

## THE SWAMIS IN AMERICA.

THE order of the Sannyasin, of whom the Swami (master) Vivekananda\* was the first to appear in this country, is the most ancient order of monks in the world. Max Müller speaks of them as known before the rise of Buddhism. In the Bhagavad-gita (v. 3) we read: "He is to be known as a Sannyasin who does not hate and does not love anything." To-day there are thousands of them in India, many who have passed directly from the student life into that of the spiritual man, taking the vows of poverty, chastity, and homelessness. In their long ochre robe, with staff and alms-bowl, they wander barefoot from village to village. Children are taught to read, the sick are cared for, the people are shown better habits of life, and the profound philosophies of the Vedanta are taught. In India, religion and philosophy are one. They have no organization, as we understand the word. They have no monasteries. They hold no property. It is a voluntary, undogmatized brotherhood, with recognized freedom of thought. The true Sannyasin may be said to represent no religion. His religion is a life—a realization; it is not a theory. The Jewish prophets living in lowly places; John the Baptist, crying in the wilderness; Jesus of Nazareth, who had not where to lay his head;—these were but living the life of a Sannyasin. Literally, "Sannyasin" means *saint*.

Formerly, the status of a Sannyasin implied to the Hindu years of discipline—first as a student, then as a householder or married man. After a period of fulfilling these duties he retires from the world to the forest, performing certain exercises, and is often accompanied by his wife and children. The fourth and last stage implies a complete surrender of worldly interests. He has no fixed habitation. He lives alone and becomes a *Rishi*—seer of truth. Max Müller tells us "the Buddhist re-

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\*Vivekananda: Sanskrit, *Ananda*—bliss; *Viveka*—discrimination. [See frontispiece.]

volt was mainly based on the fact that if spiritual freedom was the highest goal on earth it was a mistake to wait for it till the very end of life, and the Buddhists declined to pass through the years of discipline."

The Sannyasin for thousands of years has wandered barefoot through India and sat cross-legged under a tree to teach the people. When on the platform of the World's Parliament of Religions, at Chicago, the Sannyasin, Swami Vivekananda, of Calcutta, India, stood, for the first time, to address an audience, the thrill of a broader view, a quickened spirit, was not alone his. Surrounded by the chosen representatives of the world's faiths, facing an audience of four thousand people, few who remember the power, the force, the eloquence of his words that morning knew that he was delivering his first public lecture in English—and standing. The ability shown by Vivekananda at this time made him an object of interest, and during the winter of 1893 he was invited to give a series of lectures on secular subjects in this country. (No Hindu monk takes money for religious teachings.) He did so, with marked success. The following winter he lectured in New York and Brooklyn under the auspices of a company of liberal men and women calling themselves the Vedanta Society. This organization has done a good work since 1894, sustaining a teacher and giving a course of eighty lectures during the winter months. It is now recognized as a growingly important factor in the thought-movement of the day.

The evident influence of what Max Müller calls the dialogic process on many current reports with regard to the Sannyasins in this country makes one wish to emphasize the fact that a monk has no caste. Brahman, Kshatriya (warrior caste), Sudras, are all represented. Vivekananda was a Kshatriya; his successor in this country, Saradananda,\* is a Brahman. A monk may eat of any food, in any company, in any country. He is above caste.

Miss Sarah J. Farmer conceived the idea of continuing at

\*Saradananda—Bliss in wisdom. [See frontispiece.]

Greenacre Inn, Eliot, Maine, the movement inaugurated at Chicago, and forming a center there during the summer months for the study of the points of contact—the sympathy to be found between the thought-movements of the world. In 1894, the first year of this movement, seventeen different faiths were represented. Vivekananda lectured there for two weeks; and his successor in this country, Swami Saradananda, delivered his first public speech in America in July, 1896, at Greenacre, on the banks of the Piscataqua. He continued to lecture during the summer months at the Greenacre School of Comparative Religion, which was held apart from the lecture-course, with Dr. Lewis G. Janes as director. The next winter Mrs. Ole Bull opened her house at Cambridge, Mass., and a series of conferences were held there, also under the direction of Dr. Janes. Saradananda gave a course of lectures on the Vedanta philosophy. It is stated in the circulars of both schools that the *motif* is comparative study, and that the representatives of different views make no attempt at the "propaganda of doctrines."

During the following winter Saradananda spent several months in Cambridge and in New York City, lecturing under the auspices of the Vedanta Society. In 1898 he returned to India, and the same winter his successor, Swami Abhedananda\* lectured at Mott Memorial Hall, in New York, and through the summer at Greenacre. During the last season he has given at Assembly Hall, in the Associated Charities Building, eighty lectures on the Vedanta philosophy to large and intelligent audiences.

Swami Vivekananda, when in this country, initiated three persons into the order of the Sannyasin. The robe worn by its members typifies the fire of knowledge that will burn away ignorance and impurities. When a man renounces worldly ambitions and becomes a Sannyasin he is regarded by the Hindu as having been born again, and a new name is given to him. This is a custom common to many orders of monks.

\*Abhedananda—Bliss in unity. [See frontispiece.]

In 1886 a remarkable Hindu teacher died—Sri Ramakrishna. During the latter years of his life there gathered about him a company of about twenty young men and boys, most of them educated at the Calcutta University. He was himself an uneducated Brahman, but with such rare spiritual powers that to-day he is regarded by many Hindus as one of the Saviors—the great teachers of mankind. He lived in a garden, eight miles from Calcutta. Men of all faiths came to him to be taught—Jews, Parsees, Mohammedans, Jains, bond and free. He recognized no sect, no caste. When pressed to take bodily rest he would say, "I would suffer all sorts of bodily pains if by so doing I could bring one single soul to freedom and salvation." Max Müller tells us that he practised many different religions, even Mohammedanism, believing them different ways to the same goal, and arriving at their highest purposes. He saw Jesus in a vision, and for days he could speak and think of nothing but Jesus and his love.

Such a man was the Guru (spiritual teacher) of the Vedantists who have come to this country. Many of the boys who were drawn to Ramakrishna crept secretly from their homes for months. To a Hindu family, to have a son become a monk without first passing the prescribed periods of student life and that of a married man is regarded as a calamity. The ideal of the Hindu is that he shall first experience life in its different phases; that first the mind circles forward to the senses, then back again to the spiritual. But "the joy of a Hindu in the beginning was worship, and his joy to-day is worship."

What would we think of an American boy who went about with tears in his eyes, asking, "How can I find God?" He would be incarcerated at the expense of the State as a dangerous member of society. Another Hindu boy saves his money to buy a New Testament. Another reads Geikie's "Life of Christ" and lends it to his heathen companions.

The *Hindu Patriot*, a Calcutta daily newspaper, gave a detailed account of the reception given to Vivekananda on his return from America. The Raja of Ramnad travels miles to meet him; the carriage is dragged by barefoot natives, headed

by the Raja; flowers are cast about him, and to the fullest we see the poetic extravagance of the Oriental. Why is this? Because the mainspring of the Hindu is his religion. The cause of the most terrible rebellion India has ever known was an invasion of its religious rights. Every nation has its ideal—its theme. To India it is *spirituality*.

What do the Hindus know of the Western world? They have heard nothing of the vast political changes that within the last few years have subverted the order of things; but, as Vivekananda said, "let there be a Parliament of Religions at Chicago, and let one Sannyasin go from India to represent to the Western world the highest purposes of Hinduism, as every beggar knows."

The Swamis have been invited to this country, and to England, by those interested in the study of the Vedanta. There are many different sects in India, and almost as many shades of belief as there are people; but the back-bone of religious life there is the Vedanta philosophy. This philosophy is the metaphysical portion of the Vedas, the ancient sacred literature of the Hindus. The Vedas are said to be without beginning or end; revelation is not completed; it is an accumulating treasure of spiritual laws, from any source at any time. Women as well as men have been discoverers of these laws, and are called *Rishis* (seers of truth).

It is not within the scope of this article to give any idea of the profound philosophies of the Vedanta. It is founded on a subtle system of monistic philosophy, holding that there can be but one Reality, whatever it may be called—God, the Unknowable, Brahman, the Absolute. This philosophy existed two thousand years before Spinoza, yet is identical in some respects with the system taught by him. Centuries before evolution had been heard of in any language the Hindus were evolutionists, with Brahman as our great ancestor.

There has never been a religious persecution in India. "The Vedanta adapts itself to any philosophy, to any religion." To the Hindu every nation has its Savior, Jesus is as much a Savior of the world to them as Buddha, Krishna, or Zoroaster.

Dr. Lewis G. Janes tells us in a recent article that "Mazoomdar's Oriental Christ has helped many a Western mind to a truer understanding of the man of Nazareth."

To every thoughtful mind the question comes, What has this teaching for us? What effect, if any, will it have upon Western civilization?

There has been no attempt to form a sect or to proselytize. Repeatedly has Vivekananda said: "Shall the Christian become a Hindu? God forbid! May you be a better Christian."

Does this study mean anything in our daily life, or is it a mere intellectual pastime for the few? The value of all labor, of all thought, is summed up in the word *service*. Will this subtle system of Eastern philosophy *serve* us as we press toward the mark of our high calling? The command of the Greek philosopher, "Know thyself"; the words of Jesus of Nazareth, "Lo, the kingdom of God is within you"; and the highest teaching of the Vedantic philosophy, "Thou art That"—"See the Self by the Self"—these are all one and the same.

If the Hindu helps us to the level the uninhabitable peaks of dogma, and to recognize the one essential in religion—realization; if he helps one man in this materialistic age to pause and to listen to the "still, small voice," his coming has not been in vain.

But can the monstrous system of caste and superstition, in which India is engulfed, be the outcome of the teachings of this Vedanta philosophy? Did Jesus Christ lay a single stone in the edifice of dogma and ceremonial many of us call *our church*? Is the commercial and social system of this country founded upon the teachings of Jesus Christ? Might not the question be asked, Are we a *Christian* people? No Vedantist can believe in caste who recognizes this central thought in the philosophy: the oneness of existence, the brotherhood of man. Every great teacher has cried out against it, and the barriers are breaking. English education, railways, commerce—all are helping to do the work.

The Brahman has been to India what the Levite was in the old Jewish system; now, through the struggle for existence,

*New York.*

ANNA JOSEPHINE INGERSOLL

he has been pushed into the business world as clerk, merchant, lawyer, etc.

The great need is education for the women and children. Money and teachers are needed; not Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, but Christian *teachers*, in the broadest sense of the word. The Swamis have well exemplified in this country the wisdom of presenting Eastern ideas through Western methods. Might it not be wise for our teachers in foreign lands to profit by their example?

A Miss Noble, of England, has recently gone to India, and under the direction of Vivekananda has started a kindergarten.

These men are trying in every way to help their people. They denounce their ignorance, their weakness, their superstition. Vivekananda tells them they have pitched their religion into the kitchen—their God has become the cooking-pot; that they are losing the spirit of the grandest religion in the world through the foolish restrictions of food and drink. He calls them weak and down-trodden. He also tells them that they do not love one another enough. Might not the contributors to certain missionary periodicals be reminded of this fundamental teaching of Jesus Christ?