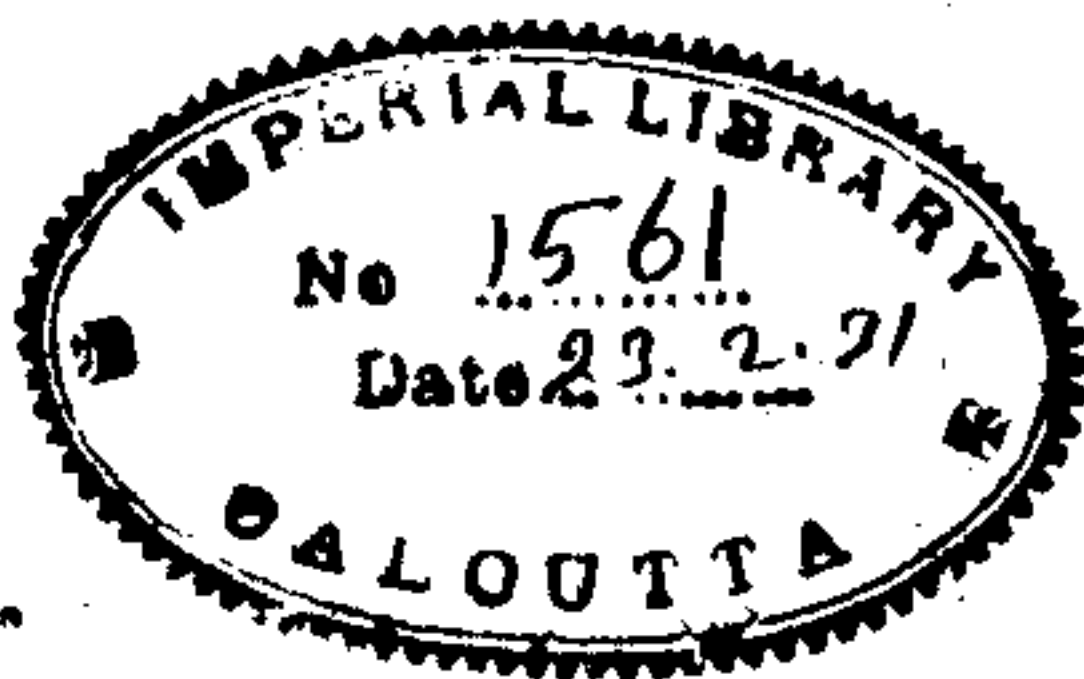


CHAITHNYA TO VIVEKANANDA

LIVES OF THE SAINTS OF BENGAL

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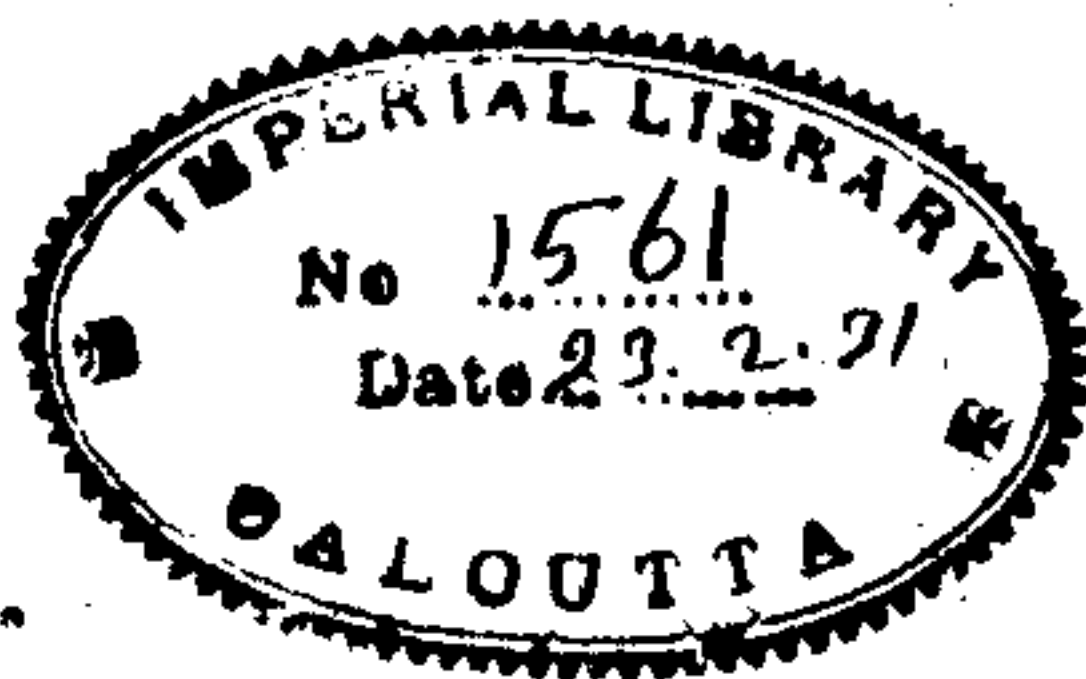
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INTRODUCTION.

IN this book are presented the life-sketches of six saints —five Bengali and one Assamese. Both in their individual character and teaching and in their historic setting, they differ widely, one from the other. Chaitanya arose at a time when the native dynasties of Bengal had become a name and she was fast becoming a province of the Moghul Empire. He was a born mystic and preacher and founded a most impassioned type of Vaishnavism. Sankara Deva, somewhat elder to Chaitanya in age, started in times almost contemporary with Chaitanya, an equally widespread, though somewhat different, type of Vaishnavism in Assam. Ramaprasad Sen was born in the 18th century when Bengal was passing from the Nabobs into the hands of the English Company and became the scene of great political and social turmoil. An ardent initiate of the decadent Saktaism, he sang in matchless songs a religion of true love and ecstatic realisation of God under the form of the Dread Mother Kali. A century and more of civilized administration and wide diffusion of Western knowledge separate the subjects of the last two sketches from the rest. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, though uneducated in the formal sense, was a saint of the old ascetic type, full of the great philosophic learning of the Hindus and possessing a marvellous depth of mystical genius and intuition which cast a spell on all who knew him or came into his company. His illustrious disciple Swami Vivekananda, a Bengali youth nurtured in Western knowledge and endowed with great mental gifts, gave a world-wide currency to the teachings of his Master and evoked a wide interest in ancient Indian Philosophy and Religion in

our own country and in Western lands. He stands for a combination of the old Philosophy and Intuitive Religion with the learning and science of modern times.

To a superficial observer it may appear impossible to point to any continuous or common features in these historic teachers and men of religion who have successively risen in the bosom of the Bengali race. If we adopt the common distinctions of Hinduism, we should call one of them a Vaishnava, another a Shakta and the modern ones, Vedantins pure and simple. And if we look to the manner of their lives and teachings, we would be disposed to draw a similar distinction. Chaitanya, steeped in Vaishnava poetry and imagery, and preaching to ecstatic multitudes, would figure as a preacher and reformer. Ramaprasad Sen would naturally be classed as a poet; while Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda would be deemed exalted types of Recluse and Missionary respectively. But, over and above these distinctions—distinctions due partly to differences of individual genius and partly to their different historic setting and influences—one cannot but perceive a certain common individuality and family likeness running through them all.

From Chaitanya "the mad preacher of Nadia" who, foregoing all the privilege of position and learning, took himself to the company and service of the lowly and the devout, preaching the cult of the Loving God, down to the uneducated "priest of Dakshineswar" and his celebrated disciple who careered round the world "blowing the trumpet of Vedanta," we find in them all a great and noble catholicity of mind and a high attempt to live and propound the cardinal faith of the Ancient Religion. In spite of the varying dress and language in which their teachings are clothed, these saints all found themselves on

the permanent doctrines of Hinduism, its age-long ~~concepts~~ of Godhead and soul, its sure and accredited modes of religious approach and effort. It is the ancient philosophy of the Hindus that finds varied utterance in the teachings of Chaitanya, the poems of Ramaprasad Sen, the sayings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the eloquent discourses of Swami Vivekananda. Further, we find in the best Bengali types, a supreme and burning love for fellow-men, a deep spirit of humanity to which we can find few parallels outside Bengal or even India.

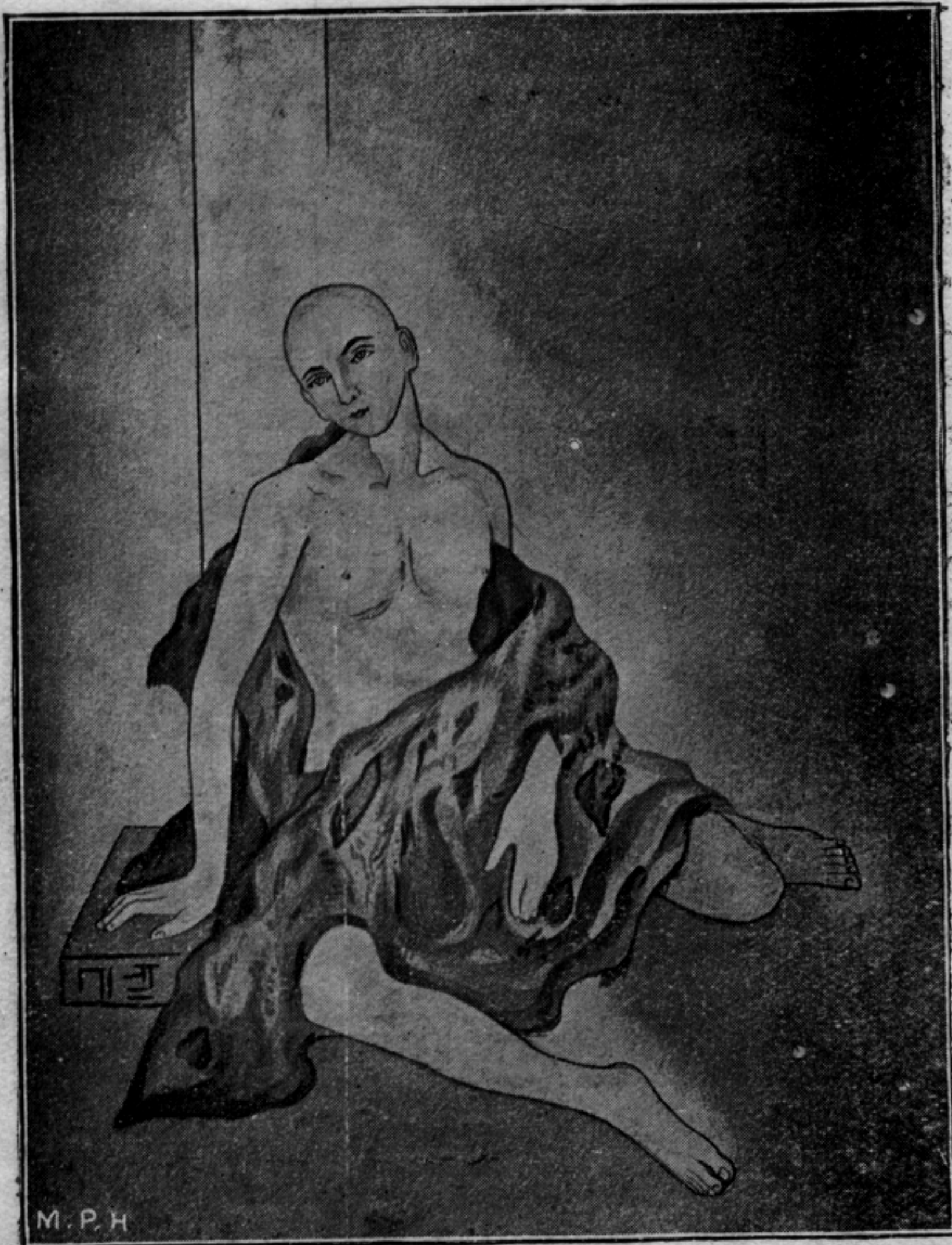
The creed of love, which Chaitanya began to preach in Bengal, has left profound and deeply graven marks on Bengali culture and literature and on the social and communal life of Bengal, permeating the lowest strata of society. "It has found exquisite expression in lyrical poetry and music in a richly emotional school of devotional hymns which has been a peculiar contribution of Bengal. Every Bengali has in his blood a liberal dose of this sweet religion of love as a culture-inheritance." Part of this inheritance may be traced to the centuries of Buddhistic influence in which the early Bengali race was cradled and nurtured.

We have, in these sketches, tried to give not only a detailed biography of the saints and teachers but also a succinct account of the religion and philosophy which each of them taught or propounded. The details of their lives even in the case of those removed from us by centuries, are happily preserved to us in native chronicles of exceptional value. We have drawn on them and unfolded in the usual biographical manner, the various stages of their lives, their doings, the religious and social reforms they effected and the missions or sects which they founded. These lives are full of interest for the student of Religion as they shed the

~~most~~ powerful light on the journey of the soul, its upward ascent as exemplified in some of the most gifted types of religious men known to India or even outside it.

In describing the teachings of the various saints, their special and historic versions of the Hindu faith, we have throughout drawn on the utterances or poems, as the case may be, of the individual saints themselves. These utterances and poems have a unique value, and give us wonderful glimpses into the inner life of the saints in a manner which mere biographical details cannot reveal. But apart from their intrinsic merit as revealing the inner life and perfection of the saints, they also serve to put forth in fresh and undying language the great truths of the Hindu religion conceived though they be in Vaishnava, Sakta or





CHAITANYA

CHAITANYA

SRI Krishna Chaitanya (1485—1533) the mediæval Reformer of Bengal, preached a most impassioned type of Vaishnavism and left a great and historic sect behind him. But greater than his creed and reforms was his character pure, gentle, ecstatic, full of sweetness and loving kindness. His heart flowed out in sympathy for all, for the poor and the lowly as well as for the scholar and the prince. He lived with them all, taught them, served them and consoled them. Still, across the centuries, the story of his life and character—so full of purity, self-sacrifice and a deep love of humanity—moves our admiration. Never, since Buddha's death, had any saint more gentle and sweet, more humane, trodden the soil of India.

Chaitanya's life falls into three periods (i) the first twenty-four years from his birth to the time of his entering the monastic order; (ii) the six years of pilgrimage to South and North India; (iii) the last eighteen years which were spent in residence at Puri.

CHAITANYA'S BIRTH AND PARENTAGE.

Jagannath Misra, surnamed Purandhar, a Brahman of the Vaidik sub-caste, had emigrated from his ancestral home in Sylhet and settled at Navadwip, a town in the district of Nadia in Bengal, in order to live on the bank of the holy Ganges. His wife was Shachi, a daughter of a great scholar, by name Nilambar Chakravarthi. Nine children were born to this couple of which the first eight, all daughters, had died in infancy and the ninth, a boy, named Bishwarup, abandoned the world at the age of

sixteen when pressed to marry, and entered a monastery somewhere in South India. In February-March 1485 A.D. when there was a lunar eclipse at the time of full moon, another son was born to this couple. It was their tenth child. The first thing that attracted the attention of the joyous parents, was the impression on the child of the thirty-two marks of the person of Narayan. They believed with joy that their child was the second person of the Hindu Triad—the deliverer and preserver of gods and men. The new-born child was named Bishwambhar. But the women of the village, seeing that his mother had lost so many children before him, gave him the disparaging name of *Nimai* ('short-lived') in order to propitiate the evil spirits. His marvellous beauty, however, earned him the name of *Gaur* or *Gauranga* ("Fair-complexioned"). The day on which Bishwambhar was born being the day of lunar eclipse, Hari's name was chanted all over the village and this was taken as a pious omen that Bishwambhar would prove a teacher of Vishnu faith and *Bhakti*.

HIS EDUCATION.

Navadwip was famous in mediæval Bengal for its *tols* or schools of Sanskrit learning. Especially Sanskrit Grammar and Logic were highly developed and studied there. The fame of its scholars had spread all over the province and students came from several parts to study under them. Bishwambhar early joined one of these *tols* and he showed great keenness and precocity of intellect in mastering all branches of Sanskrit learning, especially Grammar and Logic. "But, if we may believe the biographers of Chaitanya (the name by which Bishwambhar was initiated as a monk later on and which we have anticipated in this book) the atmosphere of the town was sceptical and un-

cere devotion. Proud of their intellectuality, ~~proud of~~ ^{of the} vast wealth they acquired by gifts from rich Hindus, the local *Pundits* despised *Bhakthi* or devotion as weak and vulgar, and engaged in idle ceremonies or idler amusements. Vedantism formed the topic of conversation of the cultured few; wine and goat's meat were indulged in by the majority of the people and such *shakta* ceremonies as were prescribed were performed with zeal and enthusiasm.* Chaitanya too grew up as one of them, proud of his learning and intellectual attainments.

HIS MARRIAGE.

His father died while he was still a student. He then married Lakshmi, the daughter of a Ballab Acharya, with whom he seems to have fallen in love at first sight. He thus became a householder and, when his studies were over, he began to take pupils like the other Brahmans of his town. As a pundit, he surpassed the other scholars of the place, and it is said that he once even defeated in argument some renowned scholar of another province who was travelling all over India holding disputations. Vivid descriptions are left to us in his biographies of this famous encounter—how all the enthusiastic scholars of the town, young as well as old, put forward this Chaitanya as their candidate and how the young scholar, after a great display of his logic and learning, made the itinerant disputant admit his defeat. Chaitanya then made a scholastic tour in East Bengal in which he received many gifts from admiring householders. When he returned to Navadvip, he found that his wife had died of snake-bite during his absence. After a while, he married Vishnupriya. Chaitanya was now in the very height of his wordly career—a rich and prosperous man, a

* Krishna Das' "Life of Chaitanya". Translated by Prof. Jadu Nath Sarkar, Introduction.

proud scholar, and the admiration of his province. His prosperity and learning seem to have turned his head with pride ; but the reformation of his soul was close at hand.

CHAITANYA'S "CONVERSION."

During a pilgrimage to Gaya for performing *Shraddh* to his father, he met Ishwar Puri, a Vaishnava monk of the order of Madhwacharya and a disciple of Madhav Puri or Madhavendra, a monk of the same order. This Madhavendra seems to have first introduced the new cult of Vishnu-worship and Bhakthi among the monks of Bengal and Orissa. Chaitanya took Ishwar Puri as his Guru, "A complete change now came over his spirit. His intellectual pride was gone ; he became a bhaktha ; whatever subject he lectured on, the theme of his discourse was love of Krishna. Indeed he developed religious ecstasy and for some time behaved like a mad man : he laughed, wept, incessantly shouted Krishna's name, climbed up trees or raved in abstraction imagining himself to be Krishna."

The intensity of his feelings sought expression in the movements of his body. He fell on the ground, rolled in the dust, wept, laughed, and danced. During this *Prem Pralap*, or "fit of love," which lasted for hours, he neither ate nor drank. When it was day, he would ask what part of the night it was, and, when it was night, he would ask what part of the day it was, while ever and anon he uttered the words—"Krishna ! Krishna ! Hari bal ! Hari bal !"

MADHAV PURI'S TEACHINGS.

From what we gather, Madhav Puri seems to have been a godly man, learned, simple in habits and thought, full of a deep and ecstatic love for Krishna. But, in spite of his ecstasy and wandering life, strangely anticipating the doings of Chaitanya himself, he seems to have been a scholar

went about teaching the same to all. It was ~~throu~~ ^{thru} ~~the~~ ^{his} of his disciples—Ishwar Puri—that the new Creed descend-
ed to Chaitanya and Nityanand the latter of whom was
converted some time earlier than Chaitanya and who be-
came to Chaitanya “even more than what Paul was to
Christ.” Madhav Puri and his disciples do not stand alone
in this respect. Others, too like Ramananda of the
Ramanujite order and Vallabhacharya were South Indian
Missionaries. It was the seed sown by the former that
blossomed into the great popular religions of Kabir and
Nanak: while the latter’s name is remembered as the
founder of the great Vaishnavite church that still holds
its sway over millions in Rajasthan and Guzerat.

CHAITANYA’S LIFE AFTER HIS ‘CONVERSION.’

The youthful and mystic heart of Chaitanya was greatly
touched by the new religion of *bhakti* and loving worship.
He gathered round himself the devout and the enthusiastic
of his town, and with them often danced and sang and dis-
coursed on the sweetness and beauty of Krishna. Men from
other parts of the district too joined him, Adwaitacharya of
Shantipur and Nityananda being the chief of them.
The chief feature of the new life was the *bhajans* and
sankirtans which were celebrated with song and prayer and
ecstasy. We have a vivid description of one of these, held
in the house of Adwaitacharya, in Krishna Das’s *Life of*
Chaitanya. •

His native village was the first scene of his labours.
On his recovery from the *Prem Pralap*, he boldly pro-
claimed the name of Hari, or Krishna, as the only deliverer
of mankind. Some of the respectable Brahmans of Nadiya
he easily gained over. The village of Nadiya resounded
with the *Hari Nama*. Gourhari (another name of
Chaitanya); with his disciples, spent whole nights in singing

~~These~~ ^{These} ~~meetings~~ of Radha and Krishna ; in discoursing on the amours of the milk-maids of Mathura ; in weeping, laughing, and dancing. In these nocturnal meetings, which often were dissolved at day-break, Gourhari, it is gravely stated, constantly transformed himself into the six-handed Vishnu. Other miracles were not wanting.

These ecstatic doings and the new religion behind them should have come with a surprise upon the formal and pedantic world that surrounded Chaitanya. Nothing could have been more contrary to the secret tantric rites and the nihilistic Vedantism of the contemporary pundits and scholars. They therefore rose in opposition and even treated Chaitanya and his companions with open hatred.

CHAITANYA AND THE KAZI

It was now that that remarkable incident took place which throws a wonderful light on the practical spirit and knowledge of human nature on the part of Chaitanya. The novelty of his doings seems to have attracted the notice of the local Mahomedan officer, the Kazi. Perhaps induced by the scholars and pundits of the town who openly opposed Chaitanya, the Kazi caused the musical instruments in the house of one of Chaitanya's friends to be broken, and strictly prohibited the holding of singing and dancing parties. Chaitanya determined to set at defiance the order of the Governor and bring him to reason. He organised three large *sankirtan* parties and, at the head of one them, marched to the very door of the Kazi's house. The gate had been shut ; but in response to Chaitanya's message, the Kazi came out and soon he and Chaitanya became staunch friends. Chaitanya took the Kazi to task for his un-Mahomedan conduct in not properly receiving a guest at his door. The Kazi, thus put to shame, was obliged to apologise. The result was a most hearty reconciliation.

between the parties. After thus securing the friendship of the Mahomedan Governor, Chaitanya and his friends engaged in their *sankirtans*, *bhajans* and nightly vigils in peace.

CHAITANYA BECOMES A MONK

But inspite of the friendship of the Governor, the learned and the orthodox still maintained their attitude of hatred and opposition towards Chaitanya. He was, however, not in the least shaken by the opposition of the people, but was only moved to grief at their scepticism and want of faith. He could make very few converts among them. Only one way suggested itself to him. He decided to take the robes of a Sanyasin. Chaitanya argued thus: "As I must deliver all these proud scholars and orthodox householders, I have to take to an ascetic life. They will surely bow to me when they see me as a hermit and thus their hearts will be purified and filled with *bhakti*. There is no other means of securing their salvation." So, at the age of 24 (1509 A.D.), he got himself initiated, under one Keshav Bharati, as a *sanyasi* under the name of *Krishna-Chaitanya*—usually shortened into Chaitanya, a name which we have already anticipated in this sketch. His mother, the tender-hearted Sachi, who had already been filled with woe at the loss of Chaitanya's elder brother and who had long urged him not to desert her as the elder had done, was now heart-broken at the initiation of Chaitanya. But Chaitanya, who bore deep love and reverence for his mother to the end of his life, consoled her in every possible way and obeyed her wishes in many points in his after years as lovingly as he had done before renouncing the life of the householder.

Hitherto, the doctrines of Gourhari had been confined to his chosen disciples. The time of his public ministry had

~~now~~ arrived. "Go," said he to his disciples, in one of the nocturnal meetings described above; "go and proclaim in every house in Nadiya, the name of Hari. Teach it to the old and young, the sinful Chandala as well as the righteous Brahman; then will they with ease go across the river of death." For executing the commission of their master, the timid disciples were not yet prepared. They recounted the many dangers that awaited this bold step, the vehement opposition they would likely meet with, and, in particular, the virulent enmity, which two Brahmans, *Jagai* and *Madhai*, had conceived against *Hari Nama*. Gourhari, nothing daunted by the representation of these difficulties, determined to go himself, accompanied with all his Bhaktas, into the streets, and fearlessly proclaim the name of Hari. Accordingly, on the following morning, he collected all his disciples, and at their head marched through the streets. Entranced by the music of the *Mridanga* and the *Karatal*, the Vaishnavas with uplifted hands sang the praises of Krishna. Says Lochan Das—"Nadiya became an ocean of gladness; the sound of *Hari Nama* reached the skies."

Contemporary records give copious accounts of Chaitanya's wanderings and pilgrimages, his strict avoidance of all publicity and display—above all, his life of simplicity and devotion and sweet companionship with all, the high and the lowly alike, the monkhood gave full scope to a heart already full of missionary zeal and reforming enthusiasm. Modern Indian history cannot furnish a more remarkable example of religious missionary and preacher. All his great learning and intellect, Chaitanya bent with one supreme effort to the propagation of the new cult and we who can look back with impartiality cannot but admire his great zeal and single minded devotion.

CHAITANYA

HIS PILGRIMAGES AND WANDERINGS.

After performing a variety of miracles, and assuring the agonizing Bhaktas of his continual presence with them, Chaitanya, accompanied by his attached friend, Nityananda, departed towards Orissa. On his way, so deeply affected was he with the impiety of the people and their ignorance of Krishna, that he was almost inclined to drown himself for very grief. But the delightful sounds "Krishna! Krishna!" elicited from the mouth of a little boy, altered his resolution, and somewhat relieved his sorrowful heart. He reached *Nilachal* (Cuttack), and took up his residence in the house of a learned Brahman. The chief object of his visit to Orissa was to see the far-famed Jagannath, "the Lord of the world." The sight of the armless divinity filled him with ineffable delight. So overpowering were his spiritual sensations, that he fell down insensible on the ground. Every fresh visit similarly affected the Nadiya saint. The people wondered at the fervency of his religious impressions and the ardency of his emotions. For hours together he sat before the *Nim*-built Jagannath, thus he made many proselytes, and the streets of Nilachal resounded with *Hari Bal*, and divine honours were ascribed to him, and the people hung on his lips with mute attention and intense admiration. For some time after his arrival, he spent his days in performing his devotion at the temple. He and his disciples did not at first attract much notice: but soon Chaitanya was brought into contact with the learned Bhattacharya, Sarbabhauma, a great scholar and the minister of the Orissan king, Pratap Rudra, of the Gajapathi dynasty. The conversion of Sarbabhauma to the Vaishnavite faith by Chaitanya is the first great incident in the new life. Sarbabhauma was a great Vedantic scholar, proud of his learning and his Advaita philo-

sophy. He at first proposed to teach Chaitanya, monk as he was, the principles of the Adwaita faith. Chaitanya humbly listened to him for many days; the exposition ended, Chaitanya took up the Adwaitin's arguments and, criticising them one by one, established the superiority of the Vaishnavite doctrines and their consonance with the words of the scriptures. Sarbabhauma was convinced and adopted the new faith with exceeding ecstasy and admiration. 'Chaitanya's famous address to Sarbabhauma is quoted in a latter part of his sketch. It is sufficient here to notice the conversion of Sarbabhauma who, adopting Chaitanya's faith, praised him saying: "It was a high work to Thee to save the world, in comparison with the wonderful power Thou hast manifested in converting me. Logic had made me hard like an ingot of iron. Thou hast melted me. Oh, Thy wondrous might!"

After staying for some time more at Puri, Chaitanya started for the South. His pilgrimage, though undertaken with a view to visit the holy places, was also marked by missionary activity. He preached the new religion wherever he went and his preachings met with success and popular enthusiasm. "The people marvelled, as they gazed at His golden hue, His crimson robe, and His tears of delight, His tremour and His perspiration, which set off His beauty. All who came to see forgot their homes and stayed to join the dance and song of Shri Krishna Gopal; men and women, old and young, all were swept away by the tide of spiritual love." It was in the early part of this journey that a beautiful incident occurred which is thus described by the biographer of Chaitanya.

HEALING THE LEPER BASUDEV.

A high-minded Brahman named Basudev was covered with leprosy: but as the maggots dropped from the rotting

limbs, he used to pick them up and restore them to their places. At night, he heard of Chaitanya's arrival and next morning went to Kurma's house to see him; on hearing that the Master was gone, he fell down in a faint and lamented in many ways. Just then, the Master returned, *embraced him*, and lo! the leprosy as well as grief was gone at the touch and his body became sound and beautiful! He marvelled at the Master's grace and clasped His Feet and praised him by repeating a well-known verse from the *Bhagabat* (Rukmini's message to Krishna sent through a Brahman—X, xxxi 14.) Long did he thank the Master, saying "Listen, Gracious One! No man has Your virtue. *Even wretches fled from me at the stench of my body. But Thou, supreme lord, hast touched me!* Better for me my former state of misery, because henceforth my heart will swell with pride." The Master soothed him 'No, you will not be puffed up. Ever take Krishna's name and save men by teaching them about Krishna. Soon will Krishna accept you.'

At Vidyanagar (modern Rajahmundry, Godavari District), Chaitanya met Ramananda Ray, the minister of the Orissa King and a learned Vaishnava scholar and mystic. Long did Ramananda Ray and Chaitanya discourse on the secrets of the Vaishnavite faith and the mystic joys of Krishna-worship. One long chapter, full of beautiful quotations from the *Bhagbat*, is devoted by the biographer to this discourse. Chaitanya then left Vidyanagar and wended his way to the southernmost places of pilgrimage. He visited Tirupati Hills, Conjeevaram and at last reached Srirangam on the banks of the Kauveri. There he stayed for four months in the house of a Vaishnava Brahman by name Venkata Bhatta, who treated the Master with great respect. At his request, Chaitanya stayed with him for four months "passing the time happily in

- talking about Krishna with the Bhatta. Daily, he bathed in the Kauveri, visited Srirangam and danced in ecstasy." From Srirangam, he went to Madura (Southern Mathura), Setubhand, Cape Comorin and then, passing along the Western coast, reached Udipi, the sacred city of the Madhwachari Vaishnavas. Here Chaitanya seems to have held disputations with learned Vaishnavas. Travelling then into Maharashtra, he visited Pandharpur, Nasik, the valleys of the Tapti and the Narmada. During his travels through the Maratha country, Chaitanya seems to have come upon the rich-wrought Sanskrit poem on Krishna—entitled *Krishna-Karnamrita*—for the first time, had a copy made of it and took it with him as a treasure.

On the banks of the Godavery he met with the king of the adjacent country, to whom he showed his divine form, and discoursed on the mystic love of Krishna and the Gopis. On the banks of the Kauveri he spent four months with a Brahman, who became his convert. As he proceeded southward, he visited all those places, which are celebrated in the Ramayana. On the plains of Panchavati, the recollections of olden times, embalmed in the immortal song of Valmiki, rushed into his mind—the disfiguration of Surpanakha, the murder of Marichi, the rape of Sita, and the inconsolable grief of the heroic Raghava. On reaching his journey's end he recited the poem of Valmiki. From Rameswaram he returned by the same route, confirming the Bhaktas. Thus, after accumulating in his person the sanctities of all the holy places in the south, and proclaiming to thousands the marvellous efficacy of Hari Nama, Chaitanya returned to Nilachal.

A MIRACLE AT JAGANNATH

The next two years were spent by Chaitanya at Puri where pilgrims and disciples came to visit him during the

season of the Jagannath festivals. During his stay in Jagannath, it is recorded that his marvellous feats were concluded by a miracle. The car of Jagannath stood motionless. The innumerable multitudes had tried their united strength. The gigantic elephants of the Raja of Puri had failed. The grief of the pilgrims at this catastrophe knew no bounds. Chaitanya came to their rescue. He pushed it by his head, and the car moved along. Soon as the wheels of the unwieldy chariot clattered along the ground, the multitudinous host shouted "Hari Bal." These scenes were annually renewed when the Vaishnavas of Bengal came to Puri at the Rath Jatra. The rest of the year was spent by Chaitanya in propagating his doctrines, in proselytizing, in confirming the faith of his followers, and the celebration of the Kirttan. His residence in Nilachal contributed not a little to infuse life into the worship of Jagannath. The number of pilgrims increased every year, who returned to their houses laden with the treasures of Bhakti.

APPOINTMENT OF NITYANAND AND ADWAITACHARYA

The increasing numbers of converts and disciples and the necessity of inculcating in them the great truth of the new religion made some organisation essential. Chaitanya seems to have long thought over it and so, calling to his side his two great friends and followers—Nityananda and Adwaitacharya—he said to them "Teach the lesson of faith in Krishna *to all men, down to the Chandals.*" To Nityanand, he added: "Go to Bengal. Freely proclaim the gospel of devotion and love. Ramdas, Galadhar and some others will assist you. Now and then I shall be with you and, standing unseen, shall witness your dancing." Adwaitacharya, it may be remembered, was an elderly *bhaktha* who had

self. He was a Barendra Brahman of Shantipur where a large number of his descendants are still living. Nityanand was a Brahman of the Rarhiya clan, a native of the district of Birbhum and seems to have been a Nimvat Vaishnava of the school of Jayadev who had his head-quarters in Kenduli in the same district. Nityanand, though he does not seem to have been much of an ascetic and preacher as Chaitanya was, was yet full of a deep missionary enthusiasm, and converted to the new cult large numbers of men as well as women. The descendants of these apostles have to-day become powerful Gosains and masters of rich establishments, with princely incomes and crowds of adoring disciples; the purely religious character and work of the early apostles themselves, however, cannot be doubted.

CHAITANYA'S VISIT TO BENARES AND BRINDABAN

Chaitanya was now entering into the fifth year of his monkhood. A visit to Brindaban and the Jumna, the classic scenes of Krishna-*lila*, had long been the dream of Chaitanya's heart. He, therefore, now, resolved to visit them before he could finally settle at Puri. In spite of the protests of his friends and disciples who were unwilling to part with him, Chaitanya started on his pilgrimage alone. Their importunities, however, made him accept one *sishya* to travel with him. The journey to Brindaban, spite of its hardships, was to Chaitanya one long journey of devotion and ecstasy. His soul was filled with delight as he roamed through the wooded valleys and the bright river-swept plains of Central India. He embraced the very trees and animals in a fervour of religious ecstasy. At Brindaban itself, it was one long rapture. He bathed in the several sacred pools, worshipped at the hills and the shrines, continuously sang, danced and prayed. His devout longings satisfied, he

During the return journey, occurred an interesting incident which is described with some detail by the biographer of Chaitanya. Chaitanya, while wandering in the woods with his few attendants, suddenly fell into a religious swoon. There at the same time came upon the scene some Pathan soldiers who took the attendants for some thieves and Chaitanya himself as their victim. They, therefore, proceeded to lay hold of the supposed thieves and bind them. Chaitanya, recovering from his swoon, interposed and explained the situation. The Muslims were satisfied. One of them, "a grave man clad in black and called a Pir" was touched by the sight of the fair Hindu monk and entered into a religious discussion with him.

"He propounded monotheism and one common God on the basis of his holy book (the Quran). But the Master refuted all his propositions by arguments based on the Muslim scripture, till the man was silenced. The Master continued, 'your scripture establishes one common God (in the beginning) and refuting that theory, sets up in the end a particular God who is full of all powers, dark of hue, the perfect spirit, the soul of all.....the most excellent, adorable by all, the first cause of everything.....The highest beatitude comes only from serving His feet. After first insisting on work, knowledge, and mental abstraction, these are then set aside and the service of God is laid down as the final duty.....' The Muslim replied 'True are your words.....The abstract God is discussed by theologians. Nobody thinks of adoring the incarnate God by theologians. Nobody thinks of adoring the incarnate God.....Much have I read but cannot ascertain the *sadhya* and *sadhan* from the Muslim scriptures.....Tell me graciously what are *sadhya* and *sadhan*.' So saying, he fell at the master's feet." The Muslim was converted and chanted the name of Krishna. Chaitanya re-named him '*Ramdas*'. All the other Pathans, too, turned Vaishnavas and the contemporary biographer says that they "were all famous as the *Pathan Vaishnavas*."^{*}

Another incident more important in the life of Chaitanya as a preacher occurred in this journey. It was the meeting of Chaitanya with the two brothers, Sanatan and

^{*}Krishna Das's Life of Chaitanya. Translated by Prof. Jadunath

Rup and his discourse to them on the doctrines of Vaishnavism and Krishna-worship. They were two brothers descended from a prince of Karnata who had settled in Bengal and whose descendants had become completely Bengalis. They were at first serving in high offices under the Mahomedan Governor of Bengal but, soon, moved by the new Vaishnavite impulses, deserted their posts and fled to the groves of Brindaban. They met Chaitanya in his pilgrimage and sat at his feet and learnt the doctrines of the new philosophy and religion. Chaitanya's discourses to these two men, so fully preserved to us by his Vaishnavite biographer, are most profound and beautiful. Inspired by the new religion, the two brothers went to Brindaban and there founded a great Vaishnavite mission of which the fruits are still extant.

RETURN TO PURI

After spending four years in this manner, Chaitanya made a short tour to Bengal, visited his mother, and confirmed the faith of his drooping disciples. After returning to the sacred city, he set out on a pilgrimage to Brindaban. Leaving the main road, and entering into the jungles on the left of Cuttack, accompanied by his devoted disciple, Balabhadra, he proceeded towards Mathura. The marvels, which attended his journey, merit a somewhat more than cursory notice on account of their characteristic richness. The jungles, through which he passed, were full of savage men and doleful creatures. They were the haunts of tigers, leopards, wild elephants, and all sorts of ravenous beasts of prey. The habitations of human beings were few and far between. But these inconveniences and dangers did not damp the ardent zeal of the Vaishnava preacher. The name of Hari, which he ever and anon repeated, operated

as a charm against the attacks of rapacious beasts. We must allow Krishna Das to speak for himself.

"Mahaprabhu," says he, "leaving the common route, entered into the dense jungles on the left of Cuttack, with the name of Krishna in his mouth, at the sound of which tigers and elephants made way for him. The lord passed through herds of tigers, elephants, rhinoceroses, and wild boars. The simple Bala-Bhadra was astonished to see those furious beasts keep a respectful distance from the Maha-prabhu. One day, as the lord was passing on, his foot chanced to strike a tiger, sleeping on the road. The lord said, 'Krishna! Krishna!' at the sound of which the tiger, rising up, danced for joy. On another occasion, as the lord was bathing in the river, a flock of intoxicated elephants came thither to drink water. The lord, throwing water at them, said, 'Repeat the name of Krishna'; on which all the elephants shouted 'Krishna! Krishna!' and moved by faith and love, danced and sang; some of them fell to the ground, and others made a loud noise, to the great wonderment of the simple Bala-Bhadra. When the lord celebrated the praises of Krishna, flocks of deer attended him on both sides of the way to hear the delightful sound. The listening deer were joined by five or seven tigers, who all went along with a lord. The lord said to them, 'Say Krishna! Krishna!': and the deer and the tigers, with the name Krishna on their lips, danced with joy: To the surprise of Bala-Bhadra, and the amusement of the lord, the tigers and the deer embraced and kissed one another. Peacocks and other birds hung on the lips of the lord, and, repeating the name of Krishna, danced with joy. The lord said 'Hari Bal;' and plants and trees swelled at the joyful sound. The vegetables and minerals of the country of Rashi-khanda, hearing the name of Krishna, became mad with love."

His wanderings over, Chaitanya returned to Puri, and the remaining eighteen years of his life were spent in the holy city in the company of his disciples and friends. Few events are recorded in the story of this period of his life: it was all spent in prayer and worship and acts of piety and love. There is, however, a "daily beauty" in this life which still shines on us from the pages of the mediæval biography.

✓ HIS DAILY LIFE

Chaitanya woke with the morning and went along with

waters. From the sea-shore, his steps were directed to the temple of Jagannath and there he stood and prayed rapt in adoration long before the stream of pilgrims and daily worshippers began to pour in. Hours passed on but Chaitanya knew them not, till some friend or disciple reminded him that noon was approaching. He then returned to his residence. If anybody, householder or *bhaktha*, had invited him for dinner, he went to his house and dined; but if the day was not filled with an invitation, he and his disciples ate the temple *prasad* which the *paricha* (priest) brought to them. Often Chaitanya distributed the *prasad* by his own hand, to his disciples who received their portions with devout chantings of Hari's name. Chaitanya himself would then dine and, after a little rest, which the heat of the Indian climate makes necessary, he sat up to discourse to friend or foe, on the greatness of the Vaishnavite faith, the sweetness of Krishna or the joys of Divine Love. Memorable were these discourses: his fair face, his sparkling eyes, his musical voice and eloquence held the hearts of his listeners spellbound as he poured forth his rapturous discourse rich with stirring verses from the *Bhagabat*, or the aphorisms of Vyasa or the great utterances of the Upanishads.

Discourses and temple-worship apart, Chaitanya and his disciples often engaged in congregational worship by means of what are called *bhajans* and *sankirtans*. Gathered together on the sea-shore or among the trees of the Gundicha garden or within the cloisters of the Jagannath shrine, these men often danced and sang to the accompaniment of music. Their favourite songs were the verses from *Bhagabat* or the verses of their own native poets describing the beauty of Krishna or His Mercies or Radha's Love.

the madness of their adoration took on themselves the duty of temple-servants, went and washed the temple floor, and dragged the car. We, moderns, may not perhaps sympathise with or admire these religious exercises—the tireless exertion in *bhajan* and *sankirtan*, the physical acts of washing the image or dragging the car and the like; but few of us can fail to be struck with these saints' ecstatic piety, their overflowing love, and, above all, that spiritual comradeship and service that animated them all. It should be remembered that in this band were gathered together many princes and mendicants, scholars and low-born men. From the learned Bhattacharya and the King Pratap Rudra to the temple-*paricha* and "untouchable" Haridas Thakur—all were here living in sweet comradeship and love.

CHAITANYA'S SELF-SACRIFICE AND HUMANITY

Nothing is more beautifully brought out in the life of Chaitanya than his great spirit of self-sacrifice and humanity. At the very time of his career, when he was well on the road to worldly prosperity and fame, he suddenly renounced them all at the call of a higher life. Possessed of all the Sanskrit learning of the age, gifted with a keen and powerful intellect, he might have become the master of a rich *tol*, taking gift from Princes and Landlords. Or he might, like some of his compatriots, have even risen to be the minister of some king, dictating law and religion to his subjects. But Chaitanya gave it all up, and with a self-sacrifice, as great as it is remarkable, wandered about, dressed in the mendicant's quilt preaching of Love and Divine Service. Associating with all—the lowly, the out-caste and the poor—he ate, sang and prayed with them, he served them with his body and mind, consoling and edifying

any, more self-sacrificing, more full of love for human kind, trodden the soil of India.

While returning to Orissa, he held conferences with his celebrated disciples, Swagupu and Sanatan, at Allahabad and Benares. It was at this time that he displayed his skill in Sanskrit by affixing no less than sixty-one meanings to a single stanza of the *Bhagavat*. After passing through Bengal, where he comforted his sorrowing Bhaktas, he returned to Nilachal, from whence he was destined never to depart. The twelve years, that he spent at Nilachal, are void of incidents. His time was devoted to the instruction of his followers, in the doctrines of the *Sri Bhagavat*, the receiving of visits and adorations from the Vaishnavas of Bengal, and the several exercises of Vaishnava devotion—singing, and dancing.

HIS DEATH

As years rolled on, Chaitanya's religious ecstasy seems to have grown on him to a great degree. He had repeated fits of religious transport and ecstasy in which he acted in utter disregard of his own life—once leaping into the blue ocean, at another time battering his face against the stone walls of the temple.

With a mind absorbed in meditation on the Lilas of the Shepherd-God of Mathura, he drew near the sea-shore with a view to sequestrate himself for a few hours from the bustle of the world. Looking intently on the hoarse-resounding main, he fancied it to be the Jumna, on whose crystal waters the Gopis of Brindaban were swimming. Eager to join in the frolics of the highly-favoured maids, he jumped into the sea. Emaciated as his body was by constant vigils and fastings, it floated on the water, and fell into a fisherman's net hard by the shore. It was night. The fisherman, perfectly unaware of the circumstance, con-

gratulated himself on the success of the day, as he felt the heaviness of the net. With all the strength he could command, he dragged the net to the shore; when, lo! instead of a large fish, a human corpse made its appearance! With all possible haste he drew it ashore, when the apparently lifeless corpse made a faint sound, which curdled the blood of the fear-stricken fisherman. He concluded it to be a Bhut. Distracted with fear, with trembling feet and an agitated frame, the fisherman was pacing along the sea-shore, when he was met by Swarupa and Ramananda, who had been seeking from sun-set their divine master. The fisherman told his tale. On reaching the spot, they recognized in the fisherman's Bhut, the saviour of the universe. They laid the remains of their submerged lord on the sandy beach, and rent the air with the sounds of "Hari Bal." The music of Krishna's name it is said, restored life to the dead. As the Vaishnavas believe that soon after this Chaitanya made his disappearance from the stage of the world, and as Krishna Das closes his biography with this incident, without telling us what became of him afterwards, there can be no doubt that Chaitanya did not survive his marine excursion. He was then about 43.

Thus in June-July 1533, his physical frame broke down under such prolonged mental convulsion and self-inflicted torments and he passed away under circumstances over which the piety of his biographers has drawn the veil of mystery.

CHAITANYA'S RELIGION AND UTTERANCES

Among all the great mediæval reformers, Chaitanya stands unrivalled for his full-hearted adoption, and clear and emphatic exposition, of the principles of the new Vaishnavite creed. There is a tradition that Chaitanya

composed a commentary on Vyasa's *sutras* but the commentary is not extant. His eloquent discourses however, survive in which the special doctrines of the Vaishnavite creed—of a God with all *gunas*, of the distinction of soul from God, of a loving and joyous worship—are taught with great force and poetry. Full of his own deep personal mysticism, fired with the poetry of the *Bhagabat* and the Krishna-literature, these discourses are not mere expositions to be set side by side with the classic commentaries of the South Indian *acharyas*, but in themselves profound and stirring revelations of the Vaishnavite religion. The following, taken from Chaitanya's address to the learned scholar Sarbhabhauma, contains a masterly *resume* of the Vaishnavite doctrines :

THE VAISHNAVITE CREED.

The *Vedas* and the *Puranas* tell us how to discern Brahma. That Brahma is (only another name for) God in His Totality. The Supreme Being is full of all powers, and yet you describe Him as formless? The *shrutis* that speak of Him as abstract (*nir-bishesha*) exclude the natural and set up the unnatural.

From Brahma originates the Universe, it lives in Brahma and it is merged again in the same Brahma. The three attributes of God are that He is the three cases—Ablative, Instrumental and Locative (in relation to the universe). These three qualities particularise God. When He desired to be many, He looked at (employed) His 'natural power.' The physical mind and eye could not have then existed. Therefore the Immaterial Brahma *had* an eye to see and a mind to will with. The term, 'Brahma', means the Perfect Supreme Being' (Bhagaban) and the scriptures affirm that Krishna is the Supreme Being. The meaning of the *Vedas* is too deep for human understanding, the *Puranas* make their sense clear.

Shruti itself denies to Brahma material hands and feet, and yet it says that God 'moves swiftly' and 'receives everything'! Therefore, *Shruti* asserts Brahma to be particular (*sa-bishesha*). It is only a fanciful interpretation—as opposed to a direct one—that speaks of Brahma as abstract (*nir-bishesha*). *How do you call that God formless who has the six qualities and is supremely blissful?* You conclude Him to be powerless, who has the three natural powers, as is evident from the *Vishnu Puranas*.

God's nature consists of *sat*, *chit* and *ananda*. The *chit* power assumes three different forms in three aspects: it becomes *hladini* from the *ananda* aspect; it becomes *sandhini* in the *sat* aspect and *sambita* (known as 'knowledge of Krishna') in the *chit* aspect. The *chit* power is God's very essence (or inner nature); the life power (*jiba-sakti*) appertains to Him only occasionally; *maya* is entirely outside Him (i.e. affects creation only). But all these three offer devotion in the form of love. The Lord's six powers are only manifestations of the *chit* power. And yet you have the presumption to deny such a power? God and creation differ as the master and slave of illusion respectively, and yet you affirm that creation is identical with the Creator; In the *Gita*, creation is recognised as a force exerted by God, and yet you make such creation one with God; See the *Gita*, vii-4, the words of Shri Krishna to Arjuna:—

'Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, self and self-consciousness—these eight powers (or natures) have emanated from me.

'Valiant hero! the eight natures about which I have already spoken to you, are inferior. Beyond them I have a higher, or living 'nature' which upholds this universe.'

God's form is composed of *sat*, *chit* and *ananda*: and yet you assert that form to be corruption of the *satva* quality! He is a wretch who denies form to God; touch not, behold not that slave of Death. The Buddhists are atheists for not respecting the *Vedas*. Atheism in a believer of the *Vedas* is a worse heresy than Buddhism. Vyasa composed the aphorisms for the salvation of men, but the interpretation of these aphorisms by the 'school of illusion' (*mayabadi*) is the cause of perdition.

Vyasa's aphorisms hold the 'theory of effect' (*Parinama*) God is an incomprehensible power, but He is manifested as creation. The philosopher's stone produces gold without undergoing any change in itself; similarly, God takes the form of creation without suffering any corruption. Objecting to this aphorism as an error of Vyasa, you have set up the theory of *bibarta* by a fanciful interpretation of it. Error consists in a creature imagining, 'I am one with the Creator.' But creation is not unreal, it is only perishable. The great word *Pranaba* is the self of God; from that *Pranaba* all the *Vedas* have sprung in this world. The words 'Thou art That' (*tat-tvamasi*), applied to creation are only fractional (*praseshika*), but you, without minding the *Pranaba* call these words the supreme truth.

A LOVING GOD

In all this wide and rapturous vision of God as One full of all Attributes and supremely Blissful, there was one aspect—the Love-Aspect of God—which appealed to Chaitanya most, even as it did to the other mystics of this period, especially the Hindi poet, Kabir. God is to them not merely the supremely Beautiful, the Embodiment of all Power and Life, but the One Great Love that pervades the world. Chaitanya often speaks of Krishna as the God “at whose adoration the formula recited is Love, the offering presented is the seed of Love.” Krishna “is the source of Perfect Bliss; in comparison with Him, spiritual delight is as grass.” Elsewhere in a more mystic and beautiful strain, he describes Krishna thus: *He is the All-Attractor, the All-Rejoicer, the source of High Rasa*, making men forget everything for His own Form: *the aroma of whom* makes men give up the quest of enjoyment, success, *mukti* and pleasure.

DEVOTION OR BHAKTHI

Such a God who is all Love and Joy can be worshipped only in love—such Supreme *Rasa* can be tasted only by a heart full of longing and devotion. All the apparatus of religion—fast and ceremony and observance—are useless unless they lead to this love. Many are the eloquent passages wherein Chaitanya describes the characteristics of this *prem-rasa* or love of God.

When Passion (*pati*) in Krishna is deepened, it is called *prema* (love), the permanent form of *bhakti* in Krishna. It has two aspects. If any man has the grace to feel *shraddha* (faith), he consorts with pious men, from which companionship result the hearing and chanting of Krishna's name. From the attainment of *bhakti* all his troubles are removed; and, as a consequence, his faith becomes constant which gives him a taste for listening and hymning of Krishna's name. From taste (*ruchi*) comes strong inclination (*as kthi*) which gives birth to the sprout of passion for Krishna in the soul. When their emotion is deepened, it takes the

name of love (*prema*). That love is the ultimate fruit, the source of every bliss. The man in whose heart this emotion sprouts up is marked by the many qualities named in the *Shastras*. No earthly affliction can disturb his mind. Such a man never wastes his time without communing with Krishna. He never fears attack by enjoyment, material success or the objects of sensual gratification. Even the noblest *bhakti* considers himself as lowly, and firmly believes that Krishna will take pity on him. *He is ever expectant, ever passionately longing.*"

Such love or devotion, however, is not fraught with any reward.

"As wealth gives pleasure and drives away sorrow of itself, so *bhakti* kindles love of Krishna, and when love is turned to Krishna, man is freed from bondage to the world. The fruit of love is not riches, or the cessation of re-birth, but its chief object is the enjoyment of the beatitude of loving."

SEVERAL FORMS OF BHAKTHI

But the greatest characteristic in the theology of the Gauriya Vaishnavas is the doctrine of *Bhakti*, or faith. This is a new element in Hinduism: it is wanting in the Vedanta and all ancient Hindu scriptures. The method of deliverance which the Vedant points out, consists in the *knowledge* of God. The knowledge of God is the great purifier of the human mind. It alone frees man from all carnal impurities, delivers him from every taint of sin, annihilates the passions, and fits him for absorption into the unfathomable abyss of Brahma essence. It only has the efficacy of emancipating the spirit of man from the gross impediments of material pollutions. The ritual of a later date introduced endless and unmeaning ceremonies and rites, ablutions and fastings, all which are said to have the efficacy of procuring endless felicity. The Vaishnava does not deny that these were heaven-ordained methods of attaining supreme happiness. Knowledge, incessant meditation, austerities, good works, are no doubt recommended in the *Shastras*. But in this age of rampant vice, rife carnality, and

ignorance, they are difficult of attainment. In ages of purity and innocence and primitive simplicity, they, unquestionably, were the only means whereby to attain to Mukti. But the dispensation of knowledge and of works has ceased; and the new dispensation of Bhakti or faith is begun. Sinners have now only to believe in Krishna, to repose all confidence in Chaitanya. Great virtues are ascribed to the principle of Bhakti. "The efficacy of good works, austerities and knowledge, is nothing compared with that of Bhakti." "Without Bhakti there can be no deliverance, (Mukti.)" "Bhakti is more efficacious than all the works, meditation and knowledge, recommended in the old Shastras."

It is here in the description of this ecstatic love that we meet with those famous categories derived partly from Hindu Theology and partly from Hindu Poetics. They have been much misunderstood in some quarters and have even been the object of criticism by some. These categories are at best similes, likening the various forms or moods of man's love for God to the human loves of the comrade, the father and the lover. The prevailing principle of them all is a faith and love such as animate the human relations described. Suggested by the rich mythology of the *Bhagabat* and inspired also by the passionate poetry of Jayadeva, Vidyapathi and the other great Vaishnava poets, these categories are not without value or interest. Beneath these seemingly theological formulas is the warmly human and direct apprehension of God as the Supreme Object of Love, as the soul's comrade, friend and bridegroom. We give below the passage :—

The *shanta rasa* consists in recognising the true nature of Krishna and fixing the mind on Him only. Krishna has himself said "Devoting the mind exclusively to me to the virtue of *Shama*" (*Bhagabat XI xxx 33*). It is the duty of a *shanta* votary to give

up thirst for everything except Krishna; hence a *shanta* and a *bhaktha* of Krishna are identical terms. Krishna's devotee regards heaven and salvation as no better than hell (*Bhagabat VI xvii 28*). Devotion to Krishna and conquest of desire are the two marks of a *shanta bhaktha*. All the five kinds of *bhakthas* are necessarily marked by these qualities, just as sound, the attribute of the sky, is possessed by the other four elements also. A *shanta* votary's attachment to Krishna is like an odourless flower; he has *only* acquired a true sense of God's nature, as the Supreme spirit and Divinity. The *dasya* mood better develops the cognition of Krishna as the Lord of full powers.

Adas bhaktha constantly gratifies Krishna by serving him with a sense of His divinity, honour and great glorification; *dasya rasa* has the merit of *shanta rasa* plus service i.e., has *two* merits.

The *sakhya rasa* possesses these two merits plus absolute trust in Krishna. In *dasya*, Krishna's service is marked by honour and glorification; in *sakhya* by reliance. A *sakhya bhaktha* sits on Krishna's back or carries Him on his shoulders or has a mock fight with Him; he serves Krishna and at times makes Krishna serve him! The chief characteristic of the *sakhya rasa* is *free comradeship* without any feeling or respect or awe. So this *rasa* has *three* qualities; in it Krishna is loved more ardently, as He is held equal to the *bhaktha's* self; hence this *rasa* captivates the good.

■ In the *vatsalya rasa* there are the above three qualities plus *tenderness* which in its excess leads to chiding and chastisement. Such a devotee regards himself as the patron and as the *protege*; his service takes the form of paternal care. This *rasa* has therefore *four* qualities and is like nectar.

In the *madhur rasa* all the above four qualities are present in a heightened form, and in addition to them, the votary serves Krishna as a *lover* offering Him his or her own person. Here *five* qualities are present. All the four emotions find their synthesis in the *madhur*, just as in the case of the five elements (sky, air, light, water and earth) the attributes of the first four are all united in the fifth. Hence in the *madhur rasa* of wondrous deliciousness. This emotion has been fully described. Reflect how to spread it. While meditating, Krishna will illuminate your heart. Through Krishna's grace even an ignorant man reaches the farthest shore of the emotions.

It is the last—the *Madhurya* love—as embodied in the passionate love of Radha and Krishna that deserves notice. This, according to the Vaishnava mystics, is the highest mood of *bhakthi*, implying, as it does, all the great elements of true God-love—faith, absolute trust, service and the

abandonment of all notions of self. There is no doubt that the language of these mystics is purely allegorical and illustrative, and that here there is no idealisation of carnal emotions. But still it may be worth while to look at other parts of the faith of these mystics to know their meaning. In a beautiful passage where Chaitanya describes the love of Krishna in terms of a parable, he says:—

In roving through the universe, lucky is the man who gets the seed of the creeper of faith (*bhakti*) through the grace of his *Guru* and Krishna. He sows the seed like a gardener, waters it with the hearing and chanting of the Holy Name. As the creeper grows, it pierces through the universe, passes beyond the *Biraja Brama* world to the *Parabyom*, and above that, to the heavenly *Brindaban* where it creeps up the wishing-tree of Krishna's feet spreads and bears fruit in the form of love (*prem*). . . . *If any sin against Vaishnavism is done, it uproots or tears the creeper like a wild elephant, its leaves wither.* Then the gardener on earth carefully covers it, to save it from the elephant of sin. *But if parasites, like love of enjoyment or salvation and countless others—or forbidden practices, like rubbish—slaughter of living beings, thirst of gain or fame—adhere to the creeper, than these parasites flourish from the watering, while the main creeper's growth is arrested. Cut off the parasites first, then only will the main Branch reach the heavenly Brindaban.* When the mature fruit drops down, the gardener tastes it and proceeding up the creeper, he reaches the wishing-tree. There in Vishnu's Heaven, he tends the wishing-tree and blissfully tastes the juice of the fruit of love. That is the highest fruit, the supreme human bliss in comparison with which the four human attainments are as straw, . . . From pure faith is born love. Therefore I tell you of the signs of pure faith. Leaving all other desires, worship of others' knowledge and work, devote all your organs to the cultivation of Krishna. This is pure faith, the source of love. Its signs are described in the *Narada Pancharatna* and the *Bhagabat*.

Love, thus we see, cannot grow in a mind addicted to pleasure or to enjoyment of the senses nor in one tainted by cruelty or sin. *Bhakti* is the fruit of minds made pure.

by piety, self-abnegation and freedom from sin. As an Indian critic says, commenting on a Vaishnava poet whose verses were often sung by Chaitanya himself :—

“In ecstasy, man is beside himself: that this momentary escape from ‘himself’ is the greatest gift life offers, is a promise, as it were, a foretaste, of Release, warranting us that *Nirvana* is something more than annihilation. At the same time, be it well understood that such ecstasies are not rewarded to those who are followers of Pleasure nor to those that cling to self-will. In Vaishnava literature this is again and again emphasised. It is not till the ear ceases to hear the outside world that it is open to the music in the heart—the flute of Krishna.”

HOW TO CULTIVATE BHAKTHI OR LOVE OF GOD

There is a famous passage in which Chaitanya describes how love of God can be cultivated. It is at once supremely psychological and comprehensive. He speaks of two paths—one, by means of spiritual exercises and the other, not exercises but intuitive longing, a spontaneous devotion such as is found in gifted mystics. Study, singing, prayer, temple-worship, pilgrimage, self-restraint, active deeds of compassion and good-will—these form the spiritual exercises by which love and faith may be induced. Some of these—visiting holy places, temple-worship, etc.,—work on the man’s mind by association of thought; some, such as scriptures and stories, by kindling man’s knowledge and love. Others are exercises intended to train the mind and the heart. • These are derived from the rules and ideals of the *Shastras*. The other kind of *bhakti* is a spontaneous one—a welling-faith of love out of the depths of a mystical and devout nature. It is not the fruit of observances nor of artificial study and practice. Like that of a father to his child, like that of a comrade or lover, it is intense, personal, comes out of the depths of the heart. Such a bhaktha pays heed to no shastraic teach-

ing: "he withdraws himself into his own mind and there ever remains close to his object, the dearest Krishna, and serves Him incessantly."

Before concluding this section on Chaitanya's religion and utterances, we would quote the very noble passage wherein he describes the characteristics of the ideal Vaishnava :—

He is compassionate, spiteless, essentially true, saintly, innocent, charitable, gently pure, humble, a universal benefactor, tranquil, solely dependent of Krishna, free from desire, quiet, equable, a victor over the six passions (*shadguna*) temperate in diet, self-controlled honouring others and yet not proud himself, grave, tender, friendly, learned, skilful and silent. The society of holy men is the root of the birth of devotion to Krishna. The principal limb that springs up from it is love of Krishna. The man who consorts with woman is one kind of sinner, while the man lacking in faith in Krishna belongs to another kind. Leaving these temptations and the religious system based on caste, the true Vaishnava helplessly takes refuge with Krishna.....Then comes resignation in. After taking refuge in Krishna, the votary gives himself up entirely to Krishna who then elevates him to His own nature*.

Thus Chaitanya himself was, in actual life, the Sri Krishna for the Sixteenth Century. Writing in 1872, Hunter, in his *Orissa*, says :—

The adoration of Chaitanya has become a sort of family-worship throughout Orissa. In Puri, there is a temple specially dedicated to his name and many little shrines are scattered over the country. But he is generally adored in connection with Vishnu, and of such joint temples there are at present 300 in the town of Puri and 500 in the districts.....At this moment Chaitanya is the apostle of the common people in Orissa. The death of this reformer marks the spiritual decline of Vishnu-worship.

*The above passages are taken from Chaitanya's discourses in Krishna Das's *Life of Chaitanya* translated by Prof. Jadunath Sarkar.

THE CHAITANYA SECT

Chaitanya who, as Barth calls him, was perhaps all but 'a poor enthusiastic visionary,' had a few converts from Mahomedanism among his followers. It does not appear, however, said the late Mr. Rajagopalachari in his "Vaishnavite Reformers of India", that he ever preached any Mahomedan doctrine or tried to assimilate, like, Kābir or Nanak, the two essentially different religions, Hinduism and Mahommedanism. *Within* the pale of Hinduism, he recognised apparently no caste distinction. He seems to have preached a mild and unobjectionable form of Krishna-worship and his personal character was attractive and highly lovable. We have absolutely no reason to suppose that, by his mode of worship, he countenanced or would have countenanced the disgraceful excesses which now characterise the lower orders among his followers, and a reckless ambition to spite his rivals and persecutors at Nuddea, by developing a counter-cult to Saktaism, does not, as has been supposed, appear to be a natural part of his character as disclosed in the extant accounts of his life. Chaitanya is said to have built many shrines at Brindaban; and his native district of Nuddea contains, as Orissa does, many Chaitanya images under actual worship. Dr. Bhattacharya, writing of the Chaitanya sect, says:—

The sect that he has founded has developed into a gigantic body which threatens to throw into shade the representatives of his old enemies, if not to make them all humble followers.

Assuming that Chaitanya was no divinity but a simple religious reformer, impelled by the strength of his devotion to proclaim his doctrines, we have in him another instance of deification so thorough and complete, that, even before he died, his image was installed for worship and the incidents

of his life were modified and magnified into miracles which proved his divine nature. There is nothing strange if we remember that such has been the rule in the case of every great reformer from *Buddha* down to *Ramakrishna Paramahansa*, the Saint of Dakshineswar, who is the most recent instance of this process of deification.

SANKARA DEVA

INTRODUCTORY

SAKTI worship was the prevailing religion of Assam from the days of hoary antiquity. From the commanding position of the temple of the Goddess Kamakhya at the heart of the country, she spread an awful and fascinating influence all over the country. The Nirvana doctrine of Buddha did not either penetrate into the mountain recesses of the country or prove of any enduring value before the hard realism of the worship of the Goddess. Neither could the doctrine of World-Illusion of the great Sankaracharya, who visited Kamrup early in the ninth century, leave any trace whatsoever behind it. Anyhow, the Goddess does not seem to have shared the offerings of the people with any other rival God except with her consort Siva. There is, of course, a Vishnu temple of Haya-Griva Madhava (Horse-necked Vishnu) at a place called Hajo near Gauhati. But he could not have survived in a long competition with the stern Goddess.

At the time of the appearance of Sankar Dev, all people of light and culture seem to have been stern Sakti-worshippers. Sankara's ancestors were all Saktas, and one of them was surnamed *Devidas* because of his strong adherence to the worship of the Goddess. Madhav Dava, his renowned disciple, and Bhatta Deva, the greatest disciple of Damodar Deva, both of them of almost unmatched scholarship, were Saktas before their conversion into the new creed of Vaishnavism. There seems to have been a

universal Saktaism amongst all orders of the people, and, in some circles, abominable corruptions were suspected.

✓ Like all Vaishnava reformers of the time, he discarded the heavy outgrowth of ritualistic ceremonials and propounded the cult of *Bhakti* or devotion to Sri Krishna who was the One God above all gods without a complementary second. He asserted that devotion was the first and last condition of salvation, that heartless ceremonials to minor gods were not only deterrent of *Bhakti*, but even hostile to it, and ceremonials even in the worship of Sri Krishna were heartless. He, however, avoided the danger of extremism in this respect by making this light reservation that such *Shastric* actions would be followed, as might be calculated, to accelerate a single-minded devotion to Sri Krishna.

✓ Sankar Dev was at one with Ramanuja in not allowing women to mix in the religious gatherings of men, not to speak of allowing them to turn nuns. It is said that Sankar never gave any *mantra* to females. But this point together with some other minor ones has been slightly relaxed.

He received disciples from all classes of people.

He held rightly that no great movement could subsist, unless backed by a strong popular literature. And what he did in establishing a literature is simply colossal. He composed songs, hymns and dramas, translated the Bhagavat, and composed narrative poems of exquisite taste and refinement, all bearing upon some aspect of Krishna's life; and all this in the vernacular of the people.

BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

He was born in 1449 A.D. at Batadroba in the district of Nowgong, Assam. He came of the famous Bhuyans family, Assam. The Bhuyans were very important people in the aristocratic privileges and holding landed estates.

from the king. Sankar's family was called the *Shiromani Bhuyan*, being the chief amongst the Bhuyans. His father's name was Kusumbar, the grandson of the historic Chandibar. Sankar's mother died within three days of his birth, and he was brought up by his grandmother Khersuti.

The wild early life of great men is a historical truism now-a-days. But whether every wild boy be destined for future greatness or not, Sankar led a gay and irresponsible life up to his twelfth year. He gave himself up to wild games and merry makings, swam across the Brahmaputra river and back again during the rains; went out deer-catching with his companions and indulged in all sorts of boyish pranks. The gay and reckless temper he was developing frightened his old grandmother until one day she availed herself of the opportunity of suggesting to him over his meal, that his forefathers were all noted Pandits, and that it would be through him, if at all, that infamy would touch his glorious ancestry. Sankar looked hurt at this sly reflection, but he yielded and asked his grandmother to arrange for his schooling.

SANKAR AT SCHOOL

In a very auspicious moment, Sankar was sent to a Tol kept by Mahendra Kandali, a Brahmin Pandit. On a Thursday, Sankar began his alphabet and gave remarkable indications of a keen intellect. Just after learning his alphabet, he composed a very exquisite poem made up of simple consonantal wordings, without the addition of any vowel sounds except the first. This poem has been preserved by the old biographers as a sacred relic of the great master. His teacher was astonished at this marvellous performance. But the craze for open air did not quite forsake Sankar. The truant was not far removed from the scholar. Once he bought a deer

holiday by presenting some clothing and a coin to his teacher. In the evening, the Pandit broke the entire tale of his truancy to his grandmother. The old lady grew very severe in her reprimand and Sankar took the reproof seriously to heart. He returned to school and applied himself very earnestly to studies.

About this time, a miraculous story is narrated about his acquiring the title of "Dev," usually reserved for Brahmins. Once it so happened that, on the eleventh day of the moon, when the school was over and the students had gone home, Sankar fell asleep in the empty school house. A snake protected him from the burning sun's rays by spreading its hood. His teacher, Kandali, chanced upon the scene and the serpent glided out of sight. He was lost in wonder and divined the future greatness of the Kayastha youth. He asked his pupils to call him Sankar-Dev instead of Sankar. Moreover, Sankar was exempted from the task of washing the school house, which every student, irrespective of caste, had to do by turns. But the Brahmin students rebelled at this special favour shown to Sankar, and reported the matter to an influential Pandit who grew furious at the privileges extended to a Kayastha boy. But he is said to have been mysteriously reconciled to the new order of things.

THE DOMESTIC LIFE OF SANKAR

Sankar came out a finished scholar after paying the customary fees to his teacher. Kandali announced to his father as a matter of congratulation that Sankar would turn out a renowned and unrivalled Pandit. He had already carried away a profound learning in literature and the *puranic* lore, and was at this stage practising *yoga*. He is said to have astonished people by *yogic* feats.

state of things and displaying a profound indifference to worldly affairs. His lonely parent grew alarmed, and, in consultation with the elders of the family, hastened to bind up his flying mind in the silken tie of matrimony.

At the age of about 23, Sankar married a Kayastha girl named Suryabati, but she died immediately after giving birth to a daughter. Sankar's father also died some time after his marriage. A shadow of deep melancholy fell upon him. He stayed some years in looking over his motherless girl, and after giving her in marriage to a Kayastha youth named Hari, Sankar went out on a long pilgrimage with some seventeen followers in about 1483 A. D. His family priest Ram Ram and his early teacher Mahendra Kandali accompanied him.

HIS FIRST PILGRIMAGE

From materials up till now brought to light, a minute journal of his travel cannot be reconstructed. At any rate, we can mention with sufficient accuracy the sacred places he visited. He bathed in the sacred waters of the Ganges, ✓ went to Gaya and then to Puri. He then journeyed over ✓ to Brindaban where he defeated some local pandits in a religious controversy. Then he visited Mathura and Dwaraka to which latter place he took only two followers, —Sarvajaya and Paramananda. Thence he went to Kashi, Prayag, Sitakunda, Barahakunda and Ayodhya. In Badarikasram he composed the following beautiful song which foreshadows the nature of the message he was going to deliver soon to the world.

"Rest my mind, rest on the feet of Rama:
Seest thou not the great end approaching?
My mind, every moment life is shortening,
Just heed, any moment it might fleet off.
My mind, the serpent of time is swallowing:
Know'st thou death is creeping and lurking?

My mind, surely this body would drop down,
 So break through illusion and resort to Ram.
 Oh mind, thou art blind;
 Thou seest this vanity of things.
 Yet thou seest not.
 Why art thou, oh mind, slumbering at ease?
 Awake and think of Govinda.
 O mind, Sankar knows it and says,
 Except through Rama, there is no hope."

✓ SANKAR DEV THE PREACHER

Wandering some twelve years over the various sacred places of Northern India, Sankar came back to his native place. The mature fruits of his experiences were soon to burst forth as a sudden revelation. He had already practised the *yoga*, and after spending a record period in taking a panoramic view of the main theatres of nascent Vaishnavism in the various centres of Northern India, his conviction became rooted in the truth of the *Ekasarana cult*. He was warmly entertained by his kinsfolk after a long separation. People flocked around him to hear the tale of his wanderings, and, at their instance, he composed a beautiful drama called the *Chihnajatra* and painted with his own hand on the canvas the pictures of Heaven and Earth. He had the accompanying musical instruments specially prepared for the occasion according to his own direction. Thus he entertained his eager friends and kinsfolk by spectacular renderings of the new visions of Heaven and Earth which now took complete possession of his mind.

His people offered him his hereditary position as the chief amongst the Bhuyans; but he declined this worldly pre-eminence and announced his intention to pass his time in prayer and meditation. He composed songs, hymns, and prayers, all pointing to the devotion to the One, and the companions of his pilgrimage like Balaram, Sarvayya and G. ... early converted. One of his old orthodox

biographers has noted that Sankar commenced his missionary work abroad during his first pilgrimage. And a long list has been preserved of the persons converted in different localities like a certain Ramakanta of Mathura, Radha of Gokul, Trijata of Braja etc.

What doubts and uncertainties might have still lingered in his mind, they were cleared away by his lighting upon the Bhagavat. A miraculous story is told about it. A Brahmin Pandit of Tirhut named Jagadish Misra went to Puri to read out the Bhagavat in the temple. In his dream, the Brahmin received the mandate from Jagannath to the effect that he should proceed to Kamrup and read out the Bhagavat to Sankar. The Brahmin searched out Sankar Dev in remote Assam and read out the book before him. His mission over, the Brahmin died.

The Bhagavat removed the last vestige of doubt that might still linger in his mind. Its appreciation marked the last stage in a process of spiritual evolution and reinforced with the voice of ancient prophecy, the principle of devotion to the One, in which he had fixed his mind. The Bhagavat, with its poignant note of absolute surrender to the name of Sri Krishna as the condition of hope and final liberation, seemed to promise the only remedial social ideal; and Sankar set out at once to work it out.

He composed a remarkable work called the *Kirtan Ghosha* embodying some select episodes from the Bhagavat and other Puranas to teach by Puranic stories the supreme efficacy and excellence of the devout recitation of the name of Sri Krishna. Gifted with an astounding power of poetic expression, he composed songs of exquisite delicacy, all bearing upon the doings of Sri Krishna. People gathered around him, and he loosened their hearts in piety and love. The followers of his pilgrimage all received his

His family priest Ram Ram and his early teacher Kandal were also initiated.

CHANGE OF RESIDENCE AND ACQUISITION OF HIS GREATEST DISCIPLE MADHAVA DEVA.

On his return, Sankar had married again at the request of his kinsmen. He had been residing hitherto at his ancestral place, but owing to occasional disturbances created by the neighbouring aboriginal tribes of the Kacharis, he shifted his residence first to Gangmow and then to Dhuyahat in his native district. It was at this latter place that, in about 1522 A. D., Sankar met with Madhava destined to be his first greatest apostle and the most redoubtable exponent of the tenets of his master. Their encounter took place in characteristically strange circumstances.

Madhava was also a Kayastha youth born in 1489 A. D., at a place called Banduka in the same district of Nowgong. He was a past master of the traditional learning of the time and was an upholder of the Sakti worship. Once, on the occasion of his mother's serious illness, he made a vow that he would immolate a goat before the Goddess if his mother recovered. His mother did recover and Madhava sent his brother-in-law Gayapani to find out a goat fit for sacrifice. Gayapani had been recently initiated into the *Ekasarana* cult of Sankar, and under various pretexts he evaded his commission, until one day Gayapani replied that Madhava might think very highly of himself but he would not stand his ground before Sankar.

To try the strength of his newly-acquired scholarship, Madhava expressed a desire to be taken over to Sankara's place. The next morning, Madhava was introduced to Sankar by Gayapani. A great controversy ensued over the merits of the *Sakti* worship and the dogmat

adoration of the One Supreme Being. Madhava brought in scriptural evidences in support of the principle of attachment to the world, and Sankar, in support of detachment from the world. The sun was descending low in the west, when Sankar pronounced the following *sloka* from the Bhagavata :

“As the branches, leaves and foliage of a tree are nourished by pouring water only at the root of the tree, as the limbs of the body are nourished by putting food only in the stomach, so all Gods and Goddesses are propitiated only by the worship of Krishna.”

Madhava bent his head in reverent acknowledgement of the purity and inviolability of Sankar's creed and accepted him as his master.

Madhava was already betrothed to a Kayastha girl, but after the great message of truth received from Sankar, he found out some excuse to break off the engagement. For the sake of truth and his master, Madhava renounced the world once and for all, and in spite of the repeated remonstrances of Sankar, Madhava never entered into the restricted arena of home life.

BRAHMINIC HOSTILITIES

In Assam, as elsewhere in contemporary India, the Neo-Vaishnavism was a strong reaction against the excesses of sacerdotalism. But, in Assam, priest-craft took a more debasing form. During the interregnum following upon the disintegration of the forces of Aryan civilisation, the Tantric ritualism of Assam mingled with the corrupt tribal rites of the aborigines, put on hideous forms, and priesthood found a ready market wherein to ply its craft. The Bhagavat creed of Sankar doing away with false ceremonials went against the grain of the priesthood who commanded the King's ear. The Brahmins rose in hostility against Sankar and abused him before the Ahom king

as tampering with the popular faith. The Ahoms were a new people in the land and did not understand much of Hindu traditions. At any rate, Sankar got off free with credit from the trial to which he was summoned. The Brahmins were put out for the present, but attempts at further hostility and molestation did not cease.

The Ahom king possessed a mercurial temperament. One day he caught up the fancy of ordering his people to go elephant-catching. He made them erect a hard fence work of wooden palisades and announced the penalty that those, in whose direction the elephants should break through, would be beheaded. Sankar, as the scion of an important aristocratic family, had to join the party, but, unfortunately, the elephants broke loose through the phalanx of Sankar and his relatives, and the king ordered the capture of the supposed delinquents.

Sankar with some Bhuyans escaped from the ruthless ire of the king by flight. But Madhava Dev and Sankara's son-in-law, Hari, were made captives. Madhava, as a harmless *sanyasi*, was thrown into the prison, but Hari was beheaded because "he had people to mourn for him." Madhava Dev sang the following song to console the last moments of Hari :—

"Be careful, brother,
Till life pass away :
The Providence of Govinda
Soon will grant your grace.
Trifling is life, trifling youth,
All is illusory, have no care,
Sorrows, throw them off.
And fasten thy mind at Hari's feet,
Desires, cast them off,
Break the trap of illusion,
Saith Madhava, pin thy hope to the feet of the Lord."

SETTLEMENT AT BARPETA

This horrible incident filled Sankar's mind with disgust and he determined to shake off the dust of his native

place once for all from his feet. Madhav got released after a year and joined him. They left the Ahom territory with a considerable following, and in about 1532 A. D., came down to Barpeta in the district of Kamrup, then under the Koch kings of Kooch Behar. Here, he felt comparatively secure, built permanent houses, erected temples for sacred gatherings, and preached his religion of devout adoration in perfect freedom. The remaining portions of his life were spent here. The greatest of the religious works of Sankar and Madhava were also produced here.

DAMODAR DEVA (1488-1580 A. D.)

Sankara settled at a place called Patbausie near Barpeta. Shortly after, he was joined by Damodar Deva, a Brahmin youth from Sankara's own native district. Damodar was known to Sankar from his earliest infancy, and it is said that Sankar gave him the name of 'Domodar' in recognition of the future spiritual greatness of the infant. Anyhow, during his early sojourn at Patbausie, Domodar lost his wife and only child, but he combated the shock with serene equanimity. At this psychological moment, Sankar drew his attention to spreading his new faith. Damodar Deva only wanted the word to carry on the propagation of the Neo-Vaishnavite creed.

They were also joined by Hari Deva (1493-1633?), another Brahmin youth who lived near about Barpeta.

THE SECOND PILGRIMAGE AND FRESH BRAHMINIC HOSTILITY.

From Barpeta, Sankar went out on a second pilgrimage in about 1533 A. D., this time with a large following. He saw on his way the burial ground of Kabir and met Chaitanya Dev at Puri. He held learned discourses with him. The mysterious disappearance of Chaitanya is said to have occurred while Sankar was at Puri. Thence he

passed on to the other holy places in Northern India ; but he was withheld from visiting Brindaban by his favourite disciple, Madhava, who had a secret injunction from Sankara's wife, that he should not be allowed to see Brindaban again. She had a misgiving that Sankara would not come back if he should go over to Brindaban once again.

On his return he resumed his customary works of prayer, meditation and *Kirtan* and giving instruction to the people. The king's brother and general, Silaraya Dewan, married Sankara's niece Bhubaneswari, and became his disciple.

The Brahmins were feeling highly discomfited at the growing popularity and prevalence of Sankara's faith. They abused the king's ear by gross misrepresentations, and Sankar was once again hauled up for trial. The Brahmins brought down famous Pandits from Benares and other religious centres in Northern India. Sankar approached the king's presence by reciting a beautiful Sanskrit hymn composed by himself in glorification of Sri Krishna. Then he read a long evocation to the king himself. The king was overawed by the majestic personality of the great preacher, and offered him a seat of honour. Sankar opened the controversy by requesting the king to ask the Brahmins to explain the fourfold meanings of the hymn he had just recited. But his opponents hung down their heads in silence. Sankar then clearly explained before the king the main principles of his Bhagavat religion which ran counter to the sacerdotalism of the priestly classes. The controversy lasted for several days, and at last Sankar rose triumphant. The king was struck with the profundity of his scholarship and the sublimity of his faith and dismissed him with valuable presents.

SANKARA'S DEATH

Sankara was hereafter several times invited to the court of the Koch king. During his third visit, the king expressed a desire to become his disciple but Sankara refused to close in with the proposal. It would not be possible for kings to observe in its entire purity the perfect religion of love and devout adoration to the One. By virtue of his position, a king would have to worship other gods and goddesses, and the fundamental principle of Sankara's creed was an undeviating love to one God. There was no provision for the worship of minor gods, because that would mar the purity of his creed. The king, however, would not be persuaded; and Sankar was in a dilemma. He came back to his lodge and asked the king to remain fasting and in prayers to perform the initiatory rites. Next morning, the king's messengers waited at the door of Sankara: the great master washed his hands and feet, put on new clothings, and chanting three beautiful hymns composed by himself on different occasions, surrendered himself to the Supreme Being of his love and devotion, by *yogic* communion, and thus passed away in 1569 A. D. Sankara's eldest son was with him, but the great master nominated his favourite disciple, Madhava, to the apostolic seat.

This, in the main, is a connected story of the life of Sri Sankar Dev. But the inspiring greatness of his personality and the revolution he created in religious beliefs cannot be brought into proper relief unless they are viewed from a proper perspective in the light of contemporary history. And so a word about the religious history of Assam.

The province of Assam figures in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas by the name D.

and the first Hindu king was Naraka. Though he was divine in origin, being born of Earth by Vishnu in his Boar-incarnation, he was surnamed an "Asura," because of his irreligious propensities. At the time of the severance of the corpse of Sati, the consort of Mahadeva, her female organ fell here and the *pitha* (site) was named Kamakhya, being one of the 51 sakti pithas of India. Naraka was a worshipper of Kamakhya according to the Kalika Purana, and grew so irreverent that he wanted to marry the goddess. The goddess agreed to the proposal, but evaded the fulfilment by wily tricks. The same Purana represents Bana, the king of Sonitpur, (modern Tezpur, in the Darrang district, Assam) as a contemporary and fast friend of Naraka, and as a devout worshipper of Siva who is called Banesvar in honour of his royal votary. Bana's daughter Usha, who married Aniruddha, the grandson of Sri Krishna, was also a worshipper of the goddess. Bajradatta, the grandson of Naraka and the son of Bhagadatta, who occupies so conspicuous a place in the Mahabharata was also a worshipper of Siva, and he has been described as such in the copper plates of Balavarmana. At the eastern extremity of the province near Sadiya, there is a temple of Chandika, now known as Tamresvari, wherefrom, according to local traditions, Rukmini was stolen away by Sri Krishna. Thus, this land of Kamakhya contained votaries of Sakti as well as of Siva even in the oldest period reached only by traditions.

By the end of the 13th century, the Ahoms came from Upper Burma which was not yet under the influence of Buddhism. They were animistic in faith. They conquered the Hinduised aborigines like the Kacharis and the Chutiyas, and gradually set up their authority in the Eastern portion of Assam. The Western portion was the

scene of strife and struggle between the Hindu population on the one side, and hordes of semi-barbarous origin on the other, until the palm of victory fell into the hands of the Kochas.*

Viswa Sinha, the first Koch king, rose to power about 1515 A.D. So far as caste sanctity goes, he was of a rather humble birth, but, "as usual in such cases, the Brahmins soon sought him out and supplied him with a divine pedigree."†

He rebuilt the temple of Kamakya and imported Brahmins from Kanouj, Benares and other centres of learning and gave a new life to Sakti-worship. His son, Naranarayan, too, in whose court Sankar Dev was tried for his faith, helped in the propagation of Sakti-worship and repaired the temple of Kamakhya in 1565 A. D., after its damage by Kalapahar, the redoubtable Brahmin renegade and iconoclast. He also brought in Brahmins from Bengal to carry on the worship.

Thus the entire province was partitioned between the Kochas and the Ahoms; there were also numerous Mohammedan raids from Bengal. The forces of Aryan civilization seem to have been spent up; there arose thus a religion of bloody sacrifices from which even human beings were not exempted. It is stated that when the new temple of Kamakhya was opened, the occasion was celebrated by the immolation of some 150 men. It is said further that there was a class of persons called Bhogis who were voluntary victims.*

The moral forces of society were fully exhausted when Sankar commenced his mission. It was an uphill work for

* Adapted from Prof. (now Mahamahopadhyaya) P. N. Vidyavinode's article on "the Mahapurushiya sect", in the "Convention of Religions in India, 1911."

† Mr. (now Sir) E. A. Gait.

him to stand against such an order of things, specially when the priestly classes, whose professional interest would be at stake, rose against him in concerted activities. Moreover, they could engage the king's sympathy on their side. But the Kayastha youth, with the serene equanimity of a philosopher, the boldness of a martyr and the far-sightedness of a prophet, stood up alone, unaided, every moment subjected to persecution, to remedy those social evils which, in the name of religion, were demoralising the people.

THE NEO-VAISHNAVISM OF SANKAR

Sankar built his system upon the ethics of the Gita and the Bhakti cultus of the Bhagavat. He evolved a creed that would clear away the existing social evils in its actual working, at the same time, be an expression of the deepest philosophy. His inspiration did not come of a sudden and blow him away wherever it listed. There was a slow developing and maturity in his ideas. From after his early school days, he had realised the vanity of things. He took years to ponder over the truth of his inspirations. He practised *Yoga* before the treasures of the Bhagavat were revealed to him. He took a long pilgrimage all over Northern India which was then shining with the renascent glory of the Neo-Vaishnavite creeds. He watched, he sifted and he received the new light. He brought the judgment of maturer years and personal experiences to bear upon his prophetic inspirations.

THE EXALTATION OF BHAKTI

Sri Krishna was the supreme Being of adoration for him. In his "Kirtan Ghosha", Sankar lays down:—

"For the Satya era, supreme communion by concentration, for the Treta, rituals and worship; for the Dwapara, varied forms of worship; but for the Kali era, devout recitation of the name of Hari is the supreme religion."

"Just as fire consumes the materials whether they would like them or not, so the name of Hari is sufficient to destroy a hundred sins."

The Vedic rituals like Homa, Yagna, and other sacrifices find no support in his creed. They are quite unnecessary. The following occurs in Sankar's renderings of the Bhagavat Bk. XI:—

"People interpret the Bhagavat, says Sri Krishna, according to their own whims. They find sanction for everything except Bhakti. Some make it out that the Vedas inculcate ceremonials, sacrifices, gifts and Homas; others, that the Vedas prescribe the worship of smaller gods, pilgrimages and bathing in sacred waters, others again that the supreme bliss comes through knowledge. Their interpretations are coloured by the dominant attributes of their minds. But know thou this, oh, my friend, I am not accessible through knowledge, neither through penance nor through renunciation, nor through gifts. I am not accessible to Yoga nor to knowledge; I am tied down by Bhakti, alone".

Madhava Dev has the following passage in his "Nama Ghosha" which gives the profoundest philosophical exposition to the entire creed of his master.

"The indwelling divinity of his heart moves far far away from him who places faith in rituals. But who makes it his religion to hear and recite Krishna's name, he attains to Krishna even though not freed from the ego."

But provision has been left for works in the early stages of devotion. "For a Bhakta not fully detached from the world, it would be a fault to transcend Vedic rites. But for one undeviatingly attached to Sri Krishna's name and totally indifferent, there is no prescription."

But the rites supposed to be necessary for novices must not run counter to the principle of absolute devotion. On the other hand, they should help on the easy development of single-minded devotion. "Only so long should a Krishna's devotee observe forms fitting in with the principle of Bhakti as he is not fully attached to Krishna's name. When fast attached, he should relinquish all observances as hindering a complete devotion to Krishna's name."

The ideal of devotion can be gathered from the following :—

“I long not for beatitude, I long not for salvation; only let there be eternal devotion at Thy feet.”

The real Bhakta is he who seeks not salvation, who wants to remain in a state of perpetual enjoyment of Bhakti even when salvation is promised to him. This is the ideal of devout prayer held out to Sankar's followers. The following song addressed to a supposed spiritual teacher sums up the excellence of Bhakti :—

“Thou physician of the soul, thou sawest not the easiest remedy. Thou didst a thousand works, still thou attainest not to the Lord and comest to the world again and once again.

“Thou spendest off thy years in meditation and penance, in pilgrimage, in dwelling in Gaya and Kashi. Thou knowest the arguments of Yoga but the mind is clouded. Know thou this, except through supreme devotion, there is no liberation.

“Entire virtue remains hidden within the name of Rama; this is the final message of all the Shastras. The name of the Lord devoutly taken is the sole religion of the Kali era.

“We know of it but grasp not the essence. Says Sankara—Transient is this body, never again wilt thou gain this human form: cast off all pride of action and think of the feet of Hari with the sole devotion of the heart.”

THE CULTIVATION OF BHAKTI

In order that Bhakti might be effectual, it must be un-deviating. The Bhakta must surrender his body, mind and soul to the contemplation of the form, and the recitation of the name of Krishna. He must possess the qualities of sympathy, beneficence, forgiveness, softness of heart, and complete mastery over his passions. He must be sufficient to offer spiritual advice to people and have a strong conviction in the truth of Bhakti Yoga leading to final release of the soul from the bondage of desire. The society of such devotees has been placed higher in point of sanctity than the worship of idols and the visiting of sacred places. For these also might possess the power of purifying the mind, but a prolonged course of association is necessary : whereas

the Bhakta purifies people by his very sight. In a society of Bhaktas, the name of Sri Krishna pours in through the eyes, the ears and the mind. Regard is first produced and then comes sole attachment to the name of Sri Krishna. Worship of other gods and goddesses is sternly forbidden :—

“Bow not thy head to other gods and goddesses ; neither do thou partake of the offerings made unto them. Cast not a look at idols, neither enter their shrines ; or thy devotion will be vitiated. Make devotion unto Krishna alone and recite his name. Be a servant unto Krishna and partake of the offerings made unto him, and with thy hands also perform his work.”

Again :—

“Who worships Krishna with a single mind transcends the operation of the threefold attributes and attains to the state of Brahma.”

THE INEFFICACY OF IDOL WORSHIP

A story is preserved about Sankar's setting up the idol of Jagannath during the early period of his teachership. It was a mere decoy to the hostile Brahmins. They had been long causing nuisance to his followers by forcibly taking off their sacred garlands and putting them round the necks of dogs. Sankar set up an image of Jagannath and invited the Brahmins to carry on the worship. The Brahmins declined the invitation. Sankar declared that heavy fees and substantial rewards would be given. The Brahmins came and worshipped the idol. The ceremony over, Sankar started a debate on the merits of idol worship. The Brahmins who upheld idolatry were defeated. It was finally settled that “stones, earth and waters, even these might acquire the potency to purify the hearts of men after a course of prolonged association. But a Bhakta purifies people by his very appearance. The Bhakta stands higher as a purifying agent than idols or sacred waters.” So that the devotees whom his opponents made no scruples

to molest were higher than the idols they worshipped. This story is often twisted from its proper bearing to prove that Sankar supported idol worship. As a matter of fact, no image is ever worshipped in any Sastra of Sankar.

Madhava Dev has the following to show the futility of idol worship:—

“Unmanifested is the Supreme Deity, how could you worship him ?

How could you meditate on him who is so formless as this ?

So purge your mind by reciting the name of Rama.”

In another place occurs this:—

“To seek spiritual purgation in sacred waters, to believe divinity dwelling in idols, these ideas are never entertained by Vaishnavas. He who harbours these is worse than a cow, says Krishna.”

But the construction of the mental image of the Lord of the heart for purposes of concentration is soundly advised:—

“Contemplate the image of Rama in your heart and recite his name in your mouth.”

THE DASYA RELATION OF KRISHNA AND HIS DEVOTEES.

Unlike the main schools of Northern Vaishnavite thoughts, Sankar preached the *dasya* relations between Sri Krishna and his devotees. The devotee must conceive of God as a servant does of his master. He foresaw that the *madhura* conception of devotion, however exalted as a personal ideal, could never be fully worked out in this mundane world as a social ideal. Because of its very sublime and transcendent nature, it might be carried in actual application to the danger zone of ultra-realism, when it would fall into less enlightened minds. All writers of Sankar's school style themselves “servants unto the Lord” in the closing sections of their books. The note of extreme humility and self-surrender makes itself felt in perfect clarity all through their writings. The following hymn com-

— Madhava Dev is distinctly characteristic. The

cry is not the cry of a loving woman to her lover, but that of the servant to the Lord of his body and soul. The note of mingled pathos and hope is quite unmistakable :—

“Thou guidest, Oh Lord, the inner workings of my heart. In Thee I am possessed of a Lord.

Remove my delusion by offering me protection under Thy feet; be kind unto me, Oh Lord.

Thou art the inner controller of my soul; I have turned a servant unto Thee; know this and be kind.

I take up a straw within my teeth and bow unto Thee; show me how I may remain in Thy service.

* * * *

A sinner like me in the three worlds, there is none: like Thee too there is none, who purgest sins. Know Thou this, Oh Govinda, and do unto me as Thou thinkest fit. This is my prayer at Thy feet.

Thousands of sins day and night I commit, being wrapt in delusion. Know me as Thy slave, Thou container of the world, and forgive.

I know what is righteousness, still I do not stick to it; from unrighteousness, I do not turn away. I do as dwelling in my heart Thou biddest me do.

I know not how to worship Thee nor how to make Thee propitiated. I know naught of invocation or prayer. Hence, Oh Lord, I fall a servant at Thy feet. May Thou steer my course.”

This hymn in its clearness and simplicity sets forth the ideal of the *dasya* relation between God and his devotees. There is absolutely no mysticism in it.

THE PROTECTIVE MERCY OF GOD

It is the protective aspect of God that appeals so strongly to Sankar and his followers. They want not even salvation, for the ideal devotees do not like to be merged in the Divine Being, but ever to enjoy the perfumed sweetness of devotion; but they must be freed from the shackles of delusion. And a cry for freedom from the bondage of the world is heard all through the songs of Sankar. The following song composed on the occasion of his first son's birth is extremely characteristic :—

“I fall at Thy feet. Oh Hari, and offer Thee humble prayers to save my soul. Languishing with the poison of the serpent of the world, my life is threatened every moment.

Unstable are men and wealth, unstable is youth and the world : wife and son, they are unstable. Whom should I turn to as eternal and lasting?

My heart is fickle like water on the lotus leaf; it does not settle for a moment, owns no fear in enjoyment of the world of senses."

Yet another poem of Sankar Dev expresses the cream of his spiritual faith. The song deserves to be quoted, alike for its beauty of thought and phrasing :—

Oh, my Lord, prostrate at Thy feet, I lay myself down and beseech Thee with a contrite heart to save my soul.

My soul is on the point of perishing through the poison of the venomous serpent of worldly things.

On this earth all is transitory and uncertain, wealth, kinsmen, life, youth, and even the world itself.

Children, family, all are uncertain. On what shall I place reliance?

Like a drop of water on the lotus leaf, the mind is unsteady. There is no firmness in it.

There is nothing uncertain in Thy grace and no cause for fear under the shadow of Thy feet.

I, Sankara, pray to thee O, Irishikesh, the dweller in my heart, to pilot me across this world of trouble.

Turn my heart to Thee and lead me to Thyself, Oh lord of all blessing and all grace.

Vouchsafe unto me the truth, the right right path, and Thy kindly guidance.

Thou art my mind, Thou art my destiny, Thou art my spiritual guide. Saith Sankar, steer me across the vale of sorrows.

CONCEPT OF GODHEAD

Unlike Vaishnavite reformers like Ramanuja, Nimbarka or Madhwa, Sankar did not start with any Vedantic thesis on the nature of Godhead as the basis of his teachings. He did not therefore work out any elaborate theory about the Godhead. The presiding deity of the Gita and the Bhagavata was sufficient for him. God is Supreme Intelligence, vast, pervasive, without form, without attributes. He is the only reality, all else is untrue and illusory. All that is visible and seems real is only the manifestation of God himself in diverse forms when he chooses to express himself

through the operation of Maya. To the Bhakta in moments of supreme trance, God reveals himself in His form without Upadhis or attributes. This is the real, the eternal and the true. He is the beginning, the middle, and the end of the Universe. As the earthen pot is nothing but the earth itself, and as it is reduced again to the earth when it breaks, so the visible and the invisible worlds originate in, exist in, and end in, God himself. He is without Vikara or modification; all else suffers modification. He is the controller of Purusa and Prakriti. All other gods and goddesses are nescient. They can promise neither knowledge nor salvation. "At the threshold of God's house, minor gods like Brahma, Indra and others just deserve whipping." "It is said that Brahma creates the world, Vishnu sustains it and Rudra destroys it. This is the wrong belief of those whose minds have not been fully enlightened. But the wise see Thee aright,—Thou art the soul and inward controller of all."

The following hymn may be taken as Sankar's vision of the Godhead :—

"I bow to Thee, Oh Madhava, Thou art the lawgiver to him who creates the laws. Thou art the parent of the world. Thou art the mind of the world, Thou art the destiny of the world.

Thou art the supreme soul of the universe, Thou art the one Lord of the universe. Nothing exists in the universe except in Thee.

Thou art the creation, Thou art the cause; static and dynamic, Thou art all, like as gold is unto ornaments of gold.

Thou art plants and trees, Thou art birds and beasts, Thou art gods and non-gods.

The ignorant think of Thee as different for want of illumination.

Infatuated every moment with Thy illusion, none knowest Thee for the Soul. Thou residest in the heart of all beings; but people search Thee without, not understanding Thee.

Thou art the only truth, all the rest is false. The wise know this and contemplate Thee in their hearts.

I crave not for enjoyment of beatitude, I long not for salvation, only let there be devotion at Thy feet."

THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF SANKAR'S CREED

The main feature of Northern Vaishnavism is the combined worship of Rama or Krishna along with Sita or Radha. All writers on the Vaishnavite reformation have lamented that the degradation of Northern Vaishnavism was chiefly owing to the adoption of the female element, although the Rama-Sita worship represents a more sober line of devotion than the worship of Radha or Gopi Krishna. Sankar Dev, as has been said, rejected the female element altogether. His object of devotion is Sri Krishna alone without any complementary second. In his Dhyana or meditation, he imagines of Hari as dwelling in Baikuntha and he is the lord of Kamala who worships him also. He adores Hari as adorable even to Lakshmi. He chants also the name of Rama as indistinguishable from Krishna because they both symbolise the same image of the Brahma.

To the form of worship thus established, Sankar recognised the spiritual equality of all people; Brahmins, Sudras and Pariahs have all equal liberty in matters of worship, devotion and chanting the name of the Lord. "Why need one be a Brahmin," says he, "who devoutly recites the name of Krishna? He might be a Chandala, but he is far superior to any man who is not attached to the name of Hari." He recognised only a social significance in the caste system and has nothing to say against *Varnasrama* duties. People of each social order would follow their own traditional duties, but in religious gatherings all are equal. The sacred texts are read and explained either by a Sudra or a Brahmin according as the one or the other possesses more interpretative power. The Brahmins are offered seats in the front row but the offerings to Vishnu are distributed by people of any caste of cleanly moral habits who may be

selected for the occasion, although, as a mark of social respect, the offering is given first to the Brahmins and the leading men of the society.

The contemporary social and religious abuses of the country have already been noticed. Sankara's new faith came like a flash of lightning amidst the surrounding gloom. He threw open to all people the doors of the Temple of God and, notwithstanding persecution from the priesthood, people flocked under the banner of his new faith. He counted amongst his disciples people from all ranks of society, from the Brahmins and Mohammedans to the aboriginal mountain people.

Out of fairness it must be said when speaking of Brahminic hostilities that it was the priesthood with professional interest that was opposed to him; on the other hand, some of the enlightened and cultured Brahmins were amongst the earliest to receive initiation at his hands. When Sankar began to compose literary works to spread his new faith, some of the enlightened Brahmin scholars came forward and joined labours with him. In some works he wrote only the first few sections and then gave them over to be continued by his Brahmin friends or followers.

In religious gatherings, females are not allowed. They carry on their devotional chantings in the court yards of the temples in a separate group and that too not simultaneously.

Within the religious temples called *Kirtan Ghore*, no image of any god, not even of Krishna, is placed. The round of daily devotional ceremonies consists in the reading and explaining of the Bhagavat and the Gita, singing the hymnic songs of Sankar and Madhav and then the devout recitation of the prayers to the accompaniment of musical

instruments. This is called *Nama Prasanga*. All these items are carried on both in the early morning and the evening.

THE LITERARY ASPECT OF SANKAR'S CREED

Sankara founded a vast religious literature in order to give a permanent basis to his teachings. He composed all his works in the vernacular of the people. His hand was not wanting in any department of literature. He translated the entire *Bhagavat* and presented some selected stories from the *Bhagavat* and other Puranas supplied with the proper moral frame work of his own faith. This book called "Kirtan Ghosa" contains all his opinions in a nutshell. He composed popular religious songs, all bearing upon the life and doings of Lord Krishna, and inculcating the purity of *Bhakti*. He introduced a new feature into his movement by composing dramas in the performance of which he himself took some main parts. No Vaishnavite reformer of the time seems to have attracted people by dramatic representations. He rendered into music, poetry and drama, the entire life story of Sri Krishna. Madhav Dev contributed his share to all these literary performances. In addition, Madhav translated the "Ratnavali" of Bishnupuri Sanyasi and composed another work called *Nama-ghosha* which elucidates the philosophical aspect of the new creed. Sankara himself compiled a work of the same import in Sanskrit called "Bhakti Ratnakar." Subsequently under the influence of Damodar Dev, his renowned disciple Bhatta Dev rendered the entire Gita and the *Bhagavat* into prose. Bhatta Dev also compiled another work in Sanskrit called "Bhaktiviveka." Thus, this remarkable batch of scholars and thinkers brought the sublime ideas of the Gita and the *Bhagavat* into the households of men.

THE SPLIT AFTER SANKARA'S DEATH

Sankar Dev died in 1569 A.D., and immediately after his death, there was a cleavage between Madhav Dev, apostolic successor of Sankara, and Damodar Dev. In whatever personal relations Damodar might have subsisted with Sankar Dev, the temperamental differences between Madhava and Damodar soon found ventilation in a small quarrel when the strong impress of the towering personality of the founder was once removed. This led to the main division of the Vaishnavism of Sankar Dev into two sects, the Mahapurushiya and the Damodariya.

THE MAHAPURUSHIYA SECT

Madhav Dev succeeded to the headship of the religious sect founded by Sankara Dev, and as Damodar Dev, with his disciples, seceded from Madhav's authority, the latter party went by the name of Mahapurushiya, as Madhav Dev was looked upon as the Mahapurusha, the great man who led the way in devotion to the creeds of Sankara who is regarded as an *avatar*.

Madhav Dev organised the followers of Sankar into a compact body, sent missionaries all through Assam, and founded several *Suttras*, the foremost amongst them being that of Barpeta. The Brahminic hostility broke out afresh, and he was subjected to severe persecutions. He went to the Court of King Lakshminarayan (1584—1622 A.D.) of Cooch Behar where he was very kindly received. He lived there for some time and died in 1596 A. D. He nominated his chief disciple, Mathura Das "Ata," to the apostolic seat of Barpeta.

The Mahapurushiyas are all householders, and carry on all the duties of life with perfect resignation to the will of Sri Krishna. Sankara was himself a married man and did not encourage celibacy.

In imitation of Madhav Dev who was a celibate, some people forsook the ties of home-life and led simple lives in small cottages near the precincts of the main temples. They constituted an order and styled themselves Kevaliya Bhaktas (Solitary devotees). They profess to represent the society of *Bhaktas* so much glorified in Sankara's teachings, and, as such, old men, including even the heads of *Suttras*, much frequent their society to have their spiritual doubts cleared.

Officially, these solitary devotees hold themselves responsible for the proper carrying on of the daily devotional observances in the temples.

The Mahapurushiyas receive initiatory *mantra* at the hands of their *guru*, two or more in a body and rarely alone. Those who receive initiation at the same time regard themselves all through life as vowed spiritual friends to one another and never call one another by name. Caste restriction is not observed on these occasions. A Mahapurushiya of a high caste can receive initiation with another of a low caste, and regard him as his fast spiritual friend. But a man of high caste does not marry into the house of another of low caste, neither would the former partake of any food cooked by the latter; but they would sit on the same floor and partake of the food cooked by a man of higher caste. Caste restriction is disregarded only for religious purposes, because even the Mahapurushiya Brahmins receive initiatory *mantras* at the hands of their Sudra *Adhikara* of the *Suttras*.

THE DAMODARIYA OR BAMUNIYA SECT

Damodar Dev was a Brahmin and his followers style themselves either after him or after his caste. Damodar Dev left no literary works definitely embodying his views, the

Damodariyas for devotional purposes. But a few books were written for Damodar Dev by his subsequent followers. He was equally emphatic in his injunctions against the worship of other gods and goddesses and in his extolment of single-minded devotion to Sri Krishna. "If however", he is represented to have said, "the ancient *Rishis* enjoin the worship of other gods and goddesses in carrying on the duties of a householder, first contemplate Sri Krishna in your mind and then offer worship to other gods." But worship to other gods divorced from previous contemplation of Sri Krishna in the beginning was strictly forbidden. There is, however, no such sanction about the worship of minor gods in the canonical writings of his early followers who modelled their teachings closely on the Precepts of Sankar. He was as uncompromising as Sankara against animal sacrifice.

This supposed sanction of the worship of minor gods, if true, as asserted by his present-day followers, might be taken as a new feature introduced into the main Vaishnavism of Sankara Dev. All this, however, is prescribed for those who have not yet relinquished the ties of the world, but he, "who is solely attached to the name of Sri Krishna, transcends all works." Moreover, final resignation is enjoined to Sri Krishna alone.

In social intercourse, there is no distinction between a Mahapurushiya and a Damodariya. If they belong to the same caste, they marry into one another's house. They join in all religious ceremonies connected with the Suttras and the Namaghars, only while the Mahapurushiyas are stern against idol-worship and the worship of other gods, the Damodariyas may perform these ceremonies. Thus it seems that the observances of this sect are more of a nature of compromise between the old Brahminical and the new

new Vaishnavism than thoroughly Vaishnavic. The criticism of Sir Bhandarkar "that the tendency of Ramanuja's system seems to give an exclusive Brahminic form to the traditional method of Bhakti or devotion to God" would not be highly inapplicable to this sect. This may account for the greater predominance of the Brahminic element in this sect. The same accounts also for the fact that the adherents of this sect, though started later, outnumber the Mahapurushiyas; when a certain Brahmin priest turns a Damodariya, there is a general tendency amongst his *Jajmans* (clients) to espouse the new religion of their master.

The Damodariyas always receive their *mantra* from Brahmin *gurus* and none but a Brahmin can be the head of a Damodariya Sutra, whereas in most Mahapurushiya Sutras, it is the Sudras who are heads and they give initiatory *mantras* even to their Brahmin followers. The Brahmin *Adikara* of the Mahapurushiya Sutra at Barpeta was due to the fact that when Mathura Das Ata, successor to Madhav Dev, died without nominating his successor, the question of succession fell upon the Bhakta public, and, after a good deal of factious disturbance, a descendant of Ram Ram, Sankara's family priest, was elected.

In matters spiritual also there is difference between the two sects. While all Mahapurushiyas irrespective of caste are entitled to recite the full mystic formula of Sankar, the Damodariyas receiving the same formula observe a distinction. The Brahmins amongst them recite the full formula whilst the Sudras amongst them are allowed to repeat it only in a curtailed form. There is thus a greater sense of equality and fellowship amongst the Mahapurushiyas than amongst the Damodariyas.

THE HARIDEVIYA SECT

Hari Dev also founded an independent sect later on. The followers of this sect form a very small body, and Hari Dev being a Brahmin, his teachings lean more to the side of Damodar Dev than of Sankara.

CONCLUSION

Within the small compass of this sketch we have thus completed our general survey of the salient points of Assam-Vaishnavism. The civilization of modern Assam is essentially a Vaishnavic civilisation. Apart from the main Suttras which would number no less than three hundred, and which are like the headquarters of religion, every village of Hindu or Hinduized population contains one *Namaghar* (The temple where people gather to chant the name of God). On all festive occasions connected with the life and doings of Sri Krishna, the hymnic songs of Sankara and Madhav are recited in accompaniment to musical instruments. On such occasions, there is no sectarian distinction between a Mahapurushiya and a Damodariya, all joining in the ceremonies with equal fervour and partaking of the Vishnu offerings. Except in the respective attitudes towards idol-worship, the distinction between the people of the two sects is more theoretical than practical. And as a matter of fact, even the Damodariyas, on their own initiative, do not show any great inclination towards instituting idol worship; only they have no objection to join when others organise it.

These *Namaghars* are something like village parliaments. Their affairs are conducted on a purely democratic principle, every household in the village having an equal voice in the management of affairs.

The *Namaghars* are the court houses where the elders of the village sit in judgment on petty cases.

or social delinquents are brought to trial and fined or excommunicated until the fine is paid up, which goes to the common fund of the village. On bigger ceremonial occasions, several villages combine and carry on the ceremony of recitation of the name of Sri Krishna from village to village by turns.

As a social force, Assam-Vaishnavism has been working with marvellous success for about four hundred years, and that too without any symptom of degradation. The strict elimination of women from the religious gatherings of men is a strong point in this school. It widened the pale of Hindu community receiving adherents from any religion and gave a wider range to social activities. It has fostered the ideas of brotherhood and equality amongst all men and acted as a strong solvent of hateful distinctions. "In other prevailing forms of religion, different people are entitled only to rites variously prescribed for different castes, but in reciting the name of Hari, all are equal, and so, this is the best of all religions."

"Formerly, the stream of the love-nectar of Hari's name flowed only within the confines of the Heavens, until Sankara came and removed the embankments; and lo! now it flows tumultuous through all the world."





CHAITANYA & HARIDASA

HARIDAS

ONE of the sweetest and the most pious personalities in the devout band that gathered round Chaitanya was Haridas Thakur, also known as Brahma Haridas. We know very little of the birth or antecedents of this saint. He is reported to have been a Yavana or Mussalman, but, it appears to us, he was only a low-caste Hindu. That he was not born in any of the regenerate castes of the Hindus, and as such, was originally "untouchable" is quite clear. Contemporary references to this saint in the "Life of Chaitanya" and other writings leave no doubt as to the fact that Haridas belonged to the "untouchable" classes. He was born about the latter end of the fifteenth century and was a very devout worshipper of Vishnu in the form of Krishna. His devotion and piety won him the love and friendship of the great contemporary Bhakthas and he became one of the most favoured followers of Sri Krishna Chaitanya.

EARLY LIFE AND DOINGS.

From his childhood, Haridas was of a retiring disposition, and as soon as he became capable of taking care of himself, he retired into a secluded part of the village of Buran, in the District of Jessore, in Bengal. His hut was surrounded with *tulsi* plants, and he passed his days and nights recounting the sweet name of Hari. It is here that he became celebrated for his unparalleled devotion and piety and, it is said, he made converts and cured also several persons afflicted with loathsome diseases. He then removed to Fulia, near Santipur, where

Vaishnava Brahmin and scholar and friend and follower of Sri Krishna Chaitanya. They became friends and lived and worshipped together.

By this time, the fame of Haridas had spread far and ~~wide~~ in Bengal. His marvellous feats and austere devotions are described at some length in the *Charitamrita*. Doubtless, the austerity of his devotions attracted the curiosity of the people, who ran in crowds and rendered him divine homage. But the Mohammedan Governor of the district could not endure the sight of a mortal honoured with divine worship. Baffled in all his expedients to divert the mind of the enthusiast from the Hari Nama, the infidel functionary hoped to entrap him by the blandishments of women. Accordingly, a harlot decked with all possible charms took her seat at the door of the humble cell of the devotee. Addressing Hari Das, she said that she had a petition to present. The all but omniscient Vaishnava, aware, by the energy of his far-seeing faith, of the wicked device of the infidel ruler, requested her to wait till the end of his devotions. She waited, but to no good effect, for the devotions continued all night. The following night she again repaired to the hermitage, received the same answer, and was similarly disappointed. Night after night, she visited Hari Das, and, night after night, returned disappointed. The simple and austere disciple, blind to all female charms, pursued his avocation without any distraction of mind. But the harlot, enamoured of the beauty of holiness, forsook her sinful course and betook herself to the Hari Nama. "Behold here," says the author of the *Charitamrita*, "the efficacy of the blessed Hari Nama."

HARIDAS AND CHAITANYA.

Haridas soon afterwards, heard of the reputation of

great and kind-hearted saint was struck with the devotion and faith of the low-born bhaktha and embraced him saying that devotion and service to God knew no distinctions of caste or birth. He made Haridas one of his own followers and treated him with the greatest love and affection. Haridas followed Chaitanya in his pilgrimages and at last, when the latter settled at Puri, he came and lived near him in a hut which is still pointed out to pilgrims. There is a passage in Krishnadas's *Life of Chaitanya* describing the arrival of Haridas at Puri and the most affectionate welcome accorded to him by Chaitanya. The passage is highly interesting as it throws some light on the devotion and humility of Haridas and the great love which Chaitanya bore to him. We give below the passage:

“Haridas lay prostrate far away on the edge of the public road, whence he had first beheld Chaitanya. He had not resorted to the Master's reception, but stopped at a distance. The devotees hurried there to lead him in, but Haridas said, ‘I am a low person, of no caste, and debarred from going to the Temple. If I can get a little retired space in the garden, I shall lie there and pass my time in loneliness, so that no servitor of Jagannath may have any occasion to touch me. This is my prayer’..... Then Chaitanya came to receive Haridas who was chanting God's name in rapture. Haridas fell flat at the Master's feet, who clasped him to his bosom. Both wept in fervour of love—the Master overcome by the disciple's merits, and the disciple by the Master's. Haridas cried, ‘Touch me not, Master, I am a low untouchable wretch!’ But the Master answered, ‘I touch you to be purified, because I lack your pure religion. Every

‘places, or by performing sacrifice, austerities and almsgiving, or by reading the Vedas. You are holier than a Brahmin or Sanyasi.’ So saying, he took Haridas into the garden and gave him a room all apart, adding, ‘Live here, chanting God’s name. Daily will I come and join thee. Bow to the discus on the top of the Temple of Jagannath (which you can see from here). The *prasad* will be sent to you here.’ Nityanand, Jagadanand, Damodar and Mukunda rejoiced on meeting with Haridas.” Then the Master carefully sent the *prasad* to Haridas by the hand of Govinda.”

Haridas has indeed met with a kindlier fate than the one that befell his brethren in West and South India. Without being scorned or persecuted, he was loved and respected by the pious men of the age, and lived in devout comradeship with them. All honour to Sri Krishna Chaitanya who, with his eye of love, discerned the devotion and piety of Haridas and made him one of his own.

LIFE AT PURI

The centre and resort of the devotees and saints of this time was Puri. What Chidambar was to Nanda and the South Indian devotees, what Pandharpur was to the Maratha bhakthas, that was Puri to the monks and devotees of Bengal. The city with its sea-side temple had, early in history, become famous and attracted large numbers of pilgrims. Year after year, they came in large numbers, bathed in the sea, worshipped at Jagannath’s shrine, witnessed the festivals and returned home joyously. To the Vaishnava monks and bhakthas of this period, however, Puri appeared as the very Heaven wherein Vishnu lived. The image of Jagannath was to them the visible symbol of Krishna whom they all adored. The city with its

minds strange reminiscences of the scenes of Krishna's life. Hither, therefore, Chaitanya and his followers and all the great devotees came and lived, and spent their lives in constant worship of Jagannath. Their daily life was one unceasing round of bath and prayer and worship at the shrine and devout discourse. On festive days—on other occasions, religious processions, *bhajans*, were frequently got up in which these devout men went dancing and singing through the streets. In the madness of their devotion to Jagannath, these bhakthas (including Chaitanya) sometimes took on themselves the duties of temple-servants—went and swept the temple-floor, washed the image or dragged the car. Indeed, their religious ecstasy knew no bounds.

Such then are the features of the life which Haridas now led with his brother devotees at Puri. He sat at Chaitanya's feet and listened to his discourses. Or he joined the devotees in their *bhajan* parties and with them danced and sang. More often, he would retire into the privacy of his little hut, and there long sit and pray. Though his friends and brother-devotees treated Haridas on equal terms, he never gave up the humbler position prescribed to his caste—he ate the *prasad* after all others had eaten and prayed to Jagannath standing far away from the temple gate. His devout days at last drew to an end, and he died somewhere before the year 1533, the year of the death of Chaitanya, amidst the tears of friends and bhakthas. ✓

RAMAPRASAD

RAMAPRASAD, the Bengali poet of the 18th century, is the most remarkable influence in Indian literature of the great Shakta cult and philosophy that flourished in Bengal in the Middle Ages. Though born long after the heyday of Shaktatism in Bengal, at a time when its hold on the people had considerably waned, and Vaishnavism under Chaitanya had become a rival power in the land, he yet, by dint of a great and inborn mysticism and passionate effort, realised in himself all the power and glory of the old Shakta teaching and won back for it a new life and power in the decaying Bengal.

HIS BIRTH AND PARENTAGE

Ramaprasad was born in the village of Kumarahatti, near Halisahar, a station on the East-Bengal Railway in the year 1718 A. D. He was the son of Ramarama Sen, a Vaidya by caste. Defrauded of his inheritance by his relatives, Ramarama Sen had little to provide his son with, and the poet-child passed his early life in poverty. While yet in his teens, Ramaprasad was taken as an apprentice in the revenue office of a zemindar and was entrusted with the work of keeping the accounts. One day, the zemindar was taken by surprise at reading some remarkably beautiful songs scribbled over the pages of the account-book in the hand-writing of Ramaprasad. Knowing that they were the composition of the young Ramaprasad, and highly pleased with his poetic talents, he conferred a pension of Rs. 35 on him, bade him retire to his native village and devote himself to the composition of songs.

RAMAPRASAD AND KRISHNA CHANDRA

Impelled perhaps by poetic ambition, the young Ramaprasad chose not retirement, but sought the patronage of Raja Krishna Chandra of Navadvipa, a distinguished scholar and patron of letters, but a scheming and worldly noble. Raja Krishna Chandra's court was the scene of intrigues and political plots. He deprived his uncle by a stratagem of his rightful ownership of his estate of Krishnagar. He lived on terms of friendship with the English and is credited with having first put the idea of defeating Sirajud Daulah with the help of the English into the head of Mir Jafar. He was, however, the wealthiest noble in Western Bengal and, being well accomplished alike in poetry, philosophy and logic, his court attracted various eminent scholars and poets of the period. Under the influence of such a court, the young and gifted Ramaprasad wrote a poetic version of the *Vidya Sundari*—a love story—made current in religious literature by being made part of Shaivite epic poems, entitled *Ananda Mangal* or *Kalika Mangal*. The story, itself sensuous in theme and lacking in moral interest, is further marred in Ramaprasad's hand, through the sensuous imagination of youth and the gay influences of a worldly patron and his court. But his work was soon outdone by another poet, Bharata Chandra, who came out with a more poetic and artistic version of *Vidya Sundari*. Ramaprasad finally left Krishna Chandra's court in 1758 at the age of forty; and, as the historian of Bengali Literature, D. C. Sen, says: "it was well that he was defeated in his effort to win precedence in a court where scurrility reigned—the pity is that he soiled his hand by such an attempt to pander to the vitiated taste of the age." The Raja,

however, conferred on him a pension and gave him 100 bighas of rent-free land.

RAMAPRASAD AS A SHAKTA POET

Ramaprasad, now freed from the worldly influences of a noble's court, sought communion with his own soul and the Divine Mother; and his songs born of his great yearning and devotion to Kali soon began to spread throughout Bengal. Composed in the soul captivating ragini, *Malasri*, "these songs" says D. C. Sen, "wrought a revolution in the spiritual world." The songs, it may be pointed out, were not the fruit of a life of mere joy and freedom, but come out of a life, spent in strenuous meditation and mystical exercises into which at this period Ramaprasad with his entire soul and strength seems to have entered. Writes Sirish Chandra Vidyardanya, the Bengali writer on Tantra, in his "Principles of Tantra"—

He (Ramaprasad) sank into the depths of the ocean of Sadhana (spiritual and mystical discipline) and it was only in intervals of rest from Sadhana performed in fixed Asanas that he was now and then moved by the breeze of emotion to sing his songs. Proofs of Ramaprasad's Shavasadhana, Chitasadhana, Shaktisadhana, rosary of Mahashankha, Bilvamula and Panchanarda and other Asanas (various Tantrik Sadhanas; with a corpse on a funeral pyre: with a Shakti: rosary of human bones: five skulls: under a bil tree: and other mystical exercises), we still possess. The community of Sadhas is still resounding with the deep trumpet sound echoing from the sphere of spiritual competence in which Ramaprasad moved, and of the truth for which he bore a madly impassioned love. . . . Guru was his guide, Shashtra itself was his lamp, the path of Sadhana was the path he followed, and the Chintamani Region of the Mother of the world (the Supreme Region) was that to which it led." *Translated by Arthur Avalon Vol. II, pp. 232,233*).

His fame was well established in his life-time, and there are many legends about him, some are genuine and others are obviously invented at a later date. Here is one which may be taken for what it is worth. On his way to the Ganges, we are told that he met a woman who asked him to sing to her

He told her to wait at his house, till he returned from bathing. When he arrived and asked for her, she had gone, but had left a note for him in the family temple. This note informed him that the goddess Kali had come from Kasi (Benares) to hear him sing, and now commanded him to go to Kasi. He fell ill on the road, and composed the song, 'I cannot go, but your Feet shall be my Kasi.' Recovering, he tried to go on; but fell ill again, and saw Kali in vision, telling him to forego the journey. He obeyed her, making the following song.

What have I to do with Kasi? The Lotus-Feet of Kali are places of pilgrimage enough for me. Deep in my heart's lily meditating on them, I float in an ocean of bliss. In Kali's name where is the place for sin? When the head is not, headache cannot remain. As when fire consumes a heap of cotton, so all goes in Kali's name.

The worshipper of Kali laughs at the name of Gaya, and at ancestral offerings there and the story of salvation by ancestors' merits. Certainly, Siva has said that if a man dies at Kasi, he wins salvation. But devotion is the root of everything, and salvation but her handmaid who follows her. What is the worth of salvation if it means absorption, the mixing of water with water? Sugar I love to eat, but I have no wish to become sugar.

Prasad says joyously: By the power of grace and mercy, if we but think on the Wild-locked Goddess, the Four Goods become ours.

A beautiful and just estimate of Ramaprasad's poetry was given by Sister Nivedita in her *KALI THE MOTHER*. She writes:

"No flattery could touch a nature so unapproachable in its simplicity. For in these writings we have, perhaps alone in literature, the spectacle, the spectacle of a great poet whose genius is spent in realising the emotions of a child. William Blake in our own poetry strikes the note that is nearest his, and Blake is by no means his peer. Robert Burns in his splendid indifference to rank, and Whitman in his glorification of common things have points of kinship with him. But to such a radiant white heat of childlikeness, it would be impossible to find a perfect counterpart. His years do nothing to spoil this quality. They only serve to give him self-confidence and poise. Like a child, he is now grave, now gay, sometimes petulant, sometimes despairing. But in the child, all

this is purposeless. In Ramaprasad there is a deep intensity of purpose. Every sentence he has uttered is designed to sing the glory of the Mother."

Sister Nivedita compared Ramprasad with Blake. "He resembles rather Herrick, in his self-consciousness and in his habit of looking at himself from outside. But these are only casual and partial affinities. His lyrics at their simplest often have the quality of a snatch of nursery babble, and sing themselves into the memory of an illiterate folk by a riot of punning sound and alliteration, a musical toss and play of syllables."

The fact is, Ramaprasad took a child-like pleasure in these. Much of his imagery, says Mr. E. J. Thompson in his "Bengalee Religious Lyrics" is fanciful and conceited. Yet even this has a charm of peculiar, local interest.

"The student of his poetry will be rewarded with a wealth of local thought and custom and of such stories as flower in the undergrowth and byways of authorised legend. This 'local habitation' of Ramaprasad's mind is strength as well as sometimes weakness. His range of ideas and illustrations is narrow; but within that range, he is a master. If he falls short on occasion, because so much of Tantric teaching is puerile and worthless, he rises greatly again when he touches Earth, that Universal Mother. His illustration is racy, from the soil and of the soil; it comes from the life of an agricultural people. In Bengal, 'every schoolboy' (as a plain, literal fact) knows his sublimely simple reproof to his soul, in a moment's shrinking from death, 'Thou, a snake, fearing frogs.' This wealth of metaphor plucked from a simple life and society will meet the reader on every page."

RAMAPRASAD'S POEMS

Ramaprasad has left a large number of songs, all of them bearing testimony to his deep mystical struggles and final fruition. A number of his poems are addressed to Kali and combine profound imagery and power with a burning devotion and love to the dread and loving Mother. The following is a beautiful and stirring specimen:

"O Mother, how Thou didst dance in battle?
Incomparable is Thy garment,
Loose is Thine hair.

Naked art Thou on Hara's breast,
How Thou didst dance in battle !

Who is that Dark Lady ?
Her colour is like crushed collyrium,
Her face is like the circle of the autumnal moon,
Her tresses are loosely flowing,
Her body is splashed with blood ;
She shines like a freshly-formed cloud streaked with lightning !

O who is that Charmer of Mind—
That Charmer of Mind ?
Like a mass of lightning is she,
Her beauty shines like gems and rubies.

O who is that Charmer of Mind ?
With a swaying gait, who comes there ?
Her tresses are loose and she is stirred by wine,
She moves fast in battle,
Seizes those who surrounded me
Holds elephants in the hollow of her hand ;
Ah : who is that Dark Lady coming there ?
Who is She, young and naked ?
And yet devoid of shame ?
She charms the world.
What unseemly conduct for a lady of respectable family ?
Her gait is like that of an elephant,
She is intoxicated with wine,
Her tongue is lolling,
Her hair is loose,
The sight of Her makes men and Devas fear Her
Roaring she crushes Danavas."

The need for sadhana—her true mystical exercise—
for practical love and devotion is brought out in the following songs:—

"All jivas meditate on the Guru in the Brahma-randhra,
And Sadashiva is a great Yogi through meditation on the
form of Kali.

Truly the fifty letters form the substance of Veda and
Agama.

But it is hard for even a Yogi to contemplate the formless
aspect.

Thou hast no form, Akshara (written characters) is thy form.
O thou whose substance is Gunas

Thou hast taken forms according to the different Gunas.
Veda says that Kaivalya (Liberation) is attained by
worshipping the formless Deity.

To me this notion seems wrong, and the effect of highness of
intellect.

Prasada says—The mind ever seeks the Black Beauty.
Do as thou do it wish—who wants Nirvana (Liberation) ?

Of what use is this body, O brother! if it does not melt in love for the Gracious Goddess?

Oh Fie, Fie to this tongue if it does not utter the name of Kali?

Those eyes are sinful which see not the form of Kali.

Oh, How wicked is the mind which does not sink under Her feet!

May thunder strike those ears which do not hear the sweet name making copious tears flow from the eyes. For what purpose does their existence serve?

Oh, should we desire to have the hands that fill the belly, if they are not joined together to hold sandal paste, Java flowers and bil leaves?

Oh, of what use are the feet, and wholly without purpose they do by day and night, if they do not willingly and gladly carry us there where images of Kali are enshrined?

If a man's senses be not under his control, can Devata be so?

Ramaprasad asks—Does a Babin tree (a wild tree) ever bear mango fruit?"

His doubts and mystical despair find expression in the following :—

"O mind, you are still labouring under this error. You do not clearly realise what Kali is.

Although you know, why do you, O mind, seem not to know that the universe consisting of the three worlds is the Mother's image?

And you want to worship her by building images of clay! The Mother who decks the three worlds with measureless gems and gold,

Her you want to deck with worthless tinsel ornaments—the Mother who feeds the world with all kinds of food.

With what place do you think to feed Her on atapa (rice of unboiled paddy) rice and soaked peas?"

The following lines give fitting expression to his remarkable mystical passion and longing :—

"Will such a day come, O Tara, a day on which tears will stream from my eyes when I will cry—Tara, Tara, Tara!

My heart-lotus will be fully blown,

The mind's darkness will be dispelled, and then I shall fall and roll on the Earth and be beside myself, crying 'Tara'!

I shall forsake all distinctions.

My mind's sorrow will be destroyed.

O! Hundreds of true Vedas say that my Tara is 'without form.'

Shri Ramaprasad says—The Mother dwells in all bodies, O, blinded eye! See, the Mother is in darkness, the dispeller of darkness."

The following poem has been described by the Editors of the *Bengali Religious Lyrics* as one "that has never been forgotten by his countrymen." They add that in it the poet "looks past the blood-stained image which represents his 'Mother' to the many, sees with revolt the butchered victims and the red stains upon the flowers of worship, and cries out to that World—Mercy, which he has found for himself and which he adores, that he will sacrifice not living, quivering flesh but the 'six passions'—the sins of his heart and mind."

Mind, why art thou so anxious? Utter Kali's name, and sit in meditation. From all this pomp of worship the mind grows proud. Worship her in secret, that none may know. What is thy gain from images of metal, stone or earth?

Fashion her image with the stuff of mind, and set it on the lotus-throne of your heart. Parched rice and plantains, ah! how vainly do you offer these! Feed her with the nectar of devotion, and satisfy your own mind.

Why seek to illumine her with lamp and lantern and candle? Light the jewelled lamp of the mind, let it flash its lustre day and night.

Why do you bring sheep and goats and buffaloes for sacrifice? Saying 'Victory to Kali,' 'Victory to Kali,' sacrifice the Six Passions.

Prasad says: What need is there of drums and tomtoms? Saying, 'Victory to Kali,' clap your hands and lay your mind at her Feet.

The following poems, couched in allegorical language and sweet poetry, characteristic of Ramaprasad, contain the poet's call to religion, to a life of earnest search after God.

Beware, beware, the boat is sinking!

Ah, my careless mind, the days are passing, and thou hast not worshipped the Queen of Ruin. Thou hast weighed down thy boat with vain goods of thy traffic, thy buying and selling. All day, thou hast waited at the *ghat*, and now with evening thou wouldst cross the stream. Thou hast made thine old boat heavy with sins. If thou wouldst pass over the ocean of the world, make the lord thy helmsman. Seeing the leaping waves, the Six Boatmen have fled.

This day will surely pass, Mother, this day will pass, and only rumour linger. Countless will be the reproaches against Tara's name. I came to the market of the world, and by its bathing-*ghat*, I sat to sell my wares. Mother, the Sun, our Lord is seated on his platform, the ferryman has come. The load of the many fills the boat, he leaves behind the wretched one. They seek a cowrie from this poor man ; where shall he set it ?

Prasad says : Stony-hearted Girl, look. Give me a place, O Mother ! Singing thy glory, I will plunge into the sea of the world.

The following is one of Ramaprasad's very last poems composed in the evening of his life.

My play is finished, Mother. My play is finished, thou Joyous One. It was to play that I came to the earth, I have taken its dust and played. O thou Daughter of the Mountains, now am I in fear of deaths, for death is close at hand. In childhood's days what games I had ! Then I wasted in the joys of married life the breath that should have been given to prayer.

Ramprasad says : Now that I am old and feeble, tell me, Mother, what I must do. O Mother of mine, thou that art strength itself, give me devotion. Cast me into the waters of salvation.

The songs of Ramaprasad are the property of the Bengalee nation. They have gone to the heart of the people as few poets' work has done. Coolies working on the road and peasants ploughing the paddy fields are singing his songs with ecstasy. They are heard at sunset by the river margin, and the village folks hum his songs as they go ferrying to the market.

Tagore's songs, says Mr. Thompson, are heard in Calcutta streets, and have been widely spread by the student community and the Brahmo Samaj ; but in the villages of Bengal they are unknown, while Ramaprasad's are heard everywhere. ' The peasants and the *pandits* enjoy his songs equally. They draw solace from them in the hour of despair and even at the moment of death. The dying man brought to the banks of the Ganges asks his compari-

Ramaprasad died in 1775. A tradition says that on the night of his death, he worshipped Kali and composed the song, 'Tara, do you remember any more. Then he died singing, like Saxon Cædmon; with the conclusion of the lyric, his soul went out through the top of his head,' and passed to the World of Brahman, whence there is no return to this wearisome cycle of births and deaths.

Yet another account says that Ramaprasad, "following in a trance the clay image of Kali when it was thrown into the Ganges, on the Kali puja day, was drowned."

Ramakrishna Paramahansa

INTRODUCTORY

A BEAUTIFUL story told by Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa brings out very vividly the special feature of his greatness, the characteristic which more than all others entitles him to the love and reverence of all mankind. He says that three men hearing of a beautiful garden, went in search of it. They journeyed far and were footsore and weary. Finally, their good luck took them to the garden, but they found that a high wall had to be scaled before the garden could be reached. They set themselves to the task of scaling the wall, and on reaching the top and surveying the manifold glories of the garden, two of them got intoxicated with joy, and at once jumped into the garden to enjoy its pleasures. But the third man, though he felt the beauties in as great a measure as his companions and was sorely tempted to follow their lead, yet, moved by the desire of imparting to his ignorant brethren information as to the pleasure of the garden and the path thereto, returned to his village to enlighten them. Shri Ramakrishna used to say that the great Saints of the world who choose rather to live in the midst of erring humanity to turn its eyes Godward than to lose themselves in spiritual communion with God for which their soul is panting, are like the third man in the story. They are not less spiritual than their brother-seers who go into the silent bliss of *samadhi*, oblivious of the sorrows of suffering humanity. But they have an infinity of compassion for the blind and ignorant people, which compels them to live in the midst of worldliness, trying to

achieve the spiritual regeneration of the world. Shri Ramakrishna was one of these. From childhood upward, he never came under the yoke of worldliness. He became a *Jivan-mukta*; yet he could not bear to withdraw himself from the busy haunts of men, but lived and worked among them, labouring unceasingly for their good.

BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

He was the son of Kudiram Chatterjee, an orthodox Brahmin, living in a village in Bengal. He was born at Kumarpukur on 20th February, 1833. He was the youngest of three brothers, and was called Gadadhar in his early life. A story is told of his singular impressionableness in his youth. His elder brother once chastised him saying that he would vomit blood for his misbehaviour. He took this so much to heart that he actually began to vomit blood. He was sent to school, but he found it impossible to take kindly to secular education. He went to Dakshineswar near Calcutta and became a priest in the temple of the Goddess Kali. The idea of realising God took firm hold of his mind and it haunted him night and day. He would even neglect the daily worship in the temple, and would lie moaning on the sacred floor: "One day is gone in vain, Oh Mother, and thou dost not come; one day of this short life is gone, and I have not known the Truth." Swami Vivekananda says: "About that part of his life he has told me many times that he could not tell when the sun rose or set, sometimes for weeks he had no other idea, only tears would trickle down his cheeks, and that one prayer came out: "Dost thou manifest thyself in me, Thou Mother of the Universe. See that I want thee and nothing else." He had read that renunciation of gold and woman was the first condition of real spiritual life. He gave up what little pro-

"The sight of money fills him," wrote the Rev. Protap Chandra Mazumdar, the celebrated Brahmo leader, "with strange dread. His avoidance of women and wealth is the whole secret of his matchless moral character. For a long time he practised a singular discipline. He took in one hand a piece of gold and in the other a lump of earth. He would then look at both, repeatedly calling the gold *earth* and the earth *gold*, and then shuffling the contents of one hand into the other, he could keep up the process until he lost all sense of the difference between the gold and the earth."

This is corroborated by the experiences of another distinguished Brahmo leader—Pandit Shivanath Sastri—who also came in intimate contact with Ramakrishna. He was so saturated with the hatred of money, that, in later life, while in a trance, if a coin were made to touch any portion of his body, that portion would shrink from the touch as from an unholy thing.

The Brahmo leader wrote of him :

"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."

Elsewhere he wrote :—

He has no other thought, no other occupation, no other religion, no other friend in his humble service than his God. That God is more than sufficient for him.

Numerous stories are told of the way the Master conquered the passions of the sex. It is related in the exhaustive Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western disciples that one day, a householder took him to a house, where it had been arranged that dancing-girls should endeavour to turn his mind from the highest truth.

The Master walked into the house, not knowing who were the inmates. He ascended the stairs and was left in the drawing-room all by himself. And then came in the dancing marionettes of sin, beautiful and seductive, and exhibited their charms to him. "O Mother! O Mother! Where have you brought me?" An agonising cry, as of a child in trouble, rent the air. And then the body of Sri Ramakrishna became rigid as though dead. His soul had gone into Samadhi. The scene changed. The women were amazed. Holiness filled the room. The women, full of remorse, fell at the feet of the Master. And, turning to him who had brought the saint into the presence of sinners with their sins, the women exclaimed, "Why did you bring a saint here? He is a Sukadeva. He is a man of God. We can only look upon him as a child." And Sri Ramakrishna, coming to earthly consciousness, stretched out his hands and blessed the women. And lo! They were raised into an ecstatic mood!

Protap Chandra Mazumdar has described how he escaped the evil of carnality which he dreaded.

"His Mother to whom he prayed, that is the Goddess Kali, made him recognise every woman as her incarnation, so that he now honors each member of the other sex as his mother. He bows his head to the ground before women, and before little girls; he has insisted upon worshipping not a few of them as a son might worship his mother. The purity of his thoughts and relation towards women is most unique and instructive. It is the opposite of the European idea. It is an attitude essentially, traditionally, gloriously national."

Ramakrishna had been married early in life to Sarad Devi. It was not a marriage as the world understands the word, for there were no marital relations.

During his protracted meditations and austere observances, the sex instinct had been completely subdued by Ramakrishna. All women, even the fallen among them, were, in his eyes, manifestations of the Deity. He went to her and prayed that he might be released from the bonds of matrimony so that he might pursue with a single heart his worship of the Mother. She encouraged him with her words and set him free; and in later life, like Yasodhara of immortal fame, became one of his disciples. The good "Mother" as she was called by the disciples lived to a ripe old age and died in 1920 mourned by the whole group of devotees.

He now redoubled his efforts to realise God. At the temple of Dakshineswar, food, cooked and uncooked, was freely supplied to Sadhus and Sannyasins who tarried there for a short space while on a pilgrimage to the various sacred places and shrines in India. Ramakrishna came in frequent contact with these people and learned from them many Hindi songs and holy sayings. A Sanyasini, and after her, a Saint, Totapuri, initiated him in the knowledge of Yoga, and taught him the sublimest doctrines of the Vedanta. It was he who probably conferred upon him the name of Ramakrishna. He was so absorbed in the attempt to realise God that he never cared for his body, and, but for the efforts of his friends, his frame must have given way under the strain. At last, he had his due reward, and there came a moment when

The mortal limit of the self was loosed
And pass'd into the Nameless, as a cloud
Melts into heaven.

The idea of the body passed away from him. Pointing to his body he used to say, 'this abode of my Mother.'

pelled from within by that irresistible necessity that had called him into being without one 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."

MIDDLE LIFE.

He had now reached that realisation of unity for which he had panted and striven with matchless patience and untiring energy. He still continued his efforts to get rid of every idea that would disturb the enjoyment of "that light whose smile kindles the Universe." The desire to annihilate the pride of superior social birth took hold of him once, and this Brahman of Brahmans could not rest in peace until he cleansed the dirtiest corner of a Pariah's hut with his flowing tresses. His heart was full to overflowing with love for all. He could not bear to see the sufferings of others. He now wanted to realise the truths taught in other religions. A Mahomedan sage appeared on the scene and initiated him into the truths of Mahomedanism. He went through the rites and observances of that religion, followed the directions laid down by it, and emerged with the conviction that it also was a road to the same Temple of Truth which he had already reached by another path. He realised for himself the truth of the Christian also. Mr. Mazumdar has left a faithful account of Ramakrishna's wonderful catholicity. The leader of the reforming party was struck with admiration of the breadth of view displayed by the orthodox priest of Dakshineswar. He wrote :—

"Nor was his reverence confined within Hinduism. For long days he subjected himself to various disciplines to realise the Mahomedan idea of an all-powerful Allah. He let his beard grow, he fed himself on Moslem diet, he

continually repeated sentences from the Koran. His reverence for Christ is deep and genuine. He bows his head at the name of Jesus, honors the doctrine of his Sonship, and we believe he once or twice attended Christian places of worship. These ideas at all events show the catholic religious culture of this great Hindu Saint.

Each form of worship that we have tried to indicate above is to the Paramahansa a living and most enthusiastic principle of personal religion, and the accounts of discipline and exercise through which he has arrived at his present state of devotional eclecticism are most wonderful, although they cannot be published."

He attempted next to realise God in the manner known to each religious sect in India.

"My father," says the Paramahansa, "was a worshipper of Rama. I, too, have accepted the Ramayat covenant. When I think of the piety of my father, the flowers with which he used to worship his favourite God bloom again in my heart and fill it with Divine fragrance."

He imitated the sweet love of the Gopis for Shri Krishna, dressed himself like a Gopi, and sat waiting for the absent idol of his heart. He was sometimes Hanuman, the devoted servant of Rama, and used to spend his time on the tops of trees, eating fruits and repeating Ram, Ram. In this manner, he spent forty years of his life, realising truth under all her manifold forms and preparing himself for his great mission. "There was not a symbol in India that he had not worshipped, and did not love; not a worshipper by whatever rite, whose special need he had not felt in his own nature, and borne till it was satisfied: not a prayer nor an ecstasy, nor a vision that he did not reverence or understand and give it its true place in a growing knowledge."

AS A TEACHER.

The world began slowly to understand that a Saint of great eminence had been vouchsafed to it. Men of light and leading came to sit at his feet. Keshab Chunder Sen came under his influence, and began the New Dispensation, which was a puzzle to his followers, and showed clearly the influence of Shri Ramakrishna's Teachings. Ramakrishna himself went to see Keshab and very soon there sprang up between these two kindred spirits a deep intimacy based upon their earnest religious feelings. Both were well-advanced in their convictions, both were full of real humility. When Ramakrishna once asked Keshab to deliver a speech, the latter replied, "Am I to vend needles in a blacksmith's shop? I would rather listen to your words."

Following the distinguished lead of Keshab Chunder Sen, other men of note began visiting Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The papers controlled by Keshab published some of his sayings and drew attention to the saintliness of his character. Max Muller heard of him and wrote an account of him and quoted his sayings. "I am most fortunate", said Keshab, "in coming across a man equal to Christ or Chaitanya whose names only are known to us." Protap Chandra Mazumdar wrote a touching appreciation of the Master in the pages of the *Nineteenth Century*, then at the height of influence :

"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, unpolish-

ed, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee? Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Muller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines? I who am an ardent disciple and follower of Christ, a friend and admirer of liberal-minded Christian missionaries and preachers, a devoted adherent and worker of the rationalistic Brahmo-Samaj—why should I be spell-bound to hear him? And it is not I only but dozens like me who do the same.”

Leading men of Calcutta thronged to see the saint and hear his discourses. Pundits, scholars, the wealthy and the influential, vied with one another in paying homage to the sage of Dakshineswar. Bankin Chandra Chatterji, the famous writer and composer of the *Bande Mataram* song, was reproved for his ill-timed and indecorous levity while conversing with Ramakrishna. So were Maharaja Jotindra Mohan Tagore and Kristo Das Pal for their assumption of superiority.

Dr. Mahendra Lal Sircar, a learned scientist and the leading homœopathic physician of Calcutta in his time, was strongly attracted by Ramakrishna Paramahansa whom he treated in his last illness, and used to spend hours listening to the marvellous conversation of his patient.

Shivanath Sastri was another who frequented the Master. In his Reminiscences, Shivanath speaks in glowing terms about the love and tenderness with which Sri Ramakrishna regarded him. We are told that on many occasions, the Master clasped him to his bosom and requested him again and again to come to Dakshineswar. At one time finding him not turning up even after repeated requests, the Master himself went to his place. Such was the passionate love of Sri Ramakrishna for all who tried to lead a religious life. But in spite of his close intimacy, Pundit

Shivanath had a strange idea about the Master's transcendental state or losing outward consciousness in Samadhi. He saw in it only the outcome of "a strange nervous disorder, under which, whenever there was any strong emotion or excitement, he would faint away, losing his consciousness for the time being, and his whole countenance assuming a radiant glow, as a mark of the emotion working within." He had heard about Sri Ramakrishna's great austerities, specially regarding food and sleep, and therefore concluded that all this was but the after-effect of the austere life he had led during his youth. He, however, has classified these 'fits' of Sri Ramakrishna with those of Chaitanya, Mahomed and many other saints of a devotional temperament. Considering that too much intimacy with Sri Ramakrishna was responsible for that spiritual revolution in the mind of Vijay which made him leave the Brahmo Samaj, Shivanath was anxious to ward off this unwholesome influence, as he thought it to be, on his Samaj. Asked as to why he no longer frequented the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, he replied that if he did so, other members of his Samaj would follow his example, and as a result, the whole organisation would collapse. Sri Ramakrishna heard of Shivanath's views about himself, and one day finding him at Dakshineswar, cornered him saying. "Well, Shivanath, I hear that you call this state of my mind a disease and say that I become unconscious at that time. You think day and night of all sorts of material things and yet consider yourselves as possessing quite sound brains, while I who always meditate on that Eternal Fountain-head of Consciousness appear to you as deranged! A fine piece of reasoning!" Pundit Shivanath could not utter a word in reply.

But one of the most beautiful conversations recorded in the *Life of Ramakrishna* is that between Ramakrishna

and that great and good man, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. In the afternoon of 5th August 1882, Sri Ramakrishna set out for the house of Vidyasagar with Mahendra, Bhavanath and Hazra.

As he was nearing the place of Vidyasagar, he said to himself several times, "Mother, I am going to see the Pundit; but you know, I am absolutely devoid of learning." He then fell into an exalted mood and expressed his dislike to light topics. The carriage stopped in front of Vidyasagar's house. Sri Ramakrishna alighted, supported by Bhavanath. He wore a red-bordered cloth, the skirt of which was thrown over his shoulder, and a coat which was unbuttoned. As he was going through the garden, he asked Mahendra if he should button his coat. "No, Sir," replied Mahendra, "you need not care about it." The party reached the first floor of the building. Mahendra introduced the Master to the Pundit, who received him cordially. The Master was gazing at the Pundit like a familiar figure and was smiling in an ecstatic mood.

* * * *

"Then he addressed Vidyasagar with a smile: 'To-day, I am before the 'ocean'. Up till now, I came across canals and streams, or, at best, rivers. But to-day, I see the ocean.'"

Vidyasagar: Then, Sir, be pleased to take some salt water from it.

Sri Ramakrishna: No, no, you are not an ocean of that kind. You are not an ocean of Avidyā (ignorance) but of Vidya (knowledge). (*Laughter.*) You are the ocean of milk spoken of in the Puranas.

Vidyasagar: Well, Sir, you may say as you please.

Sri Ramakrishna: What you do is Sattvika work. It is the Rajasika aspect of Sattva. Compassion springs from Sattva. The work that is done out of compassion is a

Rajasika work no doubt, but this Rajas is the outcome of Sattva and does no harm. Sukadeva and others did not give up compassion in order to teach mankind about God. You are distributing knowledge and food; this also is good. It will help you to realisation if only you can do this disinterestedly. Some work for name or for acquiring religious merit. The work of such is not selfless work. Besides, you are already a perfected sage. (Siddha).

Vidyasagar: How, Sir?

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): Potatoes and other vegetables become soft when boiled (siddha), and you are so tender-hearted—you are so kind! (*Laughter.*)

Vidyasagar: But certain things harden when boiled, as for instance, pulse made into pulp. (*Laughter.*)

Sri Ramakrishna: No, no, you are not of that type. Mere scholars are like diseased fruits that will never ripen. They are stranded half-way. The vulture soars very high, but has its eye on a bit of carrion on the ground. Mere scholars are such only in name, for they are attached to lust and wealth—like vultures they are on the look-out for carrion. Attachment belongs to the realm of nescience (Avidya), while compassion, devotion and renunciation are the glorious offshoots of knowledge (Vidya).

Everybody listened with rapt attention to his words.

The conversation was most entertaining and instructive. After a time Sri Ramakrishna left the Pundit."

• THE FIRST MEETING

But by far the most remarkable of the visits, and one that led to far-reaching consequences was from Narendranath Dutt, who, subsequently became the Paramahansa's principal disciple under the name of Vivekananda. For Swami Vivekananda, then a Bengali graduate, came under his influence, and Sri Ramakrishna prophesied great things about him.

How these prophecies were fulfilled is a matter of general knowledge. The disciple has given a luminous account of his first meeting with the Master. Says Swami Vivekananda:—

“This man came to live near Calcutta, the capital of India, the most important University town in our country, which was sending out sceptics and materialists by the hundreds every year, yet the great men from the different Universities used to come and listen to him. I heard of this man, and I went to hear him. He looked just like an ordinary man, with nothing remarkable about him. He used the most simple language, and I thought: “Can this man be a great teacher?” I crept near to him and asked him the question which I had been asking others all my life: “Do you believe in God, Sir?” “Yes,” he replied: “Can you prove it, Sir?” “Yes.” “How?” “Because I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense.” That impressed me at once. For the first time, I had found a man who dared to say that he saw God, that religion was a reality, to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. I began to come near that man, day after day, and I actually saw that religion could be given. One touch, one glance, can make a whole life change. I had read about Buddha and Christ and Mohammed, about all those different luminaries of ancient times, how they would stand up and say: “Be thou whole,” and the man became whole. I now found it to be true, and when I myself saw this man, all scepticism was brushed aside. It would be done, and my Master used to say: “Religion can be given and taken more tangibly, more really than anything else in the world”.

It is interesting to recall the Master's own account of the first meeting with his illustrious disciple. Sri Ramakrishna said:—

“Narendra on that first day entered this room by the Western door (facing the Ganges). I saw in him no attention towards the body, no trimming and fashioning of hair of the head or finery of dress and clothing, no attachment towards external objects and interests, like other ordinary men of the world, as if everything about him was devoid of attachment for him. Looking at his eye, I thought as if some power had drawn inwards by force a great part of his mind. Seeing him I thought, “In Calcutta, the abode of people engrossed with worldliness, is it possible for a person of such great Sattvaguna to live!”

“Enquiring about singing, I learnt that he knew only a few Bengali songs, and on my asking him to sing them, he began with the song of Brahma Samaj, “O mind, come to your own home,” etc., and putting his whole mind and soul into it as if in meditation, began to sing it. Hearing the song, I could not control my religious emotions and fell into a trance.

“Afterwards, when he went away, the whole time the mind was filled with such eager longing to see him as cannot be expressed in words. At times, the pain was so intense that I felt like some one forcibly wringing a cloth within the heart. Then, unable to contain myself, running to an unfrequented part of the Dakshineswar garden near the pine trees, I used to weep aloud giving vent to pent-up feelings saying, “O, you come, I cannot remain without you.” Weeping for some time like this would relieve my feelings and I could control myself. For six months, it was like this. For some among the other devotees who had come here, the mind had felt attracted and distressed like that, but compared to what I felt for Narendranath, it was nothing.”

So deep, so transcendental was the relation between Master and disciple.

Ramakrishna was imparting spiritual knowledge without any distinction of caste or creed or colour just as the Sun sheds its light on the whole world. As has been well said, "the last few years of his life were an unceasing ministration to the salvation of his fellowmen." Even while he was suffering, when speech itself was difficult, he would impart knowledge. Indeed the suffering was so great that while the Master was writhing in agony, the disciples prayed continually, besides making every effort to alleviate the pain. About this time Pundit Sasadhar paid a visit to the Master in the Cossipore garden and said, "Sir, the scripture says that saints like you can cure their physical illness by means of will-force alone. If you only concentrate your mind on the affected part, with the resolve that it be cured, you will get all right. Why don't you try it, Sir?" The Master replied, "You are a scholar and still you make this thoughtless proposal! This mind has been given up to God once for all. How can I withdraw it from Him to turn it on this worthless body?" Such was his resignation to God, even in the midst of this dreadful agony!

Sasadhar was silenced. But Narendra and other devotees did not stop there. After the departure of Sasadhar, they pressed Sri Ramakrishna to try that. "You must cure your illness," they persisted, "for our sake at least."

"Sri Ramakrishna: Do you think that I have been thus undergoing a voluntary suffering? I do wish to come round. But how is that possible? It all depends upon the Mother.

Narendra: Then please pray to Her for recovery. She cannot but listen to you.

Sri Ramakrishna: It is easy for you to say so. But

Narendra : No, Sir, that won't do. You must tell the Mother about it, at least for our sake.

Sri Ramakrishna : All right. I shall try to do so if I can.

After a few hours Narendra Nath asked the Master if he had prayed like that, and if so, with what result.

Sri Ramakrishna : I said to Her, 'I cannot eat anything for this pain. Please so arrange that I may eat a little.' She showed you all and said,—'Why, you are eating through so many mouths!' I was ashamed and could not utter another word.

What a total indifference to the body-consciousness !"

He passed away on the 16th August, 1886. The disciples were plunged in grief. They felt as if the sun had been blotted out of the heavens.

SHRI RAMAKRISHNA THE MAN

It will not be possible to praise adequately the sweetness of his nature and his infinite kindness and compassion for all. His was a universal mind, and his heart was full of love for all things. Again, that he had a singular steadfastness of purpose is shown by his ceaseless efforts to realise God as Mother. Moreover, he had passion for getting at the truth of things. He had a real contempt for learned discussions by people about the nature of the 'Godhead, based upon verbal jugglery and argumentative subtleties. He was simple in his habits, unassuming in his manners, and full of an abounding love for all things; his intellectual powers were of a high order and he had that gift of vision which enabled him to see the real relations of things and describe them in deathless words; above all, his very presence compelled Godward thoughts, and raised people from their petty desires and fruitless worldly tasks to the contemplation of the effulgence of God. Swami Vivekananda

brought against Shri Ramakrishna. It has been said by some that he occasionally used indecent language. There was not the slightest tinge of sensualism in his nature ; and the alleged impropriety was due to a happy ignorance of euphemistic modes of speech, and to a clear vision that found out the truth of things. Some people have condemned Ramakrishna for his alleged desertion of his wife. But they forget that he took her consent before embarking definitely on his religious career. Also, as Vivekananda asks, why should love be carnal alone ? Shri Ramakrishna was asked once : " Why do you not lead the life of a householder along with your wife ? " He replied : " I consider every woman as my Divine Mother." Again, it is said that he was wrong in not expressing vigorous hatred of social evils. He is found fault with for not having shown abhorrence of prostitutes and drunkards. But in this respect, he does not stand quite alone among the founders of religions. One need only call to mind the incidents in the life of Christ to realise that it is foolish to set this down as a point against Shri Ramakrishna. The narrow Philistine morality, that sins in secret and looks with raised eyebrows on the erring and the weak, that thanks the Lord for the good things of the world but refuses to share them with the hungry and the wretched, may not have a good word for him. But the Philistines have always been the foes of the higher morality. There is no doubt that the world has come to recognise the various excellences of the work and teachings of Shri Ramakrishna and understand that he is one of those rare souls that are born once in an age to raise the world to a clearer understanding of the scheme of things and make all human beings achieve the salvation of their souls. Said

“To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my Master. Other teachers have taught special religions which bear their names, but this great Teacher of the nineteenth century made no claim for himself, he left every religion undisturbed because he had realised that, in reality, they are all part and parcel of one Eternal Religion.”

SOME ASPECTS OF HIS GENIUS.

Though he owed very little to culture of the conventional sort, yet his attainments were of a varied character. He had a specially fine musical perception. He could paint well, and had a good æsthetic taste. Nor is this strange. He who has realised—

This strange beauty which no eye can see,
And that sweet music which no ear can measure,
cannot fail to be a great poet and artist. As Emerson says: “Those who are capable of humility, of justice, of love, of aspiration, stand already on a platform that commands the sciences and arts, speech and poetry, action and grace. For whoso dwells in this moral beatitude already anticipates those special powers which men prize so highly.”

He was eager to see all aspects of truth, and had wonderful mental catholicity. He pursued the Eastern method of introspection and arrived at great truths in the realm of thought. He discarded the pompous ratiocinations of the Pundits, and taught great truths by similes and parables. His sayings are so simple and yet so full of beautiful truths that one can well ask whether such a combination of simplicity of utterance and profundity of thought has been ever seen before. He never writes anything, observed an illustrious contemporary of the saint he

He was continually pouring out his soul in a rhapsody of spiritual utterances, he sang wonderfully, and made observations of singular wisdom. He unconsciously threw a flood of marvellous light upon the obscurest passages of the Puranic Shastras, and brought out the fundamental principles of the popular Hindu faith with a philosophical clearness which strangely contrasted itself with his simple and illiterate life. These incarnations, he said, are but the forces (*Shakti*) and dispensations (*Lila*) of the eternally wise and blessed *Akhandā Sachchidananda* who never can be changed or formulated, who is one endless and everlasting ocean of light, truth and joy.

A living evidence of the depth and sweetness of Hindu religion was this good and holy man. He had wholly controlled his flesh. It was full of soul, full of the reality of religion, full of joy, full of blessed purity. As a *Siddha* Hindu ascetic, he was a witness of the falsehood and emptiness of the world. His witness appealed to the profoundest heart of every Hindu. He had no other thought, no other occupation, no other relation, no other friend, in his humble life than his God. That God was 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 were his only reward.

THE PARAMAHAMSA'S RELIGION.

The history of religious progress in India is a fascinating subject, but we shall consider it only in so far as it is necessary to narrate it for explaining Shri Ramakrishna's place in the history of Indian thought. When the ancient and sublime religion of Aryavarta was in danger of being buried under ceremonialism and sacerdotalism, Buddha appeared on the scene. He tried

to reconstruct religion on a purely ethical and philosophical basis. But this was too difficult for the masses to comprehend, and superstitions worse than those that ever prevailed before came to dominate the minds of the people. At this time, Sankara appeared and brought new life to the simple and sublime Vedantic faith, and his work was carried on by Shri Ramanuja and Madwacharya. After the inroad of Islam into India, there were various religious reconstructions by Ramananda, Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya and Dadu. They introduced a democratic element into religion, and emphasised the supreme importance of Bhakti. Since then, a new force began to operate in Indian Society. When the English came to India, a new leaven was introduced into the old civilisation. They came here as the most modern exponents of the Greek culture, with its insistence on the value and beauty of the outward world, and its emphasis on the importance of the political life. The utilitarian and scientific modes of thought began to exercise a great fascination over the mind of educated India. But as Swami Vivekananda pointed out again and again, the genius of India is essentially religious, and new methods of religious reconstruction began to be attempted. Raja Ram Mohan Roy wanted to found a new theism. Swami Dayanand Saraswati wanted to go back to the simple faith of the Vedas. He founded the Arya Samaj, but it took no deep root because his movement has no strong doctrinal basis, insists upon a peculiar and arbitrary interpretation of the Vedas, and is strongly in favour of advanced social reform. Brahmoism also was founded as a protest against ceremonialism, and did not attempt at a synthesis. Hence, it also had no chance of establishing itself universally in the land. Thus, at this time, when the whole land was in a ferment and faith

were rising and decaying with astonishing quickness, there was born a man who was destined to continue the traditional faiths of the land, and give it a new vigour and life by a new synthesis of his own. He is the last of the great batch of teachers who have handed on the lamp of spiritual knowledge in undimmed lustre from time immemorial in our holy land. And what was Shri Ramakrishna's religion? In the words of the Brahmo leader again:—

It is orthodox Hinduism, but Hinduism of a strange type. Ramakrishna Paramahansa is the worshipper of no particular Hindu God. He is not a Shivaite, he is not a Shakta, he is not a Vaishnava, he is not a Vedantist. Yet he is *all these*. He worships Shiva, he worships Kali, he worships Rama, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedantist doctrines. He accepts all the doctrines, all the embodiments, usages, and devotional practices of every religious cult. Each in turn is infallible to him. He is an idolater, yet he is a faithful and most devoted mediator of the perfections of the one formless, infinite Deity whom he terms *Akhandā Sachchidananda* ("Indivisible-Existence-Knowledge-Bliss"). His religion, unlike the religion of ordinary Hindu *Sadhus*, does not mean too much dogma, or controversial proficiency, or the outward worship with flowers and sandalwood, incense and offering. His religion means ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight, his whole nature burns day and night 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. While his interlocutors are weary, he, though outwardly feeble, is as fresh as ever. He merges into rapturous ecstasy and outward unconsciousness often during the day, oftenest in conversation when he speaks of his favourite spiritual experiences, or hears any striking response to them. But how is it possible that he has such a fervent regard for all the Hindu Deities together? What is the secret of his singular eclecticism? To him, each of these Deities is a force, an incarnated principle tending to reveal the supreme relation of the soul to that eternal and formless Being Who is unchangeable in His Blessedness and the Light of Wisdom.

MESSAGE TO INDIA.

What was his special message to India? He taught with a new emphasis the old and sublime truth that religion is realisation. He told people to give up their passion for ceremonialism and to aspire to know the truth of things.

matter of social etiquette, and of churches being formed in India like those in the West, he stood up, as India always stood up in times past, for individualism in matters of religion. Again, he taught the people of this land to appreciate the good points in other religions and realise the essential harmony of them all. He was exceptionally fortunate in his disciples. For under the lead of Swami Vivekananda, there arose an order of monks inspired by the message of the Master which they took upon themselves to propagate.

“Sri Ramakrishna did not only impart rich spiritual teaching unto his disciples, he imparted, likewise, a stimulus and strength to follow that teaching. His own life, the force of his utterances, the readiness with which he experienced the highest state of consciousness, his communion with divine realities, his overwhelming sense of the obstacles to the spiritual life,—all these were as a great light to the disciples, and in that light they gained strength and a glorious spiritual consciousness.”

His thoughts and his message were known to very few who were capable of teaching them. Among others, he left a few young boys who had renounced the world, and were ready to carry on his work. Attempts were made to crush them. But they stood firm, having the inspiration of that great life before them. Having had the contact of that blessed life for years, they stood their ground. These young men were living as Sannyasins, begging through the streets of the city where they were born, although some of them came from first-class families. At first, they met with great antagonism, but they persevered and went on from day to day spreading all over India the message of that great man, until the whole country was filled with the ideas he had preached. This man from a remote village of Bengal, without education, simply by the sheer force of his own determination, realised the truth and gave it to others leaving only a few young boys to keep it alive.

To-day, said Swami Vivekananda * in the course of a remarkable address delivered in America,

the name of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa is known all over India with its millions of people. Nay, the power of that man has spread beyond India, and if there has ever been a word of truth, a word of spirituality that I have spoken anywhere in the world, I owe it to my Master: only the mistakes are mine.

Even Swami Vivekananda felt himself unworthy to speak of the greatness of his Master. Asked why he did not publish his lecture on MY MASTER (since published), Swami Vivekananda boldly confessed :—"I did not allow it to be published as I had done injustice to my Master. My Master never condemned anything or anybody. But while I was speaking of him, I criticised the people of America for their dollar-worshipping spirit. That day I learnt the lesson that I am not yet fit to talk of him."

MESSAGE TO THE WEST

Shri Ramakrishna's life is full of significant messages to the West. He showed to it that a religious leader cannot be found among the paid dignitaries of churches, and, that spiritual growth is the result of individual effort. He laid special emphasis on the unsatisfyingness of material ambitions, and the insatiableness of the gold-hunger and land-hunger that are leading the powerful races of the West to adopt unrighteous modes of dealing with the less powerful races of mankind. He showed to them by his life the value of religious toleration and placed before them the great truth of harmony of religions. "This is the Message of Shri Ramakrishna to the modern world," said Swami Vivekananda at New York.†

* *The Mission of Our Master* (p. 407.) G. A. Natesan & Co., Madras, Price Rs. 3.

† *Speeches and Writings of Swami Vivekananda*

"Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man which is spirituality, and the more that this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that, first acquire that, and criticise no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, nor names, nor sects, but that it means spiritual realisation. Only those can understand who have felt. Only those that have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light."

HIS METHOD AS A TEACHER

His method as a teacher was the Eastern method of receiving pupils and fostering the progress of each by adopting the course most helpful to him. The Hindus have never adopted the Western method of haranguing from pulpits large and miscellaneous gatherings, as a means of leading men's minds towards God. They know the utter futility of such occasional exhortations. The highest Hindu teachers have always sought to influence the general public by their lives and to develop spiritually only those that came to them and were found worthy of receiving illumination. The theory of *adhikaris*, or fit and proper persons, has a considerable element of truth in it. It is only by imparting the sacred learning to a person fit to receive it and thus transmitting it from generation to generation that the spirit of a religion can be preserved. If the Western method had been adopted in our land, we should have had, as in the West, a continuity of church history instead of a continuity of spiritual life. Shri Ramakrishna himself used to say: "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." The late Professor Max Muller wrote:—

"This saying of Shri Ramakrishna has been verified often and often in his own life. 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."

While thus his method as a teacher is in accord with the best traditions of Hindu spiritual *gurus*, he made a happy departure in one respect. His lack of regular scholastic training seems to have been of great service to him in this matter. He could never have been the great spiritual force that he has been and is, if he had adopted the method of learned and logical exposition of Scriptural truths. This would have appealed, if at all, only to a learned few, who would have been more ready to criticise the teachings than to accept them. The older teachers were unable to get out of their grooves and could display their originality of thought only through the medium of a commentary, by taking the words of the text to pieces and showing surprisingly novel relations among them and bringing out the maximum of meaning out of the minimum of words. The later the teacher the less was his scope for the display of original thought as the field in which alone he could show his ability had been traversed already, and the greater were his efforts to make the most of the unpromising materials before him and to extract new meanings from old words. This method engendered a mode of looking at things which is more noteworthy for the scope it afforded for intellectual display than for any desire to make a popular appeal. Shri Ramakrishna gave up this barren method, and talked, in clear homely words, the profoundest spiritual truths. He taught them with a directness and simplicity that charmed, and at the same time, convinced, the minds of his hearers. Similes and parables were as largely employed by him as by some of the greatest teachers of ancient times. It was by means of these that he

of which has shone through the ages and will shine through all eternity.

HIS TEACHINGS

It is difficult to state what were the new truths preached by him, because he was avowedly an expounder of the ancient truths enshrined in our Scriptures. But he gave special prominence to certain aspects of those truths that deserve special mention. He taught the unity that underlies the seeming diversity; he taught the harmony of religion and showed that all religions are so many paths to reach the Godhead; he made people realise the Motherhood of God; above all, by the force of his saintly life, he made people hunger for that union with the Divine which he alone among his generation was able to accomplish. In him all sects and faiths found a meeting place. His great disciple says:—

“It (his life) is an extraordinary search-light under whose illumination one is able to understand the whole scope of the Hindu religion. He was the object-lesson of all the theoretical knowledge we get from the Shastras. He showed by his life what the Rishis and the Avatars are to teach. Books teach mere theories. His was a realisation. In one life of fifty-four years he lived the eight thousand years of national spiritual life and raised himself as an object-lesson to future generations. The Vedas can only be explained and the Shastras reconciled by his theory of *Avasthas* or stages.”

He emphasised the great doctrine of *Ishta* or freedom in worship. In one of his beautiful sayings, he says:

As one and the same material namely, water, is called by different names by different peoples, one calling it water, another *vari*, a third, *aqua*, and another *pani*; so the one Sachchidananda—the Everlasting-Intelligent-Bliss is invoked by some as God, by some as Allah, by some as Hari, and by others as Brahman.”

Again he says:—

“As one can ascend to the top of a house by means of a ladder or a bamboo, or a staircase or a rope—so diverse are the ways and means of approaching God, and every religion in the world shows one of such ways.”

The doctrine of the Motherhood of God has a singular fascination of its own. The West has been proclaiming to the world the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God as a great religious truth. But the doctrine of the Motherhood of God has an unutterable beauty and appeals to the heart irresistibly. He has given expression to it in many a beautiful saying. He says :—

O man ! You have forgotten your Divine Mother, absorbed in the vanities of the world, and when you throw them off and cry after Her, She will come at once and take up in Her arms.

Again, he says :—

Why does the God-lover find such ecstatic pleasure in addressing his God as Mother ? Because the child is freer with the mother than with anybody else, and consequently to it she is dearer than all.

There are a thousand minor questions on which he has shed a new light, a thousand problems of the spirit for which he has given simple and satisfying solutions. It will be possible to recount here only some of these. He was of opinion that an aspirant after truth must not mix much with the world. He says :—

“If the neophyte, thirsting after self-improvement, mix indiscriminately with all sorts of worldly men, he is sure to lose his ideal, and his former faith, love, and enthusiasm also die away imperceptibly.”

He says also :—

“In the first stage of one's life in the spirit, one cannot do without solitude. The mind, the retired corner, and the forest are the three places for meditation.”

He has given expression to valuable hints, as to the means of realising God. He says :—“These are some of the means by which one can see God: (1) Going from time to time into solitude; (2) Chanting His names and His attributes; (3) Discrimination; (4) Earnest prayer—with a yearning for the Lord.

“The rosy light of dawn cometh before the rising Sun. Likewise is a longing and yearning heart the sign of the God-wisdom that cometh after.”

Regarding the doctrine of non-resistance, he used to say that a person living in society ought not pay back evil for evil, but yet should make a show of resisting evil for the purposes of self-defence. He says :—

Resist not evil by doing evil in return. All that thou mayest do is to make a show of resistance with a view to self-defence."

In regard to mere book knowledge, he was unsparing in its condemnation. Again and again he ridicules the idea of trying to attain salvation through the study of Scriptures. He says :

"The proud man of intellect is vainly busy in finding out the why and wherefore of creation, while the humble man of wisdom makes friends with the Creator and enjoys His gift of supreme bliss in this world."

Upon the problem of evil, he has given expression to a striking truth :

"Evil in creation is not evil to the Absolute and the Unconditioned any more than the venom in the fangs of the snake is venom to the snake. He is above and beyond good and evil."

Again, he deals in a new and beautiful manner with the old fight between the doctrine of the Personal God and the doctrine of the Impersonal God. He says :—

"The Impersonal and the Personal are one and the same Being, even as fire and its burning properties are one. Ye cannot conceive the fire apart from its power of burning. They are one even as milk and the whiteness of milk are one. One cannot conceive the milk without the whiteness. They are one even as a gem and its brightness are one. You cannot conceive a gem without the brightness. They are one even as a serpent and its movement in a crooked line are one. You cannot conceive the serpent without its serpentine tortuous motion."

In another place, he gives expression to the same great truth by another striking analogy. He says :

"Suppose there is an Infinite expanse of water—water above, water beneath, water in all directions. Portions of the water we may imagine get changed into ice by contact with cold and thus solidified. Again, suppose that the same ice is exposed to heat, then the solid ice is liquefied. It is changed into water once more. The Absolute is the Infinite expanse of water. The portions of this water that are changed into ice are the Spiritual Personal Forms of the Deity manifest to devotees. The cold is the Bhakti of

the devotee, his love, his devotion, his self-surrender. The heat again is discrimination between the Real (*i.e.*, God the Absolute) and the Unreal or Phenomenal Universe, leading up to selfless *Samadhi* and the total effacement of the self which saith 'I,' 'I.' To a devotee (dualist worshipper) the Lord may manifest Himself in various forms. To a person that reacheth, my Mother willing, to the height of Absolute Knowledge in *Samadhi*, he is the Absolute once more, Formless, Unconditioned. Herein is the reconciliation between Realisation by Philosophy and that by Love."

He was of opinion that the realization of the Absolute could be got only through the Personal God. He says:—

"Thus another thing is added to the position of the purely Advaitist philosopher, *viz.*, that it is the Personal God that can and doth give Brahma-Jnan."

He was always throwing ridicule on the Western conception that human beings are sinners. He said!

"The bondage is of the mind. Freedom is also of the mind. I am a free soul: be it in the world, or in the forest, I am not bound. The wretch who saith eternally 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner' turneth out a sinner indeed!"

Upon the Western apotheosis of work, he has given expression to very valuable remarks. There has been of late such a strong plea for strenuous life and such insistence on the improvement of our worldly condition, that we need strong reminders that the older ideal in India is the higher ideal, and that all forms of activity should contribute to the attainment of that ideal. The Paramahansa says:

"No greater mistake can be committed than to look upon work as the first chapter of human life. God is the conclusion."

Indeed, his views as to the Western Gospel of work and strenuous life are as original as they are beautiful.

He says:—

"Thou must be careful to take up only such works as come in thy way—such works, again, as appear to be of a pressing necessity. Do not seek them—do not seek more work than thou canst well manage. If thou dost, thou wilt lose sight of the Lord. Work or the performance of one's duty is the means and God is the

At the same time, he was strong in his denunciation of that weakness which despises work while the heights of Realisation are yet beyond reach. He says:

"It is possible for him alone to give up all work who hath seen, who hath realised, God."

He taught further that, of the three paths towards salvation—the Karma Marga or the path of work, the Jnana Marga or the path of knowledge and the Bhakti Marga or the path of Love—the last was the easiest path and the one to be adopted in this age. He has given also a beautiful and clear description of the six steps leading to the realisation of God when a person goes along the Bhakti Marga.

Upon the question of sects and castes, he has given us very valuable remarks. When asked if it was good to create sects, he gave a beautiful reply: "He, whose heart earnestly runs after the Deity, has no time to give for anything else. He, who looks for fame and honour, forms sects." Only when one has realised the sense of universal unity in all things, then and then only can he have no distinctions of caste.

NOTEWORTHY SAYINGS

It will be impossible to collect here all his numerous beautiful sayings. All things, old and new, are laid under contribution to illustrate his thoughts. If all his utterances could be recorded, they would form a volume of strange and wonderful wisdom. "If all his observations on men and things could be reproduced, people might think that the days of prophecy, of primeval, unlearned wisdom had returned." We shall give here some of his most noteworthy and characteristic sayings:

Q. If the God of every religion is the same, why is it then that the God is painted differently by different religionists?

A. God is one, but His aspects are different: as one master of the house is father to one, brother to another, and husband to a third, and is called by these different names by those different persons, so one God is described and called in various ways according to the particular aspect in which He appears to His particular worshipper.

* * *

The Master continued: 'Everything that exists is God.' The pupil understood it literally, but not in the true spirit. While he was passing through a street, he met with an elephant. The driver (mahut) shouted aloud from his high place: 'Move away, move away!' The pupil argued in his mind: Why should I move away? I am God, so is the elephant also God. What fear has God of Himself? Thinking thus he did not move. At last the elephant took him up by his trunk, and dashed him aside. He was severely hurt, and going back to his Master, he related the whole adventure. The Master said: All right, you are God. The elephant is God also, but God in the shape of the elephant-driver was warning you also from above. Why did you not pay heed to his warnings?

* * *

A man sitting under the shade of the Kalpavriksha (wishing-tree) wished to be a king, and, in an instant, he was king. The next moment, he wished to have a charming damsel, and the damsel was instantly by his side. The man then thought within himself, if a tiger came and devoured him, and alas! in an instant he was in the jaws of a tiger! God is like that wishing-tree; whosoever in His presence thinks that he is destitute and poor, remains as such, but he who thinks and believes that the Lord fulfils all his wants, receives everything from him.

* * *

As a boy begins to learn writing by drawing big scrawls, before he can master the small hand, so we must learn concentration of the mind by fixing it first in forms; and when we have attained success therein, we can easily fix it upon the formless.

* * *

As a marksman learns to shoot by first taking aim at large and big objects, and the more he acquires the facility, the greater becomes the ease with which he can shoot at the smaller marks on the target, so when the mind has been trained to be fixed on images having form, it becomes easy for it to be fixed upon images having no form.

* * *

When a mighty raft of wood floats down a stream, it can carry a hundred men, and still it does not sink. A reed floating down may sink with the weight of even a crown. So when a Saviour become incarnate, innumerable are the men who find salvation by taking refuge under Him. The Siddha only saves himself with much toil and trouble.

* * *

There is a fabled species of birds called 'Homa,' which live so high up in the heavens, and so dearly love those regions that they never condescend to come down to the earth. Even their eggs, which, when they are laid in the sky, begin to fall down to the earth attracted by gravity, are said to get hatched in the middle of their downward course and give birth to the young ones. The fledgelings at once find out that they are falling down, and immediately change their course and begin to fly up towards their home, drawn thither by instinct. Men such as Suka Deva, Na:ada, Jesus, Sankaracharya and others, are like those birds, who, even in their boyhood, give up all attachments to the things of this world and betake themselves to the

highest regions of true Knowledge and Divine Light. These men are called Nitya Siddhas.

* * *

As an aquatic bird, such as a pelican, dives into water, but the water does not wet its plumage, so the perfect man lives in the world, but the world does not touch him.

* * *

Milk and water, when brought into contact, are sure to mix so that the milk can never be separated again. So, if the neophyte, thirsting after self-improvement, mixes indiscriminately with all sorts of worldly men, he not only loses his ideals, but his former faith, love, and enthusiasm also die away imperceptibly. When, however, you convert the milk into butter, it no longer mixes with water, but floats over it. Similarly, when the soul once attains Godhead, it may live in any company without ever being affected by its evil influences.

* * *

So long as a man calls aloud, 'Allah Ho ! Allah Ho' ! (O God ! O God !), be sure that he has not found God, for he who has found him becomes still.

* * *

So long as the bee is outside the petals of the lotus and has not tasted its honey, it hovers round the flower, emitting its buzzing sound ; but when it is inside the flower, it drinks its nectar noiselessly. So long as a man quarrels and disputes about doctrines and dogmas, he has not tasted the nectar of true faith ; when he has tasted it, he becomes still.

* * *

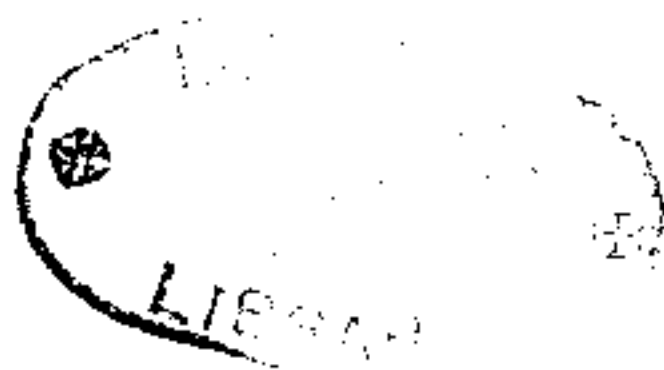
Little children play with dolls in a room apart just as they like, but as soon as their mother comes in, they throw aside the dolls and run to her crying : 'Mamma. Mamma.' !



SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA



VIVEKANANDA



You also are now playing in this world deeply absorbed with the dolls of wealth, honour, and fame, and have no fear or anxiety. But if you once see the Divine Mother entering in, you will not find pleasure any more in wealth, honour, and fame. Leaving off all these, you will run to Her.

* * *

Why does the God-lover find such pleasure in addressing the Deity as Mother? Because the child is more free with its mother, and consequently she is dearer to the child than any one else.

* * *

Worldly persons perform many pious and charitable acts with a hope of worldly rewards, but when misfortune, sorrow, and poverty approach them, they forget them all. They are like the parrot that repeats the Divine name 'Radha Krishna, Radha Krishna,' the livelong day, but cries 'Kaw, Kaw' when caught by a cat, forgetting the Divine name.

* * *

Men always quote the example of King Janaka, as that of a man who lived in the world and yet attained perfection. But throughout the whole history of mankind, there is only this solitary example. His case was not the rule, but the exception. The general rule is that no one can attain spiritual perfection unless he renounces lust and greed. Do not think yourself to be a Janaka. Many centuries have rolled away and the world has not produced another Janaka.

* * *

Two men went into a garden. The worldly-wise man no sooner entered the gate than he began to count the

bore, and what might be the approximate price of the whole orchard. The other went to the owner, made his acquaintance and quietly going under a mango tree, began to pluck the fruit and eat it with the owner's consent. Now who is the wiser of the two? Eat mangoes, it will satisfy your hunger. What is the good of counting the leaves and making vain calculations? The vain man of intellect is uselessly busy in finding out the 'why and wherefore' of creation, while the humble man of wisdom makes acquaintance with the Creator and enjoys Supreme Bliss in this world.

* * *

As when going to a strange country, one must abide by the directions of him who knows the way, while taking the advice of many may lead to confusion, so in trying to reach God, one should follow implicitly the advice of one single *Guru* who knows the way to God.

* * *

Take the pearl and throw the oyster-shell away. Follow the mantra (advice) given thee by thy *Guru* and throw out of consideration the human frailties of thy teacher.

* * *

Knowledge and love of God are ultimately one and the same. There is no difference between pure knowledge and pure love.

* * *

When a man realises one of the following states, he becomes perfect :—(1) All this am I: (2) All this art thou; (3) Thou the master, and I the servant.

* * *

The darkness of centuries is dispersed at once as soon as a light is brought into the room. The accumulated ignorance and misdoings of innumerable births vanish before the single glance of the Almighty's gracious look.

As a King, before going to the house of his servant, sends from his own stores the necessary seats, ornaments, food, etc., to his servant, so that the latter may properly receive him; so before the Lord cometh, He sends love, reverence, faith, yearning, etc., into the heart of the devotee.

* * *

Q. What do you say about the method of religious preaching employed nowadays?

A. It is inviting hundreds of persons to dinner when the food supply is sufficient for one only.

* * *

Instead of preaching to others, if one worships God all that time, that is enough preaching. He, who strives to make himself free, is the real preacher. Hundreds come from all sides, no one knows whence, to him who is free, and are taught. When a flower opens, the bees come from all sides uninvited and unasked.

* * *

When fruit becomes ripe and falls of itself, it tastes very sweet; but when unripe fruit is plucked and artificially ripened, it does not taste so sweet, and becomes shrivelled up. So when one has attained perfection, the observance of caste distinctions falls off of itself from him, but so long as this exalted knowledge is not reached, one must observe caste distinctions.

* * *

Q. Why do you not lead a family life with your wife?

A. The God Kartikeya, the leader of the Heavenly army, once happened to scratch a cat with his nail. On going home he saw there was the mark of a scratch on the cheek of his Mother. Seeing this, he asked of her:

“Mother, dear, how have you got that ugly scratch on your cheek?” The Goddess Durga replied: ‘Child, this is thy own handiwork—the mark scratched by thy own nail.’ Kartikeya asked in wonder: ‘Mother, how is it? I never remember to have scratched thee!’ The Mother replied: ‘Darling, hast thou forgotten having scratched a cat this morning?’ Kartikeya said: “Yes, I did scratch a cat; but how did your cheek get marked?” ‘The Mother replied: ‘Dear child, nothing exists in this world but myself. I am all creation. Whomsoever thou hurtest, thou hurtest me.’ Kartikeya was greatly surprised at this, and determined thenceforward never to marry; for, whom would he marry? Every woman was mother to him. I am like Kartikeya. I consider every woman as my Divine Mother.

* * *

The anger of the good is like a line drawn on the surface of water, which does not last long.

* * *

The Hindu Almanacs contain predictions of the annual rainfall. But squeeze the book, and not a drop of water will be got out of it. So also many good sayings are to be found in books, but merely reading them will not make one religious. One has to practise the virtues taught therein.

* * *

As the young wife in a family shows her love and respect to her father-in-law, mother-in-law, and every other member of the family, and, at the same time, loves her husband more than these; similarly being firm in thy devotion to the Deity of thy own choice (Ishta-Devata), do not despise other Deities, but honour them all.

* * *

The difference between the modern Brahmoism and Hinduism is like the difference between the single note of

music and the whole music. The modern Brahmos are content with the single note of Brahman, while the Hindu religion is made up of several notes producing a sweet and melodious harmony.

* * *

Visit not miracle workers. They are wanderers from the path of truth. Their minds have become entangled in the meshes of psychic powers which lie in the way of the pilgrim towards Brahman, as temptations. Beware of these powers, and desire them not.

* * *

So long as the heavenly expanse of the heart is troubled and disturbed by the gusts of desire, there is little chance of our beholding therein the brightness of God. The beatific vision occurs only in the heart which is calm and rapt up in divine communion.

* * *

Q- Where is God? How can we get to Him?

A. There are pearls in the sea, you must dive deep again and again until you get the pearls. So there is God in the world, but you should persevere to see Him.

* * *

None ventures to keep milk in a vessel in which curd had formerly formed, lest the milk itself should get curdled. Nor can the vessel be safely used for other working purposes lest it should crack upon the fire. It is therefore almost useless. A good and experienced preceptor does not entrust to a worldly man valuable and exalting precepts, for he is sure to misinterpret and misuse them to suit his own mean designs. Nor will he ask him to do any useful work that may cost a little labour, lest he should think that the preceptor was taking undue advantage of him.

* * *

Although in a grain of paddy the germ is considered the only necessary thing (for germination and growth), while the husk or chaff is considered to be of no importance, still if the husked grain be put into the ground it will not sprout up and grow into a plant and produce rice. To get a crop, one must needs sow the grain with the husk on; but if one wants to get at the germinating matter itself, he must first perform the operation of removing the husk from the seed. So rites and ceremonies are necessary for the growth and perpetuation of a religion. They are the receptacles that contain the seeds of truth, and consequently every man must perform them before he reaches the central truth.

* * *

Every man should follow his own religion. A Christian should follow Christianity, a Mahomedan should follow Mahomedanism, and so on. For the Hindus the ancient path, the path of the Aryan Rishis, is the best.

* * *

The magnetic needle always points towards the North, and hence it is that the sailing vessel does not lose her course. So long as the heart of man is directed towards God, he cannot be lost in the ocean of worldliness.

* * *

Knowledge leads to unity, and Ignorance to diversity.

* * *

How long does godliness remain in man? The iron is red so long as it is in fire. So the human being is godly so long as he is in communion with God.

As the water and its bubbles are one, and as the bubbles have their birth in the water, float on the water, and ultimately are dissolved into water: so the Jivatman and the Paramatman are one and the same: the difference is in

degrees—the one is finite and small, the other is infinite; the one is dependent, the other independent.

Also : “The union of the *Jivatman* with the *Paramatman* is like the union of the hour and the minute hands of a watch once in every hour. They are inter-related and inter-dependent, and though usually separate, they may become united as often as favourable opportunities occur.”

CONCLUSION

Such was the great life and such were the wonderful teachings of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. “For years I lived with that man,” said Swami Vivekananda,

“but never did I hear those lips utter one word of condemnation of any sect. He had the same sympathy for all of them; he had found the harmony between them. A man may be intellectual, or devotional, or mystic, or active, and the various religions represent one or the other of these types. Yet it is possible to combine all the four in one man, and this is what future humanity is going to do. That was his idea. He condemned no one, but saw the good in all.”

Swami Vivekananda

GREAT souls that lead us out of 'the encircling gloom' into the promised land are not accidentally born. They come at a time when the world is waiting for them in eager and anxious expectation. It was thus at a critical period of India's history, there was born that great saint, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. He lived the life that the *Rishis* had lived in ancient days, and taught once more in deathless words, the golden truths that are enshrined in our scriptures. His beloved disciple, Swami Vivekananda, bore aloft the torch so lit by Shri Ramakrishna to the ends of the earth and shed the light of spiritual knowledge over the whole world.

EARLY LIFE

He was born on the 9th January, 1862, in one of the oldest Kayastha families known as the Datta family of Simoolia. His grandfather who, it is said, resembled him in appearance, became a *Sannyasin* in the evening of his life. His father was Vishwanatha Datta, an Attorney-at-Law, practising in the Calcutta High Court. His mother was a remarkable lady, having had such an excellent faculty of memory that she could reproduce any song after hearing it only once. During childhood, he used to be called Vireshwara, because he was born after a long and devoted worship of Siva at Benares. His name was changed to Narendra Nath when he entered school. Even during youth he showed that wonderful memory, that burning love for the lowly and the oppressed, that passion for holiness and spirituality that distinguished

his later career. As he grew into manhood, he became a close student of English philosophy, and while he was at College, he sent to Herbert Spencer a criticism of Spencer's philosophic doctrines. Spencer was very much struck with the performance, and encouraged him in his inquiry after truth. During his collegiate career, the study of Western philosophy led him into agnosticism. Soon after he left College, he came under the influence of Brahmoism. But when he found that the shining lights of Brahmoism had no spiritual experiences, he gave up his connection with that religion. This was a period of acute spiritual suffering for him, for he yearned to have a glimpse of the shining countenance of Truth and yearned in vain. He went to the teachers of the various faiths and asked them if they had realised the spiritual truths they taught and invariably got a negative answer. He was eagerly looking for a teacher who would resolve his doubts and lead him on to a full realization of the truths of the spirit.

DISCIPLESHIP.

He had now passed the B.A. Degree Examination of the Calcutta University, and was preparing himself for becoming a lawyer. At this time, an uncle of his, who was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, took him to that great saint. Narendra went to the saint in an utterly sceptical frame of mind. Sri Ramakrishna at once recognised him as the man for whom he had waited so long, and who was destined to rouse India from her sleep of ages. The first interview between them is affecting to a degree. Sri Ramakrishna asked him if he could sing religious songs. Narendra said *yes*, and sang two or three songs in his glorious voice. Sri Ramakrishna was so moved by them that he sat for some time rapt in ecstatic contemplation of God. Narendra at last took leave of him, promising that he

would come alone some other day. Finally, he became the inseparable disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

The first meeting had impressed itself indelibly on the mind of the disciple as well. Narendranath, speaking about the day of the first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, recalled thus :—

“I sang the song, but after it Sri Ramakrishna suddenly getting up from his seat took me by the hand to the veranda, north of his room. It was winter at that time, and to keep out the cold northern wind, the open spaces between the pillars of the veranda were closed by curtains, so that entering the veranda and closing the door of the room behind no one could be seen within the room or outside. On Sri Ramakrishna's entering the veranda and closing the door behind I understood he meant to give me some religious instructions in private. But what he said and did was utterly beyond my imagination. Holding my hand his eyes everflowed and he shed copious tears of bliss and addressing me in terms of great endearment, like one long familiar before, said, ‘Have you to come after such a length of time? Have you not to consider the great eagerness with which I have been waiting for you and come earlier? Hearing the vain and frivolous talks of the worldly-minded people, my ears are nearly burnt; being unable to speak out the thoughts and feelings of my inmost heart to anybody, my inner religious feelings are all pent up within’—he spoke many words like this and shed tears. And then just after, standing with folded hands before me and paying me the regards and considerations of a God, he began to say, I know, O Lord, you are the ancient Rishī Nārāyana in the Nara or human form descended again into human body to banish the ignorance and misery of human beings.”

Narendra was completely astonished at such actions and behaviour. At first he thought the man was crazy and off his head. He kept silent and let the “wonderful mad man” say as he liked. Sitting still he began to observe more closely and scan his ways. He soon found there was nothing of madness in his ways, conversations and dealings with others ;—

“Listening to his holy talk and seeing his tranced absorption in God I thought that really he was one who had given up everything for God and what he was saying he had himself followed and practised. ‘As I am seeing you and talking with you, so God can be seen and talked with, but who wants this? People in sorrow for wife and children, can shed tumblerfuls of tears, for money and!

property they do likewise, but say, who does it in sorrow and contrition of heart, that he has not found and seen the Lord God? If anybody calls on the Lord with great longing of the heart, inwardly saying and feeling, O Lord, I have not found Thee, then the Lord surely shows Himself to him.' Hearing these words from his mouth, the thought arose in my mind that he was not speaking thus from imagination or in the language of rhetoric, like other religious preachers I had heard, but he was repeating what he had directly seen and perceived, giving up everything for the sake of God and calling on Him with his whole mind and heart. Then attempting to reconcile his previous strange behaviour with me with these sane words, the instances of monomaniacs which Abercrombie and other English philosophers have mentioned in their books, arose in my mind and I firmly concluded that he also must be likewise. But even after settling the matter like that, I could not forget the glory and power of his wonderful self-forgetfulness and renunciation for God, and, wonderstruck, began to think that even if he was off his head, such renunciation for the sake of God was rare, of which few were capable. Even if mad, this man is very holy and pure, of great self-abnegation and therefore fit to command the respect and homage of the human heart. Thinking thus, that day, prostrating at his feet I took leave of him and returned to Calcutta."

About a month hence he paid another visit to the Master, alone. The Master drew near and touched him in a way that Narendra began to have novel experiences :

With my eyes open I saw that the walls, and everything in the room, whirled rapidly and vanished into nought, and that the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious Void! I was terribly frightened and thought that I was facing death, for the loss of individuality meant nothing short of that. Unable to control myself, I cried out, 'What is this that you are doing to me? I have my parents at home!' He laughed out at this and passing his hand over my chest said, 'All right, let it rest now. Everything will come in time!' The wonder of it was that no sooner did he say this than that strange experience of mine vanished. I was myself again and found everything within and without the room as it had been before.

Indeed the Master's behaviour to Narendra was like that of a man who met an old friend after a long absence. The third meeting was even more fruitful. After a time the Master fell into a trance and as Narendra was watching this transformation of his, he suddenly came and touched Narendra. The latter immediately lost all outward consciousness. When he regained his consciousness after a

while, he found that the Master was passing his hand over his chest.

Though Narendra was unaware of what had transpired in the meantime, the Master came to know many strange things regarding him. Referring to this incident he said later on :

"I put him several questions while he was in that state. I asked him about his antecedents and whereabouts, his mission in this world and the duration of his mortal life. He dived deep into himself and gave fitting answers to my questions. They only confirmed what I had seen and inferred about him. Those things shall be a secret, but I came to know that he was a sage who had attained perfection, a past-master in meditation, and that the day he should come to know about his real nature, he would give up the body by an act of will, through Yoga."

Narendra Nath was now fully convinced of the extraordinary nature of that mighty power which was working through Ramakrishna. His idea of the Master as a monomaniac was replaced by a feeling of respect for him. But still he was determined not to accept anything about him without testing it by his own experience or reason. His faith in asceticism and renunciation, however, was confirmed by his coming in contact with Ramakrishna. For Sri Ramakrishna proceeded to instruct him with the infinite love and patience of an ideal teacher. He was full of admiration for Narendra's pure character and strength of mind. But he had apprehensions for him in one respect. He knew that the boy was endowed with rare potentialities, a fraction of which was sufficient to make a man a powerful figure in the world, but if this tremendous energy was not directed in a spiritual channel, it might be misused. He might become the founder of a new sect or party, but that was not what he was meant for. He was to be the Lord's instrument for bringing about a spiritual regeneration of mankind. Naturally, therefore, Sri Ramakrishna was anxious to direct his mind to the realisation of God, and this

was the secret of his intimate relationship with Narendranath. The whole story of this relationship can never be told. It was too deep for human expression. There was not the slightest tinge of worldliness in the love Sri Ramakrishna manifested for his worthy disciple. We are told that if the latter failed to come to Dakshineswar for a few days, he would become disconsolate. He would weep, he would pray to the Divine Mother to send him to Dakshineswar, and would find no peace till Narendranath made his appearance.

From the very first, Sri Ramakrishna had realised that Narendranath was the fittest person to be initiated into the mysteries of the Advaita Vedanta. But Narendranath was not to be so easily won over even by the Master. He was constantly arguing with the Master. Under the influence of Brahmo teaching he argued against image worship ;

One day, when the latter could not convince him by any means, he said, "Why do you come here if you won't acknowledge my Mother?" Narendranath replied, "Must I accept Her simply because I come here?" "All right," said the Master, "ere long you shall not only acknowledge my Blessed Mother, but weep in Her name." Then addressing other devotees he said, "This boy has no faith in the forms of God and tells me that my supersensuous experiences are hallucinations, but he is a very fine boy, of pure instincts. He does not believe anything unless he gets direct proof. He has studied much and is possessed of great judgment and discrimination."

It is interesting to read that both the Master and pupil tested each other thoroughly before accepting each other. Once Ramakrishna pretended to ignore Narendranath and for months did not so much as exchange a word with him. Narendranath continued to visit the Master heedless of the Master's supposed indifference to him. Then the Master asked : "How is it that though I don't speak a word to you, you still continue to come here". Narendranath replied: "Sir, it is not your words alone that draw me here. I

love you and want to see you, therefore, I come." Ramakrishna was highly pleased with the answer.

On another occasion, the Master asked Narendra Nath if he would like to acquire supernatural powers which he was in a position to impart. Narendranath asked "Sir, will these powers help me towards God-realisation?" On being told they would not, Narendranath declined to be initiated into them as he might forget his ideal and "making use of them for some selfish purpose may come to ruin." This also pleased the Master.

One instance of the disciple testing the Master must be recorded. Ramakrishna once said to Narendranath :

"Test me as the money-changers do their coins. Your path is not to accept me until you have tested me thoroughly."

One day when the Master was absent in Calcutta, Narendranath came to Dakshineswar. Finding there was no one in his room, a desire arose in his mind to test the Master's renunciation of wealth. He took out a rupee from his pocket and secreted it under his bed. He then went to the Panchavati for meditation. After a while Sri Ramakrishna returned. He proceeded to the bed and as soon as he touched it he started back in great pain. Wondering, he was looking round, when Narendranath came in and watched his plight silently. An attendant hastened to examine the bed, which disclosed the presence of a rupee. Both the attendant and the Master were surprised. Narendranath silently walked out of the room. The Master came to know all about it and was glad that Narendranath had tested him.

One of the most beautiful stories recorded in the official *Life of Ramakrishna* touching the Master's relation to Narendranath should be read with profit. On the death of Narendranath's father in 1884 the family, suddenly deprived of the earning member, was in a very impecunious state.

“Chill penury repressed their noble rage.” Narendra Nath felt all the poignancy and indignity of poverty. Starving and barefooted he wandered from office to office but found himself unwanted. Day after day he came to Master and asked him to pray for some competence as the “Mother” would not listen to him. The Master told him “why don’t you ask the Mother yourself? All the sufferings are due to your disregard of Her.” Narendra said :

‘I do not know the Mother, you please speak on my behalf. You must.’ He replied tenderly, ‘My dear boy, I have already done so again and again. But you do not accept Her, and so She does not grant my prayer. All right, it is Tuesday—go to the Kali temple to-night, prostrate yourself before the Mother and ask Her any boon you like. It shall be granted.’

Narendranath went and was so filled with divine intoxication that he forgot to ask the Mother for riches. He only prayed: “Mother! Give me discrimination! Give me renunciation.” He returned to Ramakrishna and reported. Again and again he was asked to go to the Mother and pray for wealth. Narendra Nath always forgot this particular request on his entrance into the presence of the Mother :

I went for the third time, but on entering the temple, a terrible shame overpowered me. I thought, ‘What a trifle I have come to pray to the Mother about! It is like asking a gracious king for a few vegetables! What a fool I am!’ In shame and remorse I bowed to Her respectfully and said, ‘Mother, I want nothing but knowledge and devotion.’

Needless to say that the above incident marked the opening of a new chapter in Narendra Nath’s life. Hitherto he had not realised the significance of the Motherhood of God and His worship through images and symbols. He had had nothing but contempt for such worship. But

all this was now changed. The secret of the worship of Personal God was brought home to his mind and lent a fulness and breadth to his vision.

A MOVING INCIDENT

Here is a beautiful and moving account of the affection between Master and disciple which we have read with pathetic interest. While Ramakrishna was suffering from his last illness, Dr. Mahendralal Sirkar had pronounced the disease to be cancer of the throat. He told the disciples that it was an infectious disease and advised them to be careful in the nursing of him. Some of the young disciples became a little nervous. Vivekananda noticed this. He went into the room where the Master was lying, looked at the vessel containing the fatal discharges of ~~mucous~~ and puss, took it up and drank from it before the other disciples of the Master. From that day never did the thought of infection trouble their minds any more.

A few days before the passing away of Ramakrishna, the Master called Narendra Nath to his side. The mantle of the Master was to fall on the shoulders of the disciple.

There was nobody else in the room. The Master made Narendra sit in front and gazing at him fell into Samadhi. Narendra Nath felt that a subtle force resembling an electric shock was penetrating his body. Gradually he, too, lost outward consciousness and sat stiff. He did not remember how long he had been in that posture, but when he came to his normal consciousness he found Sri Ramakrishna weeping. On being interrogated, the Master tenderly said, "To-day I have given you my all and have become a Fakir! Through this power you will do immense good to the world, and then only shall you go back." It was nothing short of a transfer of the world-moving power that Sri Ramakrishna himself possessed, and henceforth Rama-



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

krishna and Narendra Nath became as one soul. "What the effect of this holy confluence was is a commonplace of history now, and we need not rehearse it here. Suffice it to say that Vedanta revived in the life of the Master found its effective conduit in the person of the worthy disciple, to bring about a regeneration of mankind throughout the world."

For as Swami Madhavananda put it appropriately, nature furnished him (Shri Ramakrishna) with the best instrument he could ever have for this purpose in the person of the future Swami Vivekananda.

When the Guru and the disciple are both of an extraordinary type, then is the real manifestation of the highest knowledge. And this marvellous union of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda has ushered into the world a flood of spirituality which was never before witnessed on earth. We shall not discuss how much the disciple got from his Master, and what was his own contribution to it, for an ideal disciple is the exact mirror of his Guru, he has to *assimilate* the Master's teachings and make himself the selfless instrument whereby the Guru's message is carried from corner to corner of the globe. For practical purposes, it will be best to treat Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda as a composite personality, as two facets of the same thing, the two together making the circuit of galvanic spirituality complete.

As in the case of Sri Ramakrishna, so in Swamiji's case also, the realisation of Advaita—the One without a second—was the pivot on which all the other aspects of his personality were balanced. Through the Guru's blessings the Swami Vivekananda got this highest realisation in the very prime of youth, and succeeded in perfectly assimilating it before he attained the age of thirty. As he himself playfully expressed it to one of his brother disciples, "I have finished all that there was to be achieved within twenty-nine years." As soon as he was ripe to deliver his message of uplift to the world, there was a field ready for him in the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. To move the world, a good fulcrum is needed, and the Chicago Parliament served as that point to the Swami.

THE DISCIPLES

When Sri Ramakrishna passed away on the 16th August, 1886, his disciples resolved to tread in the holy path which he had trod, and give up the worldly life altogether.

Needless to say, ever since the passing of the Master, Narendra was their leader. He was alive to the difficulties of the religious path. He knew its dangers and pitfalls. So with the ~~utmost~~ caution, he began to mould the spiritual lives of his brother monks. He would try to broaden their outlook by saturating their minds with universal ideas. He tried to make them conversant with the essential features of different branches of human knowledge. The topics he took up for discussion were many and various, ranging from comparative religion and philosophy to history and science. Narendra was the very personification of intellectuality. His personality also was such as to overwhelm every one that came under its influence. "No wonder, therefore, that his brother disciples also looked upon him with the highest ~~veneration~~, considering him as the mouthpiece of Sri Ramakrishna himself. Most of the sublime ideas which he afterwards gave to the world as the great Swami Vivekananda were not new, except in their mode of expression, to these brother monks, for they had heard them in these Baranagore days, or even earlier at Cossipore."

There were considerable trials before them; their relations and friends were dissuading them from sacrificing their lives at the altar of truth. But they had already devoted themselves to the cause of India and Hinduism. They exchanged their worldly careers for the beggar's bowl! Their contemplation of the life of their master upbore them and kept them true to their ideal. Sometime afterwards Swami Vivekananda wanted to meditate in solitude, and went alone to the Father of mountains. He lived there for six years, and attained that luminous spiritual perception which distinguished him from other men. During that period he went to Tibet and studied Buddhism there. Then he came down from the heights into the world of men and travelled

all over India. He went to Khetri, where the Maharajah became his disciple. Then he went along the west coast, as far South as Trivandrum, and from there he went to Madras. Wherever he went, he extorted admiration, and succeeded in making young India alive to the glory of her past. At this time the Parliament of Religions was held at Chicago. Some people in the Madras Presidency thought that it would be a very good thing if Swami Vivekananda could be sent over to America to represent Hinduism. He was delighted at the opportunity offered to him of showing his Motherland, and revealing to the West the beauty of the Hindu religion. Funds were subscribed and he went to America *via* Japan.

THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS

When he went to Chicago, his little stock of money had run out and he was for a while on the brink of starvation. One day when he was disconsolately walking about the streets of a village near Boston, an old lady who was struck with his appearance and costume, accosted him and asked him his business. Learning from him who he was, she asked him to dinner intending to afford a pleasant surprise to her friends by exhibiting this curious specimen of Eastern humanity. But they found that the specimen exhibited a high order of intelligence and a sweetness of manner that were but rarely met with even in the centres of Western civilisation. They could not understand his philosophic expositions and so invited a professor of philosophy to meet him. He met the Swami and recognised his merit. He introduced him to Dr. Barrows, the President of the Parliament of Religions, and the latter put him down as the representative of Hinduism in the Parliament. His opening speech brought him instantaneous fame, and he became at once the central figure of the Parliament.

When he read his epoch-making paper on Hinduism, it was received with a storm of applause. *The New York Critique* said :

He is an orator by divine right and his strong, intelligent face in its picturesque setting of yellow and orange was hardly less interesting than those earnest words and the rich, rhythmical utterance he gave them.

The New York Herald said :

Vivekananda is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.

The most learned societies in the land vied with one another in honouring him with invitations to lecture. Before the first year of his stay in America was over, he had two American disciples, Madam Louis who became Swami Abhayananda and Mr. Sandsberg who became Swami Kripananda. He lectured in various places, and made Vedantism popular in America.

ENGLAND

From America he went over to England and stayed three months there. He held many classes and gave lectures in various places. An English newspaper said :

All sorts and conditions of men are to be found in London, but the great city contains just now none more remarkable than the philosopher who represented the Hindu Religion at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago.

He made the acquaintance of Professor Max Muller, and induced him to publish the life and sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. Miss Margaret Noble who is now known as Sister Nivedita, became one of his most devoted disciples. Another disciple was the late J. J. Goodwin who accompanied his master wherever he went. A third was the late Captain Sevier who helped in founding the Advaita Ashrama at Maya-

RETURN TO INDIA

On the 16th December, 1896, Swami Vivekananda, with a handful of English disciples, started for his Motherland. He landed at Colombo, and from there, his journey to Almora was a brilliant triumphal progress. His brethren received him with open arms and gave him a magnificent reception. At every halting place he was surrounded by the leaders of the Hindu community and idolised by them.

With untiring energy he delivered address after address evoking enthusiasm for the noble religion of the Vedanta.

His health was affected by the continuous strain to which he had been subjected ever since he left India. He retired from the platform for some time, and devoted himself to the consideration of the work he had set himself to do. He established two monasteries for training Brahmacharins, one about six miles north of Calcutta, and the other in the Himalayas. He organised the Ramakrishna Mission, and settled the lines on which it was to work for the betterment of the people of the land. He also started the Ramakrishna Mission Relief Works at various places, during the famine of 1897. Under such continued exertion his health gave way, and medical experts advised a short residence in England and America. He went to England, and from there to America. After a short stay at California, his health improved, and he again took up platform work. He established a Vedanta Society and an Ashrama called 'Shanti Ashrama' in San Francisco, which are now in a flourishing condition. In New York, he accepted an invitation to attend the Congress of Religions to be held in Paris in 1900. He delivered addresses on Hindu Philosophy in French. From there he returned to India, with his health utterly shattered. But his fiery nature could not brook the dictates of doctors, and as he saw work to do, he

would be restless till it was done. He started the Ramakrishna Shevashrama for helping Sadhus. Another Ashrama was opened at Benares for teaching Brahmacharya to the young men of India. He started also a Training Home for students, called the 'Ramakrishna Patasala.' He established the Ramakrishna Home of Service at Benares to relieve the distress of the poor and the helpless. At this time some leading Japanese came to invite him to attend the Religious Congress to be held there, as Japan was in great need of a religious awakening. But his health still continued to be uncertain, and so the visit was put off. On the 4th July, 1902, he became very meditative. He was then in good health. He held a class during the day on Panini's Grammar, and, in the afternoon, discoursed upon the Vedas. He then went out on a walk, and returned. In the evening he again sat in meditation. At about nine o'clock he went into Mahasamadhi, and passed away from the world of men.

The end was quite sudden and unexpected. But the Swami by all accounts, was conscious of its approach. Say his biographers in the exhaustive *Life of the Swami*:

"On the Day of Mahasamadhi itself, whether consciously or intuitively, his actions were most deliberate and full of meaning. Of all others, the solitary meditation he underwent for three hours in the morning from eight to eleven was the most striking. He had arisen rather early from his bed and had spent the time in much recollection and some quiet conversation. Having partaken of his tea he entered the chapel of the monastery. Suddenly, it was noticed that he had closed all the windows and had bolted all the doors. What transpired there, no one can even know, save that in his meditation, his own Master and the Divine Mother,—to his own realisation One and the same Personality,—were present before him in living spiritual contact. For when he had finished his *Dhyanam*, and when his mind descended from those exalted Heights of Insight, finding himself in sweet communion with the Infinite, he broke forth in a touching song in which the Highest *Jnanam* mingled with the Highest Bhakti.

when to be alone and undisturbed in that Final Meditation before his Lord, he had performed such an uncommon act as *bolting* the chapel doors, for he could never meditate in a closed room.

Descending the stairs of the *Thakurghar*, he walked backwards and forwards in the courtyard of the monastery a transfigured presence, his mind most inwardly withdrawn. Suddenly the terseness of his thought expressed itself in a whisper audible enough for the Swami Premananda to overhear, as he chanced to be near by, in the verandah of the chapel. The Swami was saying to himself: "If there were another Vivekananda, he would understand what Vivekananda has done! And yet,—how many Vivekanandas shall be born in time!" This remark startled his *gurubhai*, for never did the Swami speak thus, save when the floodgates of his soul were thrown open and the Living Waters of the Highest Consciousness rushed forth.

In communicating the sad news to America, Swami Saradananda sent the following message:

"He entered into the Life Eternal on July 4, Friday-evening at ten minutes past nine. It came upon us so suddenly that even the Swamis in the other rooms of the Math had not had the slightest intimation of it. The Swami was meditating in his own room at 7 p.m., leaving word that none was to come to him until called for. An hour after, he called one of us and requested him to fan him on the head. He lay down on his bed quietly and the one tending him thought he was either sleeping or meditating. An hour after, his hands trembled a little and he breathed once very deeply. Then all was quiet for a minute or two. Again he breathed in the same manner, his eyes getting fixed in the centre of his eyebrows and his face assuming a divine expression, and all was over.

"All through the day he felt as free and easy as possible, nay, freer than he had felt for the last six months. He meditated in the morning for three hours together, took his meals with a perfect appetite, gave talks on Sanskrit Grammar, Philosophy and on the Vedas to the Swamis at the Math for more than two hours and discoursed on the Yoga Philosophy. He walked in the afternoon for about two miles, and, on returning, enquired after every one very tenderly. While resting for a time he conversed on the rise and fall of nations with his companions, and then went into his own room to meditate—you know the rest."

"To his disciples," wrote Sister Nivedita, "Vivekananda will ever remain the arch-type of the Sannyasin."

Burning renunciation was chief of all the inspirations that spoke to us through him. "Let me die a true Sannyasin as my Master did," he exclaimed once, passionately, "heedless of money, of women, and of fame! And of these the most insidious is the love of fame!" Yet the self-same destiny that filled him with this burning

er—full of the yearning to protect and save, eager to learn and teach the use of materials, reaching out towards the reorganisation and re-ordering of life. In this respect, indeed, he belonged to the race of Benedict and Bernard, of Robert de Cîteaux and Loyola. It may be said that just as in Francis of Assissi, the yellow robe of the Indian Sannyasin gleams for a moment in the history of the Catholic Church, so in Vivekananda the great saint, abbots of Western monasticism are born anew in the East."

The passing away of the Swami created the profoundest regret all over the country. Men felt as if a great storm had blown over the land and left it desolate. What is the reason of the extraordinary sorrow which his death had called forth? To say that he pandered to the vulgar patriotism of the people by speaking of the glory of the past would be a cruel lie. No, on the other hand, there was no more scathing critic of the present degeneracy of the Hindus than Swami Vivekananda. Those that have not had the fortune of listening to his many private discourses have simply to read his many lectures, and, in particular, the one on the Vedanta delivered at Lahore on the 12th November, 1897. Therein they will find the Swami's sledge-hammer blows on the excrescences that have crept into our religion and life. The secret of his success lay in his sincere but enlightened love for the land of his birth and the religion of his Rishis. His religion knew no caste, no colour; his philosophy knew no systems and sophistries; his sympathy was boundless, and he recognised a brother and sister in every man and woman he met. With the same breath and with the same spirit he praised the glory of the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews and the Father in Heaven of the Christians. He despised no religion, no form of worship. If often he laid stress on the glory of the Vedanta, it was because

incessantly voiced forth,—the lesson of the harmony of all religions.

VIVEKANANDA THE MAN

It will now be proper to understand what it was that made him wield such extraordinary influence over men, what brought him at one bound to the front rank of teachers and kept under a lasting spell the minds of those who had the rare good fortune of meeting him and learning from him the truths that lie hidden in Hindu scriptures. It is always difficult to find out the elements that go to make up what is generally known as personality. But in his case certain traits stood out clear and distinct, and contributed to his influence over his brethren. First and foremost he had those noble characteristics which have always distinguished the greatest religious leaders—love and tenderness towards all things, and a deep over-mastering desire to make the whole world participate in the life of the spirit and its perfect bliss. Not inconsistent with this was his passionate adoration for India, and burning eagerness to restore her to her ancient supremacy in the realm of religion. Another characteristic was his thorough hatred of shams, his desire to let the daylight of reason stream over all things, and his wish to reject all things that have no justification in reason. He was utterly fearless in his exposure of national defects, and denounced in deathless words superstitious clinging to forms that had long survived their usefulness. He was always sanguine, always confident of the final triumph of truth. His courtesy and affability were also marvellous. To these moral traits, he added intellectual gifts of a high order. He had wonderful versatility; he was an orator of the highest type: his style was unique for its

languages ; he was one of the most learned men of his time ; he was a great musician, and also wrote fine poems in his mother tongue ; and his conversational powers were of the highest order. When to these characteristics, he added a striking presence, a face lit up by a pair of shining eyes, and a voice that had a richness and musical quality seldom seen among men, we can understand in some measure the wonderful charm of his personality. As Swami Madhavananda, whom we have already quoted, aptly pointed out :—

Swami Vivekananda was an epitome of all that was great and good in the India of the past, and all that is also potentially great and good in her. With Sankara's intellect he combined Buddha's heart, Christ's renunciation, and the Prophet of Arabia's spirit of equality, and the result of this holy confluence will in time flood the whole world. Though he was the most accomplished of men, none possessed greater humility or genuine devotion to the Guru than Swamiji, and his lion-heart throbbed with surging emotions whenever Sri Ramakrishna's sacred name was mentioned in his presence. Had Sri Ramakrishna not been born into the world, the world would have worshipped the Swami Vivekananda himself with divine honours,—so great was Swamiji and of so multi-sided a personality. But he believed from the bottom of his heart, that he owed everything to the divine touch of that wonderful man. To quote his own words : “And if there has ever been a word of truth, a word of spirituality, that I have spoken anywhere in the world, I owe it to my Master, only the mistakes are mine.”

SOME ASPECTS OF HIS GENIUS

Before dealing with his teachings, we should consider certain aspects of his genius. As a thinker, he possessed two great virtues. He evinced great speculative boldness, and followed in the wake of reason without shrinking or fear. Also, he tried to appreciate the conclusions of thought in other countries, and attempted to make a new synthesis in which all truths could find their proper place. His method as a thinker was the method that had always been adopted in India, the method of introspection and self-analysis. What success he achieved

his genius was his poetic gift. His was a poet's soul, to which the world had messages unknown to the ordinary man, and which revealed them in words of imperishable loveliness. He wrote very few poems. But his great poetic gift finds its best expression in the wonderfully imaginative passages that illumine his writings. As a writer he displayed a mastery of a clear, simple, and forcible style, an erudition that was but rarely equalled even by the best Western *savants*. The beauty of his letters is also well-known. Many of his friends will realise what a balm his letters were to their suffering souls. As an orator—and it is as an orator that he will be longest remembered—his chief characteristics were a passionate enthusiasm for noble causes, and energy and felicity of utterance. He never prepared his speeches. The stream of his eloquence came from his heart, and the spontaneity of his speeches enhanced their effect. It was this unique combination of various excellences that gave such currency to his great teachings, and made them powerful agencies in the building up of a new India, which will be the spiritual leader of humanity in the future as she was in the past.

THE PATRIOT SAINT

Swami Vivekananda was above all a great patriot. In him "patriotism was deified into the highest saintship." Patriotism with him meant the transfiguration of one's whole personality into the soul of a people. In his famous lecture on "My plan of campaign," he uttered these burning words :

"They talk of patriotism. I believe in patriotism, and I also have my own ideal of patriotism...First feel from the heart...Through the heart comes inspiration. Love opens the most impossible gates; love is the gate to all the secrets of the universe. Feel, therefore, my would-be reformers, my would-be patriots! Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of Gods and of men

millions are starving to-day, and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it gone into your blood, coursing through your veins, becoming consonant with your heart-beats? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin, and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your dearest ones, your property, even your own bodies? Have you done that? That is the first step to become a patriot, the very first step. I did not go to America, as most of you know, for the Parliament of Religions, but this demon of a feeling was in me and within my soul. I travelled twelve years all over India, finding no way to work for my countrymen, and that is why I went to America. Most of you know that who knew me then. Who cared about this Parliament of Religions? Here was my own flesh and blood sinking every day, and who cared for them? This was my first step."

In this connection the Swami's passionate exhortation to his countrymen in concluding his book on "Modern India" comes irresistibly to our mind:

"Oh India! Forget not—that the ideal of thy womanhood is Sita, Savitri, Damayanti; forget not—that the God thou worshippeth is the great ascetic of ascetics, the all-renouncing Sankara, the Lord of Uma; forget not—that thy marriage, thy wealth, thy life are not for sense-pleasure,—are not for thy individual personal happiness; forget not—that thou art born as a sacrifice to the Mother's altar; forget not—that thy social order is but the reflex of the Infinite Universal Motherhood; forget not—that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper, are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers. Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian,—and proudly proclaim,—'I am Indian,—every Indian is my brother.' Say,—'The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahman Indian, the Pariah Indian, is my brother.' Thou too clad with but a rag round thy loins proudly proclaim at the top of thy voice,—'The Indian is my brother,—the Indian is my life, India's Gods and Goddesses are my God, India's society is the cradle of my infancy, the pleasure-garden of my youth, the sacred haven, the *varanasi* of my old age'. Say, 'brother,—'The soil of India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my good,' and repeat and pray day and night,—'O Thou Lord of Gouri, O Thou Mother of the Universe, vouchsafe manliness unto me! O thou Mother of Strength, take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness, and—MAKE ME A MAN!"

Shall India die, he asked in a famous lecture in which he delineated India's part in the world economy:

Shall India die? Then from the world all spirituality will be

pathy for religion will be extinct; all ideality will be extinct; and in its place will reign the duality of lust and luxury as the male and female deities, with money as its priest; fraud, force and competition; its ceremonies; and the human soul, its sacrifice. Such a thing can never be.

"First, let us be Gods, and then help others to be Gods. 'Be and make.' Let this be our motto." "India will be raised,—not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit; not with the flag of destruction but with the flag of peace and love,—the garb of the Sannyasin; not by the power of wealth, but by the power of the begging bowl. Say not that you are weak. The spirit is omnipotent."

"You must give up. Be great..... Bring all the forces of good together. Do not care under what banner you march. Do not care what be your colour, green, blue or red, but mix all the colours up and produce that intense glow of white, the colour of love. Ours is to work. The results will take care of themselves.....I do not see into the future; nor do I care to see. But one vision I see clear as life before me. That the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on her throne, rejuvenated, more glorious than ever. Proclaim her to all the world with the voice of peace and benediction."

MESSAGE TO INDIA

What were his services to India, and what was the special mission that he was charged to deliver to India? He vindicated her position as the leader of the nations in the realm of thought and religion. The great message which he delivered to India was that the mission of India was to teach spirituality to the world, that the true sign of life is expansion and we must bring into existence a new aggressive Hinduism, a dynamic religion, whose votaries will go to the ends of the earth and spiritualise the world, that to effect this object we must get rid of our unmanliness, care for the spirit rather than for the letter, and have once again that passion for the life of the spirit that distinguished the India of the past. To Vivekananda again, everything Indian was absolutely and equally sacred,—
"This land to which must come all souls wending their way Godward." In answer to a question by an interviewer about the distinguishing feature of his movement, he said :—

Aggression. Aggression in a religious sense only. Other sects and parties have carried spirituality all over India, but since the

days of Buddha we have been the first to break bonds and try to flood the world with missionary zeal.

He next beautifully describes his method :

Our method is very easily described. It simply consists in re-asserting the national life. Buddha preached *renunciation*. India heard, and in six centuries she reached her greatest height. The secret is there. The national ideals of India are *renunciation* and *service*. Intensify her in those channels, and the rest will take care of itself. The banner of the spiritual cannot be raised too high in this country. In it alone is salvation.

He held that with an increasing realisation of the truth of the doctrine of *Atman* must come strength and union, and taught the need for the manliness and corporate life with the full conviction that if Indians would only retain their spirituality, and be manly and united, they would be able to take their proper place in the scale of nations.

MESSAGE TO THE WEST

The task he set himself was the harmonisation of the East and the West, and the bringing into existence of that higher Aryan type, which will be the result of the interaction of Eastern and Western ideals. To the West, his special message was that materialism can never permanently satisfy the soul of man, that there is a nobler quest than the accumulation of wealth, or the acquisition of an extensive empire, that religion and science are in essential harmony, and that man can best achieve the object of his existence only by living a spiritual life. He taught them to give up the silly notion that man was a sinner, and to think that man was essentially divine. He said in his epoch-making address on Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions : "Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings, ye divinities on earth, sinners? It is a sin to call a man so : it is a standing libel on human nature."

made the Western nations realise the harmony of religions. He made them give up the Christian dogma of creation out of nothing and placed before them the Vedantic conception of evolution.

HIS TEACHINGS

Every great man has after all to base his claim to the admiration of posterity on the volume of helpful thought that he gives to the world. His position as a religious teacher is best stated in his own eloquent words :—

My teaching is my own interpretation of our ancient books, in the light which my master shed upon them. I claim no supernatural authority. Whatever in my teaching may appeal to the highest intelligence and may be accepted by thinking men, the adoption of that will be my reward. . . . Above all, I teach no authority proceeding from hidden beings speaking through visible agents, any more than I claim learning from hidden books or manuscripts. I am the exponent of no occult societies, nor do I believe that good can come of such bodies. Truth stands on its own authority and truth can bear the light of day.

He says in his lecture on *Cosmos*:—

We do not pretend to throw new light on these all-absorbing problems; our proposal is to attempt to put before you the ancient, the hoary truth, in the language of modern times, to speak the thoughts of the ancients in the language of the moderns, to speak the thoughts of the angels in the language of poor humanity, so that men will understand it.

Some of these statements of old truths are very beautiful and suggestive. He defined the Vedas as “the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by men in different times.” He defined destruction as ‘the dross becoming fine,’ that instinct is ‘involved reason,’ and stated that ‘every evolution is preceded by an involution’. Special mention should be made of his learned and lucid papers on *Re-incarnation* and the *Freedom of the Soul*; and his books on *Raja Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Gnana Yoga* and *Karma Yoga*. The messages that he bore to the world from his master were the fruitful and valuable ideas that religion is realisa-

temple of Truth, and that God should be realised as Mother.. These truths he expressed in language which was remarkable for its combination of beauty and power, and won for them the loving approval of the world.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO WORLD THOUGHT.

We shall now consider his distinctive contributions to the world of thought. One of the valuable ideas that he gave us is that the origin of religion should be found not in any theory of ghost-worship or ancestor-worship, but in 'the struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses,' and that [man is man so long as he is struggling to rise above nature'.

Again, he pointed out that every religion consists of three parts—the philosophy and ideals of the religion, mythology and ritual, and that though the last two varied in the various religions, there was an essential identity as regards the first.

The religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic: they are but various phases of one eternal religion. One infinite Religion existed all through eternity and will ever exist, and this Religion is expressing itself in various countries, in various ways: therefore, we must respect all religions, and we must try to accept them all as far as we can. . . . To learn this central secret that the truth may be one and yet many at the same time, that we may have different visions of the same truth from different stand-points, is exactly what must be done. Then, instead of antagonism to any one, we shall have infinite sympathy with all.

At the same time he taught that universal religion ought to embrace different types of minds and methods. It ought to find a place for the three types of humanity—the worker, the thinker, and the man of devotion. It was on this ground that he maintained that the Vedanta had the best claim to be recognised as the Universal Religion. He says :—

All the other religions of the world are included in the nameless, limitless, eternal Vedic Religion.

Again he says in the *Bhakti Yoga* :—

Every sect of every religion presents only one ideal of its own to mankind, but the eternal Vedantic religion opens to mankind an infinite number of doors for ingress into the inner shrine of Divinity, and places before humanity an almost inexhaustible array of ideals, there being in each of them a manifestation of the Eternal One.

He also taught that the Dualistic, Vishishtad and Advaitic schools of thought are not in conflict with each other, as they had been long supposed to be. He showed how the monistic conception is the fulfilment of the other conceptions.

Just as in the case of the six *darsanas* of ours we find they are a gradual unfolding of the grand principles, the music beginning in the soft low notes, and ending in the triumphant blast of the Advaita, so also in these three systems we find the gradual working up of the human mind towards higher and higher ideals, till everything is merged in the wonderful unity that is reached in the Advaita system.

Our solution is that the Advaita is not antagonistic to the dualistic. We say the latter is only one of three steps. Religion always takes three steps. The first is dualism. Then man gets to a higher state, partial non-dualism. And at last he finds he is one with the universe. Therefore the three do not contradict, but fulfil.

Again, he proved the hollowness of the theory that the Vedanta has no satisfactory basis of morality. He said :—

The infinite oneness of soul is the eternal sanction of all morality.

This oneness is the rationale of all ethics and all spirituality. He said also :—

Every time that your heart goes out towards the world, you are a true Vedantin, only you do not know it. You are moral without knowing why; and the Vedanta is the philosophy which analysed and taught man to be moral consciously. It is the essence of all religions.

Another teaching of his was that the Vedanta is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. He says in his *Maya and Illusion* :—

Thus the Vedanta philosophy is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. It preaches both of these, and takes things as they are.

never be a good world, because the very idea is a contradiction in terms; nor can there be a bad world. At the same time it finds out one great secret by this analysis, and it is this, that good and bad are not two cut-and-dried, separate existences. There is not one thing in this world of ours which you can label as good and good alone, and there is not one thing in this world of ours which you can label as bad and bad alone. The Vedanta says, there must come a time when we will look back and laugh at these ideals of ours which made us afraid of giving up our individuality.

He also told us that religion is not a mere matter of belief, but is realisation. He said:—

The Vedas teach three things; this self is first to be heard, then to be reasoned, and then to be meditated. When a man first hears it, he must reason on it, so that he does not believe it ignorantly, but knowingly; and after reasoning what he is, he must meditate upon it and then realise it: and that is religion. Belief is no part of religion. We say religion is a superconscious state.

We owe to him another valuable idea, *viz.*, that the ideals and methods of religion can bear daylight and the searching examination of reason and that mystery-mongering ought to be shunned like plague by every earnest seeker after truth. He says in his introduction to *Raja Yoga*:—

The best guide in life is strength. In religion, as in everything else, discard everything that weakens you, have nothing to do with it. All mystery-mongering weakens the human brain.

He taught also that true spiritual progress cannot be made except with the help of a *guru*. He did not share in the opinion of those who hold that study of sacred books by itself can lead us to the desired goal. In his book on *Bhakti Yoga*, he says:—

The soul can only receive impulses from another soul, and from nothing else. We may study books all our lives, we may become very intellectual: but, in the end, we find that we have not developed at all spiritually. It is not true that a high order of intellectual development goes hand in hand with a proportionate development of the spiritual side in man. In studying books we are sometimes deluded into thinking that thereby we are being spiritually helped; but, if we analyse the effect of the study of books on ourselves, we shall find that, at the utmost, it is only our intellect that has derived profit from such studies, but not our inner spirit. This insufficiency of books to quicken spiritual growth is

wonderfully on spiritual matters, when it comes to action and the living of a truly spiritual life, we find ourselves so awfully deficient. To quicken the spirit, the impulse *must* come from another soul.

He then proceeds to consider the necessary qualifications of the aspirant and the teacher, and this portion of the book is full of helpful and suggestive thought.

Swami Vivekananda has given a clear and convincing explanation of Hindu idolatry. He showed that the Hindu worships not the stone but the Supreme Being whom the image represents, and that only the perfect men can afford to realise God as *Satchitananda*. He says in his lecture on *Bhakti* :—

You are all born idolaters, and idolatry is good because it is in the constitution of human nature. Who can go beyond it? Only the perfect men, the Godmen. The rest are all idolaters.

We should now consider the ideas that he spread in regard to the social and material improvement of India.

One striking idea that he gave to the world was that every one was great in his own place, that every one should do his work and let others do their work, that confusion of duties should be avoided. He said :

Every man should take up his own ideal, and endeavour to accomplish it; that is a surer way of progress than taking up other men's ideas, which he can never hope to accomplish.

VIEWS ON SOCIAL REFORM

To the Social Reformers he pointed out that their ideal should be growth and expansion to fuller life along the lines laid down by the sages, and that their method ought to be conciliation and co-operation. He said :—

Vain it is to attempt the lines of action foreign societies have engrafted upon us. Impossible it is. Glory unto God that it is impossible, that we cannot be twisted and tortured into the shape of other nations. I do not condemn the institutions of other races; they are good for them but not for us. What is meat for them may

have got their present systems. We with our traditions, with thousands of years of *Karma* behind us, naturally we can only follow our own bent, run in our own grooves, and that we shall have to do.

He held that the only right principle on which societies should act is to give the utmost liberty of thought and action, so long as it injures no one. He said in one of his letters :—

My idea is to bring to the door of the meanest, the poorest, the noble ideas that the human race has developed both in and out of India, and let them think for themselves. Whether there should be caste or not, whether women should be perfectly free or not, does not concern me. Liberty of thought and action is the only condition of life, of growth and well-being. Where it does not exist, the many, the race, the nation must go down. Caste or no caste, creed or no creed, any man or class or caste or nation or institution which bars the power of free thought and action of an individual, so long as that power does not injure others, is devilish and must go down.

On the question of caste, he held that the absolute destruction of all caste distinctions would be impossible, and that the proper method was not to degrade the Brahmin, but to raise the lower classes by throwing open to them the treasure-house of Indian thought. He said :—

From the time of the Upanishads down to the present day, nearly all our great teachers wanted to break through the barriers of caste, *i.e.*, caste in its degenerate state, not the original system. What little good you see in the present caste clings to it from the original caste, which was the most glorious social institution.

To the Brahmins, who form a sort of an intellectual and religious aristocracy, he said :—“The duty of the aristocracy is to dig its own grave.” To the non-Brahmins of South India, he said :—“Be not in a hurry. Do not seize every opportunity of fighting the Brahmin. Do not any more neglect Sanskrit learning and culture. Sanskrit and prestige go together in India.”

On the question of foreign travel, he spoke often and

that foreign travel is unshastraic and injurious to our spiritual welfare. He said :—

We cannot do without the world outside India. The more you go out and travel among the nations of the world, the better for you and for your country.

Again :

The sign of life is expansion ; we must go out, expand, show life, or degrade, fester, and die ; there is no other alternative.

The Swami was strongly of opinion that we should receive back into our fold those who had gone out of it and were anxious to return, and that we should make provision in our fold for converts to Hinduism.

The Swami held decided views on the question of the improvement of Indian womanhood. He thought the present low position of woman was due to the influence of Buddhism, and that Indian women must be given leave to solve their own problems. He said :—

They have many and grave problems, but none that are not to be solved by that magic word 'Education.' The true education, however, is not yet conceived of among us. . . . It may be described as a development of faculty, not an accumulation of words, or as a training of individuals to fill rightly and efficiently. So shall we bring to the need of India great, fearless women—women, worthy to continue the traditions of Sangamita, Lila, Ahalya Bai, and Mira Bai, women fit to be the mothers of heroes, because they are pure and selfless and strong with the strength that comes of touching the feet of God.

With regard to education, he taught us that we must strive to take the education of youths into our own hands, and that we must realise the indispensableness of spiritual education. * One of the noblest dreams of his life was to have a National University. He said :—

I look upon Religion as the innermost core of education. Mind, I do not mean my own or any one else's opinion about Religion. I think the teacher should take the pupil's starting point in this, as in other respects and enable her to develop along her own line of least resistance.

Upon the question of the elevation of the masses, he felt keenly. He thought that the most pressing of problems.

was the betterment of the masses, and deplored the fact that our activities were absorbed in other pursuits. He says in one of his epistles :—

Remember that the nation lives in the cottage. But alas! nobody ever did any thing for them. Our modern reformers are busy about widow re-marriage. Of course I am a sympathiser in every reform, but the fate of a nation does not depend upon the number of husbands their widows get, but *upon the condition of the masses*. Can you raise them? Can you give them back their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature? Can you become an occidental of occidentals in your spirit of equality, freedom, work, and energy, and at the same time a Hindu to the very backbone in the religious culture and instincts? This is to be done and *we will do it*. You are *all born to do it*. Have faith in yourselves, great convictions are the mothers of great deeds. Onward for ever! Sympathy for the poor, the down-trodden, even unto death, this is our motto. . . . Keep the motto before you, 'elevation of the masses without injuring their religion.'

He was strongly of opinion that our civilisation is doomed unless the material condition of the country can be improved, and the poverty that is acting as a blight upon India is removed at once and for ever. He wrote in one of his epistles :

Their extreme poverty is one of the causes why the Chinese and the Indians have remained in a state of mummified civilisation. To an ordinary Hindu or Chinese every-day necessity is too hideous to allow him to think of anything else.

In one of his powerful letters he says : "And, oh how my heart ached to think of the poor, the low in India. They have no chance, no escape, no way to climb up. The poor, the low, the sinners in India have no friends, no help—they cannot rise, try however they may. . . . They have forgotten that they too are men. . . . Onward for ever : sympathy for the poor, the down-trodden, even unto death. That is our motto!" . . . I am poor. I love the poor." He knew at the same time that the poor of India have high moral qualities and are the backbone of India. In another letter he says : "The only

hope of India is from the masses. The upper classes are physically and morally dead."

He was of opinion that this material betterment ought to go hand in hand with the education of the masses, so that the improvement may be assured and stable. He thought that even the establishment of free schools would not solve the problem, as life was hard for the poor, and young boys would prefer to be at their ploughs with their fathers rather than spend their time in school.

So, if the poor boy cannot come to education, education must come to him. There are thousands of single-minded, self-sacrificing *Sannyasins* in our own country, going from village to village, teaching religion. If a part of them can be organised as teachers also of secular things, they will go from place to place, from door to door, not only preaching but teaching also.

Again :

I see it before my eyes, a nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence are spread among the masses.

The Swami emphasised the imperative need of Hindu-Muslim unity. The following from his biography will be read with particular interest :

"In his own personal experience he had seen that the Mahomedans as a race were as generous, as humane and as Indian at heart as the Hindus, and also that the enlightened ones among them understood and appreciated the culture of Hinduism as well, realising the intimate relationship between the philosophy of Sufism and the Advaita Vedanta and other social and religious elements. Therefore, in his own mind, the distinctions between Mahomedan and Hindu, which the Swami as a young man had thought to be insuperable barriers to a unified Indian consciousness, were entirely modified and in many respects obliterated. He thought of all as Indians, and often he seemed to foresee, as a renewed possibility, that which had already been a fact in the history of the Indian Past, namely, that Mahomedan and Hindu, seeing the necessity of confederation and national organisation, would put aside their religious sectarianism and join hands as in the days of Akbar and Shah Jehan."

But perhaps the most important yet the least noticed of his work was his insistent appeal for practical service. He hated the callousness of some of the Saints and

He exhorted them to a life of vigorous and active social service :

"Do not talk,—work, work, work!..... There is too much talk, talk, talk!—We are great, we are great! Nonsense! We are imbeciles; that is what we are! To work, my brave men, to work! You have not caught my fire yet—you do not understand me!"

"My child, what I want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, inside which dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made. Strength, Kshattra-Virjya and *Brahma Teja*."

"Work on unto death—I am with you, and when I am gone, my spirit will work with you."

"I look back and scarcely find any action I have done for self—even my wicked deeds were not for self. So I am content."

"Ramanuja, Sankara, seem to have been mere pandits with much narrowness of heart. Where is that love, that weeping heart at the sorrow of others? Dry pedantry of the pandit—and the feeling of only oneself attaining salvation hurry-scurry! But is that possible?.....Can it be attained with any shred of 'I' left in us?"

"Sankara had not the slightest bit of Buddha's wonderful heart—dry intellect merely."

"We want some disciples,—fiery young men—do you see!—intelligent and brave, who dare to go to the jaws of death, and are ready to swim the ocean across."

"He alone is a child of Ramakrishna who is moved to pity for all creatures and exerts himself for them even at the risk of incurring personal damnation.....This is the test: he who is Ramakrishna's child, does not seek his personal good. They wish to do good to others even at the point of death."

To the Pandit who came to him to argue on the Vedanta philosophy, he said :

"Panditji, first of all you try to ameliorate the terrible distress that is prevailing everywhere, the heart-rending cry of your hungry countrymen for a morsel of food, and after that, come to me to have a debate on Vedanta. To stake one's whole life and soul to save the thousands who are dying of starvation—this is the essence of the religion of Vedanta!"

That also was the essence of Swami Vivekananda's life and teachings !

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