SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

EARLY DAYS

Swami Vivekananda, or Narendranath Datta, or simply Narendra or Naren as he was known during his pre-monastic days, was born to Vishwanath Datta and Bhuvaneshwari Devi on Monday, 12th January 1863, at Calcutta. The Datta family was rich, respectable, and renowned for charity, learning, and a strong spirit of independence. Narendranath’s grandfather, Durgacharan Datta, was well-versed in Persian and Sanskrit and was skilled in law. But after the birth of his son Vishwanath, he renounced the world and became a monk. He was then only twenty-five. Vishwanath Datta was an attorney-at-law in the High Court of Calcutta. He was proficient in English and Persian, and took great delight in reciting to his family the poems of the Persian poet Hafiz. He also enjoyed the study of the Bible which he thought contained the highest wisdom. Though charitable sometimes to an extravagant degree, and sympathetic towards the poor and those who suffered, he was an agnostic in religious matters due to the influence of Western culture which he had imbibed. Bhuvaneshwari Devi was an accomplished woman with a regal bearing. She was deeply religious, and so she sowed and nurtured the seeds of religion in the tender heart of Narendranath. Endowed with a keen memory, she remembered a good portion of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which she taught her son when he was still very young.
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Naughty and restless though Narendranath was by nature, and given to much fun and frolic, he was greatly attracted towards spiritual life even in childhood. The stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which his mother told him left on him an indelible impression. Play delighted Narendranath, and one of his pastimes as a child was to worship and meditate on the image of Rama, Sita, or Shiva. Every night, before he fell asleep, there appeared to him between his eyes a wonderful spot of light of changing hues. That light would gradually expand until it burst and bathed his whole being in a white radiance. He had full faith in Hindu mythology. Once he went to hear an exposition of the Ramayana in the course of which he heard the pundit describe the great devotion of Hanuman. At the end of the exposition, he approached the pundit and said he would like to know the whereabouts of Hanuman. The pundit said that he might be in some plantain grove. So Narendranath waited at a plantain grove till late at night expecting to meet Hanuman, and his people could find him only after a great search.

Narendranath had his first experience of spiritual trance at the age of fifteen at the sight of a large beehive in a cleft in the hills of Vindhya range. At that time he was travelling with his mother to Raipur (Madhya Pradesh), where his father was then temporarily working.

Morning shows the day, and the early years of Narendranath were full of events that held promise of a great spiritual personality as well as of great powers of leadership. Once, when he was returning with his friends from a fair, carrying some dolls which he had purchased, he heard shouts from behind from people
scared by some imminent danger. Looking back, he found that one of his companions was on the point of being crushed by a hackney carriage. Instantly, putting the dolls under one arm, he rushed to his companion and dragged him out of danger. The passers-by were astonished at the bravery and presence of mind of Narendranath. Another time, young Narendranath was trying with some of his friends to put up a trapeze, but the wooden poles were too heavy for the little boys. A European sailor who was passing by went to their help. He pressed down the legs of the frame with his feet, while the boys pulled at the rope to raise the other end. Suddenly, the rope snapped and the legs jumped up. The sailor was injured and became unconscious. Most of the boys fled in consternation, but Narendranath and a few others took care of the sailor, nursed him to recovery, and raised a subscription for him.

Even in his early boyhood, Narendranath demanded intellectually convincing arguments for every proposition. He often used to swing on the branches of a champaka tree in a neighbour’s compound. This irritated the owner, an old man, and he warned Narendranath and his companions that the tree was haunted by a bad ghost who would some day break their necks. This frightened the other boys; but Narendranath argued that if the old man were right, their necks would have been broken long ago. And he continued to swing on the branches of the tree as before.

Vishwanath’s clients belonged to all sections of the Calcutta public—Hindus, Mussulmans, Christians, and others. And, as social custom required, to enable them
all to smoke he provided different pipes attached to bowls filled with water. Narendranath's curiosity was aroused by this strange custom. Why could not all use the same pipe? On inquiry he learnt that unless this custom was followed, one's caste would be lost, so he proceeded to check this fact. One day, when nobody was there in his father's office, Narendranath entered the room and took a puff at each of the pipes in turn. Suddenly, his father entered the room and asked the boy what he was doing. Nothing daunted, the intrepid boy answered that he was just testing how one's caste was actually lost. The amused father left with the simple remark, "Wicked boy that you are!"

Bhuvaneshwari Devi taught young Narendranath the Bengali alphabet and his first English words. At the age of seven, the boy started his education proper under a private tutor. Being exceptionally intelligent, he learnt by heart in a short time a considerable portion of the Sanskrit grammar, *Mugdhabodha*, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In 1871, at the age of eight, he joined the ninth class at Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's Metropolitan Institution. In 1879 he entered the Presidency College, after passing the Entrance Examination. A year later he joined the college that is now known as the Scottish Church College.

Narendranath was gifted with a multiplicity of talents and he cultivated them all. His lionine beauty was matched by his courage; he had the build of an athlete, a delightful voice, and a brilliant intellect. His interests ranged from fencing, wrestling, rowing, games, physical exercise, cooking, and organising dramas to instrumental and vocal music, love of philosophic discussion, and criticism. In all these he was an un-
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disputed leader. These and other traits in his character soon attracted the notice of his teachers and fellow students. The principal of his college, professor Hastie, once remarked: "Narendra is a real genius. I have travelled far and wide, but have not yet come across a lad of his talents and possibilities even among the philosophical students in the German universities. He is bound to make his mark in life."

At college Narendranath began to interest himself more seriously in studies. Apart from the usual college curriculum, he avidly studied western logic, the abstruse philosophy of Herbert Spencer, the systems of Kant and Schopenhauer, the mystical and analytical speculations of the Aristotelian school, the positivist philosophy of Comte, and John Stuart Mill's *Three Essays on Religion*. He also mastered the ancient and modern history of Europe and the English poets like Shelley and Wordsworth. He even took a course in physiology with a view to understanding the functioning of the nervous system, the brain, and the spinal cord.

But this contact with western thought, which lays particular emphasis on the supremacy of reason, brought about a severe conflict in Narendranath. His inborn tendency towards spirituality and his respect for the ancient traditions and beliefs of his religion which he had imbibed from his mother, on the one side, and his argumentative nature coupled with his sharp intellect which hated superstition and questioned simple faith on the other, were now at war with each other. Under a deep spiritual urge, he was then found observing hard ascetic practices, staying in his grandmother's house, away from his parents and other relatives, following a strict vegetarian diet, sleeping on
the bare ground or on an ordinary quilt, in accordance with the strict rules of brahmacharya. From youth, two visions of life had presented themselves before him. In one, he found himself among the great ones of the earth, possessing riches, power, honour, and glory, and he felt himself capable of attaining all these. In the other, he saw himself renouncing all worldly things, dressed in a simple loin-cloth, living on alms, sleeping under a tree, and then he felt that he had the capacity to live thus like the Rishis of ancient India. It was, however, the second vision that prevailed in the end, and he used to sleep with the conviction that by renunciation alone could man attain the highest bliss. He also used to meditate for long hours before going to sleep; and from boyhood he had a passion for purity, which his mother made him observe as a matter of honour, and in loyalty to herself and the family tradition. He was a born idealist and seeker of truth; so he could hardly be satisfied with worldly enjoyment, though he was a jubilant lover of life.

But now his contact with western philosophy and science unsettled his mind, and he was filled with grave doubts about the existence of God. One of the chief questions that he could not answer was: How to reconcile the presence of evil in Nature with the goodness of an omnipresent Creator? Hume’s scepticism and Herbert Spencer’s doctrine of the Unknowable made him a settled agnostic. After wearing out his first emotional freshness and naivete, he felt a dryness of heart and an incapacity for his accustomed prayers and devotions. His real problem was: If God really exists, it must be possible for one to see Him. He felt the need of a helping hand to save, to uplift, to protect,
and to transform his impotence into strength and glory.

In this predicament he tried to find comfort in the Brahmo Samaj, a popular socio-religious movement of the time. This sect discarded Hindu conventions, opposed orthodox rituals and image worship, and taught people to worship and adore only 'the eternal, the unsearchable, the immutable Being, who is the author and preserver of the universe'. This new faith appealed to Narendra Nath. He was also impressed by its insistence on the supremacy of reason, and its programmes for social reform and mass education. Though for a time the congregational prayers and devotional songs of the Samaj attracted him, and he took an active part in them, he soon found that they did not give him that spiritual satisfaction for which he was thirsting.

In his eagerness for spiritual illumination he went to Devendranath Tagore, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj, and asked him: "Sir, have you seen God?" The old man was embarrassed by the question, and replied, "My boy, you have the eyes of a Yogi. You should practise meditation." The youth was disappointed, but he received no better answer from the leaders of other religious sects whom he approached with the same question.

At this critical juncture he remembered the words of his professor, William Hastie, who, while speaking of trances in the course of his lecture on Wordsworth's Excursion, had said, "Such an experience is the result of purity of mind and concentration on some particular object, and is rare indeed, particularly in these days. I have seen only one person who has experienced that blessed state of mind, and he is Ramakrishna Paramahamsa of Dakshineshwar. You can understand if..."
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go there and see for yourself.” Ramachandra Datta, a relative of Narendranath’s, seeing his yearning for religion, also advised him: “If you really want to cultivate spirituality, then visit Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, instead of knocking about here and there.” Narendranath had earlier once met Shri Ramakrishna in the house of Surendranath Mitra, a disciple who invited the Master occasionally to his house for the benefit of himself and other devotees. On one occasion Narendranath had been requested to be present to sing devotional songs. So now, in his trouble, the young seeker decided to have yet one more try to solve his problem.

AT SHRI RAMAKRISHNA’S FEET

Shri Ramakrishna represented the very heart of India, with all her spiritual traditions, asceticism, and realisations—the India of the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Gita. From childhood, he had remarkable insight into spiritual truths. Having been vouchsafed the highest spiritual realisation promised by Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, he was convinced that the same truth was expressed by all the religions. Thereafter he wanted to share the fruits of his realisation with worthy aspirants, and through them, with the whole world. He was eagerly expecting the arrival of his disciples, and at the very first meeting with Narendranath at Dakshineswar in November 1881, he recognised in him the worthiest of them all.

Shri Ramakrishna, describing the meeting, said later on: “He seemed careless about his body and dress, and unlike other people, unmindful of the external world.
His eyes bespoke an introspective mind. . . . I was surprised to find such a spiritual soul coming from the material atmosphere of Calcutta. . . . The friends with whom he had come appeared to be ordinary young men with the usual tendencies towards enjoyment. He sang a few Bengali songs at my request." To continue the story in the words of Narendranath himself: "Well, I sang the song; . . . he (Shri Ramakrishna) suddenly rose and led me to the northern veranda. . . . We were alone. I thought he would give me some private instructions. But to my utter surprise, he began to shed profuse tears of joy as he held my hand, and addressing me most tenderly as one long familiar to him, said: 'Ah, you have come so late. How could you be so unkind as to keep me waiting so long! My ears are wellnigh burnt in listening to the profane talks of worldly people. Oh, how I am yearning to unburden my mind to one who can appreciate my innermost experiences!' He continued sobbing, and with folded hands, 'Lord, I know you are that ancient sage Nara, the incarnation of Narayana, born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind', and so on. I was altogether taken aback by his conduct. . . . I thought: 'He must be stark mad. Why, I am but the son of Vishwanath Datta, and yet he dares to address me thus!' But I kept quiet allowing him to go on. Presently, he went back to his room and bringing some sweets, sugar-candy, and butter, began to feed me with his own hands." In vain did Narendranath protest. Before returning to his room, Shri Ramakrishna extracted a promise from him that he would come again alone at an early date.

As he sat and watched him, Narendranath did not find anything wrong or strange in Shri Ramakrishna's
words or behaviour with others. Rather, there was marked consistency between his words and his life, and he appeared to be a man of genuine renunciation. Approaching him, Narcendranath asked him the question which he had asked others often before: “Sir, have you seen God?” “Yes,” answered Shri Ramakrishna, “I see Him just as I see you here, only I see Him in a much intenser sense. God can be realised; one can see and talk to Him as I am doing with you. But who cares to do so? People shed torrents of tears for their wife and children, for wealth and property, but who does so for the sake of God? If one weeps sincerely for Him, He surely manifests Himself.”

This startling reply impressed Narcendranath at once. For the first time he had found a man who could say that he had seen God, and recognised that religion was a reality to be felt. As he listened, he could not but believe that Shri Ramakrishna spoke from the depths of his own realisations. But what about his strange conduct with himself a few minutes before? He concluded he must be a monomaniac, but he could not help admiring his spirit of renunciation. He returned to Calcutta bewildered, but with a feeling of inner peace and blessedness.

The second time Narcendranath went to Dakshine swar, a month later, Shri Ramakrishna was alone, sitting on his bedstead. As soon as he saw Narcendranath, he received him cordially and asked him to sit near himself on the bed. In a moment, overcome with emotion, the Master drew closer to him. Muttering something to himself, and with eyes fixed on the young aspirant, he touched him with his right foot. The magic touch produced a strange experience in Narcendranath. With
his eyes open, he saw the walls and everything in the room, nay, the whole universe and himself within it, whirling and vanishing into an all-encompassing void. He was frightened as he thought he might be on the verge of death, and cried out: "What are you doing to me? I have my parents at home." Shri Ramakrishna laughed aloud at this, and stroking Narendra Nath’s chest, said: "All right, let us leave it there for the present. Everything will come in time." Surprisingly, as soon as he uttered these words, Narendra Nath became his old self again. Shri Ramakrishna, too, was quite normal in his behaviour towards him after the incident, and treated him kindly and with great affection.

Drawn by this kindness and affection, and even more, by the need to fathom the mystery, Narendra Nath went to Dakshineswar for a third time, probably a week later. He was determined not to allow the previous experience to repeat itself, and was fully on his guard. But with all his critical faculties alert, he fared no better. Shri Ramakrishna took him to the adjacent garden belonging to Jadunath Mallik. After a stroll, they sat down in the parlour. Soon, Shri Ramakrishna fell into a spiritual trance and touched Narendra Nath. Despite his precautions, Narendra Nath was totally overwhelmed and he lost all outward consciousness. When he regained consciousness, he found Shri Ramakrishna stroking his chest.

Referring to this incident, Shri Ramakrishna said later on: "I put several questions to him while he was in that state. I asked him about his antecedents, and where he lived, his mission in this world, and the duration of his mortal life. He gave fitting answers after diving deep into himself. The answers only
confirmed what I had seen and inferred about him. These things shall remain a secret, but I came to know that he was a sage who had attained perfection, a past master in meditation, and the day he knows his real nature, he will give up the body by an act of will, through Yoga."

Whatever it was, Narendranath was completely puzzled. He saw the holiness, purity, and extraordinary powers of the person, and he admired them. Perhaps this was the person for whom he was searching. Who else could help him in his intellectual and spiritual struggles? But should he accept him straightaway as his Guru? The wounded pride of his intellect, which had received such an unpleasant rebuff on two occasions, would not allow him to do so. He would test him through and through before he wholly submitted himself to him and accepted him as his guide for life.

Of all the disciples of Shri Ramakrishna, Narendranath alone doubted the Master and criticised any of his teachings that appeared irrational. He was a staunch seeker of truth, and so he detested any form of sentimental piety. During his early contacts, he was severely critical of what Shri Ramakrishna said about his divine visions and quoted as the words of the Mother. He used to ask him bluntly: "How do you know that your realisations are not the creation of your sick brain, mere hallucinations?" And in support of his argument he would cite the latest conclusions of western psychology.

Firmly poised as he was in the knowledge of the highest truth, Shri Ramakrishna, however, did not upset the intellectual outbursts of Narendranath. He rose
equal to the occasion. He never asked Narendranath to abandon his reason. On the other hand, he enjoyed his criticisms, and even encouraged them. He told him: "Test me as the money changers test their coins. You must not accept me until you have tested me thoroughly." He led the young disciple through a path suited to his temperament and when all other methods failed to convince him, he granted him the necessary insight which set all his doubts at rest.

Narendranath was bitterly against the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta which Shri Ramakrishna was eager to explain to him. The Advaita idea of the identity of the individual soul and the Supreme Self appeared to him as bizarre and blasphemous. Shri Ramakrishna tried his best to bring home to the disciple the truth of Advaita by reason and argument, but without success. One day after a trying discussion, he found Narendranath speaking about the doctrine disparagingly to a friend and in a light vein. Shri Ramakrishna, in a semi-conscious mood, approached him and just touched him, and immediately a wonderful change came over Narendranath. He was filled with the consciousness that everything around him was God. The impression persisted even when he reached home, at the end of the day. He did not relish his food. He ate too much or too little, to the consternation of his mother. He felt that the food, the materials, the server and he himself were all God. In the street, he did not feel like moving out of the way of the swiftly moving cabs, thinking they were God Himself. In the public park, he struck his head against the railings to see if they were real. This feeling lasted for many days. Henceforth he could not deny the truth of Advaita.
Narendranath’s days passed in study and meditation, with frequent visits to Dakshineswar. Under the guidance and protecting care of the Master, he underwent a rigorous course of spiritual discipline and had various spiritual experiences. He was more and more drawn to the ideal of a monastic life. Fortunately for him, all proposals of marriage fell through on one account or another.

In 1884, Vishwanath Datta suddenly passed away, plunging the whole family into grief and poverty. He was the only earning member of the family, and being of a prodigal nature, he spent lavishly and left the family in debt. At the time Narendranath was studying for the B.A., and had just finished the examination. As the eldest surviving son, he now had to shoulder the entire responsibility of the family. Starving and barefoot, he went from office to office in the scorching sun in search of a job. Everywhere the door was slammed in his face. Friends turned into enemies in an instant. Creditors began knocking at the door. Temptations came. Two rich women made proposals to him to end his poverty, and he turned them down with scorn. Often he went without food so that the others at home might have a better share. He was face to face with realities, and the world appeared to him to be the creation of a devil.

Nevertheless, the protégé of Shri Ramakrishna did not lose his faith in God and divine mercy. Every morning, taking His name he got up and went in search of a job. One day his devout mother overheard him and said bitterly: “Hush, you fool, you have been crying yourself hoarse for God from your childhood. What has He done for you?” Narendranath was stung to
the quick, and began doubting the existence of God. And he did not hide the fact because it was against his nature to do anything in secret. He now proceeded to declare to everybody that God was a myth, or even if He existed, it was useless to call on Him. Friends and foes alike began to exaggerate this, and the report gained currency that he had become an atheist, and had relaxed his moral scruples.

A garbled report of Narendra's state of mind and activities reached Shri Ramakrishna also. Narendra was piqued at the thought that Shri Ramakrishna might believe it. He said he did not care if the opinions of people rested on unfounded rumours. But Shri Ramakrishna was quite unperturbed and scolded those who had brought him the report. He had been assured, he said, by the Divine Mother Herself about Narendra's character.

These atheistic views were just passing ripples on the surface of Narendra's mind, forced by external circumstances. Deep down in his heart he felt that life would be meaningless if these views were correct. God must exist, and there must be some means of realising Him. He had not forgotten the divine experiences which he had had from his boyhood, and especially after his contact with Shri Ramakrishna.

One evening, after a whole day's fast and exposure to rain, Narendra was returning home with tired limbs and a jaded mind. Overpowered with exhaustion, he sat down on the outer plinth of a roadside house in a dazed condition. Various thoughts crowded into his mind. He was too weak to drive them off and concentrate on any particular thing. Suddenly he felt that, by some divine power, the coverings of his soul were being
removed one after another. His doubts regarding the coexistence of divine justice and mercy and the presence of misery in the creation of a benign providence were automatically solved. He felt completely refreshed and full of mental peace. He decided to become a monk, renouncing the world. He even fixed a date for it. Shri Ramakrishna came to Calcutta that day. Narendranath went to have his blessings, and accompanied the Master to Dakshineswar. There, in a state of spiritual trance, Shri Ramakrishna began to sing a touching song which brought tears to the eyes of both. The meaning of the song was very clear, for it revealed that the Master had known the disciple’s decision even without being told of it. But Shri Ramakrishna persuaded Narendranath to stay in the world as long as he himself lived.

The condition of the family did not improve much. Narendranath could earn a little by working in an attorney’s office and translating some books; but he had to carry on a hand to mouth existence. He worked for some time in Vidyasagar’s school as a teacher but without much financial improvement. One day it struck him: Why not ask Shri Ramakrishna to pray to God for my sake and thus remove my pecuniary wants? It was believed that God listened to Shri Ramakrishna’s prayers. So Narendranath went to Shri Ramakrishna and told him his intention. Shri Ramakrishna said in reply: “Why don’t you go and ask Her yourself? All your sufferings are due to your disregard of the divine Mother.” Narendranath said: “But I do not know the Mother, you please speak to Her on my behalf. You must.” Shri Ramakrishna replied: “My dear boy, I have done so again and again. But as you do not accept
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Her, She does not grant my prayer. Go to the Kali temple tonight, and ask Her any boon you like. It will be granted."

It was a Tuesday, an auspicious day for the worship of the divine Mother. Narendranath went at the appointed hour. As he approached the image, he found it living and conscious. He was caught in a surging wave of devotion and love. He forgot to ask the boon for which he had gone there. Instead, he prayed for discrimination, renunciation, knowledge, devotion, and an uninterrupted vision of Her. He felt great peace within when he returned to the Master's room and told him what had happened. Advised by Shri Ramakrishna, he went a second time, but again the same thing happened. The third time, he was overcome with a sense of shame that he could have gone to Her for such a trifle. So he said: "Mother, I want nothing but knowledge and devotion." However, he could not forget the distressing poverty of his family. So he entreated Shri Ramakrishna to help him out of the predicament. At first the Master declined, saying that it was against his nature to pray for anyone's material advancement. But when Narendranath became insistent, he finally gave him an assurance that his people would not lack the bare necessities of life. After this incident, all Narendranath's opposition to Kali the Mother and to image worship vanished.

Thus, with infinite patience, Shri Ramakrishna calmed the rebellious spirit of Narendranath and led him from doubt to certainty and from anguish of mind to spiritual bliss. More than Shri Ramakrishna's spiritual guidance and support, it was his love for him that bound Narendranath to him for ever. Narendranath, too, in
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turn reciprocated in full measure the love and trust of the Master.

An incident which had some bearing on the future work of Narendra Nath may be mentioned here. Once, Shri Ramakrishna was expatiating on the triple precept of the Vaishnavas, namely, relish for the name of God, compassion for all creatures, and service to the Lord's devotees. When he came to compassion for all creatures, he said in a semi-conscious state, as if speaking to himself: "Thou fool! An insignificant worm crawling on earth, who art thou to show compassion? No, it is not compassion for others, but service to man, seeing in him the veritable manifestation of God." Narendra Nath who was near by, drew from these simple words, which went unnoticed by others present there, a world of meaning, and vowed to proclaim to the whole world the grand truth which he had discovered in them. It was then that he conceived his philosophy of practical Vedanta.

In the middle of 1885, Shri Ramakrishna developed cancer in the throat. For better treatment he was taken to a rented garden house at Cossipore, a northern suburb of Calcutta. The young disciples, under the leadership of Narendra Nath, took charge of nursing the Master. They gave up all thought of their studies for the time being, though that displeased their parents, and wholeheartedly devoted themselves to nursing the Master. In between, when they found time, they would gather to spend some time in meditation, holy study, divine songs, and scriptural discussion. Narendra Nath was a constant source of inspiration. They lived in a delightful atmosphere, and time passed unnoticed. Attracted by the pure and selfless love of Shri Ramakrishna, and the magnetic personality and fraternal affection of the leader, these
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young men\(^1\) were more closely knit together than any family. Though their number did not exceed twelve at that time, each one was by his consecration to the service of the Guru, a tower of strength.

One day, Narendranath heard the other disciples talking about the infectious nature of the disease, as the doctor told them. He saw at his feet the cup of gruel which had been partly taken by the Master and which would have contained the supposed germs of the fatal disease. He took it up and drank from it before them all. Henceforth there was no apprehension on the part of the disciples.

\(^1\) They were Narendranath, Rakhal, Baburam, Niranjan, Yogin, Latu, Tarak, Gopal Senior, Kali, Shashi, Sharat, and Gopal Junior. Sarada, on account of his father’s persecution, used to stay occasionally for a day or two Hari and Gangadhar visited at intervals, but practised tapasya at home. The monastic disciples assumed the following names after their ordination later at the Baranagore Math.

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* Though Hariprasanna joined the brotherhood later, we include him in the list for convenience.

Narendranath did not take any particular name at that time. He used to call himself variously, as Vividishananda, Sachchidananda, etc., in order to conceal his identity. So, we refer to him only as Narendranath till he assumed the now famous name of Vivekananda on the eve of his departure for the West in 1895 at the request of the Maharaja of Khetri. The other disciples are referred to by their monastic appellations.
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Shri Ramakrishna’s illness showed no signs of abatement in spite of the best treatment. As the Master’s end neared, Narendranath’s thirst for God-realisation increased. One day he entreated the Master for an experience of nirvikalpa samadhi, the highest realisation of Advaita Vedanta. He spoke to the Master in this strain: “I want to remain immersed in samadhi for three or four days, continuously, breaking it only for a little food.” But the Master reprimanded him: “Shame on you! You are seeking such an insignificant thing. There is a state higher than that even. Is it not you who sing, ‘Thou art all that exists?’ I thought you would be like a banyan, sheltering thousands from the scorching misery of the world. But now I see you seek your own liberation.” A few days later, however, Shri Ramakrishna blessed him with the experience of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. When the beloved disciple came back from that state, the Master said: “Now then, the Mother has shown you everything. Just as a treasure is locked in a box, so will this realisation be hidden from you and the key shall remain with me. You have work to do. When you have finished it, the treasure will be unlocked again, and you will know everything then just as you do now.”

One day Shri Ramakrishna distributed gerua clothes to the young disciples who were serving him, to signify that they were to become monks and the future apostles of the Ramakrishna Order. He then put them through a ceremony, and sent them out to beg their food. He later told Narendranath: “I leave them all to your care. See that they practise spiritual exercises even after my passing away and that they do not return home.”

Three or four days before the end, the Master called
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Narendranath to his side, and looking steadfastly on him entered into deep meditation. Narendranath felt a subtle force, resembling an electric shock, passing through his body, and he lost outward consciousness. When he returned to the normal state, Shri Ramakrishna told him, weeping: “O Naren, today I have given you my all and have become a fakir, a penniless beggar. By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you, only after that will you go to whence you came.”

At Cossipore also, as earlier at Dakshineswar, Shri Ramakrishna impressed on the other disciples the high plane of spirituality to which Narendranath belonged, and the mission he was born to fulfil. He often talked with Narendranath privately about the order of monks he was to organise, with the brother disciples as the nucleus. Narendranath was thus chosen and trained as the future leader of a spiritual regeneration.

Having finished his immediate task and being assured of a glorious future for the new movement, Shri Ramakrishna passed away on 16th August 1886.

THE BARANAGORE DAYS

After the death of the Master some of the young disciples returned home, under pressure from their guardians, and resumed their studies. Others went on pilgrimage. Three of them, however, stayed on at the Cossipore house until the expiry of its lease. When they were wondering what to do after that, Surendranath Mitra, one of the lay disciples of Shri Ramakrishna offered to contribute towards the maintenance of a monastery where the young disciples of the Master
could stay and continue their spiritual and devotional exercises, and where the householder disciples might now and then go for peace and solace. Accordingly, an old dilapidated house was rented at Baranagore, and two of the monastic disciples went to live there. Narendra Nath, who was busy conducting a law suit pending at the court, used to spend the night at the monastery. He exhorted the others to join the brotherhood.

At this time, the mother of Baburam (Premananda), one of the brother-disciples, invited them all to her house in Antpur. Most of them accepted the invitation. This brought them all together and bound them with a single purpose. Narendra Nath, the leader of the group, reminded them of the words of Shri Ramakrishna and spoke to them eloquently of the glory of the monastic life. Inspired by his words, they all resolved to renounce the world and become monks. One night, they all gathered round a huge fire in the open, with the intention of spending the whole night in prayer and meditation. In the stillness of that night, when they had meditated for a long time, Narendra Nath related to them the story of Jesus and appealed to them all to imitate Christ’s life and work, to realise God and deny themselves even as Christ had done, for the redemption of the world. Then and there they took the vows of Sannyasa, though the ritualistic formalities were gone through much later. What was their surprise when they discovered that it was Christmas Eve.

On returning to Calcutta, they renounced home once for all and joined the monastery. There they lived a life of severe austerity, meditation, study, and prayer. The centre of the math was, of course, the shrine room in
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which one of them, Shasi (Ramakrishnananda), had installed the Master's relics and worshipped him there, feeling his living presence. The monks would get up at three o'clock in the morning, and would be immersed in meditation. Their meditation would continue throughout the day and sometimes even during the late hours of the night. They lived on what chance brought to them. There were days when they had nothing to eat. For months they lived on boiled leaves of the bimba creeper, salt, and rice. They had only two pieces of kaupina (loin-cloth) for use in the monastery, and an ordinary piece of cloth and a Chaddar (upper garment) for outdoor work. They slept on straw mats spread on the bare ground. But these inconveniences mattered little; they were swept on by a wave of ecstatic love and devotion to the Master and the lofty ideals he preached.

Lest this devotion should become dammed up within the narrow limits of a creed or cult, the leader forced them to study the thought of the world outside. He himself instructed them in western and eastern philosophy, comparative religion, theology, history, sociology, literature, art, and science. He read out to them the great books of human thought, explained to them the evolution of the universal mind, discussed with them the problems of religion and philosophy, and led them indefatigably towards the wide horizons of the boundless truth which surpassed all limits of schools and races, and embraced and unified all particular truths. In the light of the teachings of Shri Ramakrishna, he reconciled the apparent contradictions between the various systems.

Thus the days passed in great joy at the monastery. But all the monks, except Shashi, felt restless for the life
of a wandering monk, and one by one they left the monastery in quest of solitude, depending entirely on the Lord. Narendranath, too, was eager to follow their footsteps. He was only restrained by his loyalty to the brotherhood at Baranagore, whose welfare Shri Ramakrishna had entrusted to his hands. When the desire became uncontrollable, he paid temporary visits to Vaidyanath, Simultala, Antpur, and other places in north India, mostly in the company of somebody, until he finally broke away from the monastery in 1891.

The Wandering Monk

Between the closing of 1888, when Narendranath first left on his temporary excursions, and the year 1891, when he parted from his brethren alone and as an unknown beggar, “to be swallowed up in the immensity of India”, there came over him a remarkable change in outlook. When he first left in 1888, it was mainly to fulfil the natural desire of an Indian monk for a life of solitude. But when he left the monastery in 1891, it was to fulfil a great destiny. By then he had realised that his was not to be the life of an ordinary recluse struggling for personal salvation. Many times he had tried it: he had entered the deepest of Himalayan forests to lose himself in the silent meditation of the Absolute. Every time he had failed. Something or other brought him back from the depths of meditation to the midst of the suffering masses, beset with a thousand and one miseries. The sickness of a brother monk, or the death of a devotee, or the poverty at the Baranagore monastery, was enough to disturb him. More than all, the fever of the age, the misery of the time, and the mute appeal issuing from
the millions in oppressed and downtrodden India pained his heart. He lived in anguish during that period, in a seething cauldron as it were, and carried within himself a soul on fire whose embers took years to cool down. As he moved from place to place in the north, and later on in the south, studying closely the life of the people in all strata of society, he was deeply moved. He wept to see the stagnant life of the Indian masses crushed down by ignorance and poverty, and the spell of materialistic ideas among the educated who blindly imitated the glamour of the West but who never felt that they were the cause of India’s degeneration and downfall. Spirituality was at a low discount in the very land of its birth. The picture of ancient India, once the envy of the world, came before his eyes vividly in all its grandeur and glory. The contrast was unbearable. Things should not be allowed to drift in this way. He visualised that India must become dynamic in all spheres of human activity and effect the spiritual conquest of the world, and he felt that he was the instrument chosen by the Lord to do it.

To resume the story, the first lap of his journey took him to Varanasi, Lucknow, Agra, Vrindaban, Hathras, and Rishikesh. At Varanasi, he met Pramadadas Mitra, a Sanskrit scholar with whom he was in correspondence regarding the Hindu social customs, the anomalies of the Hindu scriptures, the state of realisation, the authority of the Vedas, the injunctions of the Smritis, and other such subjects. At Hathras, he met his first disciple, Sharat Chandra Gupta (Swami Sadananda), to whom he revealed the mission entrusted to him by his Master, namely, the regeneration of India and the spiritual conquest of the world. Sharat, who was then the railway
station-master of the place and the host of his spiritual guide, then and there resigned his job and followed the Guru to help in his mission. They travelled together to Rishikesh, but had to return to Hathras owing to Sharat’s illness. At Hathras, the master himself fell sick. So they returned to Baranagore.

After a year, in 1889, Narendranath left for Vaidyanath and thence to Allahabad to nurse a sick monastic brother. From there he went to Ghazipur to meet Pavhari Baba, attracted by the saint’s pure and dedicated life. But he soon had to return to Calcutta. After two months’ stay at the Baranagore monastery, in July 1890, he took leave of Shri Sarada Devi and the brother monks, not to return until he had attained such realisation as would enable him to transform a person by mere touch.

Narendranath then started for Almora with Akhandananda. On the way he passed through Vaidyanath, Varanasi, Ayodhya, and Nainital. It was at Varanasi that he told Pramadadas Mitra: “When I shall return here next time, I shall burst upon society like a bombshell, and it will follow me like a dog.” How this declaration was fulfilled to the very letter is well known to all who know the later life story of Narendranath. At Nainital, he heard about the suicide of his sister under tragic circumstances, which made him ponder over the problems of Indian women. From Almora he visited Garhwal, Karnaprayag, Srinagar, Mussoorie, Dehra Dun, Rishikesh, Hardwar, and Meerut. He was accompanied by Saradananda, Akhandananda, and Vaikunthanath Sanyal (a householder disciple of Shri Ramakrishna). Swamis Turiyananda, Brahmananda, and Advaitananda joined the party at Mussoorie, Hardwar, and Meerut respectively. At Meerut, where they stayed for five
months, the leader took scriptural classes for the rest. Here, he surprised the librarian of the place by reading and mastering in one day Sir John Lubbock’s works. Now he was seized with a desire to lead a solitary life and he bade goodbye to his brother disciples. It was January 1891.

From Meerut he proceeded to Delhi under the name of Vividishananda, assumed by him to hide his identity. There he accidentally met some of his Gurubhais, whom he sternly told not to follow him. He asked them to strive for the goal according to their own light. He reached Alwar in February 1891, met the Maharaja of the place, and discussed with him the various problems of India. This Maharaja was not a believer in image worship. One day the Swami asked some of his subordinates, in the presence of the Maharaja, to spit upon the ruler’s photograph, saying that it was, after all, only paper. This horrified the subordinates, and it brought home to the Maharaja the rationale of image worship. While at Alwar, as in his wandering throughout the subcontinent, the Swami came in contact with the people of all strata, the rich and the poor, and exhorted the young students to study Sanskrit and western science, to revive the glory of the motherland, and to write an authentic history of the country following the scientific method of the West.

From Alwar the Swami went to Jaipur, where he studied with the help of a Pandit Patanjali’s Mahabhashya on grammar. The Pandit having failed to make clear to him the meaning of the first sutra even after three days, he began studying it by himself, and with his power of concentration was able to grasp the meaning in three hours. Then he went to Ajmer. The summer
months of 1891 were spent at Mt. Abu. There he came in contact with the Maharaja of Khetri, who became his disciple, and remained one of the staunchest supporters of his work. He went to Khetri at the Maharaja’s invitation, and resumed his study of Mahabhashya under another Pandit.

Then the Swami journeyed to Ahmedabad, where he lived on alms for several days, and with the help of Jain scholars enriched his knowledge of Jainism. He then visited Limdi, Junagadh, Bhuj, Kutch, Porbander and other important places in Western India and became acquainted with many princes and Dewans. The Dewan of Junagadh became a fast friend of his. At Porbander, where he arrived after visiting Veraval and Somnath (Prabhas), he stayed for eleven months, and helped the Dewan of the place, Pandit Shankar Pandurang, in translating the Vedas. He completed his study of the Mahabhashya, and learnt French at the instance of the Dewan, who suggested to him to go to the West, where his ideas were likely to be better appreciated. Hearing about the Parliament of Religions to be held at Chicago he expressed to his host at Porbander his desire to attend it.

In the last week of July 1892, he reached Bombay via Baroda and Khandwa, and left for Poona after a week. At Poona he stayed with Bala Gangadhar Tilak for a few days. His next halt was Kolhapur, where, too, he was the guest of the Maharaja. From there he went to Belgaum and thence to Bangalore. At Bangalore he lived in obscurity for some time, until he met the Dewan, K. Sheshadri Iyer. The Dewan was charmed by the Swami’s magnetic personality, his wide learning, and deep insight, and invited him to be his guest.
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After three or four days, the Swami found himself the guest of the Maharaja of Mysore, Chamaraja Wadiar. In his talks with the Maharaja, he unburdened the heavy load he was, as it were, carrying on his head, and expressed his intention of going to the West to get funds to ameliorate the material condition of India. The Maharaja offered to bear the expenses. The Swami addressed an assembly of Pandits at Mysore palace on Vedanta. From Bangalore, he went to Trichur and Trivandrum. Then he visited Kanyakumari where, sitting on the prominent rock away from the coast, he reviewed his experiences during his wanderings and meditated deeply on the problems of India. The past, the present, and the future of India, the causes of her downfall, the means of her resurrection—all these flashed through his mind, and he took the momentous decision to go to the West to raise funds for the uplift of the Indian masses, by giving in exchange the rich spiritual treasures that India had accumulated through centuries, and which he himself had inherited from his Master. With this decision he proceeded to Madurai where he met the Raja of Ramnad, who became his disciple. The Raja also urged him to go to the West and offered him every help he could. Then he visited Rameshwaram.

From there he journeyed to Madras on foot. At Madras, a group of young men, headed by Alasinga Perumal, was eagerly waiting his arrival. On the way he visited Pondicherry. The young men, who had already heard about the Swami and intuitively recognised his greatness, welcomed him with great joy. In Madras he met eminent persons from various walks of life—lawyers, judges, college professors, Sanskrit
Pandits, members of the social reform movement—and with them he discussed different topics affecting the welfare of the country. He also revealed to them his intention of going to the West to attend the Parliament of Religions to be convened at Chicago. The group of young men who became his disciples whole-heartedly approved the idea, and encouraged him in the plan. They raised a subscription for his travel abroad. But he asked them to distribute it to the poor as he was not yet quite sure whether the plan was in accordance with the divine Will. A symbolic dream convinced him that he had the needed sanction. He saw the figure of Shri Ramakrishna walking from the seashore into the ocean beckoning him to follow. Further, the Holy Mother, Shri Sarada Devi, to whom he wrote for approval and blessings, communicated to him her consent and good wishes.

In the meantime, the young disciples again started raising subscriptions. Alasinga Perumal begged from door to door, mostly from the middle class people; for the Swami had told him: “If it is the Mother's will that I should go, then let me receive the money from the people. Because it is for the people of India's sake that I am going to the West—for the people and the poor.” The Swami paid a short visit to Hyderabad at the invitation of his friends and returned to Madras on 17th February 1893. In Hyderabad, he gave his first public lecture, “My Mission to the West”.

While arrangements were being made for sailing, a sudden invitation came from the Maharaja of Khetri to go to his place, with the assurance that he would do everything for the trip. The Swami agreed to this. With the Maharaja he went to Jaipur, and from there
he left for Bombay alone. On the way to Bombay he halted for a night at the house of a railway employee, one of his hosts during his wandering days. At Mt. Abu he met Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda, to whom he said with great feeling: “I travelled all over India. But, alas, it was agony to me, my brothers, to see the terrible poverty of the masses, and I could not restrain my tears. It is now my firm conviction that to preach religion to them without trying to remove their poverty and suffering is futile. It is for this reason—to find means for the salvation of the poor of India—that I am going to America.” To Turiyananda he said with profound sorrow and intense emotion: “Haribhai, I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion. But my heart has expanded very much, and I have learnt to feel (the sufferings of others). Believe me, I feel it very sadly.”

The Swami sailed from Bombay on 31st May 1893. Alasinga Perumal, his devoted disciple, was there to bid him farewell. For it was the disciples of Madras and the Rajas of Ramnad and Mysore who had helped him financially for the voyage. Their help was complemented by the Maharaja of Khetri who gave him a first class ticket and a purse, and an outfit of clothing. Also, the Maharaja of Khetri requested him to assume the beautiful name, Vivekananda, by which he has become famous all over the world.

His First Journey to the West and the Parliament of Religions

On the way, the ship touched Colombo, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Nagasaki, Kobe, and Yokohama, before she reached Vancouver in British
Columbia. The Swami took advantage of the three days' halt at Hong Kong to visit the Buddhist monasteries at Canton. He was agreeably surprised to find in Chinese and Japanese temples Sanskrit inscriptions in old Bengali characters. The distance from Kobe to Yokohama he covered by the land route, to visit on the way the premier cities of Japan, Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo. He was greatly impressed by the industrial progress made by Japan.

The Swami arrived in Vancouver shivering for want of warm clothing. Neither he nor the disciples in Madras, nor the Maharaja of Khetri, had any idea of the cold weather there. Greater surprises were awaiting him at Chicago. He reached Chicago by train after three days, and he was bewildered like a child. Next day he went to the World's Fair and marvelled at the power, riches, and inventive genius of the western world. For twelve days he watched with eager eyes the panorama of the latest machinery and products of art exhibited there. Then he visited the information bureau of the Universal Exposition to inquire about the details of the Parliament of Religions. He was shocked to learn that the Parliament was not to commence till after the first week of September and that no delegate would be admitted without proper credentials from a bona fide organisation. He further learnt that the time for admittance and registration of delegates was over. It was only the middle of July and the Swami had not with him any credentials whatever. He blamed himself for having foolishly listened to those "sentimental schoolboys of Madras", to none of whom it had occurred to make the necessary inquiries before sending him to such a distant land. They, in their
unbounded enthusiasm and faith, had taken it for granted that their Swami had only to appear and he would be given a chance. The Swami, too, did not foresee the difficulties in the way, as he was sure he was moving towards the fulfilment of a divine mission. Added to all this, to live in Chicago was very costly and he did not have enough money. He was, however, determined not to give up till the end, and Providence came to his rescue in a mysterious way.

He heard that living was cheaper at Boston, and decided to go there. On his way to Boston, a rich fellow-traveller in the train, Miss Katherine Abbott Sanborn, was attracted by his personality. She was pleased to learn the purpose of his coming to America and invited him to live in her village home, “Breezy Meadows”, in Massachusetts, near Boston, until something better turned up. This invitation was a godsend for the Swami. His hostess used the Swami as a curio from India to be shown to her guests, but among them was Professor J. H. Wright of the Greek department of Harvard University. After a four-hour conversation with the Swami, the Professor was so impressed by his learning and wisdom that he took it upon himself to get him admitted to the Parliament of Religions as a delegate. He exclaimed: “To ask you, Swami, for your credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine!” He wrote to the Chairman of the Committee for the selection of delegates, who happened to be his friend: “Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together.” He also gave him letters of introduction to the committee in charge of housing and providing for the oriental delegates, and purchased a ticket for the Swami for Chicago.
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Unfortunately, when the Swami arrived at Chicago he found to his dismay that he had lost the address of the committee. Nobody cared to direct him. It was late at night, and he decided to sleep in a huge empty box in the railway freight-yard. In the morning, he set out to find his way. Soon, he was in one of the rich quarters of the city. Extremely tired and hungry, he sought help from house to house, as a Sannyasin would. Seeing his soiled clothes and worn-out appearance, the servants in some of the houses treated him rudely, and in some others slammed the door in his face. After some time, exhausted and resigning himself to the will of God, he sat down on the roadside. Just then, the door of a fashionable residence opposite opened, and a lady of regal appearance accosted him. Guessing that he was a delegate to the Parliament of Religions, she invited him to her house and attended to his immediate needs. Later, when the Swami had eaten and rested, she took him to the offices of the Parliament of Religions. He was accepted as a delegate and soon lodged with the other oriental delegates. The lady who went to the help of the Swami was Mrs. Hale, wife of Mr. George W. Hale. The husband and wife, whom the Swami used to address as "Father Pope" and "Mother Church" respectively, and their daughters, ever remained the Swami’s most faithful friends. Some of the finest letters that the Swami wrote were to Miss Mary Hale, with whom he had closest relationship, and he always stayed with the Hale family whenever he went to Chicago in later years.

The Parliament of Religions was an adjunct of the World’s Columbian Exposition, organised to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of
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America by Christopher Columbus. One of the goals of the Exposition was to disseminate and enlighten the public on the progress made in the West in various branches of knowledge, especially in modern science and technology. Religion being an important factor in human civilisation a Parliament of Religions was summoned in conjunction with the Exposition.

The first session of the Parliament was held on Monday, 11th September 1893, in the spacious hall of the Art Palace; and its huge galleries were packed with nearly 7,000 people—men and women representing the best culture of the country. Representatives of all organised religions—Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Shintoism, Mohammedanism, and Mazdaism—were there, and amongst them was Swami Vivekananda, who represented no particular sect. The Swami represented nothing and yet everything. There was a grand procession of delegates. Cardinal Gibbons, the highest Prelate of the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S.A., opened the meeting with a prayer and, after that, Dr. Barrows, the Chairman, introduced the delegates one by one. All of them, except Swami Vivekananda, read prepared speeches. The Swami was addressing a huge assembly for the first time, and his heart was fluttering and his tongue dried up. He was so nervous that he did not speak in the morning session. He went on postponing the summons from the chair.

In the end, when he could no longer put off his turn, he stepped up to the rostrum and, in his mind, bowing down to Saraswati Devi, began to speak. No sooner had he addressed the assembly “Sisters and Brothers of America” than there was deafening applause lasting for
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full two minutes. The audience rose as one man to express heartfelt appreciation for the warm feelings which those five simple words conveyed to them. Others addressed them in the set way, but the Swami touched the deepest cord of their hearts by discarding the formality and stressing the kinship of humanity with such sincerity. After the applause had subsided, the Swami made a brief speech. He greeted the youngest of the nations in the name of the most ancient monastic order in the world—the Vedic order of Sannyasins—and in the name of Hinduism, the mother of religions, and her followers. He spoke of the special message of Hinduism, her tolerance and spirit of universality, mentioning how she had practically demonstrated this through the centuries by giving shelter to the persecuted of all religions. He pleaded for the adoption of this spirit of universal brotherhood by the other religions, too, and the termination of sectarianism, bigotry, and fanaticism. When he ended, a tremendous ovation ensued, and he sat down exhausted with emotion. The next day, all the papers lionised him as the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions and declared in their columns that his speech was the best. He became known to the whole of the United States of America.

In his subsequent speeches in the Parliament, five in all, he again and again reiterated his theme of universal toleration, every time presenting it with new arguments and greater emphasis. In the final session on 27th September, he concluded his lecture with these words: “Holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, . . . every system has produced men and women of the most
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exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: ‘Help and not Fight’, ‘Assimilation and not Destruction’, ‘Harmony and Peace and not-Dissension’.” (Complete Works, I, p. 24). The West came to know India through his speeches. But India’s gain also was not less remarkable. In a paper on Hinduism read on the 19th, he spoke on the salient religious ideas of the Hindus. In the process, he had re-created Hinduism. Besides, his success made India conscious of her greatness.

The Swami, however, did not take this as a personal triumph. Although he had become famous overnight, and the doors of the rich were open to him, he wept over his victory, remembering his people at home, sunk in poverty and ignorance, for whose sake he had come to America. On the very night of his success, as he retired to bed, he cried out in despair, rolling in agony on the ground: “O Mother, what do I care for name and fame, when my motherland remains sunk in utmost poverty! To what a sad pass have we, poor Indians, come when millions of us die for want of a handful of rice, and here they spend millions of rupees upon their personal comfort. Who will raise the masses of India? Who will give them bread? Show me, O Mother, how I can help them!”

WORK IN AMERICA

In order to further the cause of India and to free himself from obligation to his wealthy friends, he-
accepted the offer of a lecture bureau for a lecture tour of America. He thought that that would help him also in spreading his ideas. The tour took him round the large cities in the Eastern and Mid-Western States. Everywhere, people flocked to hear him. His speeches, delivered extempore, were mostly devoted to the exposition of religion and philosophy as preached and practised by the Hindus through the centuries. He also explained to the American audiences the Hindu manners, customs, and religious practices, removing some of the misconceptions spread through the monstrous and fantastic stories told by the Christian missionaries. The Swami also spoke with great reverence on Christ and his teachings and the valuable contribution of the West to the culture and civilisation of the world. He did not hide his admiration for the tremendous progress the West had made in the fields of industry and economics, as well as for the western democratic social system with equal opportunity for everyone. While he was never sparing in his praise of the good side of western civilisation, the hollowness of the western society—the tears behind the peal of laughter—became more and more apparent to him as he moved from city to city. He was mercilessly critical of the defects in European culture—the signs of brutality, inhumanity, pettiness, arrogance, and ignorance of other cultures—as he was severe in his criticism of the defects of Indian social customs like untouchability and other allied evils during his lectures from Colombo to Almora after his return from the West in 1897. The Swami’s remarks on the insincerity of some of the Christian leaders and his reference to false Christianity enraged some Christian missionaries,
who started vilifying him. Some Indians, too, jealous of the Swami's success in the Parliament of Religions joined the missionaries in their false propaganda. The Swami remained calm and unperturbed in the midst of these provocations, trusting in the ancient maxim: Truth alone triumphs, not falsehood.

The lecture tour gave the Swami an opportunity to see the different aspects of western life at close quarters. The vision of a mighty future civilisation in which the best in the East and in the West would be harmoniously blended began to flit across his mind. The Swami, however, soon became sick of what he termed "the nonsense of public life and newspaper blazoning". The lecture bureau had been advertising him as a curio and exploiting him fully to its own advantage; he received only a negligible portion of the collections made at his lectures. He felt disgusted with the bureau's behaviour and severed his connection with it. Besides, he found out that the interest he had created among the public was superficial; that was not what he wanted. Now he desired to teach only earnest students freely, living independently in a place of his own. He decided to arrange his lectures directly, free of charge, himself paying for the expenses. He accepted invitations from churches, clubs, and private gatherings, and travelled extensively through the eastern and mid-western States of America, delivering twelve to fourteen or more lectures a week. In Detroit, where he was the guest of Mrs. John J. Bagley and Mr. Thomas W. Palmer, he met Miss Greenstidell, who later became his disciple adopting the name Sister Christine and dedicating herself for life to his cause and work in India. In the summer months, he delivered a series of lectures at the
“Greenacre Conference”, arranged by the Christian Scientists, spiritualists, faith healers, and others of that sort. He also taught Vedanta at Greenacre to a group of sincere students, sitting under a pine tree, in the Indian way. Invited by Dr. Lewis G. Janes, the president of the Brooklyn Ethical Association, he spoke on the Hindu religion before that Association. Between February and June 1895, he took classes in New York on Raja-Yoga and Jnana-Yoga. In June 1895, he had finished dictating to Miss S. E. Waldo, his famous book Raja-Yoga. Miss Waldo became a disciple, taking the name Sister Haridasi. The Swami acquired at New York some of his lifelong friends and admirers. Among them were Mrs. Ole Bull, wife of the celebrated Norwegian violinist; Miss Josephine MacLeod, who remained his staunch friend and helper in his cause; and Leon Landsberg and Madame Marie Louise, who were of great help during his first days in New York and who became his sannyasi disciples later at Thousand Island Park as Swamis Kripananda and Abhayananda respectively. The other notables whom the Swami met at New York were: Nicolas Tesla, the great electrician, Sir William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin), and Professor Helmholtz, two leading western scientists; Sarah Bernhardt, the famous French actress who greatly admired his teachings, and Madame Emma Calvé, a well-known prima donna, who described the Swami as one who “truly walked with God”.

Thus the Swami’s western work took him gradually beyond his original plan, which was just to raise money for the uplift of the Indian masses. He realised that his services could not be confined within narrow limits. He wrote to his disciples who were urging him to return
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to India: “I have helped you all as I could. You must now help yourselves. What country has any special claim on me? Am I a nation’s slave? I do not care whether they are Hindus, or Mohammedans, or Christians, but those that love the Lord will always command my service.” He gave away most of his earnings through lectures to the charitable institutions there in America and asked his friends to do the same. He wholeheartedly devoted himself to the service of the West.

This attitude, however, was no mere vol tep face. It arose from the fact that he had become conscious of the full significance of his life’s work. His mission was to the whole world, not to India only. He realised that his task was to preach the fundamental universal principles of religion, and to preach them to all countries. Later he was to assure India that only if she clung to those universal principles, which were her birthright, would her poverty and other problems be solved. To these universal principles he gave the name “Vedanta”, which had not previously been given such a wide connotation. As Miss Marie Burke writes in Swami Vivekananda in America: “Never before had it been broadened into a philosophy and religion which included every faith of the world and every noble effort of man—reconciling spirituality and material advancement, faith and reason, science and mysticism, work and contemplation, service to man and absorption in God. Never before had it been conceived as the one universal religion, by accepting the principles of which the follower of any or no creed could continue along his own path and at the same time be able to identify himself with every other creed and aspect of religion.” (p. 677).
The Herculean task of teaching Vedanta in a foreign land had completely worn him out; he needed rest badly. So, on the invitation of Mr. Francis H. Leggett, he went for a short stay at Percy, New Hampshire. Thence he proceeded to Thousand Island Park on the St. Lawrence where, at the earliest request of a few students, who were ready to put aside all other interests to study Vedanta, he agreed to hold classes for them. One of the students, Miss Dutcher, had offered her cottage for the purpose. There, under ideal surroundings, he taught those intimate students. The subjects discussed in that heavenly atmosphere surcharged with his spirituality were many. The Swami expounded to them such precious texts as the Bhagavad-Gita and the Narada-Bhakti-Sutras, with his mind always absorbed in Brahman. He himself said later that he was at his best at Thousand Island Park. One of the students records: "Of the wonderful weeks that followed, it is difficult to write. Only if one's mind were lifted to that high state of consciousness in which we lived for the time, could one hope to recapture the experience. We were filled with joy. . . . On the wings of inspiration, he carried us to the height which was his natural abode. . . . His first overwhelming desire was to show us the path of Mukti, to set us free. . . . His second object . . . was to train this group to carry on the work in America." There he reached one of his loftiest heights; the students saw ideas unfold and flower. He sought to awaken the heroic energy of the souls placed in his hands. He said: "If I could only set you free with a touch!" And how many were helped to freedom during his lifetime; Besides, the number of those who are being inspired to divinity by
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his immortal message is on the increase as time rolls on.

After seven weeks of "inspired talks", he returned to New York by steamer. In the meantime, preparations were afoot for the Swami's departure for England in response to the invitations of Miss Henrietta Muller and Mr. E. T. Sturdy. Mr. Francis H. Leggett of New York, a wealthy businessman and a friend of the Swami, also invited him to go on a trip to Paris and to England as his guest. The Swami himself felt the need to preach Vedanta in England. So he arrived in London in September 1895, after a short visit to Paris. Soon, he started his classes, interviews, and public lectures which became popular. Miss Margaret E. Noble, who was running a school in Wimbledon, was among those who were greatly impressed by the teaching. Later, she became his disciple, and the Swami named her Nivedita (the dedicated one). She followed the Swami to India and worked for the education of Indian women.

The Swami returned to New York on 6th December, after three months' absence. He started classes on Karma-Yoga, living in an apartment with Swami Kripananda. He worked for two weeks incessantly, giving as many as seventeen lectures a week, besides carrying on a voluminous correspondence and granting numerous private interviews.

The Swami's lectures were always extempore. The disciples were eager to have them recorded. So they appointed Mr. J. J. Goodwin, a fast stenographer, who had just come to New York from England. Enlightened by the thought he was recording and transcribing, Goodwin refused remuneration, saying: "If Vivekananda gives his life, the least I can do is to give my
service." He worked day and night, accompanied the Swami wherever he went, and even attended to the Swami's personal needs. He took the vow of Brahmacharya, and followed the Swami to India.

The Swami spent the Christmas of 1895 with Mrs. Ole Bull at Boston. There he met Professor William James of Harvard University, who regarded him as a paragon of Vedantists and addressed him as "Master". The Swami gave a series of lectures in Brooklyn. At New York his famous lectures on Bhakti-Yoga were delivered. In February 1896, he ordained Dr. Street into sannyasa, giving him the name of Yogananda. The Harvard and Columbia Universities offered him the Chair of Eastern Philosophy, which he refused being a monk. By the spring of 1896, invitations came requesting him to revisit England. The earlier months of that year were spent in consolidating the work he had done. A concrete result of his New York work was the establishment of a Vedanta Society there, under the presidency of Mr. Francis H. Leggett.

The Swami had seen by now the best and the worst of both the East and the West. He was now convinced that each had something to learn from the other. "I believe that the Hindu faith has developed the spiritual at the expense of the material," he said, "and I think that in the West the contrary is true. By uniting the materialism of the West with the spiritualism of the East, I believe much can be accomplished." In Detroit, he said: "May not one combine the energy of the lion and the gentleness of the lamb? Perhaps, the future holds the conjunction of the East and the West, a combination which would be productive of marvellous results." The problem was how to harmonise everv-
thing without sacrificing anything. He had in his mind the plan of bringing his brother disciples to teach and preach Vedanta in America, and taking some of his American and English disciples to teach science, industry, economics, applied sociology, organisation, and co-operation in India. Swami Saradananda had already arrived in London, and Swami Abhedananda was to come. That, however, would not go far unless there was a complete and thorough reorganisation of the great religious and philosophical thought of India on a sound national and universal basis. Then alone could Indian thought recover its dynamic drive and progressive power to advance and spiritualise the West. For this purpose, he seriously thought of writing a book. He revealed this idea of his to Alasinga, his disciple, thus: “Now, I will tell you my discovery. All of religion is contained in Vedanta, that is, the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy—the Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary. This is the essential of religion. The Vedanta applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India is Hinduism. The first stage, Dvaita, applied to the idea of ethnic groups of Europe is Christianity; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism. The Advaita as applied in its Yoga perception form is Buddhism, etc. Now by religion is meant Vedanta. The application must vary according to the different needs, surroundings, and other circumstances of different nations. ...I wish to write a book on this subject; therefore, I want the three Bhashyas.” (Ibid. V, 82-83). He wrote to Mr. Sturdy: “I quite agree with you that only the Advaita philosophy can save
mankind, whether in East or West, from devil worship and kindred superstitions, giving tone and strength to the very nature of man.” (Ibid., VIII, 337).

SECOND VISIT TO LONDON

The Swami sailed for England for the second time on 15th April 1896. This visit of his was marked by three important events: first, his lectures on Jnana-Yoga which were later published in book form; second, his meeting with Professor Max Müller, the German Sanskritist and Indologist; and third, the Seviers’ becoming his disciples.

The Jnana-Yoga lectures were delivered in the beginning of May 1896. The Swami met the Indologist on 28th May. The professor had already written an article for the *Nineteenth Century* entitled “The Real Mahatman” which was later elaborated into *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*. Greatly impressed by Professor Max Müller, the Swami contributed an article to the *Brahmavadin* describing the meeting.

The Seviers’ acquaintance with the Swami came about thus. After listening to one of the Swami’s lectures, Captain Sevier, a retired officer of the British army, asked Miss MacLeod: “You know this young man? Is he what he seems?” Miss MacLeod answered: “Yes.” “In that case, one must follow him and with him find God”, said Mr. Sevier. The Captain, with his wife, had sought the highest truth in various sects and creeds, but nowhere could they find it. He went to his wife and asked her: “Will you let me become the Swami’s disciple?” “Yes,” she said, and asked him in turn: “Will you let me become the Swami’s
disciple?" "I am not so sure!" replied her husband with affectionate humour. The very first time the Swami met Mrs. Sevier, he addressed her as "Mother", and asked her if she would not like to go to India. He told her, "I will give you my best realisations." The couple forthwith resolved to follow the Swami to India. The Swami was exhausted with the heavy work in London, and so at the end of July, the Seviers and Miss Henrietta Muller took him to the Continent for a holiday tour. They passed through Dover and Calais, and visited Paris, Geneva, the famous retreat of Chamounix, and the glacier Mer-de-Glace. In the Alps, the Swami enjoyed himself thoroughly. "Never have I seen the Swami to such advantage. He seemed to communicate spirituality by a look or a touch", related Mrs. Sevier later. It was to the Seviers, while travelling in the Alps that the Swami expressed his desire to have a monastery in the Himalayas, where he would retire at the end of his life, and where his eastern and western disciples would live and practise and train themselves to work for the spiritual and material uplift of the West and the East respectively. The Seviers took up the idea as the mission of their life and gave shape to it by founding the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati.

After visiting some other places in Switzerland, they went to Kiel where they met Paul Deussen, the renowned Indologist and Professor of Philosophy at the Kiel University. On the way they halted at Lucerne, Zermatt, Schaffhausen, Heidelberg, Coblenz, Cologne, and Berlin. Deussen and the Swami discussed many topics of common interest. Deussen took the Swami round the city. After nearly six weeks' holiday the Swami and party returned to London, via Hamburg.
and Amsterdam, and he resumed his classes and lectures. He was very much impressed by the work of this period. "In England, my work is really splendid", he wrote to a disciple in Madras.

RETURN OF THE HERO

Though the Swami was completely absorbed in his work in the West, he never forgot about his original mission. He was constantly in correspondence with his disciples in Madras and elsewhere, guiding, instructing, and encouraging them to push on with the work in India. In his immortal letters, detailed instructions were given about organising the work. To quote only a few of his inspiring words: "Work hard, be steady, and have faith in the Lord. . . . Keep the motto before you—'Elevation of the masses without injuring their religion'. . . 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? . . . 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." (Complete Works, 1963, V. 29-30). "I believe that the Satya Yuga (Golden Age) will come when there will be one caste, one Veda, and peace, and harmony. This idea of Satya Yuga is what would revivify India. Believe it." (ibid., 31) "Believe, believe, the decree has gone forth, the fiat of the Lord has gone forth—India must rise, the masses and the poor are to be made happy. Rejoice that you are the chosen instruments in His hands. The flood of spirituality has risen." (ibid., 35) "A huge spiritual tidal wave is coming
—he who is low shall become noble, and he who is ignorant shall become the teacher of great scholars—through His grace. . . . He alone is a child of Shri 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 when at the point of death. . . . Propagate his character, his teachings, his religion. This is the only spiritual practice, the only worship, this verily is the means, and this the goal. . . . Onward! Onward! There is not time to care for name, or fame, or Mukti, or Bhakti! We shall look to these some other time. . . . I only tell you this, that whoever reads this letter will imbibe my spirit! Have faith!” (ibid., VI. 294-95). “Onward, my lads! The whole world requires light. It is expectant! India alone has that light, not in magic mummeries, and charlatanism, but in the teachings of the glories of the spirit of real religion—of the highest spiritual truth. That is why the Lord has preserved the race through all its vicissitudes unto the present day. . . . Have faith that you are all, my brave lads, born to do great things.” (ibid., V. 43). “Shall India die? Then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all moral perfection will be extinct, all sweet-souled sympathy 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. . . . India will be raised, not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit; not with the flag of
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destruction, but with the flag of peace and love; ... not by the power of wealth, but by the power of the begging bowl. ... But one vision I see clear as life before me is that the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on Her throne—rejuvenated, more glorious than ever. (ibid., IV. 348, 352, 353).

In the middle of November 1896, he suddenly decided that he must go back to India. So he asked Mrs. Sevier, after a class talk, to book their berths for India from Naples by the earliest steamer available. On 16th December the Swami left London with the Seviers and visited Dover, Calais, Mont Cenis, City of Pisa, Florence, Rome, Vesuvius, and Pompeii, before taking the boat at Naples on 30th December 1896. In Rome, at St. Peter’s, he was struck by the resemblance between the Christian liturgy and the Indian ceremonies. At Naples, Mr. Goodwin joined the party, and they arrived in Colombo on 15th January 1897.

The news of the Swami’s return had already reached India. He was no longer the unknown, wandering Sannyasin. The great work he had done for India in the West had become known throughout India. From Colombo to Madras, in all the important cities, committees consisting of all sections of the society had been formed to accord him a fitting reception. Two of his brother disciples and others from the north hastened to Ceylon and to Madras to receive him. Everywhere, people gathered in hundreds to have his darshana and pay him homage. There were grand processions along richly decorated streets strewn with flowers; and triumphal arches, religious chants, addresses of welcome, and suitable replies by the Swami were the order of the day. Incense was burnt before the houses, and the
sacred water of the Ganga and rose water were sprinkled on him. The newspapers carried editorials on the Swami. At Ramnad, where he arrived on 26th January, the Raja of Ramnad himself drew the carriage in which the Swami was being taken in procession. Inspired by the Swami’s message, he fed thousands of the poor. But the grandest reception awaited the hero at Madras, where the admirers were expecting him for weeks in feverish excitement. Madras had been mainly instrumental in sending the Swami to the West, and so it was but natural that that city should give him a hero’s reception. He was taken in procession through the streets which were profusely decorated with triumphal arches, flags, festoons, and flowers. Thousands gathered in the streets just to have a look at him, and during his stay there he was presented with twenty-four addresses of welcome in various languages. The horses of the carriage in which he was conducted were unharnessed, and the citizens themselves drew it. The public life of the city was suspended for nine days. He was accommodated in the Castle Kernan, a palatial building belonging to Mr. Biligiri Iyengar.

All along the route of his tour, specially in Jaffna and Kumbakonam, he gave inspiring lectures, reminding the people of the glory of India’s past and exhorting them to apply themselves to the task of raising her to her ancient splendour. But it was in Madras that he gave full expression to his ideas. On the third day after his arrival, a public address of welcome was presented to him at the Victoria Hall, but it was too small to contain the large gathering. The Swami at the insistent demand of the enthusiastic public waiting outside, spoke to them in the open from the top of a
coach in "the Gita fashion", urging them to maintain their enthusiasm and utilise it for the service of India. During his stay in Madras the Swami gave five public lectures, the subjects selected being "My Plan of Campaign", "The Sages of India", "Vedanta in Its Relation to Practical Life", "The Work before Us", and "The Future of India". In these, the Swami addressed the whole of India, and here one finds his message to India expressed in the most inspiring language.

Let us listen to a few of his soul-stirring words: "I see that each nation, like each individual, has one theme in this life, which is its centre, the principal note round which every other note comes to form the harmony. In one nation political power is its vitality, as in England, artistic life in another, and so on. In India, religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life. . . . Therefore, if you succeed in the attempt to throw off your religion and take up either politics, or society, or any other things as your centre, as the vitality of your national life, the result will be that you will become extinct. . . . Every man has to make his own choice; so has every nation. We made our choice ages ago, and we must abide by it. And, after all, it is not such a bad choice. Is it such a bad choice in this world to think not of matter but of spirit, not of man but of God? . . . The first work that demands our attention is that the most wonderful truths confined in our Upanishads, in our scriptures, in our Puranas, must be brought out from the books, brought out from the monasteries, brought out from the forests, brought out from the possession of selected bodies of people, and scattered broadcast all over the land, so that these truths may run like fire all
over the country. . . . my plan is to start institutions in India, to train our young men as preachers of the truths of our scriptures in India and outside India. Men, men, these are wanted; everything else will be ready, but strong, vigorous, believing young men, sincere to the backbone, are wanted. A hundred such and the world becomes revolutionised. . . . For centuries people have been taught theories of degradation. They have been told that they are nothing. The masses have been told all over the world that they are not human beings. They have been so frightened for centuries, till they have nearly become animals. Never were they allowed to hear of the Atman. Let them hear of the Atman. . . . Let them have faith in themselves. . . . What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel. We have wept long enough. . . . stand on your feet and be men. It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want. And here is the test of truth—anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually, reject as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity. truth is all-knowledge; truth must be strengthening. must be enlightening, must be invigorating. . . . I love my nation, I cannot see you degraded, weakened any more than you are now. Therefore I am bound for your sake and for truth's sake to cry, 'Hold!' and to raise my voice against this degradation of my race. Give up these weakening mysticisms and be strong. Go back to your Upanishads—the shining, the strengthening, the bright philosophy—and part from all these mysterious things, all these weakening things. Take
up this philosophy; the greatest truths are the simplest things in the world, simple as your own existence. The truths of the Upanishads are before you. Take them up, live up to them, and the salvation of India will be at hand." (Ibid., III. 220-25).

"Bring all light into the world. Light, bring light! Let light come unto everyone; the task will not be finished till everyone has reached the Lord. Bring light to the poor; and bring more light to the rich, for they require it more than the poor. Bring light to the ignorant, and more light to the educated, for the vanities of the education of our time are tremendous! Thus bring light to all and leave the rest unto the Lord, for in the words of the same Lord, 'I to work you have the right and not to the fruits thereof.' 'Let not your work produce results for you, and at the same time may you never be without work.' " (Ibid., 247).

"We must have a hold on the spiritual and secular education of the nation. ... Till then there is no salvation for the race. The education that you are getting ... is not a man-making education, it is merely and entirely a negative education. A negative education or any training that is based on negation, is worse than death. The child is taken to the school, and the first thing he learns is that his father is a fool, the second thing that his grandfather is a lunatic, the third thing that all his teachers are hypocrites, the fourth that all the sacred books are lies! By the time he is sixteen he is a mass of negation, lifeless and boneless. And the result is that fifty years of such education has not produced one original man in the three Presidencies. ... Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot.
there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-
building, man-making, character-making, assimilation
of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made
them your life and character, you have more education
than any man who has got by heart a whole library.
. . . The ideal, therefore, is that we must have the
whole education of our country, spiritual and secular,
in our own hands, and it must be on national lines
through national methods as far as practical.” (ibid.,
301-02).

Having given a definite direction to the enthusiasm
of the people in such stirring words, the Swami sailed
for Calcutta, arriving there on Monday, 15th February
1897. In Calcutta also he was given a grand welcome
and reception. In his reply to the address of welcome
given him on the following day by the citizens of
Calcutta, he paid a touching tribute to his Master,
Shri Ramakrishna. He said: “If there has been any-
thing achieved by me, by thoughts, or words, or deeds,
if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped
anyone in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was his.
But if there have been curses falling from my lips, if
there has been hatred coming out of me, it is all mine
and not his. All that has been weak has been mine,
and all that has been life-giving, strengthening, pure,
and holy, has been his inspiration, his words, and he
himself. . . . Through thousands of years of chiselling
and modelling, the lives of the great prophets of vore
come down to us: and yet, in my opinion, not one
stands so high in brilliance as that life which I saw
with my own eyes, under whose shadow I have lived, at
whose feet I have learnt everything—the life of Rama-
krishna Paramahamsa. . . . If this nation wants to rise,
take my word for it, it will have to rally enthusiastically round his name. . . . Judge him not through me. I am only a weak instrument. Let not his character be judged by seeing me. It was so great that if I or any other of his disciples spent hundreds of lives, we could not do justice to a millionth part of what he really was. Judge for yourselves; in the heart of your hearts is the Eternal Witness, and may He, the same Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, for the good of our nation, for the welfare of our country, and for the good of humanity, open your hearts, make you true and steady to work for the immense change which must come, whether we exert ourselves or not. He can raise His workers from the dust by hundreds and by thousands. For the work of the Lord does not wait for the like of you or me. . . . It is a glory and a privilege that we are allowed to work at all under him.” (ibid., III. 312, 313, 315-16).

While in Calcutta, the Swami spent the daytime in Seal's garden house, and the nights at the Alambazar Math, where his brother disciples had removed the monastery from Baranagore during his absence. There he met the people, especially young men and students, to whom he explained his mission.

During his talks and conversations with friends and disciples, he always emphasised the main theme of his life, namely the regeneration of India through renunciation and service. When a young man complained that he was not having peace of mind in spite of long hours of meditation with doors shut and eyes closed, the Swami told him: “My boy, if you take my word, you will have first of all to open the door of your room and look around, instead of closing your eyes. There are hundreds of poor and helpless people in your
neighbourhood; . . . serve them to the best of your ability; . . . feed those who have nothing to eat; . . . teach the ignorant. My advice to you is that if you want peace of mind, you shall have to serve others to the best of your ability.” To a professor who thoughtlessly said that the Swami’s ideas of service and doing good to others were all in the domain of Maya and that Mukti alone is the goal of life, he said: “Now I have no desire for Mukti. I do not care for it as long as a single individual in the universe remains in bondage.” He addressed four new Sannyasins, whom he ordained after his return from a fortnight’s rest at Darjeeling, thus: “Remember, for the salvation of one’s own soul and for the good of the world, a Sannyasin is born. To sacrifice his own life for others, to alleviate the misery of millions, to wipe away the tears from the eyes of the widows, to console the heart of the bereaved mother, to provide the ignorant and depressed masses with knowledge and the power to stand on their own feet, to preach broadcast to one and all the teachings of the Shastras—the Sannyasin is born.” When some of his brother disciples criticised his ideas of service, preaching, and the like as being of foreign origin and not in accordance with the teachings of Shri Ramakrishna, he reminded them of Shri Ramakrishna’s words: Religion is not for empty stomachs. In a fit of emotion he burst out: “You think you have understood Shri Ramakrishna better than myself. You think Jnana is dry knowledge to be attained by a desert path, killing out the faculties of the heart. Your Bhakti is sentimental nonsense which makes one impotent. You want to preach Shri Ramakrishna as you have understood him, which is mighty little!"
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Hands off!” Thereafter the brother disciples, who remembered Shri Ramakrishna’s high opinion of the Swami’s superior spirituality and who bore him great love, obeyed him implicitly without a murmur. Swami Akhandananda, who had done some educational work in Rajputana, now went to Murshidabad to organise famine relief work, and later to Sargachi to begin a school for orphans. Also, at his behest, Swami Rama-
krishnananda, who had never stirred out of the Math since its inception, left for Madras to found a monas-
tery there. Swamis Shivananda and Trigunatitananda went to Ceylon and Dinajpur to do propaganda and famine relief work respectively. His own disciples also moved to different places, preaching and doing philanthropic work.

WORK IN INDIA

For the purpose of establishing his work on a firm basis, the Swami summoned all the monastic and lay disciples of Shri Ramakrishna to a meeting at Balaram Bose’s house on 1st May 1897. He told them that he had come to the conclusion that without an organisation nothing great and permanent could be achieved, and proposed that an association he formed in the name of the Master known as the Ramakrishna Mission. The aims and ideals of the Mission as propounded by the Swami were purely spiritual and humanitarian. The Mission had nothing to do with politics. Suitable resolutions were passed to this effect and the Ramakrishna Mission came into being. The Swami himself became the General President, Swami Yogananda the Vice-President, and Swami Brahmananda the President of the Calcutta centre.
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

The Swami now felt relieved to a certain extent: he had inaugurated the machinery for carrying out his ideas. But his health had not been good for some time and, on the advice of the doctors, he left for Almora with some brother monks and disciples. Miss Muller and Mr. Goodwin were already at Almora. After two and a half months' stay there, he left for Ambala where he met the Seviers. Visiting some places in the Punjab, and Srinagar in Kashmir, he went to Jammu where he met the Maharaja of Kashmir and discussed with him the question of starting a monastery in Srinagar. He returned to Calcutta in the middle of January 1898, halting on the way at Lahore, Khetri, Alwar, and some other places, where he addressed meetings, inspiring people as he had done in Madras and Calcutta. He also met some important persons in all the places, amongst whom was Mr. Tirtha Ram Goswami, then a professor of Mathematics in Lahore. Tirtha Ram was much influenced by the Swami. He took Sannyasa later and became famous as Swami Ram Tirtha.

To fulfil the Swami’s cherished dream of having a permanent monastery on the Ganga, a plot of land was secured at Belur, near Calcutta, early in 1898, and the Math was removed to Nilambar Mukherjee’s garden house at Belur, to be near the new site which needed much improvement. During this period, he initiated Sister Nivedita and Swami Swarupananda into brahma-charya and sannyasa respectively. On 30th March he went to Darjeeling for a change, but returned to Calcutta on 3rd May on hearing that plague had broken out there. Immediately he made plans for relief work with the help of the members of the
monastery and volunteers from the city. Sister Nivedita was in charge of the relief operations. When a brother disciple asked him where he would get the funds from, the Swami replied: "Why, we shall sell, if necessary, the land which has just been purchased for the monastery." This extreme step was, however, not necessary.

After the plague had been brought under control, the Swami left Calcutta, on 11th May for Naini Tal, Almora, and other places, with some of his brother disciples, and western disciples, Sister Nivedita, Mrs. Ole Bull, and Miss MacLeod. On this trip, the main concern of the Swami was the training of the disciples, especially Sister Nivedita, who had cut off all her associations in England and come away to India once for all to dedicate herself to the education of Indian women. He explained to the western disciples with great patience the Hindu ideals and gave them a glimpse of the real India.

In Almora, the Swami heard the news of the death of Goodwin and exclaimed in bitter grief: "My right hand is gone." Before leaving Almora, he arranged to restart, at Almora, the monthly magazine Prabuddha Bharata, which had ceased publication at Madras on the premature death of its gifted editor, B. R. Rajam Iyer.

On 11th June, the Swami left for Kashmir as the guest of Mrs. Ole Bull. The trip to Kashmir was an unforgettable experience both to the Swami and the disciples. From 21st to 25th June, the entire time was spent in dungs on the river Jhelum in and around Srinagar, with excursions to nearby places. At the end of July 1898, the Swami left with Sister Nivedita on a
pilgrimage to the holy shrine of Amarnath. The Swami moved with the thousands of pilgrims trekking their way to the shrine, observing scrupulously the humble practices demanded by custom—he would bathe in the holy waters, fast and pray, tell his beads, offer flowers, fruits, etc. to the deities. On 2nd August he entered the famous shrine of Amarnath, his body besmeared with ashes and wearing only a loin-cloth. His whole frame was shaking with emotion, and his face was aflame with supreme devotion to Lord Shiva. As he knelt before the ice-linga, he was almost in a trance; a great mystical experience came over him, of which he never spoke beyond saying that Shiva Himself had appeared before him and had bestowed His grace—not to die until he himself chose to do so. He told his disciples: “The image was the Lord Himself. It was all worship there. I have never seen anything so beautiful, so inspiring.” For days together, there was no other talk on his lips except Shiva, the Lord of Immortality (Amarnath)—so saturated was he with the experience.

On 8th August he returned to Srinagar, along with his disciples, and they remained there till 11th October. During this time, the Swami went off in his boat alone for some days in order to be in strict solitude. He was then possessed by the divine Mother Kali. Wherever he turned, he told his disciples, he was conscious of the presence of the Mother, as if She were a person in the room. Once he worshipped a little four-year old girl, daughter of a Mohammedan boatman, seeing the divine Mother in her. One evening, after an intense meditation, he had a vision of Kali, the Terrible, and he jotted down his experience in the form of a poem, Kali the Mother. As he finished the poem, he dropped to the
floor unconscious, his soul soaring into the highest form of bhava-samadhi. Following this experience, on 30th September, the Swami retired abruptly to the shrine of Kshir Bhavani, alone, leaving strict injunctions that none should follow him. There he daily performed Homa and worshipped the Mother with Kshira (thickened milk) and told his heads like a humble pilgrim. He also worshipped every morning a Brahmin’s little daughter as Uma Kumari, the divine virgin. He was full of the Mother. Once, seeing the dilapidated condition of the temple, the result of Mohammedan vandalism, he thought within himself: “If I were here then, I would never have allowed such things. I would have laid down my life to protect the Mother.” Immediately, he heard the voice of the Mother: “What, even if unbelievers should enter My temples, and defile My images? What is that to you? Do you protect Me? Or do I protect you?” The Swami, recounting the experience later, said: “All my patriotism is gone. Everything is gone. Now it is only ‘Mother! Mother!’” He returned to Srinagar on 6th October, and on 11th the whole party left for Baramulla and Lahore. From Lahore, the Swami returned to Calcutta with Swami Sadananda, commissioning Swami Saradananda to escort the disciples to other places in the north. He reached Calcutta on 18th October.

When the Swami arrived at the Belur monastery, the brother disciples saw him pale and ill. He suffered from suffocating fits of asthma. In spite of this, he plunged himself into numerous activities. The new house of the monastery had by now been completed, and the consecration ceremony of the Math took place on 9th December 1898. On that occasion, while he was carry-
ing the urn containing the relics of Shri Ramakrishna to the place where it was to be installed, he remarked: "It would be a centre in which would be recognised and practised the grand harmony of all creeds and faiths as exemplified in the life of Shri Ramakrishna and only ideas of religion in its universal aspect would be preached. And from this centre of universal toleration would go forth the shining message of goodwill and peace and harmony to deluge the whole world." In January 1899, the monks moved to the new site, the now famous Belur Math, the permanent headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The initial expenses were mainly borne by Miss Henrietta Muller and Mrs. Ole Bull.

On 12th November 1898, the dedication of the Sister Nivedita Girls’ School was performed by the Holy Mother, Shri Sarada Devi. On 14th January 1899, the Bengali monthly Udbodhan was started. The dream of the Swami to start a monastery in the Himalayas was also realised during this period, through the efforts of Capt. and Mrs. Sevier. The Advaita Ashrama was established at Mayavati, in the heart of the Himalayas, at an altitude of 6,300 ft. on 19th March 1899. The Swami laid down the ideals and principles of that monastery in the following lines: "Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught and practised nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; and though in entire sympathy with all other systems, this Ashrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone." To this new place, the Prabuddha Bharata was removed from Almora.

During these days, the Swami was in an indrawn mood
most of the time. “Ever since I went to Amarnath, Shiva Himself has entered into my brain. He will not go” he used to say. But he was ever eager to help sincere souls, and appeared to be full of love for everybody, even those who led indifferent lives. If anybody objected, he would reply: “The poor souls have knocked at every gate to get a little peace of mind. They have been refused everywhere. . . . If I too refuse them, they will have nothing to fall back upon.” His main concern, however, was the training of the young Sannyasins and Brahmacharins, who were to carry on his work in the future. He encouraged them to develop an all-round personality, himself setting the example. He arranged study classes for them. He told them: “You will go to hell if you seek your own salvation. Seek the salvation of others if you want to reach the Highest.” “You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now, and the next moment you must be ready to go and cultivate the fields. You must be prepared to explain the intricacies of the scriptures now, and the next moment to go and sell the produce of the fields in the market. . . . The true man is he who is strong as strength itself and yet possesses a woman’s heart.”

But the Swami’s health was failing. So, when he announced his plan to revisit the West to inspect the work he had founded there and to give it a fillip, the monks welcomed it thinking that it would help improve his health.

SECOND VISIT TO THE WEST

The Swami left India on 20th June 1899, along with Swami Turiyananda and Sister Nivedita. The
journey with the Swami was an education to both of them. Sister Nivedita wrote: "From the beginning to the end a vivid flow of thought and stories went on. One never knew what moment would bring the flash of intuition and the ringing utterance of some fresh truth." They arrived in New York on 16th August 1899, touching London on 31st July on the way. The trip was beneficial to the Swami’s health. In America he visited California, Los Angeles, Oakland, as well as Chicago and Detroit. The main event of this period was the starting of the Shanti Ashrama in Northern California. He told Swami Turiyananda, whom he asked to take charge of the centre: "Hoist the flag of Vedanta there; from this moment destroy even the memory of India." He also started the Vedanta Society of San Francisco in 1900.

The Swami was becoming more and more aware of the approaching end. He wrote to Miss MacLeod: "My boat is nearing the calm harbour from which it is never more to be driven out." He wanted to retire from all work.

On 1st August 1900, he arrived in Paris to participate in the Congress of the History of Religions, held there on the occasion of the Universal Exposition. He took part in only two sessions. Among the distinguished persons he came in contact with in Paris were: Professor Patrick Geddes of Edinburgh University, Hiram Maxim of machine-gun fame, and Dr. J. C. Bose, the Indian scientist.

On 24th October 1900, he left Paris for the East, by way of Vienna and Constantinople. With him were Monsieur Charles Loyson (formerly Père Hyacinthe) and his wife, Monsieur Jules Bois, Madame Calvé, and Miss
APOSTLES OF RAMAKRISHNA

MacLeod. The party visited Hungary, Serbia, Rumania, and Bulgaria, before arriving at Constantinople. Then they proceeded to Athens and Cairo.

In Cairo, the Swami suddenly became restless to return to India; he had a presentiment of Capt. Sevier's death. He took the first available boat and hurried back to India, alone.

LAST YEARS IN INDIA

Immediately after arrival in Bombay, he left for Calcutta, and reached Belur Math late in the evening of 9th December, 1900, without any previous intimation. The gates of the monastery were closed for the night. Hearing the dinner bell, in his eagerness to join the monks at their meal, he scaled the gate. There was great rejoicing over the hero's home-coming.

At the Math, he heard of the passing away of Capt. Sevier at Mayavati, which happened on 28th October 1900. He stayed at the Math for eighteen days and left for Mayavati to console Mrs. Sevier, reaching there on 3rd January 1901.

After a fortnight's stay, he left Mayavati on 18th January and arrived at the Math on 24th. After seven weeks' stay in the Math, he left for East Bengal on a lecture tour. His mother, who had expressed an earnest desire to visit the holy places there, went with him. "This is the one great wish of a Hindu widow", he wrote to Mrs. Bull. "I have brought only misery to my people. I am trying to fulfil this one wish of hers." He returned to the Math in the second week of May 1901, visiting on the way Kamakhya and Shillong in Assam. It was at Shillong that he expressed the great impact of
his work and mission. "What does it matter!", he said, "I have given them enough for fifteen hundred years."

Now the Swami tried to lead a carefree life at the monastery, surrounded by his pets: the dog Bagha, the she-goat Hansi, an antelope, a stork, several cows and sheep and ducks and geese, and a kid which he named Matru. He used to run and play with Matru like a child. He would roam about the Math grounds, sometimes clad in his loin-cloth; or he would supervise the cooking arrangements; or be with the monks singing devotional songs. Sometimes he would be seen imparting spiritual instruction to the visitors, at other times engaged in serious study in his room or explaining to the members of the Math the intricate passages of the scriptures and unfolding to them his scheme of future work. He freed himself entirely from all formal duties by executing a deed of trust in favour of his brother disciples, investing in them all the properties, including the Belur Math so far held in his name. Swami Brahmananda was elected President. Still he kept a careful watch on the life in the monastery, in spite of his physical suffering, and he was obeyed unquestioningly by all including the President. He looked to every detail—cleanliness, meals, study, meditation, work. He drew up a weekly time-table and saw to it that it was scrupulously followed. The classes on the Vedas and the Puranas were held daily, he himself conducting them when his health permitted. The bell sounded at fixed hours for meals, study, discussion, and meditation. About three months before his death, he made it a rule that at four o'clock in the morning a handbell should be rung from room to room to awaken the monks. Within half an hour all were to gather in the chapel.
for meditation. He was always there before them. He got up at three and went to the chapel, where he meditated for more than two hours. As he got up, he used to chant softly “Shiva! Shiva!” His presence in the chapel created an intense spiritual atmosphere. Swami Brahmananda used to say: “Ah! one at once becomes absorbed if one sits for meditation in the company of Naren. I do not feel this when I sit alone.” Once when Swami Prenananda was going to the chapel for worship the Swami suddenly said, shaking with emotion: “Where will you go to seek Brahman? He is immanent in all beings. Here, here is the visible Brahman. Shame on those who, neglecting the visible Brahman, set their minds on other things! Here is the visible Brahman before you as tangible as a fruit in one’s hand. Can’t you see? Here, here is the Brahman.”

In the later part of 1901, the Swami fed sumptuously a number of Santhal labourers engaged in digging the grounds about the monastery. He said to a disciple: “I actually see God in them. How guileless they are!”

Towards the end of 1901, two learned Buddhists from Japan came to the Math to induce the Swami to attend the forthcoming Congress of Religions in Japan. They were Okakura, a famous artist and art critic, and Oda, the Abbot of a Buddhist monastery. The Swami could not accept the invitation on account of his ill health. But he agreed to accompany Okakura to Bodh Gaya. From Gaya he went to Varanasi, where he met the Maharaja of Bhinga who offered him a sum of money to establish a monastery there. The Swami commissioned Swami Shivananda to organise it. At Varanasi, he was delighted to see a few young men who, under the inspiration of his message, had started nursing the
poor and the needy, which work formed the nucleus of the future Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service.

The End

The Swami knew his end was nearing. His body was wearing away day by day, and he was preparing for the final departure. “How often does a man ruin his disciples”, he said, “by remaining always with them! When men are once trained, it is essential that their leader leaves them, for without his absence they cannot develop themselves.” He refused to express any opinion on the questions of the day. “I can no more enter into outside affairs, I am already on the way” was his reply to those who came to him with problems regarding work. “You may be right, but I cannot enter any more into these matters; I am going down into death”, he told Sister Nivedita when she questioned him on some important matter concerning her educational programme.

Everything about the Swami in the last days was deliberate and significant. A week before the end, he was seen consulting the Bengali almanac. Three days before, on an Ekadashi day, he fed Sister Nivedita with his own hands, though he himself was fasting. At the end of her meal he helped her wash her hands by pouring water for her, and then he dried them with a towel. “It is I who should do these things for you, Swamiji, not you for me”, she protested. His reply startled her: “Jesus washed the feet of his disciples,” he said. The reply, “But that was the last time” came to her lips, but remained unuttered. Something checked her. Here also it was the last time.
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On the last day, Friday, 4th July 1902, he rose very early. Going to the chapel alone, he shut the doors and bolted them, contrary to his habit, and meditated for three hours. He came down the steps of the shrine, singing a beautiful song to the divine Mother Kali. Then he said in a whisper: “If there were another Vivekananda, then he would have understood what this Vivekananda has done. And yet how many Vivekanandas shall be born in time?” Next he asked his disciple, Swami Shuddhananda, to read a passage from the Shukla Yajur-Veda with the commentary of Mahidhara on it. He did not agree with Mahidhara and exhorted the disciple to make independent research into the Vedas. He partook of the noon meal with great relish, in company with the members of the Math, unlike on other days when he took his meal alone in his room. Immediately after, he gave lessons to the Brahmacharins on Sanskrit grammar for three hours. In the afternoon, he went out with Swami Premananda and walked nearly two miles, discussing his plan to start a Vedic College in the monastery. When questioned as to its utility, he said: “The study of the Vedas will kill superstition.” On his return, he inquired about the welfare of every member of the monastery. Then he conversed for a long time with the members on the rise and fall of nations. “India is immortal”, he said, “if she persists in her search for God. But if she goes in for politics and social conflict, she will die.” At seven o’clock in the evening, the bell announced the worship in the chapel. The Swami went to his room and told the disciple attending him that no one should come to him until called for. He spent an hour in meditation and telling beads, then called the disciple to open all the windows
and fan his head. He lay down quietly on his bed. The attendant thought that he was either sleeping or meditating. At the end of an hour, his hands trembled a little and he breathed once very heavily. There was silence for a minute or two, and again he breathed in the same manner. He had breathed his last. He had just completed thirty-nine years, five months, and twenty-four days, thus fulfilling a prophecy which was frequently on his lips, "I shall never live to see forty".