — many of them direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna — and soon made up my mind that my life as a novice of the Order should begin under Swami Ramakrishnananda. And this, despite the fact that some of them, for instance, Srimat Swami Shivananda, had jokingly warned me of the Swami's sternness which would often express itself in sharp reprimand.

¹ From *The Vedanta Kesari*, August 1948.

² See Appendix I for a short account of the author.

mands whenever anything went wrong. Accordingly, under arrangements kindly made by Srimat Swami Saradananda, the Secretary of the Belur Math, I quietly took my seat in the Madras Mail at Howrah, within a couple of hours of my leaving the examination hall:

I arrived at the Madras Central Station on the 22nd April, at about noon. A gentleman set me down from the tram at a point nearest Brodie's Road, Mylapore, telling me that I was not to go by the street. By a dreadful misreading of the instruction, I followed a cart track a few yards off, leading to a cocoanut garden, and presently found myself taking a long detour that made me reach the Madras Math after an hour, instead of in a few minutes. I met the venerable Swami Ramakrishnananda, who asked Brahmachari Rudrachaitanya, the only assistant stationed there, to look to my meal. Shortly after, the Swami asked me if I wanted to be a monk, to which I replied that my object was to live in their company and lead a pure life. He said, "It is the same thing. In that case you have come to the right place. In this age, whoever takes refuge in the Ramakrishna Incarnation shall undoubtedly realise the goal. But if you want money and fame and all that, better go and read for M.A." I said I did not care for them.

The monastery was quite full at the time, for Srimat Swami Brahmananda (or 'Maharaj', as he was generally designated), the first President of the Order, was there with his party, having re-

turned some time back from Bangalore after opening the new Ashram building. The main building of the Madras Math was a square one-storeyed house with a hall and four small rooms at the corners. The two eastern rooms were the Shrine Rooms of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Diagonally opposite the former was where Swami Ramakrishnananda lived; the other room was occupied by Maharaj. The hall was the office, visitors room, and also the bedroom of the other monastic inmates. Although built only two years ago, the house had heavily cracked, which necessitated its being abandoned in 1914, to be replaced by the present two-storeyed building in 1917 — a sad commentary on the business integrity of the contractor. Mosquitoes being in abundance, the problem of fitting up a mosquito-curtain in the centre of the hall was ingeniously solved by tying it to a bamboo-strip frame suspended by a central longitudinal rope from a hook in the ceiling. There was no electricity in the house, and Madras is described as a city which is 'five months hot and seven months hotter!' Consequently, the martyrdom which the robust Swami Ramakrishnananda, who had also a chronic skin trouble, suffered year after year since 1897, when he first went there at the behest of Swami Vivekananda, can easily be imagined. And such was his steadfastness that he never visited Banares and other holy places in the North up to the last.

In the afternoon I was introduced to Maharaj. Among other things, he read my palms, but passed

no judgment. Afterwards I heard that he had predicted my going back then, to join later. The presence of Maharaj, I could notice, was a constant source of blessedness to all. He literally radiated joy, in which even the humblest had a share. And he loved fun like a boy. In his party was a young Oriya cook who would laugh at the slightest provocation. So Maharaj would seek fun with him. I too came in handy for a little joke of his. The day after my arrival, in the presence of all, he showed me a recent photograph of his hanging on the wall and said, "Do you know Swami Saradananda, the Secretary of the Math? See if the picture tallies." I only smiled. Thereupon he said, "He doesn't know him!" On coming to know that I had informed those at home of my coming to Madras, he said, "What a pity! They will come after you". When I explained that it was under the instruction of Swami Saradananda, he said, "But you should have been circumspect." Those joyous days, however, were soon to end, for I learnt that Maharaj would leave for Puri in another three days.

Swami Ramakrishnananda had not only deep love for him, but, as the 'spiritual son' of Sri Ramakrishna, also a feeling of reverence, in which he seemed even to surpass his brother-disciples. He spoke to me of the occasion when, during the lifetime of the Master, Swami Vivekananda had called his brother-disciples and said, "Rakhal is our King, and you fellows are his subjects!" How he would strive to make Maharaj feel happy in

every respect ! And his least displeasure would, as eye-witnesses tell, be an agony to the Swami, who could not rest until he had begged his forgiveness with the utmost humility.

I had read in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna about the Master's calling Rakhai an 'eternally perfect soul', which led me to expect that he would be too absorbed in God to be mindful of external things. Instead, I found him take part in a game of cards ! But I kept silent. One day Swami Ramakrishnananda, of his own accord, broached the topic and said to me, "That Maharaj plays cards, is good for us. He lives at such a high spiritual level that his body would not last long if he continued always at that level. We therefore induce him to play so that his mind may relax a little." I understood how thoughtless it was on my part to judge a spiritual giant like him by conventional standards.

On the appointed day, Maharaj left, and after seeing him off at the station, Swami Ramakrishnananda said to me, "For a saint of his calibre everything is arranged spontaneously. Maharaj is nervous about travelling with Europeans. But he had a single-berth first class coupe, with a fan and everything. Sri Ramakrishna used to take so much thought for him, and gave him privileges that were vouchsafed to none else amongst us. He would even take him on his shoulders. One day he was so struck with a particularly childlike act of Maharaj that he burst into tears saying, 'You are so simple ! Alas, who will look after you when I am

gone!' But you see, the Divine Mother arranges everything for him."

Before leaving, Maharaj said to me, "Here you will be in the company of a saint. Serve him." I therefore began a little personal service of the Swami, massaging or fanning him at times. But even my best efforts seemed to give him little comfort. So he would often ask me to call the stalwart Rudra Maharaj. Minor Ashrama duties were also given to me. One of these was to sweep the floor. One day the Swami saw me gently pushing aside a spider. He took the broom from me and killed it, saying, "If you don't kill them, they will kill you." He wanted to remove my undue softness. Reciprocity is a more practicable principle for the common man or woman than non-resistance, which is fit only for advanced souls.

Another day he tested my knowledge of Sanskrit by asking me to explain some easy verses from the *Durga Saptashati* (Ch. V), at the end of which he said, "I see you have got the hang of it." In this connection he pointed out the distinction between Sanskrit and Bengali pronunciation, stating that these were two different languages, a fact which Bengalees generally ignored. He illustrated the former by correctly pronouncing the following couplet from the *Saptashati* (V. 32-34) :

'*Ya devi sarva-bhuteshu
Shakti-rupena samsthita
Namastasyai namastasyai
Namastasyai namo namah*'

'Repeated salutations to that Goddess who resides in all beings as power' — which sounded pretty much as the words would sound in English. And by way of showing Bengali pronunciation, he chose a phrase that might be transliterated as, 'Ogo shakti-swarupini' — 'O Thou Embodiment of Power' — but which sounded as 'Ogo shokti-shsho-rapini.' He also remarked that the Divine Mother was displeased if the Saptashati was not correctly recited. He advised me to read the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata in Sanskrit and note down the unfamiliar words with their meanings. Once he quoted and explained the well-known verse of the Gita (VII. 14) which says that Maya (Cosmic Illusion) can be overcome only through resignation to the Lord. Another time he asked me to read from Swami Vivekananda's recently published *Inspired Talks* the following passages, which he himself briefly explained: "People who report about sects with which they are not in sympathy are both conscious and unconscious liars. A believer in one sect can rarely see truth in others" (July 1), and "Until you are ready to change any minute, you can never see the truth; but you must hold fast and be steady in the search for truth." (July 5).

During the short time I was with him, the Swami was uniformly kind to me. He even told me in confidence things that were scarcely fit for the ears of a novice, and generally treated me as if I were an old acquaintance. Speaking of his first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna he said, "He asked me, 'Do you believe in God with form or without

form ?' I replied, 'I am not sure whether God exists at all; so there can be no question of His form or the opposite.' He was pleased with the answer." When I referred to the incident of his taking a small quantity of ice for Sri Ramakrishna to Dakshineswar from Calcutta, tying it in a corner of his upper garment, and its not melting, he mentioned that it was from a northern part of Calcutta and added, "On receiving it the Master said, 'It is quite in keeping with his devotion'." He went on to say, "Well, Samadhi and all that we have now put on the shelf. Now there is his work to do." He said he had been studying Persian in those days, and when Sri Ramakrishna came to know of it, he strongly discouraged it, saying, "If you do that, your devotion and all will go. Well, it is K — who revived the craze for study (among the disciples); otherwise they had given it up." The Swami added, "I had to learn things anew to play the part of a pedagogue!"

The Swami narrated an interesting episode about one Hariprasanna, who studied mathematics with him and also visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. The Master told him to meditate in the Kali temple. One day, as he was doing this, he felt as if his two eyes were coalescing so as to form a single eye on the forehead. He got frightened and hurried to Sri Ramakrishna to tell him of what had happened. The Master said to him, "You couldn't stand this much and came away in a fright!" I did not enquire who exactly the subject of this narrative was.

Himself an embodiment of renunciation, he could ill brook the lack of self-control among worldly people. He cited a typical case (without giving out any name) that had been reported to him. He made fun of a section of our people, saying, "They themselves are uxorious, and they conceive their gods also as having three wives each." Nevertheless, in his general dealings with people he was kind, considerate and loving. Only once did I see him, on returning from a morning class, scold a cabman for demanding more than the usual fare. All the same, he immediately ordered the amount to be paid, saying with a smile, that it was waste of time to argue with him. The boys of the local Students' Home, which he himself had founded out of sympathy for destitute children, did the marketing for the Math by turns. He would issue instructions to them and himself help to dress the vegetables for cooking. But his favourite self-chosen occupation was the daily worship of his Master, who to him was a living presence. His whole soul would be absorbed in the act, no matter how exacting it was in its details, all sense of physical discomfort being entirely set at naught. Naturally, it was a most enthralling spectacle. In spare moments he would pace the hall, repeating 'Sri Guru Maharaj' or some such sacred words with deep fervour. Usually of a grave mien, he would easily burst into laughter like a boy. He always dressed plainly, and everything about him marked him off as a saint of rare magnitude.

I recall a few little incidents that give an insight

into the working of his mind. One sultry night he had little sleep. Referring to this on the next morning he said, "May be, the mother of this new boy who has come was weeping! So I had no sleep." One day two young men saw him, with some books just purchased. He talked affably with them. Glancing at the titles of the books, he came across one that read, *Theosophy in Everyday Life*. "Why not *God in Everyday Life*?" he remarked. Once the conversation turned, I think, on the departed souls' inhabiting other worlds. The Swami asked me if I believed in it. I said, "Partly." To this he replied, "No, when later you will believe these things, you will have to believe them wholly." He warned me against sitting on a gunny bag, saying that Sri Ramakrishna had forbidden it on the ground that it tended to produce a grocer's mentality. (Another warning of the Master had been mentioned by Maharaj in the presence of us all, including Swami Ramakrishnananda, viz., that one must not allow the air wafted by a mat that is being spread, to touch the body). On two occasions the Swami gently corrected my misconception: once when I showed my preference for white bread to brown, and another time when I made light of the extra-priced feather-weight paper of the *Inspired Talks*. And how he impressed on me the superiority of the mind to the senses! "The senses," he said, "only touch the surface of things. Take, for instance, this wall. When you look at it, all you see is a coloured surface. The eyes do not tell you what is inside. It is the mind that supplies you further informa-

tion about its thickness, its being made of bricks, and so on." He went on in this strain.

One day he said, "When you see a goat suckling her kid, salute, for the Lord is manifesting Himself there." Another day, speaking about the need of renunciation, he said, "A man can forget almost anything done to him; but if it is an offence done to his wife, even by a word, he can never forget it. Therefore, he who wants to obliterate his ego as a means to God-realisation, should not marry." I also remember the telling way in which he emphasised the need of one-pointed yearning for achieving God-realisation by citing the story of the disciple who begged his teacher for a vision of God. The teacher took him to a tank and suddenly held him down under water. After a few moments he released him and asked him what he had wanted most at that time. "Just a little breath of air," said the disciple. "Nothing else?" "No." "When you will be longing in that intense way for just a little bit of God, and nothing else, then you will realise Him," said the teacher. One day I voiced the popular belief that those who approached God in an inimical spirit realised Him quicker, since they had constantly to think of Him. To this the Swami's reply was, "He whips them into the right attitude!" Regarding a well-known emotional biography of Sri Chaitanya in Bengali, which I liked much (minus its occasional lapses into bigotry), his laconic remark was, "He seems to have written a novel!"

The happy days I was passing in his company were coming to an end. True to the prognostication

of Maharaj, one of my old school-teachers, a Brahmin, came to take me home. All arguments with him proving in vain, I saw I had to go, for if I stayed on, my parents might come and trouble the Swami. Just to spare him this, I decided to go and return in a few days after persuading them. The Swami's forethought even in small matters was manifest when, at meal-time, he told me aside not to eat from the used plate of my teacher — a practice common enough in India. Considering the fact that I was treading the spiritual path, the Swami had his reasons for saying so, as I afterwards discovered. He suggested to me to visit the holy city of Conjeevaram, which was very near. But I said I was soon coming back. (Actually it took me twenty-three years to make this pilgrimage!) The Swami also advised us to halt at Puri on our way to Calcutta (which we would have done anyway to pay our respects to Maharaj as well as to see the Lord Jagannatha), adding significantly to my teacher, "You will see a living Jagannatha there," meaning Maharaj — another indication of his veneration for the latter. Incidentally, the remarks he made one of these days regarding another brother-disciple of his, Srimat Swami Premananda, whom also Sri Ramakrishna classed among the highest spiritual souls, are worth quoting. "There is Baburam," he said, "he is a storehouse of infinite power. But he won't manifest it." How potent this power was to uplift all types of people, including non-Hindus, to the spiritual plane, was evidenced a few years later, when the Swami began preaching

work in East Bengal and elsewhere. Just then, however, to outside observers he was like a dormant volcano.

At Puri, we were blessed to meet Maharaj. What his reactions on seeing us were, I knew the next time I met him there, some four months later. He said to a friend, "The boy was mercilessly dragged under a body-warrant, as it were. It pained me so much!" No wonder that Swami Ramakrishnananda had spoken of him in such superlative terms.

In Calcutta, my teacher, in his anxiety to keep watch on me, tried to alight from a moving tram and hurt his knee. On reaching our destination, while he on his part attributed the hurt to his being an instrument to divert an aspirant from the spiritual path, I had to take his place for a few days as Mathematics teacher in my old school! Shortly after this, I had a nice letter from Swami Ramakrishnananda, in which, among other things, he referred to a friend of mine who also had gone to the Madras Math to join it, but had been brought back home. "Parents of to-day," wrote the Swami, "would rather see their sons go astray than allow them to become monks."

I next saw the Swami in Calcutta, at Balaram Babu's house, about November, 1909. He was very glad to see me and said, "Take initiation from the Holy Mother; then everything will be alright." I said I had come for that very purpose. Then he said, "And take up for your M.A. a subject that will not entail much labour." I replied that I had already

done so. When I told him that my guardian might have sought police help in bringing me back from Madras, he said, "Oh, no, I could keep you at a place where no police would venture to go. I just wished you would go home!" The last time I saw him was at the Belur Math, a few weeks later. He had been suffering from fever. Still the welcoming smile was there. I was sent to Calcutta to buy some fruits for him. I learnt afterwards that he had been counting upon my joining the Order shortly. I took this as his blessing, and felt much encouraged.

Next year, after a few months' stay at Belur, I was posted to the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, in the bosom of the Himalayas. Within a year of that, the alarming news reached us of the Swami's coming to the Udbodhan Office, Calcutta, for the treatment of galloping phthisis. How with his strong constitution he could have contracted the disease, was an enigma to us. But the reason was plain: he had overworked himself, without taking proper rest or nutrition, which had surreptitiously first brought on diabetes. Not long after, we were shocked to learn that there was no hope of recovery, so that any one who wished to see him must haste. For me, leaving the place so soon was out of the question. Finally, the news of the end came, to throw the whole Ashrama into gloom. The next month *Prabuddha Bharata* published a special number in his honour.

On the last day, the Swami had suggested the idea for a song to be composed and sung to him, which was done with the help of the great devotee

and actor-dramatist, Srijut Girish Chandra Ghosh. The song opened with the words to the following effect: 'The night of misery is at an end'. His body was cremated at the Belur Math, on the bank of the Ganges. No memorial¹ of any kind marks the spot to tell visitors of its sanctity. But his memory is enshrined in the hearts of those who had the privilege of coming in personal contact with him. His contributions to the growth of the Ramakrishna Order and the Neo-Vedanta movement inaugurated by its illustrious founder Swami Vivekananda, are unique. The few valuable books he has left, as also his utterances and his glorious life of purity, self-effacement and ceaseless service in the cause of his beloved Master and suffering humanity, so far as these are recorded, will remain as his standing monuments.

¹ At present there is an enclosed place with a tablet bearing the names of all the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, including Swami Ramakrishnananda, who were cremated there.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

NOTES ON THE WRITERS OF THE REMINISCENCES

SRI C. RAMASWAMI IYENGAR

SRI C. RAMASWAMI IYENGAR (1871-1932), familiarly known as Ramu was a lay devotee who, together with his cousin Ramanuju (C. Ramanujachariar), played a very important part in the development of the Ramakrishna Movement in Madras City from its very inception. As a young student he had contacted Swami Vivekananda when he visited Madras as a Parivrajaka (wandering ascetic) and afterwards when he came again to Madras following his successful Mission in the West. After Swami Ramakrishnananda came to Madras, he lived in daily contact with him, and he along with his cousin formed his right hand, as it were, in all his work in the City. As such he had every opportunity to study the Swami at close quarters for a very long period. His Reminiscences are therefore most authentic and important.

Professionally he was the Manager of the Office of the Senior Government Inspector of Railways at Madras. But his office work did not stand in the way of his work in the service of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. His close contact with Swami Ramakrishnananda kindled the best elements in him, and he became in his life time one of the most noted philanthropic workers in Madras. The work of the Ramakrishna Students' Home, which Swami Ramakrishnananda entrusted to him at its inception, was his special care, he being its Secretary till the end of his life. He, along with his cousin Ramanuja, worked it up from an orphanage of seven boys into its present posi-

tion of being a noted institution giving free boarding and education to more than 300 poor students. Several other educational institutions, giving tuition to more than ten thousand students, also have grown round the Home, including the Vivekananda College.

SRI P. MANICKASWAMY MUDALIAR

SRI MANICKASWAMY MUDALIAR (1869-1960) was an officer in the Military Accounts Department. Before he joined service and even afterwards, he was in Madras for long periods, and it was during such times that he contacted Swami Ramakrishnananda. His association with the Swami was very intimate. Sri Mudaliar was a confirmed Advaitin, and he was also very dogged and unyielding in philosophical disputation — a trait of character which he displayed even before Swami Ramakrishnananda. Though he was not very highly placed in life, he was a man of great integrity and courage. After retirement from Government service, Sri Mudaliar lived as a lay inmate in Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras for a long time.

SRI M. A. NARAYANA IYENGAR

SRI M. A. NARAYANA IYENGAR (1868-1943), later known as Swami Srivasananda in monastic life, was a high officer in Mysore State service. He had contact with Swami Vivekananda in 1897, and was ever since an ardent follower of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement. He started the Vedanta Society of Bangalore in 1901 and invited Swami Ramakrishnananda to lecture under its auspices. During his official career he took a leading part in establishing the permanent centres at Bangalore and later on at Mysore. In 1911 he took initiation from the Holy Mother at Bangalore. He retired from Government service in 1924 and took Sannyasa from Swami Sivananda, the then President, in the same year. Out of his own resources he formed the Holy Mother

Trust with the income of which he conducted a Vedanta College which gave religious instruction to educated young men, besides free boarding and lodging, in the institution under Gurukula conditions.

SRI K. PADMANABHAN TAMPI

SRI K. PADMANABHAN TAMPI (1867-1940), latter known as Swami Parananda, came from an aristocratic family of the erstwhile Travancore State. Starting life as a Government Pleader, he retired as the Commissioner of Police of the Travancore State. From his early life he was connected with the Ramakrishna Movement, for the spread of which in Kerala, he along with his brother Dr. K. Raman Tampi, had done immense service. He was a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, and about twelve years after his retirement from Government service, he took Sannyasa from Swami Nirmalananda under the monastic name of Swami Parananda.

SISTER DEVAMATA

SISTER DEVAMATA was a nun of American nationality, attached to the Vedanta Centre called Ananda Ashrama conducted by Swami Paramananda at La Crescenta, California in the United States. She was in India during 1908-10, and much of her time in this country was spent at Madras in close contact with Swami Ramakrishnananda. She has left behind two excellent works as a result of her stay in India, known as *Days in an Indian Monastery* and *Sri Ramakrishna and his Disciples*. Both of these are largely based on the conversations she had with Swami Ramakrishnananda. Her book *The Days in an Indian Monastery* is an excellent work on Indian life and culture, and several chapters of it deal exclusively with Swami Ramakrishnananda and his work at Madras and Bangalore. We have quoted profusely from her books in the biographical section. Her reminiscences given in this book form an independent writing giving

an excellent pen picture of Swami Ramakrishnananda and his way of life and thought.

SWAMI VISUDDHANANDA

SWAMI VISUDDHANANDA (1883-1962) joined the Monastic Order of Ramakrishna in 1907 and took Sannyasa also in the very same year. He was a disciple of the Holy Mother. He had stayed in Madras in 1908 with Swami Ramakrishnananda. Even after that he had lived several years at Bangalore and Madras. He became President of the whole Math and Mission in 1962, in which year itself he passed away. He has left a book in Bengali called *Sat Prasanga*, comprising his conversations.

SWAMI SHARVANANDA

SWAMI SHARVANANDA (1885-1970) joined the Monastic Order in 1905. He took initiation from Holy Mother, and took Sannyasa from Swami Brahmananda in 1910. He lived with Swami Ramakrishnananda at Madras for about six months in 1906. Some five years later, immediately after Swami Ramakrishnananda left Madras due to illness, he was appointed as the Head of the Madras Math in 1911 and continued in that position till about 1927. He built the present main building of the Madras Math and its Shrine, and extended its publication and preaching activities. The English magazine, the *Vedanta Kesari*, and the Tamil magazine, *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*, were started by him. An eloquent speaker and a sound scholar, he travelled and preached in Tamilnad, Kerala, Andhra, Ceylon, F.M.S. etc., and was a noted figure in the field of religion in South India. He has left behind a very valuable work in his edition of the Upanishads with English translation and notes, which is perhaps the best existing edition of these difficult scriptural texts, for the common man. He played a leading part in the starting of the Mission Centres in Bombay, Delhi, Karachi, Nagpur, parts of Ceylon etc.

SWAMI MADHAVANANDA

SWAMI MADHAVANANDA (1888-1965) joined the Monastic Order in 1910. He took initiation from the Holy Mother and Sannyasa from Swami Brahmananda. He had occupied almost all the important positions in the service of the Math and the Mission, being the President of the Advaita Ashrama from 1918 to 1927, Head of the San Francisco Vedanta Centre in the States from 1927 to 1929, Assistant Secretary of the Math and Mission from 1929 to 1938, General Secretary from 1938 to 1961 and the President of the whole Math and Mission from 1961 to 1965. He was also a scholar and writer, and has left behind him the following valuable publications: Translations of Sankara's Brihadaranyaka Upanisad Bhashya and Vivekachudamani, Eleventh Chapter of Bhagavata under the title 'Last Message of Sri Krishna', Minor Upanishads, Vairagyasatakam, Vedanta Paribhasha and Meemamsa Paribhasha.

APPENDIX 2

SAYINGS OF SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

I. AS RECORDED BY SRI B. VENKANNA, B.A.,L.T.¹

1. Regard God as the highest, and give up everything for the sake of God.
2. Practise meditation on God every day.
3. Love all, teach all, and take every one to the highest goal, viz., realisation of God, irrespective of caste, creed, sect or nationality.
4. Forgive and forget all injuries received from others.
5. Take every one where he or she stands, without blaming them for their worldly or spiritual poverty and ignorance, and help them on until each one realises the highest Jnanam, Bhakti and eternal freedom.
8. It is the function of education and religion to help each one so as to manifest completely that perfection and divinity which is already inside each one, and which is one's inalienable birthright.
9. The difference between man and man is not one of kind, but of degree ; one manifests more of divinity than another ; and the purest soul manifests most. Men like Sri Ramakrishna only appear to be men, but in reality they are ever living in the highest spiritual plane holding communion with God, entirely forgetful of their body, mind and ego. When such ones come down to a lower plane, they begin to teach spiritual truths, and immediately

¹ *The Vedanta Kesari*, April 1930.

after, fly back to God, whom they never forget even in their dreams. Such men are the salt of the earth, as it is said in the Bible. God sends such men to each part of the earth, whenever there is need. So no one need fear that God forgets us — poor mortals.

10. God will surely come to each one of us if we only earnestly and sincerely pray to Him as Prahlada did.
11. God is all-powerful and all-gracious, and ever ready to help each one of us; it is our fault if we forget Him, and love only transient pleasures of the external world.
12. We can never love God *and* the world, and hope to see Him.
13. The perfect Jnani sees nothing but God; whereas the perfect Bhakta is ever with God.
14. One should realise God first, and forsake one's individual salvation and live to enjoy the purer pleasure of doing good to the world like Lord Buddha.
15. Jnanam is great, but it cannot by itself give everlasting peace.
16. Unselfish devotion and service to a Mahapurusha or all-knowing sage can alone give eternal peace.
17. Do good and be good, and thus escape all evil and suffering.
18. Evil is ultimately good, for without evil we cannot think and find ways and means of overcoming it. Because much of our knowledge consists in defining evil and finding its remedy, the existence of evil is a means of enriching our knowledge. There would be no progress, no civilisation if there were no evil. The highest knowledge and experience will be neces-

sary to combat evils and successfully overcome them. Evils are thus at the very foundation of our wisdom. Therefore we ought not to complain of evils, but be grateful to them.

19. Good and evil are the observe and reverse of the same coin as it were ; for what is good under one set of conditions is bad under a different set of conditions. It is good for a healthy athlete to consume much ghee, but it is death to a typhoid patient to consume the same quantity. Hence in reality nothing is really good or bad. It depends entirely on circumstances.
20. As Sri Krishna says in the Gita, evil is the result of our work done with attachment to fruits. If we work without attachment, then we suffer no misery. Do any amount of good to the world, but be not attached. Do not expect any personal profit of any sort ; be absolutely unselfish — this is the advice of Sri Krishna.
21. God-realisation can come only during moments of intense misery and suffering. So we ought not to fear misery in any form, but ought to welcome it and manifest our infinite power of resistance and endurance.
22. Immortality can be reached by renunciation alone, and never by works, progeny or wealth. So any search after worldly treasure or heavenly pleasure is not the right way to secure eternal life, knowledge and bliss. We have to renounce everything that is ephemeral and think of God only all the twenty-four hours of the day for ever and ever, and then only God will be pleased to confer on us the state of Satchidananda or eternal life, knowledge and bliss.
23. God is very hard to please. He is pleased only by those who manifest the maximum amount of purity, humility and unselfish love, and He tests each appli-

cant to His grace and mercy by inflicting the most diabolical misery on him, and at last saves those who exhibit supernatural patience, perseverance and uncomplaining obedience to His will. This being God's nature, there is no use of our blaming Him. We should, like Christ, ever say, "Thy will be done".

24. Both good and evil exist only in the mind, and not outside in the external world ; and so if we wish to kill evil alone or good alone, it is impossible, and therefore we shall have to kill both good and evil ; i.e., we shall have to kill our mind, and then only we shall be eternally conscious of our infinite nature which is all-blissful. This is the view of Vedanta.
25. Egoism is the most persistent and obstinate Devil in us ; and unless we receive help from God, we cannot conquer the Devil. Unless we conquer the Devil in us — the old Adam in us, selfishness in us, our lower nature — we cannot see God. The moment egoism dies or is rendered powerless, we have the vision of God.
26. No man can be completely satisfied unless he can live for ever, unless he can know everything, and unless he can be happy for ever and ever. This state can be attained by one and all by the practice of Raja Yoga under the guidance of an experienced Yogi. This is the method best suited to all atheists, agnostics and pure materialists.
27. Lord Buddha declared that Nirvana is the end of sorrow, and that every one can realise that state by means of the highest Jnana. Without Jnana, evil cannot be destroyed. To get the highest Jnana we must "be good and do good" to all men and animals.
28. Ahimsa or non-injury by thought, word and deed will lead every one, as the Jains say, to the supreme goal.

II. AS RECORDED BY SISTER DEVAMATA¹

1. 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.
2. Our experiences are like pieces of glass which reveal more or less our 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 outside.
3. 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.
4. A man who realises God will have to be realizing Him throughout eternity. No power can make him forget Him.
5. 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.
6. 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 ; what the eyes can do, the ears cannot. Therefore being one yet I

¹ In her book *Days in an Indian Monastery*.

am many. 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.

7. 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.
8. In the West they have found out evolution, while here in India we have found out revolution — the Samsara Chakra or the wheel of creation. We have discovered that everything moves in cycles. In the week we have Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday etc. The months are January, February, March and again next year the same 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 would go on throughout eternity, still the result would be finite, and compared to infinity it would be infinitesimally small.
9. 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 the life of the Universe. The rotation is endless.
10. 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 a 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.

11. Great Incarnations like Christ, Krishna, Buddha were perfectly clear mirrors which gave us a perfect reflection of God or Truth. Christianity existed before Christ ; Christ was only the mouthpiece. Mohammedanism existed before Mohammed ; Mohammed was only the mouthpiece. Each was a reflector of the Eternal Truth. 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 reveals the Truth, I belong to Buddha.' So each great teacher has his followers who believe that the Truth can come from him alone ; but all teachers reflect the same Truth.
12. Human nature is all the same, dresses differ. One man may wear a coat and trousers. I may wear this simple cloth ; but underneath, 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 realise 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.
13. In this apparent battle of life, God is the infinite side, and matter the finite side. The Infinite is bound to

gain 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.

14. 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 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.
15. There was once a great Tyagi (one who had renounced). He cared for nothing in this world, only he had a little love for his Koupinam (loincloth). He kept it hanging on a tree and sometimes rats used to come and gnaw it. This annoyed him very much. 'What,' he would say, 'I have nothing in this world but this Koupinam, and the rats want to take it 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 food, 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.
16. Our Master, Sri Ramakrishna, used to say that 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 some selfish desire, it 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 desires; but somewhere in our mind there lingers some remnant; and as from a spark left in the corner of the hearth may come a big fire, so out of that small remnant may spring a huge fire of desire.

17. Meditation means complete self-abandonment. Meditation requires complete 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.
18. 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 created. You must go beyond your mind and senses, then meditation will come of itself. This is the only way to get the inner vision. These senses are made for the creation, not for the creator.
19. 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 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 the noon time, just when the sun reaches its highest point and begins to drop down towards night. The voice rises to the highest pitch at that hour and even the cries of the street-vendors grow shriller. Sound and mind are inseparably connected. Sound being the primary expression of mind, the mind also reaches its greatest height at noon-tide.
20. The question was asked : 'Could not God free us from ignorance at once if He wished?' Swami Ramakrishnananda assured, 'Surely. But He is so infinitely loving that He does not like to molest us. Only when we turn all our desires 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, not 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.

21. 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.

III. FROM A LETTER TO A QUESTIONER¹

1. Our vision is but limited. There are many beings living beyond our ken. Microscopes and telescopes increase the power of our vision. There is another and far superior method to make our vision limitless and that is by disentangling from their seats, the eyes, which are limited by their very nature. The eyes only circumscribe our vision, and although they may be helped by microscopes and telescopes, thereby their limitations never leave them. If by means of introspection, you can gradually separate the powers of your vision from its limited seats, the eyes, the optic nerves, and the centre in the

¹ *Prabuddha Bharatha*, October 1911.

brain, you will make that power intense, and see Yakshas, Vidyadharas, Siddhas, Charanas and Kinnaras and many Gods and demi-Gods. The Infinite appears to be caught in the network of the nerves. By means of mental concentration, you can disentangle It from your nerves, your mind and your self (ego).

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