

VEDANTA

and the West

158

VIVEKANANDA CENTENARY NUMBER

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

Introduction to Vivekananda

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA

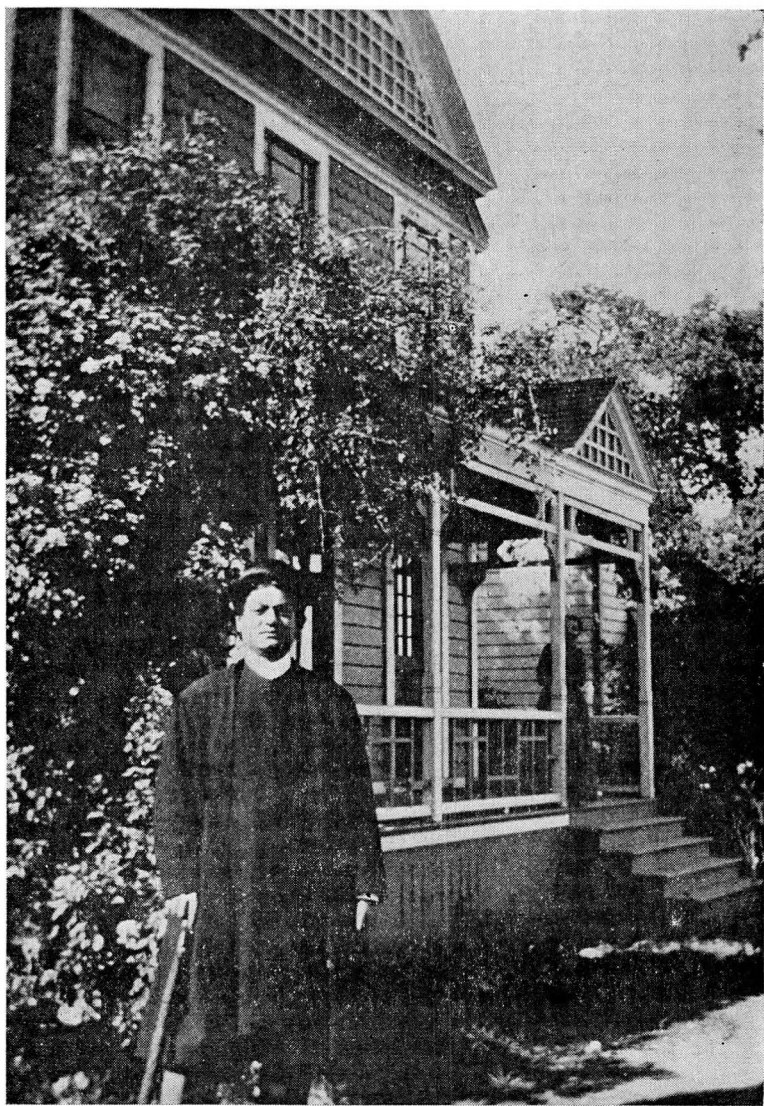
Vivekananda and His Message

Swamiji in Southern California



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VEDANTA

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158



VEDANTA SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Vedanta Press

1946 VEDANTA PLACE • HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIFORNIA

First Published November-December, 1962

Six numbers of *Vedanta and the West* are issued yearly. Subscriptions are accepted at \$3.00 for six issues, postage paid, \$5.00 for twelve issues, or \$6.50 for eighteen issues. Published issues are available at fifty cents each through booksellers or by writing the publisher.

INDIAN AGENT:
Sri Ramakrishna Math,
Mylapore,
Madras 4

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Printed in the United States of America

C O N T E N T S

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INTRODUCTION TO VIVEKANANDA

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

ONE MORNING early in September 1893, a lady named Mrs. George W. Hale looked out through a window of her handsome home on Chicago's Dearborn Avenue and saw, seated on the opposite side of the street, a young man of oriental appearance who was dressed in a turban and the ocher robe of a Hindu monk.

Mrs. Hale was, fortunately, not a conventional woman. She did not call the police to tell the stranger to move on; she did not even ring for the servants to go and ask him what he wanted. She noticed that he was unshaven and that his clothes were crumpled and dirty, but she was aware, also, that there was a kind of royal air about him. There he sat, perfectly composed, meditative, serene. He did not look as if he had lost his way. (And, indeed, he was quite the opposite of lost, for he had just resigned himself to the will of God.) Mrs. Hale suddenly made a most intelligent guess; coming out of her house and crossing the street, she asked him politely, "Sir, are you a delegate to the Parliament of Religions?"

She was answered with equal politeness, in fluent educated English. The stranger introduced himself as Swami Vivekananda and told her that he had indeed come to Chicago to attend the meetings of the Parliament, although he was not officially a delegate. As a matter of fact, he had first

arrived in Chicago from India in the middle of July, only to find that the Parliament's opening had been postponed till September. His money was running short and someone had advised him that he would be able to live more cheaply in Boston, so he had taken the train there. On the train, he had met a lady who had invited him to stay at her home, which was called "Breezy Meadows." Since then, he had given talks to various church and social groups, been asked a lot of silly questions about his country, been laughed at by children because of his funny clothes. The day before yesterday, Professor J. H. Wright, who taught Greek at Harvard University, had bought him a ticket back to Chicago, assuring him that he would be welcome at the Parliament, even though he had no invitation: "To ask you, Swami, for credentials is like asking the sun if it has permission to shine." The Professor had also given him the address of the committee which was in charge of the delegates to the Parliament, but this address Vivekananda somehow lost on his way to Chicago. He tried to get information from passers-by on the street but, as ill luck would have it, the station was situated in the midst of a district where German was chiefly spoken, and the Swami could not make himself understood. Meanwhile, night was coming on. The Swami did not know how to obtain or use a city directory and so was at a loss how to find a suitable hotel. It seemed to him simpler to sleep in a big empty boxcar in the freight yards of the railroad. Next morning, hungry and rumpled, he woke, as he put it, "smelling fresh water," and had begun to walk in a direction which brought him, sure enough, to the edge of Lake Michigan. But the wealthy homes of Lake Shore Drive proved inhospitable; he had knocked at the doors of several and had been rudely turned away. At length, after further wanderings, he had found himself here, and had decided to go no farther

but to sit down and await whatever event God might send. And now, Vivekananda concluded, "What a romantic deliverance! How strange are the ways of the Lord!"

Mrs. Hale must have laughed as she listened to this; for Vivekananda always related his adventures and misadventures with humor, and his own deep chuckles were most infectious. They went back together into the house, where the Swami was invited to wash and shave and eat breakfast. Mrs. Hale then accompanied him to the headquarters of the committee, which arranged for his accommodation with the other oriental delegates to the Parliament.

THE IDEA of holding a Parliament of Religions in Chicago had been conceived at least five years before this, in relation to the main project of the World's Columbian Exposition, which was to be held to commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus. The Exposition was designed to demonstrate Western Man's material progress, especially in science and technology. It was agreed, however, that all forms of progress must be represented, and there were congresses devoted to such varied themes as woman's progress, the public press, medicine and surgery, temperance, commerce and finance, music, government and legal reform, economic science, and—strange as it may sound to us nowadays—Sunday rest. And since, to quote the official language of the committee, "faith in a Divine Power has been, like the sun, a light-giving and fructifying potency in Man's intellectual and moral development," there had also to be a Parliament of Religions.

One may smile at all the pomposity, but it must be agreed that the calling of such a parliament was an historic act of liberalism. This was probably the first time in the

history of the world that representatives of all the major religions had been brought together in one place, with freedom to express their beliefs. Paradoxically, the most genuinely liberal of the Parliament's organizers were the agnostics; for they were interested solely in promoting interreligious tolerance. The zealous Christians took a less impartial view, as was only to be expected. In the words of a Catholic priest: "It is not true that all religions are equally good; but neither is it true that all religions except one are no good at all. The Christianity of the future, more just than that of the past, will assign to each its place in that work of evangelical preparation which the elder doctors of the Church discern in heathenism itself, and which is not yet completed." In other words, heathenism has its uses as a preparation for Christianity.

But what really mattered was the acceptance of an invitation to preside at the Parliament by Cardinal Gibbons, leader of the American Catholics. This was all the more valuable because the Archbishop of Canterbury had refused to attend, objecting that the very meeting of such a parliament implied the equality of all religions. In addition to the Christians, the Buddhists, the Hindus, the Moslems, the Jews, the Confucianists, the Shintoists, the Zoroastrians, and a number of smaller sects and groups were represented. Vivekananda could, of course, be counted as a recruit to the Hindu delegation; but in fact, as we shall see, he was standing for something larger than any one sect; the ancient Indian doctrine of the universality of spiritual truth.

When the Parliament opened, on the morning of September 11, Vivekananda immediately attracted notice as one of the most striking figures seated on the platform, with his splendid robe, yellow turban, and handsome bronze face. In his photographs, one is struck by the largeness of his features

—they have something of the lion about them—the broad strong nose, the full expressive lips, the great dark burning eyes. Eyewitnesses were also impressed by the majesty of his presence. Though powerfully built, Vivekananda was not above medium height, but he seems always to have created the effect of bigness. It was said of him that, despite his size, he moved with a natural masculine grace; “like a great cat,” as one lady expressed it. In America, he was frequently taken for an Indian prince or aristocrat, because of his quiet but assured air of command.

Others commented on his look of being “inly-pleased”; he seemed able to draw upon inner reserves of strength at all times, and there was a humorous, watchful gleam in his eyes which suggested calm, amused detachment of spirit. Everyone responded to the extraordinarily deep, bell-like beauty of his voice: certain of its vibrations caused a mysterious psychic excitement among his hearers. And no doubt this had something to do with the astonishing reaction of the audience to Vivekananda’s first speech.

During that first morning’s session, Vivekananda’s turn came to speak: but he excused himself and asked for more time. Later, in a letter to friends in India, he confessed that he had been suffering from stage fright. All the other delegates had prepared addresses; he had none. However, this hesitation only increased the general interest in him.

At length, during the afternoon, Vivekananda rose to his feet. In his deep voice, he began, “Sisters and Brothers of America”—and the entire audience, many hundred people, clapped and cheered wildly for two whole minutes. Hitherto, the audience had certainly been well-disposed; some of the speakers had been greeted enthusiastically and all of them with sufficient politeness. But nothing like this demonstration had taken place. No doubt the vast majority of those present

hardly knew why they had been so powerfully moved. The appearance, even the voice, of Vivekananda cannot fully explain it. A large gathering has its own strange kind of subconscious telepathy, and this one must have been somehow aware that it was in the presence of that most unusual of all beings, a man whose words express exactly what he is. When Vivekananda said, "Sisters and Brothers," he actually meant that he regarded the American women and men before him as his sisters and brothers: the well-worn oratorical phrase became simple truth.

As soon as they would let him, the Swami continued his speech. It was quite a short one, pleading for universal tolerance and stressing the common basis of all religions. When it was over, there was more, thunderous applause. A lady who was present recalled later, "I saw scores of women walking over the benches to get near him, and I said to myself, 'Well, my lad, if you can resist that onslaught you are indeed a God!'" Such onslaughts were to become a part of the daily discipline of Vivekananda's life in America.

He made several more speeches during the days that followed, including an important statement of the nature and ideals of Hinduism. By the time the Parliament had come to an end, he was, beyond comparison, its most popular speaker. He had his pick of social invitations. A lecture bureau offered to organize a tour for him; and he accepted.

In those days, when the Frontier was still a living memory, one did not have to go far from the great cities to find oneself in the pioneer world of the tent-show. Politicians, philosophers, writers, the great Sarah Bernhardt herself—all were treated more or less as circus attractions. Even today, the name "Swami" is associated with theatrical trickery, and most Americans are quite unaware that those who have the right to call themselves by it have taken formal monastic

vows; that it is, in fact, a title just as worthy of respect as that of "Father" in the Catholic Church. Vivekananda called himself Swami, and therefore, in the eyes of the public, he was regarded as some kind of an entertainer; he might hope for applause but he could expect no consideration for his privacy. He had to face the crudest publicity, the most brutal curiosity, hospitality which was lavish but ruthless and utterly exhausting. It exhausted him and eventually wrecked his health but, for the time being, he was equal to it and even seemed to enjoy it. He was outspoken to the point of bluntness, never at a loss for repartee, never thrown off balance even when he roared with momentary indignation because of some idiotic question about his "heathen" countrymen. No one could laugh at him as he laughed at himself; for no one else could appreciate the rich and subtle joke of his very presence in these surroundings—a monk preaching in a circus!

Vivekananda had come to America to speak for his native land. He wanted to tell Americans about India's poverty and appeal for their help. But he also had a message to the West. He asked his hearers to forsake their materialism and learn from the ancient spirituality of the Hindus. What he was working for was an exchange of values. He recognized great virtues in the West—energy and initiative and courage—which he found lacking among Indians; and he had not come to America in a spirit of negative criticism. It is significant that when, during the earliest days of his visit, he was taken to see a prison near Boston, his reaction was as follows:

How benevolently the inmates are treated, how they are reformed and sent back as useful members of society—how grand, how beautiful, you must see to believe! And

oh, how my heart ached to think of what we think of the poor, the low, in India. They have no chance, no escape, no way to climb up. They sink lower and lower every day.

Yet he offended many by his outspokenness. "In New York," he used to say smilingly, "I have emptied entire halls." And no wonder! To the ears of rigid fundamentalists, his teaching of Man's essential divinity must have sounded utterly blasphemous, especially as it was presented in his picturesque, serio-comic phrases: "Look at the ocean and not at the wave; see no difference between ant and angel. Every worm is the brother of the Nazarene. . . . Obey the Scriptures until you are strong enough to do without them. . . . Every man in Christian countries has a huge cathedral on his head, and on top of that a book. . . . The range of idols is from wood and stone to Jesus and Buddha. . . ."

Vivekananda taught that God is within each one of us, and that each one of us was born to rediscover his own God-nature. His favorite story was of a lion who imagined himself to be a sheep, until another lion showed him his reflection in a pool. "And you are lions," he would tell his hearers, "you are pure, infinite and perfect souls. . . . He, for whom you have been weeping and praying in churches and temples . . . is your own Self." He was the prophet of self-reliance, of individual search and effort.

He spoke little about the cults of Hinduism—the particular devotion to Rama, Kali, Vishnu, or Krishna which is practiced by the devotees of the various sects. It was only occasionally that Vivekananda referred to his own personal cult and revealed that he, too, had a Master whom he regarded as a divine incarnation—a Master named Ramakrishna, who had died less than ten years previously, and whom he himself had intimately known.

Vivekananda was a very great devotee; but he did not proclaim his devotion to all comers. His refusal to do so was a considered decision. Speaking of his work in America after returning to India, he said: "If I had preached the personality of Ramakrishna, I might have converted half the world; but that kind of conversion is short-lived. So instead I preached Ramakrishna's principles. If people accept the principles, they will eventually accept the personality."

AT THE TIME of the Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda was only thirty years old: he had been born in Calcutta on January 12, 1863. The name of his family was Datta, and his parents gave him the name Narendranath; Naren for short. As a monk, he had wandered about India under various names: he assumed the name of Vivekananda only just before embarking for the United States, at the suggestion of the Maharaja of Khetri, who, with the Maharaja of Mysore, paid the expenses of his journey. *Viveka* is a Sanskrit word meaning discrimination, more particularly in the philosophic sense of discrimination between the real (God) and the unreal (the phenomena recognized by our sense-perceptions). *Ananda* means divine bliss, or the peace which is obtained through enlightenment: it is a frequently used suffix to any name which is assumed by a monk.

When Naren was in his middle teens, he started going to college in Calcutta. He was a good-looking, athletic youth and extremely intelligent. He was also a fine singer and could play several musical instruments. Already, he showed a great power for leadership among the boys of his own age. His teachers felt sure that he was destined to make a mark in life.

At that period, Calcutta was the chief port of entry for

European ideas and cultural influences; and no young Indian student could remain unaffected by them. To meet the challenge of missionary Christianity, a movement had been formed to modernize Hinduism—to do away with ancient ritual and priestcraft, to emancipate women, and to abolish child marriage. This movement was called the Brahmo Samaj. Naren joined it, but soon found its aims superficial; they did not satisfy his own spiritual needs. He read Hume, Herbert Spencer, and John Stuart Mill, and began to call himself an agnostic. His parents urged him to marry, but he refused, feeling that he must remain chaste and unattached so as to be ready to devote himself body and soul to a great cause. What cause? He did not yet exactly know. He was still looking for someone and something in which he could wholeheartedly believe. Meanwhile, his restless and fearless spirit was on fire for action.

It so happened that a relative of Naren's was a devotee of Ramakrishna, and that one of Naren's teachers, Professor Hastie, was among the few Englishmen who had ever met him. What these two had to say about Ramakrishna excited Naren's curiosity. Then, in November 1881, he was invited to sing at a house where Ramakrishna was a guest. They had a brief conversation and Ramakrishna invited the young man to come and visit him at the Dakshineswar Temple, on the Ganges a few miles outside Calcutta, where he lived.

From the first, Naren was intrigued and puzzled by Ramakrishna's personality. He had never met anyone quite like this slender, bearded man in his middle forties who had the innocent directness of a child. He had about him an air of intense delight, and he was perpetually crying aloud or bursting into song to express his joy, his joy in God the Mother Kali, who evidently existed for him as a live presence. Ramakrishna's talk was a blend of philosophical subtlety

and homely parable. He spoke with a slight stammer, in the dialect of his native Bengal village, and sometimes used coarse farmyard words with the simple frankness of a peasant. By this time, his fame had spread, and many distinguished Bengalis were his constant visitors, including Keshab Sen, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj. Keshab loved and admired Ramakrishna in spite of his own reformist principles; for Ramakrishna was a ritualist and an orthodox Hindu, and Keshab's social concern seemed to him merely an amusing and necessarily fruitless game. The world, according to a Hindu saying, is like the curly tail of a dog—how can you ever straighten it out?

So Naren went to Dakshineswar with a divided mind—half of him eager for self-dedication and devotion; the other, western-educated half, sceptical, impatient of superstition. When Naren and a few of his friends came into Ramakrishna's room, Ramakrishna asked him to sing. Naren did so. The extraordinary scene which followed can best be described in his own words:

Well, I sang that song, and then, soon after, he suddenly rose, took me by the hand and led me out on to the porch north of his room, shutting the door behind him. It was locked from the outside, so we were alone. I thought he was going to give me some advice in private. But, to my utter amazement, he began shedding tears of joy—floods of them—as he held my hand, and talking to me tenderly, as if to an old friend. “Ah!” he said, “you’ve come so late! How could you be so unkind—keeping me waiting so long? My ears are almost burnt off, listening to the talk of worldly people. Oh, how I’ve longed to unburden my heart to someone who can understand everything—my innermost experience!” He went on like this, amidst his sobbing. And then he folded his palms and

addressed me solemnly, "Lord—I know you! You are Nara, the ancient sage, the incarnation of Narayana. You have come to earth to take away the sorrows of mankind . . ." And so forth.

I was absolutely dumbfounded by his behavior. "Who is this man I've come to see?" I said to myself. "He must be raving mad! Why, I'm nobody—the son of Vishwanath Datta—and he dares to call me Nara!" But I kept quiet and let him go on. Presently he went back into his room and brought me out some sweets—sugar candy and butter; and he fed me with his own hands. I kept telling him, "Please give them to me—I want to share them with my friends," but it was no good. He wouldn't stop until I'd eaten all of them. Then he seized me by the hand and said, "Promise me you'll come back here alone, soon!" He was so pressing that I had to say yes. Then I went back with him to join my friends.

This was certainly a searching psychological test for an eighteen-year-old college intellectual! But Naren's intuition went much deeper than his sophistication. He was unable to dismiss Ramakrishna from his mind as a mere eccentric. If this man was mad, then even his madness was somehow holy; Naren felt that he had been in the presence of a great saint, and already he began to love him.

At their second meeting, Ramakrishna revealed himself in a quite different aspect, as a being endowed with supernatural and terrifying power. This time, Naren found him alone in his room. He greeted Naren affectionately and asked him to sit down beside him. Then, as Naren described it later:

muttering something to himself, with his eyes fixed on me, he slowly drew near me . . . in the twinkling of an eye, he placed his right foot on my body. At his touch, I

had an entirely new experience. With my eyes wide open, I saw that the walls and everything else in the room were whirling around, vanishing into nothingness; the whole universe, together with my own individuality, was about to be lost in an all-encompassing, mysterious Void! I was terribly frightened and thought I must be facing death—for the loss of my individuality meant nothing less than that to me. I couldn't control myself: I cried out, "What are you doing to me! I have my parents at home!" At this, he laughed aloud. Stroking my chest, he said, "All right, that's enough for now. Everything will come in time." The wonderful thing was, as soon as he'd said that, the whole experience came to an end. I was myself again. And everything inside and outside the room was just as it had been before.

Ramakrishna had, by his touch, taken Naren to the very brink of that superconscious experience which the Hindus call *samadhi*. In *samadhi*, all sense of personal identity vanishes and the real Self, the indwelling Godhead, is known. The Godhead, being a unity, is experienced as a sort of Void, in contrast to the multiplicity of objects which make up our ordinary sense-consciousness. Within that Void, personal identity is lost—and loss of identity must necessarily seem, to those who are not prepared for it, like death.

For Ramakrishna, in his almost unimaginably high state of spiritual consciousness, *samadhi* was a daily experience, and the awareness of God's presence never left him. Vivekananda recalls that, "I crept near him and asked him the question I had been asking others all my life: 'Do you believe in God, sir?' 'Yes,' he replied. 'Can you prove it, sir?' 'Yes.' 'How?' 'Because I see Him just as I see you here, only much more intensely.' That impressed me at once. For the first time, I found a man who dared to say that he saw God,

that religion was a reality—to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world.”

After this, Naren became a frequent visitor to Dakshineswar. He found himself gradually drawn into the circle of youthful disciples—most of them about his own age—whom Ramakrishna was training to follow the monastic life. But Naren did not yield to this influence easily. He kept asking himself if Ramakrishna’s power could not be explained away as hypnotism. He refused, at first, to have anything to do with the worship of Kali, saying that this was mere superstition. And Ramakrishna seemed pleased at his scruples. He used to say: “Test me as the money-changers test their coins. You mustn’t believe me till you’ve tested me thoroughly.” And, in turn, he tested Naren, ignoring him for weeks on end to find if this would stop him from coming to Dakshineswar. When it did not, Ramakrishna was delighted and congratulated him on his inner strength. “Anyone else,” he said, “would have left me long ago.”

Indeed, Naren’s temperamental doubt is one of his most inspiring qualities. Doubt is something we have all experienced, and it should reassure us greatly that this keen observer took nothing for granted. It may even seem to us, as we read the life of Ramakrishna and how often he granted Naren the deepest revelations, that Naren doubted too long and too much. But we must remember that Naren’s faith was no facile thing. He doubted greatly because he was capable of believing greatly. For most of us, the consequences of conversion to a belief are not very far-reaching. For Naren, to believe meant absolute self-dedication to the object of his belief. No wonder he hesitated! No wonder his inner struggles were so severe!

In 1885, Ramakrishna developed cancer of the throat. As it became increasingly evident that their Master would not

be with them much longer, the young disciples drew more and more closely together. Naren was their leader, together with the boy named Rakhal who later became Swami Brahmananda. One day, when Ramakrishna lay in the last stages of his illness, Naren was meditating in a room downstairs. Suddenly, he lost outward consciousness and went into samadhi. For a moment, he was terrified and cried out, "Where is my body?" Another of the disciples thought he must be dying and ran upstairs to tell their Master. "Let him stay that way for a while," said Ramakrishna with a smile, "he has been teasing me to give him this experience long enough." Much later, Naren came into Ramakrishna's room, full of joy and peace. "Now Mother has shown you everything," Ramakrishna told him. "But I shall keep the key. When you have done Mother's work, you will find the treasure again." This was only one of several occasions on which Ramakrishna made it clear that he had destined Naren for a mission of teaching in the world.

On August 15, 1836, Ramakrishna uttered the name of Kali in a clear ringing voice and passed into the final samadhi. At noon next day, the doctor pronounced him dead.

The boys felt that they must hold together, and a devotee found them a house at Baranagore, about halfway between Calcutta and Dakshineswar, which they could use for their monastery. It was a dilapidated old place, with cobras under the floor, which could be rented cheaply because it was supposed to be haunted. Here they installed the ashes of Ramakrishna within a shrine, which they worshiped daily. Encouraged by Naren, they resolved to renounce the world; later they took the monastic vows in the prescribed fashion.

There were only fifteen of them. They had almost no money and few friends. Sometimes they were altogether without food, at others they lived only on boiled rice, salt, and

bitter herbs. Each had two pieces of loincloth, nothing more. They owned a set of clothes in common, however, to be worn by anyone who had to go out into the city. They slept on straw mats on the floor. Yet they joked and laughed continually, sang hymns and engaged in eager philosophic discussions; they were silent only when they meditated. At all times they felt Ramakrishna's presence in their midst. Far from regarding him with awe and sadness, they could even make fun of him. A visitor to the house describes how Naren mimicked Ramakrishna going into ecstasy, while the others roared with laughter.

But gradually the boys became restless for the life of the wandering monk. With staff and begging bowl, they wandered all over India, visiting shrines and places of pilgrimage, preaching, begging, passing months of meditation in lonely huts. Sometimes they were entertained by rajas or wealthy devotees; much more often, they shared the food of the very poor.

Such experiences were particularly valuable to Naren. During the years 1890-93, he acquired the first-hand knowledge of India's hunger, misery, nobility, and spiritual wisdom which he was to carry with him on his journey to the West. After traveling the whole length of the country he reached Cape Comorin, and here he had a vision. He saw that India had a mission in the modern world as a force for spiritual regeneration, but he also saw that this force could not become effective until India's social conditions had been radically improved. Funds must be raised for schools and hospitals; thousands of teachers and workers must be recruited and organized. It was then that he formed his decision to go to the United States in search of help. And this decision was later confirmed when the Raja of Ramnad suggested that he should attend the then newly announced Chi-

cago Parliament of Religions. Thus the specific opportunity was related to Naren's general intention. At the end of May 1893, he sailed from Bombay, via Hong Kong and Japan, to Vancouver; from there he went on by train to Chicago.

AFTER the closing of the Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda spent nearly two whole years lecturing in various parts of the eastern and central United States, appearing chiefly in Chicago, Detroit, Boston, and New York. By the spring of 1895, he was desperately weary and in poor health; but, characteristically, he made light of it. "Are you never serious, Swamiji?" someone once asked him, perhaps with a hint of reproach. "Oh yes," he replied, "when I have the belly-ache." He could even see the funny side of the many cranks and healers who unmercifully pestered him, hoping to steal a reflection of his glory. In his letters he refers jokingly to "the sect of Mrs. Whirlpool" and to a certain mental healer "of metaphysical, chemico, physical-religioso, what-not."

At the same time he met and made an impression on people of a more serious kind—Robert Ingersoll the agnostic, Nikola Tesla the inventor, Madame Calvé the singer. And, most important of all, he attracted a few students whose interest and enthusiasm were not temporary; who were prepared to dedicate the rest of their lives to the practice of his teaching. In June 1895, he was invited to bring a dozen of these to a house in Thousand Island Park on the St. Lawrence River. Here, for nearly two months, he taught them informally, as Ramakrishna had taught him and his brother disciples. Nobody who was present ever forgot this period, and it must certainly have been the happiest part of Vivekananda's first visit to America.

In August, he sailed for France and England, returning

to New York in December. It was then that, at the urgent request of his devotees, he founded the first of the Vedanta Societies in America: the Vedanta Society of New York. (Vedanta means the nondualistic philosophy which is expounded in the Vedas, the most ancient of Hindu Scriptures; and it is, of course, in line with Vivekananda's general beliefs—referred to above—that he did not call his foundation "The Ramakrishna Society.") It was then, also, that he received two academic offers, the chair of Eastern Philosophy at Harvard and a similar position at Columbia. He declined both, saying that, as a wandering monk, he could not settle down to work of this kind. In any case, he was longing to return to India. In April, he sailed for England, which was to be the first stage of his journey home.

From England, he took with him two of his most faithful and energetic disciples, Captain and Mrs. Sevier—also J. J. Goodwin, an Englishman whom he had first met in America and who had become the recorder of his lectures and teachings. Later, he was to be followed to India by Margaret Noble, the Irishwoman who became Sister Nivedita and devoted the rest of her life to the education of Indian women and the cause of India's independence. All of these eventually died in India.

Vivekananda landed in Ceylon in the middle of January 1897. From there on, his journey to Calcutta was a triumphal progress. His countrymen had followed the accounts of his American lectures in the newspapers. Perhaps Vivekananda's success had sometimes been exaggerated. But they quite rightly regarded his visit to the West as a symbolic victory far exceeding in its proportions the mere amount of money he had collected for his cause or the number of disciples he had made. Indeed, one may claim that no Indian before Vivekananda had ever made Americans and Englishmen accept

him on such terms—not as a subservient ally, not as an avowed opponent, but as a sincere well-wisher and friend, equally ready to teach and to learn, to ask for and to offer help. Who else had stood, as he stood, impartially between East and West, prizing the virtues and condemning the defects of both cultures? Who else could represent in his own person Young India of the Nineties in synthesis with Ancient India of the Vedas? Who else could stand forth as India's champion against poverty and oppression and yet sincerely praise American idealism and British singleness of purpose? Such was Vivekananda's greatness.

In the midst of all the adulation, Vivekananda never forgot who he was: the disciple of Ramakrishna and the equal brother of his fellow monks. On May 1, 1897, he called a meeting of the monastic and householder disciples of Ramakrishna in order to establish their work on an organized basis. What Vivekananda proposed was an integration of educational, philanthropic, and religious activities; and it was thus that the Ramakrishna Mission and the Ramakrishna Math, or monastery, came into existence. The Mission went to work immediately, taking part in famine and plague relief and founding its first hospitals and schools. Brahmananda was elected as its president, and to him Vivekananda handed over all the money he had collected in America and Europe. Having done this, he was obliged to ask for a few pennies in order to take the ferryboat across the Ganges. Henceforward, he insisted on sharing the poverty of his brother monks.

The Math was consecrated some time later, at Belur, a short distance downriver from Dakshineswar Temple, on the opposite bank of the Ganges. This Belur Math is still the chief monastery of the Ramakrishna Order, which now has nearly a hundred centers in different parts of India and neighboring Asian lands, devoted either to the contemplative

life or to social service, or to a combination of both. The Ramakrishna Mission has its own hospitals and dispensaries, its own colleges and high schools, industrial and agricultural schools, libraries and publishing houses, with monks of the Order in charge of them.

In June 1899, Vivekananda sailed for a second visit to the Western world, taking with him Nivedita and Swami Turiyananda, one of his brother monks. This time he went by way of Europe and England, but he spent most of the next year in America. He went to California, and left Turiyananda to teach in San Francisco. It was Vivekananda's wish to found a number of Vedanta centers in the West. At the present day, there are ten centers in the United States, one in the Argentine, one in England and one in France.

By the time he returned to India, Vivekananda was a very sick man; he had said himself that he did not expect to live much longer. Yet he was happy and calm—glad, it seemed, to feel a release from the anxious energy which had driven him throughout his earlier years. Now he longed only for the peace of contemplation. Just before leaving America, he wrote a beautiful and remarkably self-revealing letter to a friend:

I am glad I was born, glad I suffered so, glad I did make big blunders, glad to enter peace. Whether this body will fall and release me or I enter into freedom in the body, the old man is gone, gone for ever, never to come back again! Behind my work was ambition, behind my love was personality, behind my purity was fear. Now they are vanishing and I drift.

Some say that Vivekananda's departure from this life, on July 4, 1902, at the Belur Math, had the appearance of a

premeditated act. For several months previously, he had been releasing himself from various responsibilities, and training successors. His health was better. He ate his midday meal with relish, talked philosophy and went for a two-mile walk. In the evening, he passed into deep meditation, and the heart stopped beating. For hours they tried to rouse him. But his work, it seemed, was done and Ramakrishna had given him back the key to the treasure.

THE BEST INTRODUCTION to Vivekananda is not, however, to read about him but to read him. The Swami's personality, with all its charm and force, its courageousness, its spiritual authority, its fury and its fun, comes through to you very strongly in his writings and recorded words.

In reading him, it is always well to remember that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." When Emerson wrote these words in his essay on Self-Reliance, he was contrasting the "little minds" with the great minds of Jesus, Socrates, and others. No doubt Emerson would have added Vivekananda to his list if they could have met and come to know each other. But he died in 1882.

Vivekananda was the last person in the world to worry about formal consistency. He almost always spoke extempore, fired by the circumstances of the moment, addressing himself to the condition of a particular group of hearers, reacting to the intent of a certain question. That was his nature—and he was supremely indifferent if his words of today seemed to contradict those of yesterday. As a man of enlightenment, he knew that the truth is never contained in arrangements of sentences. It is within the speaker himself. If what he is, is true, then words are unimportant. In this sense, Vivekananda is incapable of self-contradiction.

Vivekananda was not only a great teacher with an international message; he was also a very great Indian, a patriot and an inspirer of his countrymen down to the present generation. But it is a mistake to think of him as a political figure, even in the best meaning of the word. First and last, he was the boy who dedicated his life to Ramakrishna. His mission was spiritual, not political or even social, in the last analysis.

The policy of the Ramakrishna Order has always been faithful to Vivekananda's intention. In the early twenties, when India's struggle with England had become intense and bitter, the Order was harshly criticized for refusing to allow its members to take part in Gandhi's Non-Co-operation Movement. But Gandhi himself never joined this criticism. He understood perfectly that a religious body which supports a political cause—no matter how noble and just—can only compromise itself spiritually and thereby lose that very authority which is its justification for existence within human society. In 1921, Gandhi came to the Belur Math on the anniversary of Vivekananda's birthday and paid a moving tribute to him. The Swami's writings, Gandhi said, had taught him to love India even more. He reverently visited the room overlooking the Ganges in which Vivekananda spent the last months of his life.

You can visit that room today; it is still kept exactly as Vivekananda left it. But it does not seem museum-like or even unoccupied. Right next to it is the room which is used by the President of the Ramakrishna Order. There they are, dwelling side by side, the visible human authority and the invisible inspiring presence. In the life of the Belur Math, Vivekananda still lives and is as much a participant in its daily activities as any of its monks.

VIVEKANANDA

AND HIS MESSAGE

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA

BEFORE we can understand the message of Swami Vivekananda—or of any other great spiritual leader or prophet—we must understand the true spirit of religion. And by religion I do not mean any particular faith, such as Hinduism, or Christianity, or Mohammedanism, or Buddhism, but what in India we call *Sanatana dharma*, the eternal religion. In this eternal religion there is no dogma, no creed, no doctrine, no theology. Three truths are preserved at the core of the eternal religion, and these may be very simply expressed.

The first of these truths states that *God is*. This proposition has been proclaimed by God-men in every age, and in every age people have asked for proofs that it is true. Many plausible arguments have been devised by philosophers and theologians to establish the existence of God. But every single argument substantiating his actuality on the basis of logic and reason may be contradicted by equally plausible arguments of opposing philosophers. All attempts to prove the existence of God through logic and reason are essentially futile. What, after all, can the philosophers and theologians establish? Only their particular *idea* of an absolute

Reality, not the Reality itself. And what guarantee is there that their idea of God and the reality of God are one and the same?

The only proof of the existence of God is to be found in the second proposition: *God can be realized*. You can know him, you can see him, you can talk to him, and you can experience your oneness with him—in the transcendental state of consciousness.

And the third proposition is that *God-realization is the supreme goal of human existence*. We ask ourselves, Why am I here? What am I to achieve? The answer to these questions is, to find the abiding Reality in the midst of the transitory objects of life. Everything is ephemeral, everything passes away; except the truth of God, which is eternal.

When we come to the conclusion that these three propositions are true, then we begin to understand that every being in the universe is divine. Divinity is our birthright. In the words of Vivekananda: "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divine within . . ." Behind the sinner's sins, behind the saint's saintliness, behind all activities and desires in this world is that one goal—unconscious though it may be: to unfold the indwelling Godhead. Every human being wants to rid himself of his bondages and frailties, and overcome death. And after experiencing pleasure and pain, good and evil, in many lives, he finally learns this truth: Abiding peace and freedom can be found only in God-realization. And who realizes the eternal truth of God? He who consciously directs his mind and life toward this attainment.

Once we understand this message of *Sanatana dharma*, we can understand any great prophet or divine incarnation. And we can test whether a spiritual teacher is genuine or not. The criterion is: Does he give the message of eternal

religion? Does he teach that God is, that he can be known, and that the purpose of life is to know him?

IF a man becomes convinced that he should devote himself to the attainment of God-realization, naturally he will ask: "Are there any exemplars of divine knowledge in this present age who can say: 'I have known the truth of God. I have reached immortal life. I have overcome the fear of death' "?

This question arose in the heart of young Naren, the future Swami Vivekananda. Naren was born with the ability to discriminate between the Eternal and the noneternal. Sense pleasures and enjoyments did not attract him, knowing as he did that they are ephemeral. Philosophy and books did not satisfy him. He wanted to find the abiding Reality behind the fleeting things of life. He wanted to meet a man of enlightenment, a living example of religious truth. And so he went to various priests and preachers, asking each one: "Sir, have you seen God?" Not one of them could answer that he had.

At long last, Naren went to Sri Ramakrishna, who was serving as priest of the Divine Mother in the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. This meeting between Naren and Sri Ramakrishna has a great significance. The Master was living in the Dakshineswar temple garden as if on an island, far away from the noise of the world. He hardly knew how to read and write. He had no book learning. And he had no idea of Western culture, education, or politics.

Naren, on the other hand, was steeped in Western science and philosophy. And he approached religion with the Western spirit of rationalism and inquiry. As he had asked the others, so he asked Sri Ramakrishna: "Have you seen

God, sir?" And the answer was: "Yes, I see him, just as I see you here—only much more intensely."

From the very first, Sri Ramakrishna behaved with Naren as if he had always known him. He said: "You have come so late! Why did you keep me waiting so long?" Then, with folded hands, the Master addressed the young man: "You are the ancient sage Nara, a part of Narayana [the Lord], born on earth to remove the sufferings of mankind." And Naren thought to himself: "Who is this man to whom I have come? He must be mad!" Yet the Master's behavior with others seemed perfectly normal, and Naren could not help but be impressed by his evident renunciation and saintliness.

After returning to Calcutta, Naren could not get Sri Ramakrishna out of his mind. And he began to visit the Master often, feeling the attraction of his magnetic personality.

Sri Ramakrishna, on his part, recognized Naren as his apostle at their first meeting. Furthermore, he knew his future disciple to be a *nityamukta*, an ever-free soul. An associate of God, the *nityamukta* incarnates on earth for the good of mankind. Sri Ramakrishna regarded six of his disciples as belonging to this category of perfect souls; and among these was Naren.

THE MASTER was very careful to train each of his disciples according to his own particular temperament and capacity. He considered Naren ready to follow the path of Advaita Vedanta, or nondualism, from the very beginning. In this path, the aspirant rejects all transitory phenomena, asserting that Brahman—the impersonal Existence behind name and form—alone is real.

In this connection, the following reminiscences, which

I heard directly from Swami Turiyananda, may be of interest. This brother monk of Swamiji (Vivekananda's familiar name in later years) told me: "At one time I was very interested in Advaita Vedanta. I spent much time reading Shankara and studying the scriptures, and therefore did not visit Sri Ramakrishna often. Later, one day, the Master said to me: 'Why did you not come to see me?' I explained to him that I had been studying Advaita Vedanta. So he asked me: 'Well, what is the truth of Vedanta? Isn't it that Brahman alone is real and that the world is unreal?' The Master added: 'You may say that the world is unreal, but if you put your hand on a thorn, the thorn will prick your hand. But there is one, Naren, if he says there is no thorn, there is no thorn.' "

Then Swami Turiyananda told a story which proved how rightly Sri Ramakrishna had estimated Vivekananda's capacity to follow the path of nondualism. Turiyananda said that years later, while Swamiji was in America, some Texan cowboys heard him speak on Vedanta. They decided to test his assertion that a knower of Brahman is equanimous in all situations. They asked Swamiji to lecture out-of-doors, standing on a wooden platform. While he was speaking, they suddenly began to fire shots on either side of him. But Swamiji continued his lecture undisturbed, saying: "I am divine; you are divine." When he had finished, the cowboys, won over by his fearlessness, lifted him on their shoulders, exclaiming: "That's our man!"

When Naren first came to Sri Ramakrishna, he was imbued with the religious ideal of the Brahmo Samaj, a theistic movement whose members worshiped God as a Personal Being with attributes, but formless. Naren, in those days, therefore thought it blasphemy to say "I am Brahman." When Sri Ramakrishna wanted him to read the *Ash-*

tavakra Samhita, a treatise on extreme nondualism, Naren objected that the ideas expressed in the book were atheistic and sinful. The Master smiled and said: "Just read a little to me. You won't have to think that you are Brahman."

One day at Dakshineswar, Naren and a friend were smoking and making fun of Advaita Vedanta. Naren said: "How can it be that this jug is Brahman, this cup is Brahman, and we too are Brahman? Nothing could be more absurd!" Hearing them laugh, Sri Ramakrishna came out of his room and asked: "What are you talking about?" And he gave Naren a touch. As a result, Naren had an experience which he later described as follows:

That magic touch of the Master that day immediately brought a complete revolution over my mind. I was amazed to find that there really was nothing in the universe but Brahman. . . . For the whole day I lived in that consciousness. I returned home, but there too everything I saw appeared to be Brahman. When I sat down to eat, I found that the food, the plate, the server, and I myself were nothing but Brahman. I took one or two morsels of food and again was absorbed in that consciousness. . . . All the while, whether eating or lying down or going to college, I had the same experience. I was constantly overwhelmed with an indescribable intoxication. While walking in the streets, I noticed horse carriages go by, but I did not feel inclined to move out of the way. I felt that the carriages and I myself were made of the same substance. . . . When this state abated a little, the world began to appear to me as a dream. . . . When I returned to the normal plane, I realized that I had had a glimpse of the nondual consciousness. . . . Since then I have never doubted the truth of nondualism.

Later, Swamiji himself had the power of transmitting

spirituality by a touch. There was a professor of science in Madras, an avowed atheist. One day he had a long argument with Swamiji about the existence of God. Finally, Swamiji gave the professor a touch, saying: "Kidi, don't you see God; don't you see God?" The man was completely transformed. He renounced the world and henceforth lived a meditative life in seclusion.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA did not want any of his disciples to be one-sided. Through the Master's grace, Naren had had a glimpse of the impersonal Reality. Now Sri Ramakrishna wanted to teach him that God can also have form. But Naren was firmly opposed to image worship, and used to call the Master's visions of the Divine Mother Kali hallucinations.

Meanwhile, Naren's father had died, leaving his family poverty-stricken. As the eldest boy, it was Naren's duty to provide for his mother and two brothers. He looked for a job, but could not find one. Worried and sad, he came to Sri Ramakrishna and appealed to the Master to pray for the removal of his family's wants. Sri Ramakrishna said: "I can't make such demands! Why don't you go and ask the Divine Mother yourself? You don't accept her; that's why you suffer so much." Then the Master told Naren to go to the Kali temple. On the way, Naren was filled with divine intoxication; and when he saw the image, the Divine Mother appeared to him living and full of consciousness. When he returned to Sri Ramakrishna, the Master asked him if he had prayed to the Mother on behalf of his family. But Naren had forgotten all about it; he had asked the Mother only for pure knowledge and pure devotion. Sri Ramakrishna sent him back to the temple to pray to Mother Kali to pro-

vide for his family's needs. At the sight of the Divine Mother, Naren again went into ecstasy. All his problems vanished in her presence. The Master sent Naren to the temple once more; and for the third time the young disciple could not pray for anything material. Then he understood the lesson the Master had wanted him to learn. He bowed before Mother Kali and her power. After returning to the Master's room, he begged Sri Ramakrishna again to pray to the Divine Mother on behalf of his people. And now the Master agreed, saying: "All right, they will never be in want of plain food and clothing." This actually proved to be the case.

Naren had now realized God with form as well as without form. One day, he told Sri Ramakrishna that he wished to remain continually absorbed in the superconscious state, coming out of it only to eat a little in order to keep his body alive. The Master was displeased, and said: "Shame on you! . . . There is a higher state than that." Naren was born for the good of mankind. He was not meant to taste the bliss of God only for himself, sitting absorbed in meditation, but to share this bliss with others. And so the Master taught Naren the highest spiritual ideal: to realize God and live in the service of mankind.

How this service was to be performed, Naren learned in a unique manner. On one occasion Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his room, surrounded by his disciples. Naren was present. The Master was quoting the following teaching of a great saint: "Utmost compassion should be shown to all creatures." Sri Ramakrishna, in ecstasy, repeated the word compassion, and then remarked: "Who am I to show compassion to others? No, not compassion for man, but service to him as the manifestation of God." On coming out of the room, Naren said: "If the Lord grants me the oppor-

tunity, I will proclaim throughout the world the wonderful truth I have heard today.”

And he did proclaim this truth: See God in every being, and serve—not as philanthropy, but as a spiritual practice, as worship.

AFTER the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, his monastic disciples plunged themselves into spiritual disciplines. Why, it may be asked, did they find it necessary to practice austerities when they had already attained samadhi through Sri Ramakrishna's grace? When Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) was questioned on this point one day, he answered: “True, the Master did everything for us. But we wanted to make this state our own.” And on another occasion, Maharaj said to one of his disciples: “Why do you want to practice austerities? We have done all that for you,” indicating that their spiritual disciplines had been performed not only for themselves but for others.

Swamiji passed several years traveling through India as a wandering monk. He practiced meditation intensively and depended entirely on the Lord for food and shelter. Seeing his people's poverty and suffering, he realized that the economic and educational standards of the masses needed to be raised. How could they be taught religion when their stomachs were empty! He received the inspiration to plan a voyage to America, there to give the message of Vedanta and to raise funds for his needy countrymen. Money was collected for his passage to the United States, and Swamiji gave it away to the poor. Another fund was collected. But Swamiji wanted to know the Lord's will directly before undertaking the journey. After praying to Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother, he had a vision of the Master, walking

on the ocean and beckoning him to follow. Still not satisfied, Swamiji wrote to the Holy Mother, asking her advice. At first, the Holy Mother wanted to write him not to go to America; she felt anxious at the thought of one of her spiritual sons traveling to such a distant land. But then she had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna which convinced her that Naren's journey was divinely ordained. And so she sent him her blessings.

It is interesting to note that Buddha preached his first sermon in Banaras, the seat of learning of his time, and that Vivekananda preached his first sermon in Chicago at the World's Parliament of Religions, where the Western intellectuals of his day had congregated. There is another similarity between these two great teachers: Both Buddha and Vivekananda had a message for their own time as well as for all ages.

What was the substance of Vivekananda's message? It was the message of harmony and universality in religion. To quote from Vivekananda's Chicago Address:

... if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite, like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for, every human being, from the lowest groveling savage not far removed from the brute, to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity, making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in

its polity, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be centered in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature.

This is, in short, the message of Vivekananda, and it is also the message of Vedanta.

NOW AGAIN, Vivekananda had a dream. And his dream was to harmonize the cultures of the East and the West.

If we go to the original teachings of Christianity, we find there the one eternal truth of all religions. And if we go to the original teachings of Hinduism, we find there that same eternal truth. But what is preached as Christianity to-day and what is preached as Hinduism, that is what we have to consider, and that is where harmony must be established between the Eastern and Western cultures.

What has been the emphasis in the West? Humanistic and scientific development. Yes, there are God-fearing people. But what is their objective? For the majority of them it is enrichment of their life on earth. The idea of contemplation also exists in the West, but, generally speaking, contemplation is considered to be a means for a temporal end. The religion taught by Christ—to know the truth, to pray unceasingly, to be perfect even as the Father in heaven is perfect—has become forgotten.

And what has been the emphasis in India? The spiritual life. Achievements in the external world were neglected because they were considered ephemeral. And what is the result? A few individuals devote themselves to God and become saints, and the masses fall into inertia and idleness because they are not ready to devote themselves to a medita-

tive life. That of course is not the true religion of the Hindus, but that is how Hinduism has been preached and misunderstood.

And so the Western and the Eastern spirit, action and contemplation, are to be harmonized and combined. If external achievements are made the goal of life and God the means to reach that goal, there will continue to be suffering and misery. But if God is known to be the supreme purpose of existence, and activity and outward achievements are made the means to fulfill this purpose, then the divinity within man will become manifest, and he will see this divinity everywhere. This is the essence of religion, which Vivekananda summed up as follows:

Do not depend on doctrines, do not depend on dogmas, or sects, or churches or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in man, which is divine; and the more this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticize no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realization. Only those can understand who have experienced it. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light.

And Vivekananda was such a power of light.

SWAMIJI IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

BRAHMACHARINI USHA

AT 309 Monterey Road in South Pasadena stands a gabled residence of the late Victorian era. It is flanked on one side by a gas station, and within three blocks of it cars streak past on the Pasadena Freeway; still the white frame building preserves its dignified charm. Every year, members and friends of the Vedanta Society of Southern California gather there—to meditate, to listen to stories of by-gone days, and to walk in the little garden behind the house. What is the significance of this old-fashioned place for these people in the middle of the twentieth century? In order to find out we must go back to the summer of 1899, when Swami Vivekananda returned to America in order to give an impetus to the work he had begun six years earlier with his address at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

On his second trip to the West, Swamiji came to the United States after a short visit to England. Upon his arrival in New York he was taken to Ridgely Manor in the Catskill Mountains, the country home of Francis Leggett and his wife Betty. Swamiji's brother monks Turiyananda and Abhedananda, and Sister Nivedita, were also present. So was Miss Josephine MacLeod, Betty Leggett's sister.

(Miss MacLeod, one of Swamiji's staunchest American friends, was known as Joe, Jaya, Yum, and later as Tantine. Swamiji himself used to call her Joe, the name by which she will be referred to in this article.) Other friends and the Leggett's children rounded out the party, of which Swamiji was the focal point.

One day, as Joe later recalled in her memories, a letter from an unknown lady arrived at Ridgely. It said that Taylor, Betty's and Joe's only brother, was lying seriously ill in the home of a Mrs. S. K. Blodgett in Los Angeles. Joe was to leave immediately to look after Taylor. As she got ready to step into the carriage waiting to take her to the railway station, Swamiji blessed her and said: "Get up some classes for me, and I will come."

In a rose-covered cottage on Twenty-first Street, Los Angeles, Joe found her brother. And above his bed she saw, to her complete amazement, a life-sized picture of Vivekananda. Realizing that Taylor was fatally ill, Joe requested Mrs. Blodgett's permission to let him stay on in her house. His hostess not only agreed but invited Joe to be her guest as well.

Then Joe asked: "Who is that man whose portrait hangs over my brother's bed?"

"If ever there was a God on earth, that is the man," said Mrs. Blodgett.

"What do you know about him?"

"I was at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893," recalled Mrs. Blodgett, a woman in her seventies, "and when that young man got up and said, 'Sisters and Brothers of America,' seven thousand people rose to their feet as a tribute to something they knew not what; and when it was over and I saw scores of women walking over the benches to get near him, I said to myself, 'Well, my lad, if

you can resist that onslaught, you are indeed a God.’”

Joe told Mrs. Blodgett that she knew this man and that, in fact, she had just left him in the little village of Stone Ridge in the Catskill Mountains of New York. Then she suggested to her hostess:

“Why don’t you ask him here?”

“To my cottage?”

“He will come,” said Joe.

Within three weeks, Taylor died. Three weeks after Taylor’s death, during the first days of December 1899, Swamiji arrived in Los Angeles and became Mrs. Blodgett’s guest.

In a letter of December 27, Swamiji wrote from 921 W. 21st St., Los Angeles, that his hostess was “a Chicago lady—fat, old, and extremely witty.” “She heard me in Chicago,” he added, “and is very motherly.” In the same letter he noted his impressions of the Southern California landscape: “It is exactly like Northern Indian winter here, only some days a little warmer; the roses are here and the beautiful palms. Barley is in the fields, roses and many other flowers round about the cottage where I live.”

Joe referred to her and Swamiji’s stay at Mrs. Blodgett’s in her published memories as follows: “This little cottage had three bedrooms, a kitchen, a dining room, and a sitting room. Every morning we would hear Swami chanting his Sanskrit from the bath, which was just off the kitchen. He would come out with tousled hair and get ready for breakfast. Mrs. Blodgett made delicious pancakes, and these we would eat at the kitchen table, Swami sitting with us; and such discourses he would have with Mrs. Blodgett, such repartee and wit, she talking of the villainy of men and he talking of the even greater wickedness of women! Mrs. Blodgett seldom went to hear him lecture, saying her duty was to give us delicious meals when we got back.”

Mrs. Blodgett's own reminiscences of Swamiji's visit in her home are recorded in a letter which she wrote to Joe in July 1902, the month that Swamiji passed away:

I am ever recalling those swift, bright days in that never to be forgotten winter, lived in simple freedom and kindness. We could not choose but to be happy and good . . . I knew him personally but a short time, yet in that time I could but see in a hundred ways the child side of Swamiji's character which was a constant appeal to the Mother quality in *all good women*. He depended on those near him in a way which brought him very near one's heart. Possessing as he did an almost inexhaustible knowledge of things old as the world, a sage and philosopher, he yet appeared to me utterly to lack the commercial knowledge which so distinguishes men of the Western world! You were constantly rendering him some apparently trifling service in the everyday homely happenings of life, he in some small way requiring to be set right. . . .

One day busy with my work and Swamiji absorbed with his curries and chapatis, I spoke to him of you when he said: "Ah yes! Joe is the sweetest spirit of us all." He would come home from a lecture where he was compelled to break away from his audience, so eagerly would they gather around him, and rush into the kitchen like a boy released from school with "Now we will cook!" . . . Ah, those pleasant "tea party" days, as you used to call them. How we used to laugh! Do you remember the time he was showing me how he wound his turban about his head and you were begging him to hasten as he was already due at a lecture. I said, "Swami, don't hurry. Like the man on his way to be hung and the crowd jostling each other to reach the place of execution who called out, 'Don't hurry, there will be nothing interesting till I get there!'"—I assure you, Swami, there will be nothing interesting till you get there!" This so pleased him that often afterwards he

would say: "There will be nothing interesting till I get there"—and laugh like a boy.

Just now I recall a morning when quite an audience had gathered at our house to listen to the learned Hindu who was sitting with downcast eyes and impenetrable face while his audience waited. His meditation over, he raised his eyes to Mrs. Leggett's and asked like a simple child: "What shall I say?" This gifted man possessing the subtle power of delighting an intellectual audience of cultured men and women asking for a theme! And there appeared to me in the question an exquisite touch of confidence in her judgment. An interesting portion of the day you lost in the early mornings when you and your sister were sleeping. He would come in for his morning plunge in the bath and soon his deep voice would be heard in solemn chant. Though Sanskrit is an unknown tongue to me I caught the spirit of it all, and these morning devotions are among my sweetest recollections of the great Hindu. In the homely old-fashioned kitchen you and I have seen Swamiji at his best.

I heard very few of Swamiji's public lectures; my age and household duties gave me no choice but like Martha to sit in the house. Were you present at a lecture when one of those ladies who love to make themselves conspicuous by some ill-timed remark asked: "Swami, who is it that supports the monks in your country? There are so many of them, you know." Like a flash Swami replied: "The same who support the clergy in your country, Madam—the women!" The audience laughed and Swamiji proceeded with his lecture. Another time I was there when he lectured in the Masonic Temple in Chicago and a noted clergyman present said: "You believe in creeds, do you not, Monk?" "Oh yes," said Swami, "while you need them. You plant an acorn for a tree and build around it a little fence to keep away the pigs and goats. But when your acorn has grown to a tall spreading tree you do not need

your little fence." He was never at a loss, always equal to the occasion. . . .

SHORTLY after his arrival in Los Angeles, Swamiji had begun to give lectures. According to the official *Life* of Swami Vivekananda, he delivered approximately a lecture a day during his ten-week stay in Southern California, either in Los Angeles or Pasadena. Not all of his public addresses here have been preserved; but those extant include some of his most inspired ones. Ida Ansell (known as Ujjvala, who met Swami Vivekananda and later became a disciple of Swami Turiyananda) heard Swamiji say that he gave his highest teachings in California.

His first lecture in Los Angeles, on "Vedanta Philosophy," was delivered at Blanchard Hall, 233 South Broadway, on December 8, 1899. His next address was given at Amity Church, under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences of Southern California, the subject being "The Cosmos."

From the Los Angeles Evening *Express* of January 3, 1900, we learn that Swamiji's second lecture at Blanchard Hall was presented on January 2. He spoke on the "History of India." The newspaper review of this address can hardly be termed an example of brilliant reporting. However, an excerpt from it is reprinted here because it gives an idea of the naiveté concerning his native land Swamiji had to encounter in segments of his audience.

India, the speaker said, is not a country but a continent containing a huge mass of races united by religion. It was inhabited when Columbus discovered America while trying to find a shorter passage to it. India has 200,000,-

000 inhabitants and is full of small villages that extend throughout all the land. There is a large amount of rainfall, which renders the ground very fertile. Notwithstanding the richness of the country, however, many of the people live on a kind of cereal. No animal food is eaten.

Ancient customs have been maintained and there are hundreds of castes within their subdivisions, and the poorest man in the country may belong to the same caste as the most powerful ruler.

The speaker said this state of affairs is for the development of the masses and that it is a true democracy.

On January 4, 1900, Swamiji spoke on "Work and Its Secret." (A typescript of this lecture in the archives of the Vedanta Society of Southern California carries the notation that it was delivered at Paine Hall, Los Angeles.) On this occasion, Swamiji pointed out that the means of work are as important as the end. We are the means, he explained. The world can be good and pure only if our lives are good and pure. "Therefore, let us purify ourselves. Let us make ourselves perfect."

The Los Angeles *Times* of January 6 reported a lecture given by Swamiji on the previous day at 330½ South Broadway, on the subject "Ourselves." Excerpts quoted in the newspaper article establish this address as one later published in the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* under the title "The Open Secret."

On Sunday afternoon, January 7, Swamiji spoke again at 330½ South Broadway. The Los Angeles *Times* reported on the 8th that his lecture was delivered "before an audience that packed the house to its capacity." From the passages printed in the paper (about one-fourth of the address) it is easily identified as his famous lecture on "Christ the Messenger." Swamiji said that day, in words reflecting the Gos-

pel according to St. John: "No man hath seen God at any time but through the Son." Warming to his subject, he continued: "It is true that you and I, and the poorest of us, the meanest even, embody that God, even reflect that God. The vibration of light is everywhere, omnipresent; but we have to strike the light of the lamp before we can see the light. The Omnipresent God of the universe cannot be seen until he is reflected by these giant lamps of the earth—the Prophets, the man-Gods, the Incarnations, the embodiments of God." During the course of his lecture, Swamiji drew a picture of Jesus as a "true son of the Orient, intensely practical," one who placed no faith in this evanescent world but preached purity and renunciation as the way to salvation. "The kingdom of God is within you," Swamiji reminded his listeners in the words of Jesus, and he exhorted them to realize their divine nature.

Joe, who was present, later called this "perhaps the most outstanding lecture" she ever heard. She said that during this talk Swamiji "seemed to radiate a white light from head to foot, so lost was he in the wonder and the power of Christ." "I was so impressed with this obvious halo," her reminiscences continued, "that I did not speak to him on the way back for fear of interrupting, as I thought, the great thoughts that were still in his mind. Suddenly he said to me, 'I know how it is done.' I said, 'How what is done?' 'How they make mulligatawny soup! They put a bayleaf in it,' he told me." Joe later commented: "That utter lack of self-consciousness, of self-importance, was perhaps one of his outstanding characteristics. He seemed to see the strength and the glory and the power of the other man who felt that courage enter into him until everyone who came near him went away refreshed and invigorated and sustained. So when people have said to me, 'What is your test of spirituality?'

I have always said, 'It is the courage that is given by the presence of a holy man.'"

On January 8, Swamiji spoke in Los Angeles on "Powers of the Mind." Man's mind, he said, has extraordinary latent powers. By applying the science of raja yoga, these powers may be developed and man can thereby hasten his growth toward perfection. At the end of this lecture Swamiji offered to teach this science to anyone genuinely interested in learning it.

The Home of Truth, a branch of New Thought, had a chapter in Los Angeles where Swamiji gave a series of addresses. An article published in February 1900 in the magazine *Unity* mentions eight, all of which were considered "intensely interesting." According to this article, there was combined in Swamiji "the learning of a university-president, the dignity of an archbishop, with the grace and winsomeness of a free and natural child." With considerably more insight into Swamiji's work than the Los Angeles newspapers were demonstrating, *Unity* explained that Hindu missionaries did not come to the West to convert Christians to a better religion than what Christ had taught, but to show that there is in reality but one religion; "and that we can do no better than to practice what we profess to believe."

On Christmas Day 1899, Swamiji spoke at the Home of Truth on "Christ's Mission to the World."

Another of his lectures at the Home was entitled "Hints on Practical Spirituality." On this occasion, Swamiji was inspired to do what he used to call "a little bomb-throwing"—which meant that he would jolt his audience out of its comfortable ruts of complacency and prejudice. "The woman in the street, or the thief in the jail is the Christ that is being sacrificed that you may be a good man," Swamiji said that day. "Such is the law of balance. All the thieves

and the murderers, all the unjust, the weakest, the wickedest, the devils, they all are my Christ! I owe a worship to the God Christ and to the demon Christ! . . . My salutation goes to the feet of the good, the saintly, and to the feet of the wicked and the devilish! They are all my teachers, all are my spiritual fathers, all are my Saviors. . . . I have to sneer at the woman walking in the street, because society wants it! She, my Savior, she, whose street-walking is the cause of the chastity of other women! . . . Whom shall I blame? Whom shall I praise? Both sides of the shield must be seen."

It is not known just when Swamiji began to give lectures in the neighboring town of Pasadena. Certainly he was working there by December 22, 1899. On this date, he wrote to Sara Bull: "I am grinding on in Pasadena; hope some result will come out of my work here."

Under the headline "The Swami Vive Kananda [*sic*], an Illustrious Visitor in Pasadena," the Pasadena Daily Evening *Star* of January 15, 1900, reported as follows:

The most conspicuous figure in the World's Congress of Religions at the World's Fair in Chicago was probably the great Indian teacher, The Swami Vive Kananda, who represented the Hindoo [*sic*] religion and aroused the people of Chicago to great enthusiasm by his charming and unique personality and presentation of his country's religion.

The Swami Vive Kananda was a visitor in Pasadena today, lecturing to the guests of the Green this morning. . . . A reception will be given him from three to five o'clock Saturday in the Shakespeare Club rooms.

Two days later, the same newspaper carried this item:

A small audience was present at the Shakespeare Club last night to greet Swami Vivekananda, the interesting young Hindu scholar and teacher and listen to his account of the Brahmin religion. The Swami will speak Friday morning at Hotel Green and tomorrow evening again at the Shakespeare Club.

There is no admission fee to these lectures and everyone is welcome. The Swami will be pleased to lecture further next week if people will organize classes and each contribute what he is able to the support of the Industrial English schools in India, which the Swami Vivekananda is working for.

From these and other newspaper accounts it is evident that Swamiji spoke at the Green Hotel (99 South Raymond Avenue) on January 15, 17, and 19. On the 15th, his subject was "Bhakti Yoga, or the Religion of Love." The older part of the Green Hotel, where Swamiji lectured, was torn down many years ago. But a newer part of the Hotel was still in business in 1962, and an arch dating back to Swamiji's day, and connecting the two parts, was still standing.

The Shakespeare Club in Pasadena, where Swamiji spoke on January 16 and 17, 1900, was then located in a small building (The Stickney Memorial Building, at Lincoln Avenue and Fair Oaks Avenue) which is no longer in existence. The Club, however, was still functioning in 1962, a few blocks from its original location.

The following quaint story, reporting Swamiji's lecture at the Shakespeare Club on January 17, was published in the Los Angeles *Times* of that date:

Clad in his maroon robe, Swami Vivekananda addressed a small audience, composed mostly of women, at the Shakespeare Club this evening. He gave an account

of the religious legends of Brahminism, which are embodied in the daily lives of the Hindus, of the origin of Shiva and his surrender to the pure spirit of his wife, today the Mother of all India, whose worship is carried to such an extent that no female animal can be killed. Vivekananda quoted freely from the Sanskrit, translating as he went along. Speaking in his soft, low voice of the mysticism of subtle India to a little gathering of people listening with rapt attention to the things of small significance to the uninitiated, the striking young Hindu scholar with the glow of the zealot on his swarthy face, was the center of an esoteric tableau.

People who attended Swamiji's lectures marveled at his ability not only to speak without ever referring to notes, but to get up on the platform "without a moment's preparation." Here is an example of how he arrived at one of his lecture topics, recorded, with the address itself, in the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*.

On January 18, he was scheduled to speak again at the Shakespeare Club. On this occasion, he told his listeners that he did not know what he was to lecture on and invited them to choose his topic for him. One questioner challenged Swamiji: "We would like to know the result of your philosophy; has your philosophy and religion lifted your women above our women?"

"You see, that is a very individual question," was Swamiji's quick parry. "I like our women and your women too."

The questioner pursued the matter: "Well, will you tell us about your women, their customs and education, and the position they hold in the family?"

"Oh yes," agreed Swamiji, "those things I would be very glad to tell you."

Whereupon he proceeded to lecture extemporaneously

on India's social, cultural, and spiritual order, and explained woman's place within this scheme. This address was later published as "Women of India."

"My Life and Mission" was also given at the Shakespeare Club—on January 27. As reported in the *Complete Works*, Swamiji was to have spoken on Vedanta philosophy that day; but the president of the Club and some of the ladies and gentlemen had asked him to tell them something about his work. And so Swamiji did. This was the first time, he said, that he lectured on the subject of his mission. He told his audience about India and the ideal of renunciation, about Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, about the foundation of the monastic order in the Master's name, and finally about his own coming to America and his plan for raising the economic and educational standard of the Indian masses.

The following day, January 28, Swamiji gave what, with the exception of "Christ the Messenger," is considered to have been his most popular lecture in Southern California. Entitled "The Way to the Realization of a Universal Religion," it was delivered at the Universalist Church in Pasadena, located at Raymond Avenue and Chestnut Street—about a block from the old site of the Shakespeare Club. In the course of his talk, Swamiji declared that any attempt to bring all mankind to one method of thinking in spiritual matters has been a failure and always will be a failure. "Variation is the sign of life," he said, pointing out that the religions of the world are not contradictory but complementary, "each embodying part of the great truth." He blasted the ignorance which makes a man go out "into the world, God's menagerie, with a little cage in hand, and says, 'God and the elephant and everybody has to go into this. Even if we have to cut the elephant into pieces, he must go in.'" An ideal

religion, Swamiji continued, must be broad and large enough to supply food for all kinds of minds: "It must supply the strength of philosophy to the philosopher, the devotee's heart to the worshiper; to the ritualist, it will give all that the most marvelous symbolism can convey; to the poet, it will give as much of heart as he can take in, and other things besides." Acceptance, not exclusion, will be our watchword, said Swamiji, expressing his credo as follows:

I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of everyone. Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future.

A series of addresses on the "Epics of Ancient India" was given by Swamiji at the Shakespeare Club. On January 31, 1900, he spoke on "The Ramayana" and on February 1, on "The Mahabharata." According to *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, the series also included lectures on "The Story of Jada Bharata" and "The Story of Prahlada." The Pasadena Evening *Star* reported that Swamiji was scheduled to speak at the Shakespeare Club on "The Aryan Race," January 30, and on "Buddhist India," February 2.

And on February 3, 1900, Swamiji delivered his famous lecture on "The Great Teachers of the World," again at the Shakespeare Club. In this lecture he presented two tremendous philosophical conceptions of Hinduism: the advent of

Divine Incarnations and the cyclic movement of the universe. The cyclic movement, which he compared to wave forms, is true of the march of human affairs, of the history of nations, and of the history of religions, Swamiji said. After a fall in a nation's spiritual life, the wave rises again, and "always on the topmost crest of the wave is a shining soul, the Messenger. Creator and created by turns, he is the impetus that makes the wave rise, the nation rise: at the same time, he is created by the same forces which make the wave . . . " Swamiji explained that each of the great Messengers, Prophets, or Divine Incarnations plays a part, the harmony consisting in the sum total. Each came to preach a great idea: Krishna, nonattachment and surrender of the fruits of action to God; Buddha, unselfishness; Mohammed, equality, the brotherhood of man; Christ, readiness, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Swamiji urged that we take all these great ideas and supplement them with our own realizations. These World Teachers, he said, attained their perfection, and we are going to attain ours now.

ALTHOUGH Swamiji's correspondence during his stay in Southern California is indicative of his thoughts and feelings on many subjects, it can only be touched upon very briefly within the confines of this article.

He felt that his health, which had been poor, was getting better. Joe had unearthed "a magnetic healing woman" from whom, to please Joe, he was taking treatments. "Whether it is magnetic healing, California ozone, or the end of the present spell of bad karma, I am improving," Swamiji wrote on December 27, 1899. Mentally, also, he was stronger, and very calm—as he mentioned in several letters of this period.

Although he was disappointed that his lecturing had brought little money to help in expanding the Order's

work, Swamiji considered California receptive to his teachings. "Some people here are very enthusiastic," he wrote from Los Angeles on December 22; "the Raja-Yoga book did indeed great services on this coast." And a few days later he wrote: ". . . when I leave I shall send for Turiyananda and make him work on the Pacific coast. I am sure here is a great field."

To those who were close to him, Swamiji admitted his increasing longing for peace and freedom from his heavy responsibilities as head of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. He wished to resign the presidency, a post which he had filled from the inception of the organization. Moreover, he felt that his mission from the platform was finished. "I want rest, a meal, a few books, and I want to do some scholarly work," he wrote on January 17, 1900. "Mother shows this light vividly now. . . . I am but a child; what work have I to do? . . . I cannot any more *tell* from the platform. . . . the next phase will be the *miraculous touch and not the tongue*—like Ramakrishna's."

But in spite of his desire for release from work, Swamiji's attitude was one of surrender to the will of the Divine Mother. "I am afraid that the rest and peace I seek for will never come," he wrote to his disciple Nivedita on January 24. "But Mother does good to others through me, at least some to my native land, and it is easier to be reconciled to one's fate as a sacrifice. . . . The great worship is going on—no one can see its meaning except that it is a great sacrifice. Those that are willing escape a lot of pain. Those who resist are broken into submission and suffer more. I am now determined to be a willing one."

IT WAS at one of Swamiji's public lectures, probably at the Shakespeare Club in Pasadena, that the three Mead sisters

met him for the first time. They were Mrs. Carrie Mead Wyckoff, Mrs. Alice Mead Hansborough, and Miss Helen Mead. Their brother William, a banker, was prominent in Los Angeles society. Alice became known as Shanti among her Vedanta friends, the name by which she will be referred to in this article. Carrie (afterwards named Lalita by Swamiji's brother disciple Trigunatita) will be called Sister, as she was known in her later years. Any of the following stories concerning Swamiji and the Mead sisters, unless otherwise identified, were told by Shanti or Sister to Swami Prabhavananda or members and friends of the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

Shanti had read Swamiji's *Raja Yoga*, which had been published in New York during his earlier visit to America. And so, when the sisters saw an announcement of one of Swamiji's lectures, they decided to go and hear him. Later Shanti said that when she had first heard Swamiji speak she had at once been eager to help in his work. Sister, too, was tremendously impressed. She said that Swamiji kept his audience spellbound; when he spoke you could hear a pin drop.

Sister and Helen were shy, but the bolder and more enterprising Shanti met Joe after the lecture and inquired whether Swamiji intended to hold any classes in Pasadena. Joe suggested that she ask Swamiji himself. Shanti did, and he said to her: "Why don't *you* arrange some classes for me?" Thus it happened that Shanti became Swamiji's secretary, and that Helen, the youngest of the three sisters, recorded some of his lectures. (Since Helen recorded "My Life and Mission," the Mead sisters must have met Swamiji before January 27, 1900.)

Shanti's energy and carefree spirit pleased Swamiji. He asked both Shanti and Helen to go to India as workers

for his cause. But neither of them went. Shanti refused because she did not want to leave her daughter Dorothy.

The "three Graces," as Swamiji called the sisters, were then sharing a rented house at 309 Monterey Road, South Pasadena. They were very eager to have Swamiji come to their home, but he had not encouraged any definite arrangements for a visit. One morning, however, a horse carriage drew up in front of the Meads' house. To the surprise and delight of the sisters, Swamiji climbed out of it, dropped his bags and baggage at the door, and announced: "I have come to stay with you. That's too much of a lady!"

Just who was "too much of a lady" is not clear. Unfortunately, Swamiji's movements during his Southern California stay have not been, and seemingly may never be, fully established. The official *Life of Swami Vivekananda* states that he spent "nearly a month" at the Los Angeles Home of Truth and that, while in Los Angeles, "he was for a time the guest of Miss Spencer." To complicate matters further, according to the Los Angeles *Times* of January 14, 1900, Swamiji was then supposedly the guest of a Mrs. J. C. Newton of South Pasadena.

It is known that Swamiji arrived in Los Angeles during the first days of December 1899, certainly by the 6th. He went immediately to Mrs. Blodgett's, where, according to Joe's reminiscences, they stayed "for months." As indicated by Swamiji's correspondence, he was still at Mrs. Blodgett's on December 27. Swami Prabhavananda was told by Sister that Swamiji stayed at the Meads' home for six weeks. (The photograph reproduced on the inside of the front cover shows Swamiji standing in front of their house in South Pasadena, with Sister in the background.) Since Swamiji left Pasadena for Northern California sometime between February 20 and 25, he may have moved to 309 Monterey

Road about the second week of January, 1900. Although Joe says in her published memories that "Swamiji lectured a great number of times at the Home of Truth," she makes no mention of his having lived there. And neither she, nor Sister, nor Shanti, nor Swamiji's letters of this period have given evidence to show that he stayed at Miss Spencer's or Mrs. Newton's.

DURING Swamiji's visit with the three sisters, the impact of his spiritual power was such that they felt, as one of them put it, as if Christ himself were in their midst. Not only did he teach the highest religious truths, he manifested them in his life. Moreover, he had the gift of expressing subtle spiritual ideas with the utmost simplicity. Shanti remembered that Swamiji informed her there were two stages of divine realization: the first, "All is not, Brahman is," and the second, "Brahman is all." And once he told Sister that she was omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient—thus reminding her that the Atman, the indwelling Godhead, is the only reality. When she was an old lady, Sister still recalled the emphasis and seriousness with which Swamiji made this affirmation.

Those who have enjoyed daily association with a man of God cherish for the rest of their lives many apparently inconsequential details of daily living pertaining to him. These are precious to the devotees because by recalling them the holy man's personality and their relationship with him are recreated. Sister thus treasured every incident connected with Swamiji's stay in her house: small services she was permitted to render him, his comments on some happening, his jokes, his daily actions. And she shared some of her memories with those who were eager to hear them.

She used to busy herself with cooking, tidying Swamiji's room, and various other household chores. And so Swamiji told her one day: "Madame"—this was his way of addressing Sister—"Madame, you work so hard that it makes me tired. Well, there have to be some Marthas, and you are a Martha."

Sometimes Swamiji helped Sister in the kitchen, cutting up vegetables, shelling peas, grinding spices. He loved hot food, chicken curry being a favorite dish. When he prepared the *chonk* for it (frying spices in butter before adding them to the meat), a great amount of smoke was produced which would make the sisters' eyes smart. And so Swamiji used to call out a warning: "Here comes grandpa; ladies are invited to leave."

A friend of the sisters came to visit one day. The ladies chatted for more than an hour while Swamiji sat in the parlor with them, smoking his pipe in perfect silence. Obviously the visitor had no idea who he was, because to the sisters' and Swamiji's vast amusement, she asked as she was leaving: "Does this gentleman speak English?"

In the cool of the evening, Swamiji used to enjoy sitting and meditating in a little garden spot behind the house. In his time, the hilly country to the southeast of the home was quite undeveloped. Swamiji used to take daily walks there, the sisters' dog accompanying him. And occasionally he joined picnic parties which the devotees would arrange for him. A photograph, taken on one of these outings, shows Swamiji wearing the cap he had designed for the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. He is sitting in the middle of a group of ladies—Sister standing behind him, Shanti seated on his right. (This photograph is reproduced on the inside of the back cover.)

Swamiji had great affection for the Mead sisters. "Lord

bless their hearts," he wrote to Betty Leggett. "The three sisters are three angels, are they not? Seeing such souls here and there repays for all the nonsense of this life." In a letter to Swami Turiyananda, he referred to them as "genuine, pure, and absolutely unselfish friends." And before he left the Meads' home he said: "You three sisters have become a part of my mind forever."

WE shall briefly consider three persons associated with Swamiji during his stay in Southern California—whom he chose as instruments of his work and whose lives he transformed.

There was Shanti.

While Swamiji was still in South Pasadena, he received an invitation to lecture at the Unitarian Church in Oakland. He asked Shanti if she wished to accompany him, saying, "If you want to go with me, don't let anybody keep you from coming." So Shanti went to Northern California with Swamiji. She was one of two ladies who kept house for him in San Francisco, and in addition she served as his secretary. In a letter dated March 17, 1900, Swamiji wrote: "Mrs. Hansborough, the second of the three sisters, is here, and she is working, working, working—to help me."

After two months in the Bay Area, Shanti found that she missed her daughter Dorothy very much, and so she was torn between the desire to return to Los Angeles and the wish to be with Swamiji who had been invited to Camp Irving—a retreat on the outskirts of Camp Taylor in the redwoods of Marin County. Swamiji urged Shanti to go to the camp. "I'll teach you to meditate," he told her. So she went. Among the devotees at the camp was Ujjvala, who later recalled that Shanti was very busy in taking care of Swamiji's needs while at the retreat. One morning, accord-

ing to Ujjvala's memories, Swamiji found Shanti in the kitchen, preparing a meal, when it was time for his class. "Aren't you coming in to meditate?" he asked her. "Yes," she answered, "but I have to get this broth simmering first. Afterwards I shall come in." Then Swamiji told her, "Well, never mind; our Master said you could leave meditation for service."

Once it rained at the camp for twenty-four hours. Swamiji had a fever and became very ill. Shanti did everything she could for him. Swamiji later told Joe: "The married one nursed me with such kindness, you will never guess," as Joe wrote Helen Mead in her letter of September 7, 1902. Ujjvala, too, was deeply impressed by Shanti's devoted nursing—so much so that fifty years later she still remembered seeing Shanti stand in the pouring rain that night at the camp, completely unaware of getting drenched, in order to place an extra piece of canvas over Swamiji's tent.

THEN there was Sister. When Swamiji sent his brother disciple Turiyananda to continue the work he had begun in California, the Meads accepted him eagerly and Sister became his disciple. One day Swami Turiyananda told Sister: "You will have a work to do; but it will be quiet work." Almost thirty years later she gave all she owned to Swami Prabhavananda, who started what became the Vedanta Society of Southern California in her Hollywood home.

Everyone who knew Sister in her later years testified to the fact that she was a saintly person. Her truthfulness was exemplary; yet she managed never to say or do anything that might possibly hurt anyone's feelings. Although her age, association with Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, and services to the local Vedanta work would have entitled her to special privileges, she was always the essence of humility.

Even when she was in her eighties, she would stand aside for younger persons to pass through the door first. This self-effacement was completely natural, never affected.

Sister was quiet and retiring by nature, but whenever someone mentioned the name of Vivekananda in her presence she would become a different person. She loved to talk about him and would do so with great animation. Whenever she spoke of him she tried to convey what a unique God-man he was. And both she and Shanti always gave the impression that Swamiji was a living presence to them.

Until the last days of her life, Sister meditated regularly three times a day. At one period, Swami Prabhavananda noticed that she remained prostrate for a long time when saluting the Lord in the shrine, and he made reference to this. "It takes me so long until I see the Light," she explained apologetically, assuming in her ingenuousness that others, whose prostrations were less prolonged, were more spiritually advanced than she and thus able to see the Light sooner.

In July 1949, when she was ninety years old, Sister passed away; her mind, at the last, going to the spiritual children of Sri Ramakrishna whose blessings she had received. Just before losing consciousness she uttered three times the names of Vivekananda and Turiyananda.

AND there was Joe. Joe of course had known Swamiji long before he came to Los Angeles. But she is mentioned here because her ties with Southern California did not end when Swamiji left for Oakland in February 1900. In later years she frequently visited the Vedanta Society in Hollywood; and always during these visits Swamiji was her favorite topic of conversation. She often said that she never considered herself as his disciple. "I am his friend," she

would say, adding, "After I met him I was never the same." Joe was completely identified with the growth of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission's work, and after Swamiji's death she continued to make trips to India. Among other things, her contributions made possible the publication of many of Swamiji's writings and also provided a guesthouse at Belur Math for the use of Western visitors. Joe was in her nineties when she returned to Southern California for the last time. She passed away at the Hollywood Center of the Vedanta Society in the fall of 1949, three months after Sister's death.

There is a typed copy of a fragmentary, undated letter, which Joe wrote from the Belur Math guesthouse some time after Swamiji had passed away. It carries a notation in her handwriting that she wanted it to be saved. In this letter, Joe tells of Swamiji's impact on her life:

The thing that held me in Swamiji was his *unlimitedness*. I never could touch the bottom—or top—or sides. The amazing size of him—I think Nivedita's hold was that, too. . . . Oh, such natures make one so free. It's the reaction on oneself that matters, really, isn't it? What one gets out of it.

You ask if I am utterly secure in my grasp on the ultimate. Yes, utterly. It seems to be part and parcel of me. It is the Truth I saw in Swamiji that has set me free! One's faults seem so insignificant, why remember them when one has the ocean of Truth to be our playground? It was to set me free that Swamiji came, that was as much a part of his mission as it was to give renunciation to Nivedita or unity to dear Mrs. S. But it is in renunciation that he is India's great spiritual gift, and so the workers in and for India (Nivedita) used to say, "I only hear one word ringing through my ears day and night, Remember Renunciation." . . . *I haven't any renunciation, but I've*

freedom. Freedom to see and help India to grow—that's my job and how *I love it*. To see this group of fiery idealists burning new paths and outlets from this jungle called Life . . .

I feel that Swamiji is a Rock for us to stand *upon*. That was his function in my life, not worship, nor glory, but a steadiness under one's feet for experiments! At last *I'm* free. It's so curious to feel free, not needed any more in the West, but all my characteristics—in India. . . . With two new upper chambers of the guest house I am living in great luxury and space, quiet on this great river. I never dreamed of such luxury anywhere! The luxury of space—no furniture to take care of, no rugs, pictures, dishes—only a tea set. That impingement of things is gone! Things to do, to take care of, all melted into thin air. Yet I'm not alone! (That I couldn't bear). One doesn't have to leave the body to find Heaven.

I see—and *why* all this? That's the wonder.

"They are fooling us with little brains, but this time they won't find me napping. I've found a thing or two beyond brains, and that is love" as Swamiji wrote to Mrs. Leggett, bless them both.

In February 1900, on the day Swamiji left the Meads' home to go to Northern California, he placed his pipe on the mantel of the sisters' fireplace, saying: "This house won't remain the same." In 1955, the property was acquired for the Vedanta Society of Southern California through the generosity of one of its members. And the following year, in the presence of two Trustees of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Swami Madhavananda (who became the Order's President in 1962) and Swami Nirvanananda, it was consecrated as a shrine.

That the exterior of the house has undergone few

changes since 1900 may be seen by studying photographs taken at the turn of the century. The floors and ceilings are also substantially the same. The interior has been redecorated in the late Victorian style of Swamiji's day. The fireplace, where he left his pipe, was discovered behind a wall which had been erected since the Meads' occupancy; it has been restored. The pipe was kept by Sister for many years before she entrusted it to Swami Prabhavananda; it is now preserved in Hollywood with other relics. The table at which Swamiji sat with the sisters stands once more in the dining room of the house. The upstairs bedroom where Swamiji had slept has become the shrineroom. And the garden in which he loved to sit is once again carefully tended.

In 1962, on the eve of his birth centenary, it was evident that the influence of Swami Vivekananda's visit in Southern California has been a lasting one. His lectures and letters have retained their immediacy and power. Devotees like Sister and Joe, who loved Swamiji, served as instruments of his work until the end of their lives; and people of our generation, in associating with these devotees, have established a bond with him. Finally, Swamiji's presence continues to make itself subtly but tangibly felt in the Mead sisters' home.

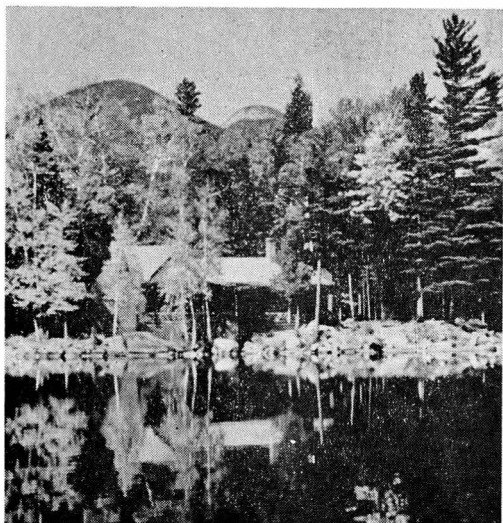
For a growing number of people, the old-fashioned house at 309 Monterey Road, South Pasadena, has become a place of pilgrimage. They gather there to pay their respects to the unique God-man who blessed it by his presence, and who has endeared himself to them by stating the truths of religion in a dynamic and compelling way. For these Western devotees, Swami Vivekananda is a special link with Ramakrishna-Vedanta.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

In June 1895, Swami Vivekananda visited the summer camp of his friend Francis Leggett in Percy, New Hampshire. On June 7, Swamiji wrote from Percy: "This is one of the most beautiful spots I have ever seen. Imagine a lake surrounded with hills covered with a huge forest, with nobody but ourselves. So lovely, so quiet, so restful . . . It gives me a new lease of life to be here." The cottage at Percy where Swamiji stayed is reproduced on the inside of the back cover. Miss Katharine Whitmarsh and Mrs. Frances Leggett made this photograph available for publication.

The original of Swami Vivekananda's photograph reproduced in the upper right-hand corner on the inside of the back cover was one of two snapshots enclosed in a letter from Mary Wright, Cambridge, Mass., to Nivedita. Dated March 5, 1900, the letter contained this message: "I am sorry that I have not had time to print you something better than these which are only to show you what the children did." The letter and snapshots were sent to Swami Prabhavananda through the courtesy of Mrs. Frances Leggett.

In the article "Swamiji in Southern California," selected passages from the following Advaita Ashrama publications have been quoted: *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, and *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*. Clive Johnson's checking of Los Angeles and Pasadena newspapers dating from December 1899 through February 1900 furnished new information concerning Swamiji's lectures in Southern California. Other members and friends of the Vedanta Society of Southern California were helpful in recalling incidents of Swamiji's visits to this area told them by Mrs. Wyckoff, Mrs. Hansborough, and Miss MacLeod.



COTTAGE AT PERCY
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VIVEKANANDA
See page 64



PICNIC SCENE
See page 57

Vedanta and the West

Vedanta teaches that man's real nature is divine; that it is the aim of man's life to unfold and manifest this divinity; and that truth is universal. Vedanta accepts all the religions of the world and reveres the great prophets, teachers, and sons of God, because it recognizes the same divine inspiration in all.

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