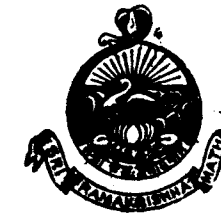


THE VEDANTA KESARI

"LET THE LION OF VEDANTA ROAR."



VOL. XIV, No. 12 : APRIL 1928

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PRAYER ...	441
SPIRITUAL TALKS OF SWAMI BRAHMANANDA ...	442
EDITORIAL NOTES ...	446
SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA AS AN INCARNATION OF THE INDIAN GENIUS.	
By K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, B.A., B.L. ...	452
THE RELIGION OF VEDANTA	
By Cridhar Majumdar, M. A. ...	461
THE INDIAN WOMAN AND THE INDIAN HOME	
By Sister Devamata ...	464
STORY OF SRI SANKARACHARYA'S LIFE	
By Swami Atulananda ...	471
NEWS AND REPORTS ...	477

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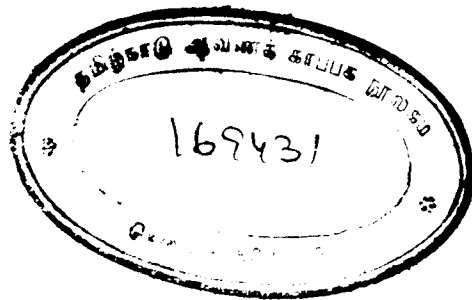
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THE VEDANTA KESARI

VOL. XIV.

INDEX

	PAGE.
Age of the Sudras, The—	
<i>By R. Ramakrishnan, B. A.</i>	68
Apocalypse Unveiled, The—	
<i>By Swami Prabhavananda</i>	102, 141
Concept of the Self—	
<i>By Swami Sharrvananda</i>	93
Devi, Saradamani—	
<i>By Ramananda Chatterjee</i>	105
Editorial Notes 5, 46, 85, 125, 165, 206, 246, 304	
327, 382, 405, 446.	
Experience as the One Self; The Doctrine of—	
<i>By Prof. K. Sundararama Iyer, M. A.</i>	17, 255, 412
Emancipated Soul According to Vedanta, The	
State of—	
<i>By Sridhar Majumdar, M. A.</i>	334
Hindu View of Life, The—	
<i>By Swami Vedantananda</i>	144
Hindu Social Reform, The Problem of—	
<i>By Swami Iswarananda</i>	337, 364
Ideal Humanity—	
<i>By R. Ramakrishnan, B. A.</i>	259
India Can Regain Her Lost Position, How—	
<i>By S. S. Setlur, M. A., LL.B.</i>	351
Indian Woman and the Indian Home, The—	
<i>By Sister Devamata</i>	464
Karma-yoga—	
<i>By K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, B. A., B. L.</i>	285
Life Sketch of Ramdas—	
<i>By Swami Gunatitananda</i>	299, 344
Maya, The Meaning of—	
<i>By B. Chandrasekharia, M. A.</i>	58
Mysticism—	
<i>By T. S. Avinashilingam, B. A., B. L.</i>	97
Notes and Comments 33, 74, 149, 193, 229, 269, 312,	
354, 387, 433	
News and Reports 38, 77, 116, 159, 197, 236, 277,	
319, 359, 397 438, 477	



SL
65 m 20 414 v
N 22

	PAGE.
Prayer 1, 41, 81, 121, 161, 201, 241, 281, 321, 361, 401, 441	
Progress in India, The Idea of— By Principal Kamakhya Nath Mitra, M. A.	111
Psychodynamics, Studies in— By S. Sankara Menon, B. A., B. L.	417
Religious Practice, Need of— By Swami Atulananda	12, 54
Ramakrishna Paramahansa— By Nagnendra Nath Gupta	71
Religion of Vedanta, The— By Sridhar Majumdar, M. A.	461
Reviews and Notices 37, 156, 235, 274, 356, 395	
Spiritual Value— By A. Govindacharya Swami	135
Sister Nivedita's Life, The Story of— By Swami Vedantananda	176
Swami Saradananda— By a Devotee	221
Sister Nivedita, Reminiscences of— By Prof. Jadu Nath Sarkar, M. A.	266
Self-knowledge— By Swami Atulananda	290
Sankaracharya's Life, Story of Sri— By Swami Atulananda	369, 426, 471
Soul of India, The— By P. N. Srinivasachariar, M. A.	375
Spiritual Talks of Swami Brahmananda 2, 42, 82, 122, 162, 202, 242, 282, 322, 362, 402, 442	
Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa as an Incarnation of the Indian Genius— By K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, B. A., B. L.	452
Talk to Students, A— By Swami Atulananda	186, 213
Upanishadic Revelation of Truth, The— By K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, B. A., B. L.	131
Vivekananda, Reminiscences of Swami— By A. Srinivasa Pai, B. A., B. L.	24
War, Seeds of— By Rev. Charles E. Jafferson, D. D., LL. D.	29

THE VEDANTA KESARI

"Let the lion of Vedanta roar."
 "Let me tell you, strength is what we want
 And the first step in getting strength is to uphold
 The Upanishads and believe that 'I am the Atman'".
 SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

Vol. XIV] APRIL 1928 [No. 12

PRAYER

ॐ

नमामि भक्तवत्सलं कृपालुशीलकोमलम् ।
 भजामि ते पदाम्बुजं हृदयमिनां स्वधामदम् ॥
 तमेकमद्भुतं प्रभुं निरीहमीश्वरं विभुम् ।
 जगद्गुरुञ्च शाश्वतं तुरीयमेककेवलम् ॥
 भजामि भावबल्लभं कुयोगिनां सुदुर्लभम् ।
 स्वभक्तकल्पपादपं समस्तसेव्यमन्त्रहम् ॥
 अरूपरूपभूषणं नतोऽहमुर्विजापतिम्
 प्रसीद देहि मे विभो पदाब्जभक्तिमाशुते ॥

Salutation unto Thee, my Lord of compassion, gracious and sweet; Thou Lord of marvellous deeds, gentle, rich and mighty; Thou one Teacher of man, eternal, blissful and pure; salutation unto Thy lotus feet, the ambrosia of the selfless ones.

Adoration unto Thee, my Lord of love Whom the worldly-minded cannot reach, but Who art to the devotees like the Wishing-tree, and Who art worshipped by all; Thou Lord of the universe, Father of us all, Thou Who art formless and with forms withal; adoration unto Thee.

Have mercy upon me, O Lord, and pray grant me devotion to Thee.

TULSIDAS.

hour or for a day;—the more you practise the more benefited you will be. Go wherever you may, if you find it a good place and good 'scenery' be there. Seek Him and Him alone. And Kamini-Kanchana (lust and gold) too you have to give up. First renunciation in the mind—draw in the mind first from earthly things.

In the beginning Sakara (with form), then Nirakara (formless) and then 'Brahman is real and all else is illusion.' The world as it appears to us is all illusion. In Samadhi the world does not exist—(only bliss)—as after deep sleep a man says, 'In great joy I was.' When a man descends (from Samadhi), only then, like unto the Rishis does he say of his experience, 'bliss and bliss only'; and words cannot 'explain' that. Then 'I' and 'Thou' all vanish—Sachchidananda (Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute) alone! "What is the proof that God is" if thus questioned, the answer will be: "We have seen God, and you too can see Him if you follow us." So have said the saints and saviours all. As Sri Ramakrishna has said: "By merely uttering the name of Siddhi (hemp-leaves) you cannot get yourself intoxicated. Bring it, grind and dissolve it, drink it, and wait for a while, then alone will you feel intoxicated. In the same way simply crying out 'Lord' and 'Lord' will not do, practise Sadhana and wait.

- Q. In performing Japam sometimes I forget everything; what is that, Sir?
- A. The *Panchadashi* is of opinion, it stands as an impediment. Meditation is to think of Him; and when it gets intensified, when God becomes visible, it is Samadhi. After Samadhi the blissful emotion lingers on for a long time. Some opines, it continues for ever. Have you not heard, the Saint of

Sundarbans, when forced to eat after being brought back from Samadhi by pulling him by the tongue, died of diarrhoea. Through Hata-Yoga the mind becomes calm and steady,—and no troubles regarding food and nourishment therein.

Sri Chaitanya sent a man to Ramananda. He (Ramananda) lived a life of luxury. But at the name of the Lord burst forth a fountain (of devotion) from within. They say, if you are not a Sadhu you cannot know a Sadhu—as a brinjal seller cannot appraise the value of a diamond.

Through Sadhana if a man attains to a higher stage, that he can surely understand. At the time of meditation you must think, desires and passions have no existence, unreal. Gradually will come up this impression. As you drive out these thoughts so are you to force in good ones. In your meditation some light or sound if you perceive, know that you are going along the right path. And these too are too trivial; but then such signs are good. Meditating in a lonely place, one can hear the sound of Pranava (sound symbol of the Brahman) or that of a bell or a sound from a distant place. "Thou art my goal, Oh Mother, art Thou my refuge;"—this prayer of Sankara after his self-illumination was only for enlightening the world, to teach humanity that God can be realised through all paths.

A man, a dare-devil he was. Just fifteen minutes before his death he said: "Carry me straight to the Ganges—Carry me thither. You think, I shall die here, do you?" And reaching the Sacred Stream he smiled and prayed: "Most Sacred Ganges! that Thou art, have I sinned so much, I do believe, Mother, wouldst Thou wash and wipe away all."

EDITORIAL NOTES

Sri Ramakrishna's Attitude Towards Women

The least understood and the most misunderstood point in Sri Ramakrishna's life is his attitude towards womankind. Was he—a "renouncer of Kamini or woman"—a misogynist? Many a superficial critic is prone to look upon him as such. But those who have taken any trouble to realise the meaning of his Divine outlook cannot but regard him as a great vindicator of the glory of womanhood which to him was the embodiment of the Mother Divine. The tendency of the age is to dethrone woman—the mother, and to instal in her place woman—the opposite sex of man. The old ideals of restraint and control are being thrown to the winds. Sex is being idolised; sense life is being glorified. And as its result a most novel and horrible form of sex-immorality is having its hold in the minds of men and women. Popular poets and writers, who "travel with the multitude," are 'pandering to the vitiated taste of the people, to win fame and glory. But Sri Ramakrishna, the world-teacher, had a different role to perform. The mission of his wonderful life was to counteract the mad tendency of the times, to place before humanity the Divine ideal, and save them from destruction which they seem to be running headlong without any thought. And to achieve this end, he held, more than anything else, his own wonderful life as the glowing example of the ideal he wanted them to follow and realise.

The Meaning of his "Renunciation of Women"

With his eye always fixed on the Divine, Sri Ramakrishna could not look upon woman as a plaything or an object of sense-pleasure. He saw in her, as he saw in man, the image of the all-pervading God Whom he addressed as his Mother Divine. He thus renounced woman in all her carnal relations, but accepted her at the same time as

the embodiment of the Mother of the Universe. Even in dream never could he think of woman in any relation other than that of the Mother. And he saw Her in the Divine image of Kali he worshipped, in the person of the mother who gave birth to his body, and also in the living image of the holy lady with whom he was united in what the world calls marital bonds. Nay, he recognised Her in all, even in those whom society looks upon as fallen women. As he says, "women, whether chaste or unchaste, naturally good or bad, should be regarded as images of the Divine Mother." These were not vain words that the Master spoke. Even when put to the severest tests he did not swerve for a moment in the least from his ideal of Divine Motherhood, perfect purity and self-control. "The Self is neither male, nor female, nor neuter. It is called so according to the body which It takes up." To our materialistic and sceptical world the Master proved the great truth of the Upanishadic saying with a new power and meaning.

His Attitude Towards His Mother

True renunciation is not anti-social as some are inclined to suppose. It purges all social relations of their attachment and impurity, and fulfils them by spiritualising and intensifying them. Sankara—the great Vedantic philosopher, who held the world to be unreal and Brahman alone as the only Reality, Sri Chaitanya—the prophet of Divine Love—who loved God with a passion before which all worldly bonds vanished away into nothingness, both of them were men of strictest renunciation but possessed the tenderest love for their mothers. Sri Ramakrishna—the Paramahansa—one who had gone beyond what human society calls duties—was a most devoted son of his earthly mother to the last days of her life. He served her with infinite tenderness. And when he once wanted to settle down at Brindaban, it was the thought of his poor and afflicted mother that brought him back to her at Dakshineswar. As

he himself says—"I thought—who would look after her if I would remain at Brindaban? And it became impossible for me to stay away." A God-intoxicated man that he was, one who would lose all outer consciousness in Divine ecstasy, he never failed to spend some time every day with his mother and minister himself to her wants. In her death-bed he also made an offering of flowers at her feet in a spirit of divine worship. Indeed his was an instance of extraordinary filial affection and duty which our modern men and women will do well to imitate. And the secret of his devotion lay in the fact that he looked upon his mother as an embodiment of the Mother of the Universe.

His Discipleship Under a Lady-Teacher

Sri Ramakrishna—"the renouncer of woman"—accepted a remarkable lady of rare learning and spirituality as one of his teachers, and underwent with her help the most difficult practices of Tantra, although he usually advised his men devotees to avoid close association with women. And to remove any possible misunderstanding of his teachings and to uphold the glory of womanhood, he sat like a child at the feet of the holy Brahmani, as he used to call her, for spiritual instruction and guidance. He thus proved that there is nothing innate in woman, that stands in the way of man's spiritual progress. It is his attitude towards woman that ennobles or degrades him. When he looks upon her as an object of sense-gratification, her physical charms appealing to his senses maddens and ruins him spiritually. When, on the other hand, he regards her as the image of the Divine Mother, she being propitiated opens to him the gates to salvation. Both attraction and hatred for woman the Master condemned. As he said to a young disciple who used to look upon women with abhorrence, "Look down upon women! What for? They are the manifestation of the Divine Mother. Bow down to them as to your mother, and hold them in respect. That is the only way to escape their baneful influence. The more you

hate them, the more will you fall into the snare." Thus it is the Divine outlook that helps man not only to conquer his evil propensity but also to attain to the emancipation of his soul. The Master proved in his own life what a benign influence woman can shed on the life of man only when she is approached in a spirit of Divine worship, and not with the idea of the so-called honour shown to her youth and beauty, which is in fact an insult to true womanhood.

His Relation With His Wife.

This is best illustrated in Sri Ramakrishna's Divine relations with the high-souled lady who became the true partner of his spiritual life. The Master was married. But the marriage was not of the body but of the soul, not as a means of sense-gratification but as a help to Self-realisation. A Sannyasin of Sannyasins, he did not disown his relation with his wife, as he did not with his mother. He received her with great love and kindness when she came to join him at Dakshineswar. The husband and the wife lived together—he as a monk and teacher, and she as nun and disciple. Never did the mind of the holy couple come to the plane of sense. Never did the thought of physical enjoyment cross their minds. They looked upon each other as embodiment of the Divine; they saw in each other the sexless Atman, and proved the truth of Upanishadic saying—"The husband is loved not for his own sake but for the sake of the Atman dwelling in him. The wife is loved not for her own sake but for the sake of the Atman dwelling in her." Perfect sense-control, and through it Divine realisation, is the ultimate goal of the monk as well as of the house-holder. According to the sages of India, marriage is meant not for sense-pleasure, but for perpetuating the race. Through his experience of the transiency of physical enjoyment, the house-holder should renounce all material pleasure, and live a life of perfect control and spiritual striving with his partner. Propagation of the human species is going on mechanically,

more or less in the way of brutes. But the ideal of Brahmacharya or sex-control, religious practice and God-realisation, in married life is being almost entirely forgotten. And it was to prove the glory of this ideal that Sri Ramakrishna took upon himself the burden of marriage and lived the ideal life with his wife before the eyes of all. And he did it with the hope that men and women should at least hold the highest ideal before them and strive their best for its attainment.

Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Women.

Little is known of the numerous women disciples whose lives were completely transformed by the teachings of this wonderful "renouncer of woman." It will be a revelation to many to know that the lady devotees of the Master used to say—"We seldom looked upon Sri Ramakrishna as a member of the male sex. We always considered him as one of us. He was our best confident." They looked upon him with supreme devotion, sometimes verging on the Divine and were ever ready to follow his directions. To them, as to men, he placed the same ideal of renouncing animal passions and greed of wealth. And if he warned his men devotees against the charms of women, he also asked his women disciples to beware of the snares of men. To the married women, as to men, he said, "when a few children have been born, you should live like brothers and sisters." To the widow devotees, as to those who later on became his monastic disciples, he placed the ideals of strict Brahmacharya, of a life of perfect chastity and service. And many of them had the rare privilege of following under the Master's direct guidance strenuous religious practices that brought to them wonderful experiences of the Spirit. There was a great lady, who at first led a miserable life owing to family troubles, but later on forgot all her sorrows at the divine touch of the Master. Later on, she used to spend the greater part of her days in religious practices and would sometimes

lose herself in "Divine ecstasy." There was another high-souled lady who first came to the Master, sorely afflicted with the bereavement of her only daughter. She soon tasted the bliss of devotion, and became an object of marvel to many by her remarkable spiritual attainments. Again there was an old and pious lady, a widow from childhood, who used to look upon Sri Ramakrishna as her Divine child. She attained to such a high spiritual eminence that, as the Master said, she reached the end of her life's goal and had no more religious practices to follow. Indeed many of the women devotees had a high place in the estimation of the Master. And a few of these holy women, lived more or less continuously in the household of the Holy Mother, and were instrumental in spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna particularly among women. But she whose influence was the greatest was the Holy Mother herself who may be said to be Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood.

The Holy Mother.

Wonderful was the life of her who was the partner of Sri Ramakrishna's Divine love and Divine knowledge. She realised the highest wisdom and infinite sweetness that she shed on all around her. And very truly has Sister Nivedita said—"The stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood,.... she had long and arduous experience in administration, secular and religious. And it must be remembered that as the wife of Sri Ramakrishna she has had the highest opportunity of personal development that is possible to enjoy. At every moment, she bears unconscious witness to this association with the great." The all-round training she received from her Master eminently fitted her for furthering his Mission for more than three decades after his passing away. And verily she became the Holy Mother—at once spiritual mother and teacher—of thousand of her spiritual sons and daughters who constantly

sought her for inspiration and guidance. The universal mother heart in her throbbed with infinite love for every child born of woman. And it was this love that urged her to remove the miseries and sufferings of care-worn and world-weary souls, whether they looked or not to her for Divine happiness and bliss'. Through her Sri Ramakrishna not only vindicated the right of woman to lead a life of the highest chastity and Divine realisations like the Brahmadakinis of old, but also the right to take up spiritual ministrations and leadership. And it was with her help again that he could present to the modern sex-obsessed world the ideal of the motherhood of woman and the highest ideal of married life—an ideal which it was not necessary to show in the lives of the great world-teachers of the past. The Divine Master and his illustrious partner have clearly demonstrated that the ideal of perfect continence and highest spiritual realisations could be lived not only by the unmarried, by the monk and the nun, but also by the married, by men and women who are sincerely eager to transmute their human relation into the divine. May the Divine outlook of Sri Ramakrishna find favour with our modern men and women! May his noble teachings stem the tide of vice and immorality that is sweeping over the entire world! And may this ideal of purity and spirituality lead our benighted mankind to the heaven of peace and blessedness!

SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA

As An Incarnation of the Indian Genius. *

By K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, B.A., B. L.

The time is now ripe for us to make a sober estimate of the life and work of one of the first minds of the last century. Till now it may be said that we were under the spell of what Max Muller has

* Read on the 93rd Birth-day Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna, at the Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

called the dialogic process. Myth-making goes on apace in regard to all great men all over the world. While in modern countries and in modern times this tendency stops at the softening of outline and at *suppressio veri*, in India, all along and even to-day, it has shown a capacity for the making of legends. But after all what really counts in the life of each great man is his loyalty to the inward light and to the spreading of that light by him in the dark places of the world.

Judged by such a test, viewed in the dry light of the estimate of posterity, Sri Ramakrishna is seen to have a powerful and permanent appeal to all times and to all climes and has more potent and fascinating appeal to-day than he had at any time before. That he should have attained such a hold upon the Indian mind is hardly a matter for surprise because he was, as I shall show, a perfect incarnation of the Indian genius. But his influence is trans-Indian and trans-Asian as well. Men and women in distant countries which are now in the van of the world's progress are turning to him in an increasing measure for solace, uplift, and guidance. To take a typical instance Nina McDonald asks in a recent poem about him:

"Why doth our inmost being joyous thrill
In blissful rapture to Thy sacred name?"

Celebrations like this celebration and great men like this great man have a special value in India to-day. These are days of cultural attack on India from abroad and of cultural self-abasement within India. Miss Mayo's notorious book *Mother India* which has been well described by the Hon'ble Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer as a report about the swept rubbish-heaps in the garden of Indian culture is only the last of a series of cultural attacks in India. India is in sore danger of losing what was almost the only thing left intact in her keeping—*viz.*, her own beautiful and divine soul. Celebrations like the present and great men like Sri Ramakrishna restore to us the greatest of all our possessions—*viz.*, our self-possession. Through such an idealisation we realise ourselves. Each great man is a true mirror wherein the soul of the nation beholds itself and rejoices in its immortal loveliness of perennial youth.

What a delight it is to contrast the natures and the services to the cause of truth of two such persons as Miss Noble and Miss Mayo! There is a real oppositeness in referring to Miss Noble better known as Sister Nivedita—in an address on Sri Ramakrishna. She was the most remarkable of the disciples of the most remarkable of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. *The Web of Indian Life* and *Mother*

India—Look on this picture and on that! Rabindranath Tagore says about Sister Nivedita: "She had won her access to the inmost heart of our society by her supreme gift of sympathy. She did not come to us with the impertinent curiosity of a visitor, nor did she elevate herself on a special high perch with the idea that a bird's eye view is truer than the human view because of its superior aloofness. She lived our life and came to know us by becoming one of ourselves. She became so intimately familiar with our people that she had the rare opportunity of observing us unawares. As a race we have our special limitations and imperfections, and for a foreigner it does not require a high degree of keen-sightedness to detect them. We know for certain that these defects did not escape Nivedita's observation, but she did not stop there to generalise, as most other foreigners.....But Sister Nivedita, being an idealist, saw a great deal more than is usually seen by those foreigners who can only see things but not truths." I have drawn attention to this passage to show by weightier words than mine what equipment persons of Miss Noble's type have got to interpret India and what equipment persons of Miss Mayo's type have not got to interpret India.

But the question of support or attack in respect of India's ideals by outsiders is not a very important fact at all. Let us dispassionately consider whether Indian ideals can or cannot stand the test of modernity and whether they have any inherent value in the modern age. The history of India has been really one of a great people who have always had a strong and unreleasable hold on the verities of life and who have always had the privilege and the mission of giving a lead to universal thought. India is as surely the heart of Asia as Greece was the heart of the West. Nay, her influence has spread in all directions. Through Pythagoras and Plotinus she influenced the thought of the West. Through Buddha she influenced the thought of the East. The influence of Sri Sankara on the thought of the world has been of a unique character. Each outer limitation of India in the political field seems to have brought forth only a finer manifestation of the sweetness of her nature so that we may well apply to India the beautiful sentence which occurs in Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitra* *Vimardasurabhih Khalu Vakulavalika*. (The fragrance of the Vakula flowers increases with each treading down.)

If such has been the contribution of India to the thought of the world in the past, the contribution is all the greater to-day and the world is more in need of it than ever before. After the great war of 1914 Europe has begun to realise—though by fits and starts as yet—the rampant evil of the religion of power which she worshipped before.

Signor Nitti says in his great and striking work on *The Decadence of Europe*: "Meanwhile the whole of Europe is in a state of decadence. It has ceased to be the continent which once controlled the production and the trade of the world. It has seen the decline of its vast expansion and the pride of its intellectual life.....As each day passes, Europe sinks rapidly into decay. There is economic decadence, there is intellectual decadence, there is moral decadence.....No one foresaw during the war that the military paradox which we are now witnessing would have been realised—that Europe after the war, when the vanquished have been disarmed, would have more men under arms than before the war. The more acts of injustice increase, the more ill-feeling increases, and the more ill-feeling increases the greater becomes the trepidation of the victor who wants bigger armies. All the peoples outside Europe look on at this progressive decay of ours with mixed feelings of stupor and agitation."

Thus post war reconstruction became inevitable if civilisation was not to be swept off from the face of the earth altogether. The League of Nations is the reply of the present in the political field to the challenge of the power-worshipping past. The co-operative basis of economic life is the reply of the present in the economic field to the challenge of the mammon-worshipping past. Art for God's sake is the reply of the present in the aesthetic field to the challenge of the beauty-worshipping past. A new yearning for a mystical vision of God is the reply of the present in the spiritual field to the challenge of the earth-worshipping past.

It is because Indian ideals in the realms of politics and economics and art and religion are so modern albeit so old that they have such a powerful appeal to-day. This is not the proper occasion to go into a detailed exposition of Hindu cultural ideals. I have tried to do so to some extent in my work on *Hindu Culture*. Speaking briefly, the Hindu genius has always stood for social interdependence, economic co-operation, spirituality in art, and mystical vision of God. The Hindu outlook is a safe, balanced, synthetic view on life. The Hindu race has always seen life steadily and seen it whole. It is as one of the most perfect incarnations of the Indian genius that we must learn to appraise and evaluate the life-work of Sri Ramakrishna if we are to realise its real glory and its true significance.

Let me turn for a brief while to the life of the saint before I refer to his life-work and its value as an embodiment of the Hindu genius. He was born on 17th February 1836 at Kamarpukur as a son of Kshudj.

ram Chatterji and Chandra Devi and was named Gadadhar. He was a most gentle and lovable child who won the hearts of all. During his boyhood his mind was steeped in the folklore of Bengal and in the immortal epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The *Sadhus* loved him and were loved by him. On one occasion when he went along with certain pilgrims he lost his ordinary consciousness and fell into a trance. He described the realisation by saying that when he chanted the name of the Divine Mother and concentrated his mind on Her form, he lost his outer consciousness and felt an indescribable and ineffable bliss in his inner consciousness. The modern world—nay, even modern India—does not know and does not seem even to care to know that Yogic Samadhi is not catalepsy or self-mesmerism or auto hypnotism but the dissolution or rather the sublimation of our petty normal individuality in enveloping and engulfing waves of spiritual bliss. He was afterwards invested with the sacred thread. He was then permitted to conduct the worship of the family god Raghuvira. He passed many hours every day in worship and intense meditation. One day when he was asked to take up the character of God Shiva in a sacred drama which was staged on a Sivaratri night, he appeared on the stage as the Lord Shiva and immediately lost his ordinary consciousness. He stood on the stage with a radiant face and with tears of joy flowing from his eyes. He could not be brought back to his ordinary consciousness till the morning and the performance had stop. On another occasion he dressed himself as a woman to realise the *Madhurya Bhava* (the feeling of intensely sweet spiritual love) which filled the heart of Radha for Sri Krishna. He never found much to attract him in the ordinary dry-as dust education which is imparted in the modern school, and he attended it for sometime merely as a matter of form. He felt that the true mission of his life was the realisation of God and the communication to others of the power of realising God. He turned away from bread-winning secular education to God-winning spiritual education.

We now come to the next outstanding event which profoundly influenced his life. Rani Rasmani was a wealthy Hindu widow. She was devoted to the goddess Kali and built a temple for the goddess at Dakshineswar near Calcutta. She requested Gadadhar's eldest brother Ramkumar to officiate as the priest in the temple. He agreed and took up that office. Gadadhar took up later on the office of decorating the image. From this time began his intensive spiritual *sadhana*. He poured out his heart in sweet song; he feasted his eyes by decorating the deity; and he meditated on the goddess day and night. The quiet spot where he used to meditate in a grove of five

trees is known as *Panchavati*. His life was then one of continuous meditation and devotion.

Gadadhar—let me rather use the more famous name—Sri Ramakrishna—threw himself heart and soul into the worship of the Divine Mother. Sister Nivedita says:—"Driven by his own nature, impelled from within by that irresistible necessity that called him into being without any rest or relaxation for twelve long years at least he persisted in that inner warfare. Then, at last, the goal was attained. The Mother revealed Herself. From that moment his personality was that of a little child satisfied that he was in Her arms." He was overwhelmed by the ecstasy of the vision of the Goddess. He felt that the image was vibrant with Her spiritual glory. His mind had moved away from the formality of *Vaidhi Bhakti* (ordinary formal devotion) into the joy of *Prema Bhakti* (intense and ecstatic devotion) and was in a state of continuous ecstasy.

His God-intoxication appeared to his nearest relations and others as insanity. To worldlings other-worldiness always appears to be madness and nothing more! Many remedies were tried but in vain. Finally his mother resolved to get him married. He was eventually married to Saradmoni Devi. He himself said on a later occasion about the meaning of marriage: "Do you know why one should marry? A Brahman has to undergo ten kinds of *Samskaras* and marriage is one of them. One can really become an Acharya when he has passed through all the *Samskaras*." The Indian ideal of marriage is the ideal beautifully described in the *Bhagavata* where woman is described as man's ally in the war of sense and soul. The highest sublimation of the Hindu marital ideal is found in Sri Ramakrishna's marital life. He was her *Ishta Devata* (beloved deity) as his *Ishtam* was the Divine Mother. He regarded his wife as a manifestation of the Divine Mother and he trained and disciplined her in the paths of God-ward love. The life of the Holy mother is one of the first things that Modern India has had the good fortune to have and to show to the world.

Sri Ramakrishna then perfected his *sadhana* by the help and guidance received by him from a Bhairavi Brahmani and by a great saint named Totapuri and by many other devotees and learned men. All the varieties of Vaishnava and Sakta *sadhanas*, all the forms of Bhava (spiritual feeling) from *dasya* (service) to *Madhurya* (sweetness), all the methods and practices and ideals of all the great religions—were summoned up and perfected and transcended in Sri Ramakrishna. More than any other *sadhanas*, the *sadhanas* of *Vatsalya* and *Madhurya* even more than the *sadhanas* of *Santa* and *Dasya* and *Sakhya* appealed to him

and won his heart. The love of the milkmaids of Brindavana for Sri Krishna has always been regarded in India as the acme of the human realisation of God. The sage Narada himself instances them in his *Bhakti Sutras* as the greatest among the lovers of God. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that they forgot their body in a tumult of bliss when they saw Sri Krishna's holy and blessed form or heard the soul entrancing melodies of his flute which, according to the Upanishads, was the form taken by God Shiva to be as near God Vishnu as possible. The most vital elements in this *Mahabhava* (supreme spiritual love) of Radha for Sri Krishna are the element of self-forgetfulness in seeking the joy of the Beloved (*Tatsukhasukhitvam*) and the element of intense pain at even the thought of a momentary separation from the Beloved (*Videshabhacerutvam*). Just as Sri Andal personated the *gopis* in her heart to realise their supreme adorations of love and just as Chaitanya impersonated Radha in the drama of Krishna Leela to realise the highest form of devotion to God, even so Sri Ramakrishna went about for some time in women's garments and spoke and felt as a woman to conquer his heart and make it full of a love which passeth all understanding. He used to be often with the ladies of the family of Rani Rasmoni's son-in-law Mathur Babu who was one of the greatest of his devotees. It was his privilege to taste the supreme bliss of God-love and at the same time to enjoy the supreme bliss of *Brahma Sakshatkara* (identity with the Blissful Absolute). It was Totapuri that gave him *Sanyasa* and initiated him in the path of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* (undifferentiated and ecstatic trance). Sri Ramakrishna passed at a bound into the highest plane of *Brahmisti* and *Brahmibhava* and attained the highest culmination of spiritual realisation.

Some years later his nephew, his brother and his mother died. But nothing in life or in death ever made him swerve an inch from his self-chosen and God-ordained path. It was in March 1875 that there happened an event which was destined to have far-reaching consequences on two great personages and their great motherland. Sri Ramakrishna heard about Keshab Chunder Sen's greatness and with his usual simplicity went to meet him. Keshab Chunder Sen was one of the most pious of men. But his mind was not steeped in the mystical lore of India or in the Indian *sadhana*s of God-love and God-realisation. His contact with Sri Ramakrishna intensified him in his desire for the vision and realisation of God. He realised and proclaimed his famous *Navavidhana* (New Dispensation) for which he received his inspiration from Sri Ramakrishna. The beautiful idea of the Motherhood of God now became a portion of the Neo-

Brahmoism. Love of God became a more intimate feeling than a mere sense of dependence and awe. God was realised both as formless and as having form and as nameless and as having names. Brahmoism became more tolerant of image-worship. Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, who was a great Brahmo leader, wrote in the Theistic Quarterly Review in October, 1897: "My mind is still floating in the luminous atmosphere which that wonderful man diffuses around him whenever and wherever he goes. My mind is not yet disenchanted of the mysterious and indefinable pathos which he pours into it whenever he meets me. What is there in common between him and me? I, a Europeanised, civilised, self-centred, semi-sceptical, so-called educated reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, unpolished, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee? His face retains a fullness, a child-like tenderness, a profound visible humbleness, an unspeakable sweetness of expression and a smile that I have seen on no other face that I can remember..... His religion means ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight, his whole nature burns night and day with the permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling. His conversation is a ceaseless breaking forth of this inward fire and lasts long hours..... He never writes anything, seldom argues, he never attempts to instruct, he is continuously pouring out his soul in a rhapsody of spiritual utterances, he sings wonderfully, and makes observations of singular wisdom..... He has no other thought, no other occupation, no other relation, no other friend in his humble life than his God. That God is more than sufficient for him. His spotless holiness, his deep unspeakable blessedness, his unstudied, endless wisdom, his childlike peacefulness and affection towards all men, his consuming all-absorbing love for God are his only reward. And may he long continue to enjoy that reward! *Our own ideal of religious life is different*, but so long as he is spared to us, gladly shall we sit at his feet to learn from him the sublime precepts of purity, unworldliness, spirituality, and inebriation in the love of God." I have quoted this long passage not only to show the differences between the approach to God from without and the approach of God from within and to show Sri Ramakrishna's great qualities as a man but also to show how the finest incarnation of the Indian genius fascinated and even overwhelmed even the leading spirits of educated India.

Thus Sri Ramakrishna's band of admirers and devotees and disciples grew from day to day. He himself has said well: "When the rose is blown and sheds its fragrance all around the bees come of themselves. The bees seek the full-blown rose, and not the rose the

bees." Among disciples the greatest was certainly Narenda Nath Dutt better known as Swami Vivekananda. Narenda was born in 1863. He was a brilliant and gifted and versatile youth. He had a natural bias for mediation but his godless modern education made him an agnostic to some extent. But yet his inner urge towards God was imperative. He went to Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore and asked him, "Sir have you seen God?" The reply which he got was unsatisfying. He met Sri Ramakrishna in November, 1880 for the first time. Sri Ramakrishna says about that first meeting: "Narendra entered this room by the western door. He seemed careless about his body and dress, and unlike other people, unmindful of the external world. His eyes bespoke an introspective mind, as if some part of it was always concentrated upon something within." Narenda himself says about it: "To my utter surprise, he began to shed profuse tears of joy as he held me by the hand, and addressing most tenderly as one long familiar to him, said, 'Ah, you come so late! How could you be so unkind as to keep me waiting so long?'" Narenda asked him: "Have you seen God?" Sri Ramakrishna replied: "Yes I see God as I see you, only more intensely." From that time forwards Narenda met Sri Ramakrishna often and became an adept in spiritual *sadhana*s and realisations. It has been well said:—"At that first meeting, when Naren met Sri Ramakrishna more than two personalities were concerned. The complex life of India itself began to flow, as it were in two definite streams of tendency—the old and the new.....And when Sri Ramakrishna met Naren, these two, the old and the new, found their confluence, and were therefore to flow into an historic stream as it were the Mighty Ganges of the Indian future."

Thus went on the ministry of Guru Maharaj to humanity in general and the people of India in particular. Crowds went to him day after day. Max Muller says: "Numbers of earnest men, of all sects and creeds began to flock to him to receive instruction and to drink the waters of life. From day-dawn to nightfall he had no leisure to eat or drink, so engaged was he in teaching, exhorting, and ministering to the wants of these hungry and thirsty millions." His incessant talk led to the trouble of the clergyman's throat which developed into cancer. The illness became aggravated, and in spite of the best treatment he went into Mahasamadhi on 16th August, 1886.

(To be Continued.)

THE RELIGION OF VEDANTA.

By Sridhar Majumdar, M. A.

The whole world is now seething with sectarian wranglings and religious disputes. These conflicts will surely vanish if we only turn to the Upanishads, the most ancient scriptures of the world. If we cast our eyes downwards from the mountain peak, in-equalities of the planes will at once disappear. The system of Religion, preached in the Upanishads known as Vedanta, is a very catholic one; it has no quarrel with any religion whatsoever; it rather embraces in its fold all the religions of the world, and its echo still vibrates from the lips of Sri Krishna in the *Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita*. Chapter IV. Verse 11, where He says: "It is my path, O son of Pritha, that men tread everywhere."

Vedanta preaches that the whole universe, with all its animate and inanimate contents, emanates from, lives and moves in, and ultimately dissolves in Brahman, the Universal Soul (*Chhandogya Upanishad*, Chap. III, 14,1; *Taittiriya Upanishad*, *Bhriguballi*, I, 1); that though the universe is a transformation of the energy of Brahman, Brahman is not exhausted in the universe, the whole creation covers only a fraction of It; but by far the largest portion remains unmanifested, which is Its transcendent aspect (*Chhandogya*, Chap. III, 12,6); that emancipation lies in having a thorough knowledge, and realization of the true nature of Brahman, attainable by Love:—"By Love he knows me intimately and thoroughly, who am I and what am I" (*Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita*, Chap. XVIII, 55).

A question may now arise as to what is the real nature of Brahman. It is extremely difficult for the finite individual soul to get at once a clear conception of the Infinite Universal Soul; and more so to express it in adequate language. Different commentators of the *Brahma Sutra* give apparently different versions of the nature of Brahman; but they all base their conclusions on the authority of *Sruti* which is the outcome of direct intuition of the Seers of old, called *Rishis*. To doubt any of these versions is to doubt *Sruti* itself, which is regarded as sacrilege by the wise. We must reverentially bow to them all and maintain that all these different *Sruties* about the nature of Brahman are perfectly true as they are all equally weighty. The illustrious Sankara, in his theory of absolute monism (*Advaita*, pure and simple), has taken Brahman in Its transcendent aspect, which is unquestionably true if we leave out of

account the universe which is only an insignificant factor in comparison with the unmanifested portion of Brahman; the devotional Ramanuja, in his theory of differentiated monism (Bisistadwaita), has treated Brahman in Its immanent aspect, which is also very true in respect of the phenomenal world with which we are primarily concerned; the strongly pious Madhva, in his theory of dualism (Dwaita), has taken Brahman in the light of the Creator and all the manifested things as created beings, which is also relatively true. As all these views are true in respect of the particular aspect of Brahman dealt with by them, each in his own way, the real nature of Brahman is an adjustment of all these views, as taken by Acharya Nimbarka without entering into any quarrel with any other commentator, in his theory of monism standing side by side with dualism (Dwaitadwaita).

Having Infinite Brahman as the ultimate goal, none can cherish any perverse idea against any religion whatsoever; as every religion of the world preaches the worship of Brahman either personal or absolute, differing only in nomenclature but remaining everywhere the same in substance.

It is not possible for every individual to realise at once the Infinite Universal Soul; Vedanta, therefore, prescribes stages, beginning from dualism, to be pursued step by step and ending in all-embracing monism. Even in dualism Vedanta does not oppose when processes for the cultivation of devotion are different like the worship of God in the light of the father, the mother, or the most intimate friend to suit one's own nature and capacity; as in every process, Vedanta declares, the ultimate aim is the realisation of Brahman. Every religion of the world may find support in one or the other of the passages of Vedanta which is at the same time so cosmopolitan in principle that even the worst criminal, it holds, will not be lost for ever, but will some day find repose in the all-absorbing Brahman after purification by several births, proving thereby, the gospel truth that "I and my Father are one".

In the religion of Vedanta "place is found", to speak in the language of the Rev. J. Tyssul Davis (Minister of the Theistic Church, London), "for the Transcendent Deity of Hebruism, and the Immanent Deity of Pantheistic Hellenism, and reconciliation of the Unknowable of Herbert Spencer with the personal God of the Christians."

It is indeed very strange that in a matter like spiritual culture where people should stand linked hand in hand, there should be so

much bickering and bad blood disturbing the peace of the world, sometimes to such an extent as to culminate in blood shed. But now an opportune moment appears to have come, as great men of the world are trying to put together their mighty intellects to find out the way to the world's lasting peace, of which the most powerful opponent is people's aversion to people; and this aversion can only be subdued by love as was found in the life of every prophet of the world.

People's innate tendency is to love others, which remains inoperative under the influence of several external and internal adverse circumstances; these adverse circumstances may be surmounted if one only remains true to one's own altruistic instincts, as fundamental principle in each and every religion is to love and to live for others. Aversion towards any religion in this world may be overcome if one only feels that he is but a link in the chain, and that every religion is a component part of the universal religion of Vedanta. One breathing the bliss of the unlimited Brahman will refuse to be confined within the limited horizon of a communal spirit.

An echo of vedantism is heard also in the Sufism of the Mahomedans. In reality there is no material antagonism between religions of the different communities except in the twisted brain of interested persons or impostors. It only behoves us to preach to the world and to make every individual feel that there is no conflict in the ultimate end and aim of life, that the aim of every religion is to realise the Supreme Spirit and that minor differences in the intermediate processes are negligible factors, tolerable and even permissible in view of the common goal.

The Revered Sri Ramakrishna has shown by his personal example that there is no real conflict in religious ideals. At different periods of his life he followed, in his divine meditation, different paths prescribed in the different creeds of differently named religions without any bias or aversion to any faith of the world; he was convinced in the very core of his heart that every religion leads to the same goal, namely the realisation of the Supreme Being. So at the end, during the latter part of his life, he remained mostly absorbed in the Supreme Soul without recourse to any dogma or creed of any nomenclature; and this we call the Religion of Vedanta.

With this lamp of Vedanta as our guide, I am sure, there will be no more quarrel with any member of any professed religion on

earth. If we can only strain our soul to such a lofty pitch, all the differences on the way will disappear; aversion will give place to affection, enmity to amity and selfishness to selflessness. With an Universal Fatherhood an universal brotherhood will be restored turning this earth into heaven purged from all dissensions and differences.

THE INDIAN WOMAN AND THE INDIAN HOME *

By Sister Devamata.

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

That hard narrow wooden bench struck the key-note of the South Indian home. I might say of the home everywhere in India. Austere simplicity is the prevailing rule. The climate demands it and all the ideals call for it. It is not that the Indians cannot have beds or are not civilised enough to use them.

The Indo-Aryan also prefers to sit on the floor. It permits a more stable, natural posture and one that prepares better for the practice of meditation and concentration. The Occidental expends an enormous amount of subconscious energy holding himself on a raised seat against the pull of gravitation. We realize it when we try to indraw our forces. I do not suggest that the people of the West discard chairs; but for a nation as inward and contemplative in habit as the Indian, sitting cross-legged on the ground or floor is beyond a doubt the best posture. It is the one peculiarly fitted to

* This forms an abridged chapter of Sister Devamata's *Days in an Indian Monastery*, a book recently published by the Ananda Ashrama, La Crescenta California, U. S. A. The Sister is a citizen of America. She lived in India with the Indians for sometime, and had the privilege of studying Indian life closely. Her observations on the Indians and specially on the women of India will be, we hope, of much interest and benefit to our readers.—Ed. V. K.

the life. They have chairs and use them on occasions, but chiefly in receiving visitors. The inner apartments show a great barrenness of furniture.

The Indian shrinks from the tyranny of things. He has not the Western mania for collecting and storing. Each set of garments is washed every day, dried and worn on the morrow. The same is true of men and women. The whole scheme of dress is of the simplest.

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

The manner of dress labels a man or woman. In South India no Brahmin lady ever wears anything on her feet, unless it be silver anklets. Gold is never worn on the foot. Bare feet are a sign of distinction. The soles of a working-woman's feet wear out, just as the sole of a shoe wears through, and she has to resort to sandals; otherwise walking would be painful. In Bengal they always wore slippers and now they have added stockings. Western influence is more apparent there and wherever the Occident comes, material things multiply.

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

In India no effort is made to mask bodily defects or to accentuate bodily advantages. People are frankly what they are. Unveiled frankness indeed appears to characterize all Indians. As there are no closets, so there are no skeletons. People talk openly of their family affairs, honorable or otherwise. The Indian manifests always a striking detachment from his external life. He rarely identifies

himself with it. He is subjective rather than objective. He is soul and possesses body as a transient tenement. Clothes, houses, furniture and material belongings are momentary and hence secondary.

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

When the hair is dried after the morning bath, and no bath is considered a bath unless water is poured over the head, the toilet box is taken out and opened, the hair is arranged and the clean *Sari* and Jacket put on. The toilet finished, the box is set away and the lady does not look at herself for twenty-four hours. The mirror bought for me measured about nine inches by twelve and Rudra apologized for getting so large a one. It was hung in a far corner of my bed room. One morning the sweeper woman happened to catch her reflection in it. She stood transfixed. It was the first time she had ever seen herself in a mirror. She was too poor to possess a toilet box. After that she would give a few strokes with her broom, then run to have another look; then again sweep, then look. Her face was a revelation to her. She did not know that I was on the verandah outside watching her.

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

There are none the less, certain conservative restrictions about their coming and going. A gentleman must not greet a lady in the street or even look towards her, much less stop to talk with her; it matters not how close a friend of the family he may be. Young married girls who have not yet gone to live in their husband's house are exempt from this restriction. I recall one evening when I was walking with a householder friend of the monastery; we passed a house where he was very intimately connected and he called a kindly greeting to a young girl standing on the steps. She made no response and he said to me quickly: "I forgot, she has joined her husband; I should not have spoken to her."

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

Unselfishness is a living, everpresent quality in the Indian woman's heart; a natural, spontaneous attribute of her character. She does not come last because she is put last, but because she covets the place. Many of the usages that are misunderstood by the Occidental world are based on a desire to honour, protect or cherish woman—not to subordinate or dishonor her. Take the custom of the wife walking behind the husband; it arose in the days when to go abroad meant facing many dangers and the first place was a place of peril, the second was a place of protection. With that idea behind it, it has come down the ages.

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

Indian women possess unusual executive ability. Indo-Aryan annals contain the record of able rulers and administrators among

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

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

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

There have been various gifted poets among the women of modern India, but the Indian woman is primarily a mother and guardian of the sanctity of the home. The home in India is sacred and inviolable. I had daily evidence of this.

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

manufactures his tool. This machine requires several other machines to make its parts, so he is caught in a mechanical labyrinth.

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

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

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

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

Among the poor the family goes with the mother. The children follow her to work and wait near by while she performs her task. I used to see a sturdy young woman helping on the construction of a new road at Madras. As she moved back and forth, four little ones sat by the roadside watching or playing together and a fifth

hung from an over-spreading branch in a hammock, made of a piece of cotton cloth. When the lunch hour came she gathered her happy brood about her, fed them, suckled the baby, hung it up again in its improvised hammock and went back to her work. Although she carried a small basket of broken rock on her head, she seemed to me better off than many sales-women in Western shops, shut away from light and air and children in bargain basements.

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

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

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

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

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

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

STORY OF SRI SANKARACHARYA'S LIFE

(MANHOOD)

(Continued from page 432)

By Swami Atulananda

Remembering the last words of Kumarilla, Sankara directed his steps towards the Ashrama of Mandan Misra, Kumarilla's foremost disciple, who after his Guru's departure was recognised as the greatest exponent of the Karma Kanda in all India,

Mandan Misra strictly observed the elaborate sites and ceremonies prescribed in the scriptures. Day and night volumes of smoke rose from the sacrificial fires. Great discussions took place there, and the Ashrama resounded with the sonorous chanting of Vedic texts from numerous disciples, all trained and instructed by the Guru himself.

Mandan Misra himself a Sanskrit scholar, imposed the study of the sacred language as the first duty of his followers. In the Ashrama no other language was ever spoken, not even by those who performed menial services. One chronicler goes so far as to tell us that even the parrots on the place were taught to repeat texts from the Vedas. Be that as it may, learning was held in the highest esteem.

To be allowed to visit the Ashrama even, one first had to satisfy a Pandit at the gate, for no one without erudition was permitted to enter the grounds.

It must have taken a great deal of courage on the part of Sankara—then hardly more than a youth—to meet the great Acharya in his own surroundings, and there to challenge him for debate. We must not forget that the outcome of the debate would either make or break the young Sannyasin, for according to Sankara's own stipulation the losing party had to ally himself with the victor.

It was only Sankara's established reputation as an exceptionally able opponent that made it possible for him to approach Mandan Misra on such terms. Both parties were confident of their own power. At the same time they realized the other's strength. They were well matched, and no one could foresee the outcome of the contest.

When Sankara arrived, Mandan Misra received him with due respect. Though himself older in years, he treated Sankara as his equal. Comfortable quarters were shown him, where he was made welcome to stay as long as it would please him. Then, with mutual understanding the day for debate was set. Both sides agreed that it was necessary to appoint an umpire to give decisions, and finally to announce the victor.

Mandan Misra was a householder. He had married a young woman as vastly learned as he himself was. Her name, Ubhoy Bharati, was known all over the land. She was the only person qualified to fill this important position. It was therefore decided to approach her on the subject.

Now the learned lady was placed in a perplexing position. Partiality on her part was out of the question. But for a wife to decide

against her husband would have been condemned as most unbecoming; neither was it befitting a woman to decide against a great Sannyasin. Such was the opinion of those days. She, therefore, declined the honour,

When, however, she was pressed to accept, as no one else could take her place, she got out of the difficulty by taking refuge in divine power. "Let the gods decide," she suggested.

When the day came the two Gurus, attended by their disciples, met for the contest. A shady space in the open was duly consecrated by sprinkling of Ganges water and uttering of prescribed Mantrams. Seats were prepared for the contestants, made of sacred Kusha grass covered with tiger skin, scriptures were recited. Then the two Acharyas took their seats facing each other, their disciples arrayed behind their masters. A Brahmin priest offered worships to the two scholars, waving before them lights and incense.

When everything was ready the lady umpire appeared. In her hand she brought two flower garlands, fresh and fragrant. Placing a garland around the neck of each of the two opponents, she spoke, "May the disputants strictly adhere to the rules of debate. May the Devas be propitious. May Truth prevail. I call upon the God of Justice to decide in this serious matter. The garland of the victor will remain fresh and fragrant while the garland of the conquered will wilt and wither. These shall be the signs of victory and defeat and there shall be no other decision."

Sankara being the challenging party, it was Mandan Misra's privilege to open the discussion. After a short outline of the creed he defended, Mandan Misra stated his conclusions in short, concise aphorisms. Sankara countered with equally terse maxims, expressing his own belief.

Mandan.—He who worships the Devas goes to the Devas.

Sankara.—He who worships the Atman goes to the Atman.

Mandan.—The Devas are the highest, they are the source of all blessings.

Sankara.—The Atman surpasses the Devas, It is beyond time and space.

Mandan.—In the sphere of the Devas man enjoys supreme happiness.

Sankara.—A million times greater is the happiness of him who knows the Atman.

Mandan.—The performance of Yajna (sacrifices) leads to Mukti (liberation).

Sankara.—No limited cause can produce an unlimited effect. Atma-jnanam (knowledge of the self) being beyond cause and effect, is the only means to Mukti.

Thus it goes on, statement and counter-statement. The subjects become more and more subtle, the arguments take the highest flight of human intellect. God, the soul, the universe, their mutual relations, creation, Maya, these and a thousand other questions tax to the utmost the mental capacity of the great philosophers.

For hours the controversy goes on—two brilliant minds beautifully matched. Sometimes Mandan Misra seems to score a point. Then, again, Sankara, like a thunderbolt smashes the very foundation of his argument. With the sharp-edged sword of wisdom all relative truths are cut asunder, and the great truths of Vedanta prevail.

Mandan Misra's flower garland begins to wilt. But the old scholar does not give in till the last blossom withers. Then there is a great shout of triumph from Sankara's disciples. But Sankara silences them with a stern rebuke. He, himself, jumps to his feet, and with great humility bows down before his brilliant contestant, taking the dust of his feet.

"No, my son," Mandan Misra remonstrates, "it is for me to do this. It is for the disciple to do honour to his master. I feel proud to place myself at the feet of the greatest philosopher and seer of this age. It is my good fortune that we have met. Henceforth I respect you as my Guru. I am ready from this moment to follow you, and carry out your behest. This Ashrama, with all it contains I offer at your feet as Guru-dakshina (gift of a disciple to his Guru). Kindly deign to accept it. I see now that it is true, indeed, that 'other doctrines sink into silence when the Vedanta speaks, even as the yelp of a jackal is silenced when the lion roars.'"

Now it is written, that Ubhoy Bharati, the lady umpire, was no other than the incarnation of Saraswati, the goddess of learning. She had taken human birth to play her part on this occasion of the great debate. Now, her work on earth was finished, and a wonderful event took place.

A cloud of dazzling splendour slowly descended from the heavens, and enveloped her. Then, just as slowly the cloud ascends. And in the midst of this glory of light, the astonished spectators behold the goddess Saraswati, majestic, beautiful beyond compare. Ubhoy Bharati has vanished. Transfigured, gently she is carried aloft back to Swarga, the abode of the gods.

Sankara resumes his journey. Mandan Misra, now named Sureswar by Sankara, is among the disciples who accompany him.

Later, he earned renown for himself as a great exponent of the Vedanta philosophy.

The party travels over the whole of India, preaching and teaching, converting whomsoever they met. Sankara also heals the sick, even raises the dead and many other miracles are ascribed to him. Of his travels many interesting episodes are recorded.

One day, passing through a village, Sankara hears of a boy, thirteen years old, who was behaving in a strange manner. In his infancy this boy, all on a sudden, refused to speak. Nothing could induce him to utter a sound. He was teased, he was coaxed, he was beaten. But it was all in vain. So they nicknamed him Hava (the dumb).

When Sankara passed through the village, the distressed father of the boy, thought, "This great Sannyasin is reputed to possess miraculous powers. Perhaps he can do something for my child." So he took the boy, and approaching Sankara, said, "Revered Sir, my son is sadly afflicted. He is a good boy, gentle and obedient. But he acts in a strange way. He does not want to speak. He never plays with the other boys; he sits quietly in a corner, indifferent to his surroundings. He never laughs, neither does he cry. He expresses neither joy nor sorrow. Perhaps a spirit obsesses him. I pray of you that you kindly have mercy on him and cure him."

Sankara looks at the boy fixedly. He takes him by the hand, smiles at him, and softly stroking his head, says very gently, "Well, my boy, tell me, who are you? What is your name? Why are you so silent?"

The boy looks up. He stares at Sankara for a moment. It is as if a thought enters his mind. An expression of wonder steals over his features. A new light shines in his eyes. He smiles; his whole attitude and bearing changes. He seems suddenly filled with joy. Then, to everyone's surprise, with his face lifted to Sankara, he chants in the sweetest voice:

I am not a boy, nor an angel, nor a ghost.
I am not a Brahmin, nor a Sudra—beyond caste.
I am not a Brahmacharin, nor householder, nor Sannyasin.
I am the effulgent one, the blissful one, the Spirit Divine.
I am the shining one, I know no grief.
I am Brahman, I am all being.
I am Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.
I am eternally free.

The father, amazed, looks on. This boy speaks! The long silence is broken! He embraces his son, holds him to his breast,

and with his voice trembling with joy, he cries out, to Sankara, "Sir what can I do to repay you for his blessing!"

Sankara looks at the boy again, intently. Then he looks at the father, and says with great tenderness, "Sir, this boy belongs to me. He will never be happy in your home. You have been a good father to him. You are a pious, virtuous man. Therefore, this child was born in your home. But he has come to this world for a great purpose—to preach the Vedanta truth to suffering humanity. You wish to repay me? Then give me your son, that his destiny may be fulfilled."

The father is downcast. Tears fill his eyes. The child, by regaining his speech, has, as it were, just been restored to him. Now he is requested to offer him up to a stranger, who will take him away for ever. What will the boy's mother say? She will be heart-broken. He hesitates. He must have time to consider.

The following day, Sankara visits the parents at their cottage, and then he assures them that soon another boy will bless their home, and that boy will be to them a source of great happiness. With this assurance the parents at last consent. The boy is happy to become a Sannyasin, and to travel far and wide with his Guru, and, with Sankara's consent, he promises to see his parents again after twelve years.

Sankara blesses the parents. "No sacrifice," he tells them, "goes in vain. Great will be your reward. He who makes an offering to the Lord, receives in return a thousandfold."

Then, taking the boy by the hand, he says, "Now let us go. You have realized the Truth. Henceforth your name will be Hasthamalak, for as one possesses the Amalak-fruit by holding it firmly in the hand, so you possess God by holding Him firmly in your heart."

Thus, one by one, Sankara collects his great disciples who become his co-workers. When the greater part of the Indian plains had been converted to his views, there was still Kashmir left, in those days a land of great culture. There was in Kashmir a temple dedicated to the goddess Saraswati. It was the stronghold of learning. Seven gates, one after the other, led to the interior of the temple where the goddess resided. Each gate was watched over by a learned Pandit. Unless one was able to defeat these Pandits in debate, one was not allowed to pass through the gates. Sankara succeeded at one gate after the other, till he stood in the very presence of the goddess. One who could proceed so far, was considered unconquerable. So after this test, further victory came without much effort. Kashmir accepted him.

Sankara's work was now finished. He had written his commentaries and original works. He had preached the sublime teachings of Advaita Vedanta. He had vindicated the truth of the Vedas, "Brahman alone is real. Everything else is relative. The human soul is that Brahman; not separate from It." It was now left for his disciples to protect the work.

Then came the last pilgrimage. Sankara went into the Himalayas. At the foot of a snow-capped peak he blessed his disciples, and old them to follow him no farther.

This was the last ever seen or heard of the great sage. At thirty years of age, from Himalayan snow peak, he entered into Bliss.

But Sankara's work is still living. His commentaries and other writings are read and studied by scholars in the East and in the West and his Advaita doctrine has never been surpassed. It represents the highest pinnacle of thought ever reached by the human intellect.

(Concluded.)

NEWS AND REPORTS

BIRTH-DAY CELEBRATION OF BHAGAVAN SRI RAMAKRISHNA AT MADRAS

The Ninety Third Birthday Anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at the Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras with due pomp and ceremony. The Tithi Puja which came off on the 23rd of February was observed with great fervour and devotion by the monks and the devotees. On that day through the calm silence of the early morning rose the sweet music of Indian pipes and drum reminding people of the advent, about a century ago, of Sri Ramakrishna, the divine Master. This was followed by the chorus devotional songs sung by the monks in glory of the great Master. This over, at 9 a. m., the boys of the R. K. Mission Students' Home congregated in the spacious Hall of the Math and chanted the Veda-Mantram for a long time, which surcharged the atmosphere with piety and devotion. Puja and Homa, offerings and distribution of Prasadam and feeding of the devotees formed some of the other items of the function.

On the 26th of February, the day of the Public Celebration, the monks and the devotees had a very busy time of it. From the day preceding the 26th all were busy in decorating the Math premises with all that augur the approach of an auspicious ceremony. From the gate right up to the Hall, all through, hung garlands of various kinds. On the east of the Hall stood the dais of Sri Guru Maharaj whereon shone forth a full size enlarged portrait of the Master in Samadhi posture in the midst of offerings of flowers and sacred leaves.

The fragrance of the incense and sandal dust that were burnt accompanied with the sweet, melodious voice of devotional songs in accompaniment of musical instruments of diverse kinds—all these but inspired devotion in all present. In the fore-noon like the previous occasions a large number of poor Narayanas were given food—one full meal and enough each. Besides the whole day distribution of Prasadam, as many as four hundred devotees partook of the dinner. In the evening, after a lecture in Tamil on "Sri Ramakrishna" by Mr. Tirukural Kuppaswami Mudaliar, Mr. K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, formerly the Acting District Judge of Trichinopoly read a paper in English on "Sri Ramakrishna, as an Incarnation of the Indian Genius" with the Hon'ble Sir. C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, the Law Member of the Madras Government in the chair.

The first part of Mr. Sastri's learned paper is published elsewhere; and the remaining portions are also expected to appear in these pages later on. While laying much stress on the importance of the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda on the revival of the Indian national life and culture, the President said that unlike many other prophets and reformers these twain personalities could not jump out of their skin. They were part of the spirit of their country. Jesus and Mahomed came to protest against the spirit of the people where they were born. But Sri Ramakrishna was an exception to this: he was the perfection of Indian spirit. To those who criticised India as the land of many irreconcilable faiths the speaker would say that the unity of life established by Bose in the scientific sphere had been established in the spiritual sphere long ago. Indians were not inert. Indians were once great and glorious and their kings were great not because of their earthly belongings and power but because of their culture and religion. In his travel from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Sind to Bengal, the speaker found a cultural unity amongst the people of India. In spite of the strong caste question, it is in India alone where a Paraiyah saint like Sri Nandanar is honoured and worshipped by all irrespective of caste and creed, high and low. The speaker concluded by pointing out the great service that is being rendered by the Ramakrishna Mission for the revival of Indian culture and civilization in this great land of ours and also for spreading India's message broadcast in countries outside India.

BIRTH DAY CELEBRATION AT OTHER PLACES

The blessed Day was observed with great devotion and enthusiasm in many places in India and abroad. We have received information from different places. Below are given some extracts.

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission Head Quarters, Belur, Bengal, witnessed a vast concourse of pilgrims. The number was estimated at exceeding a lac and a half, beating all previous records. Of this not less than a quarter of a lac partook of the sacred Prasad without any distinction of caste and creed at the dining camp, besides petty distribution in hands to a large proportion of the pilgrims. Bhajan, Kirtan and concerts by different parties, free distribution of cold drink, tea and other kinds of eatables by generous persons formed some of the important items of the great festival. The spacious grounds of the monastery was surrounded on all hands by steam boats, motor buses, cars and carriages, country boats and rickshaws, besides hundreds of foot-trotters. More than a thousand volunteers rendered their service in different capacities.

The Ramakrishna Mission Society, Rangoon convened a crowded meeting in the Reddiar Hall with Prof. Jevons of the Rangoon University in the chair. In the course of their address Bhikku Prajnanda said that Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of the Vedanta, and Messrs. S. K. Sengupta and I. B. Mazumdar remarked that Sri Ramakrishna came at a moment when Indians were fast forgetting the glory of their culture and civilization and that the Master's life was a conciliation ground of a series of contradiction.

The Ramakrishna Mission, Jaffna, Ceylon, arranged a public meeting where Mr. M. S. Rasaratnam and Principal S. N. Pillai spoke on the life and teachings of the great Master, with Swami Avinashananda in the chair. The President remarked, the service of man is the service of God on earth.

The Ramakrishna Ashrama, Ootacamund fed thirteen hundred poor Narayanas and a number of devotees. In a meeting lectures were delivered in Tamil and English by the friends and the Swamis of the Math, Mr. K. S. Ramaswami Gounden of Tiruppur presiding.

The special feature at the Sri Ramakrishna Niranjana Ashrama, Ottapalam, S. Malabar, was that at the invitation of some of the caste Hindus, the untouchables, Cherumas and Paraiahs, had the privilege for the first time to go before the shrine to offer prayers to God. They were also told that they would be welcome there any day of the year to offer their worship and prayers. After a procession with the portraits of Sri Ramakrishna on elephants' back, the poor and the devotees were sumptuously fed. In the evening the Nambudiri children performed prayers.

The Sri Ramakrishna Math, Nettayam, Trivandrum, fed about twelve hundred Daridra Narayanas, over and above a large number of Bhaktas. In the meeting presided over by Mr. Bhaskara

Menon, District Judge, lectures were delivered in Malayalam and English by the Swamis and the friends of the Math.

The Birth-day was also celebrated at the Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Bangalore; Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Haripad, Malabar; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Netrunpalli, N. Arcot; Sri Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram Kankhal; The Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram, Lucknow; The Ramakrishna Mission Barisal; Sri Ramakrishna Math, Dacca; Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Gopalganj, Faridpur. The devotees of Palghat, Malabar, also observed the holy Day. The devotees of Vizianagram fed four hundred poor people of the town, and at a meeting resolved to start a permanent Ashrama named 'Sri Ramakrishna Math.'

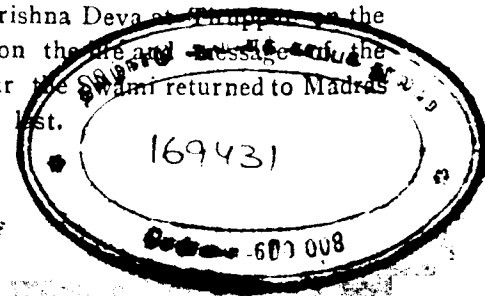
SWAMI AVINASHANANDA'S VISIT TO TELUGU DISTRICTS

In response to an invitation from Guntur, Swami Avinashananda left Madras for Guntur on the 25th January. At Guntur he delivered three public lectures on "Service and God-realisation," "The Message of Swami Vivekananda" and "Sri Ramakrishna's Mission." He delivered an address to the students and also held several informal meetings at friends' houses. After a stay of few days, he left Guntur for Bezvada where his programme included separate lectures for ladies and gentlemen and also informal conversations. At both the places the public evinced much interest in the work and ideals of the Mission. Previous to this tour the Swami also visited Rajahmundry and a few other places and delivered some lectures.

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA'S VISIT TO TRICHUR

In connection with the thirteenth Annual Conference of the Vivekodayam Samajam, Trichur, Cochin State, to celebrate the Birthday Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Yatiswarananda, President, Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Madras, visited Trichur, at the invitation of the Samajam. The Swami delivered a series of three lectures on "The Meaning and Purpose of Religion," "Message of the Gita" and "Mission of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda", the first on the 1st March and the second and the third on the 2nd March. The Swami took part in opening the Flower-Show and Exhibition, Distribution of Prizes, etc. during the four days of the Conference.

On his way back to Madras, the Swami presided over the Birthday Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna Deva at Thrippunithurai on the 11th March and delivered a lecture on the life and message of the great Master. After a fortnight's tour the Swami returned to Madras on the morning of the 13th March last.



(5)

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