

VITH THE SWAMIS
IN AMERICA

A WESTERN DISCIPLE

ADVAITA ASHRAMA

WITH THE SWAMIS IN AMERICA

BY

A WESTERN DISCIPLE

5. Sanjeevarayanam,
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ADVAITA ASHRAMA
MAYAVATI, ALMORA, HIMALAYAS

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SWAMI PAVITRANANDA,
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PREFACE

After Swami Vivekananda had succeeded in rousing interest in the Vedanta amongst the people of the New World, he sent some of his brother-disciples there, so that the Vedanta movement might be put on a sure basis. The following pages give the history of the pioneer Vedanta work in America. But it may be called the history of the transformation of many lives under the influence of the personality of those who started the work. In the present volume will be found vividly described how that wonderful transformation took place, and as such it is likely to be of great help to those who aspire after the same goal.

As the "Disciple" came into closer contact with Swami Turiyananda than with any other Swami, his work is described in greater detail. Swami Vivekananda used to say that Swami Turiyananda was the living embodiment of Vedanta. Indeed he was a blazing fire of spirituality, and whomsoever he touched was metamorphosed into pure gold. His personality has become living in these descriptions, and we feel no doubt that they will give inspiration to many who had not the privilege of meeting the Swami while he was in his physical body.

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WITH THE SWAMIS IN AMERICA

CHAPTER I

AN ACCIDENT OR DIVINE PLAN ?

If there were such a thing as accident, I would say that my coming into contact with the Vedanta teaching was purely accidental. It had all the appearance 'of accident, it came to me unsought, unexpected—it just happened. Consciously I had nothing to do with it, so far as appearance goes.

In reality I do not believe in accident, at least not in my saner moments. I believe that our lives are guided, that a helmsman steers our boat across the ocean of life. Firmly seated at the helm of our hearts, he catches the wind of our desires and steers the boat accordingly. Little eddies or whirlpools may threaten to throw us to one side, but his steady hand keeps us in the main current—the deep-seated, flowing desire of our hearts.

Sometimes we mistake these little eddies for the main stream and we rebel when our boat is turned away from them; we are disappointed. But our helmsman, unmoved, steers us onward.

The secret of success lies in one-pointed, all-absorbing, all-sacrificing effort in a given direction. But most of our planning and scheming

in life is concerned with the shallow, surface currents of our consciousness. And then there is little progress. Few there are who can discern the deep undercurrent that leads to the goal, whatever that goal may be. And amongst those who do discern what their real aim in life is, there are but few who can withstand the temptation of momentary excursions in different directions. We grasp what lies near at hand, what is easy to attain, what brings immediate enjoyment. And thus we suffer delay.

It is only when we realise the presence of an ever-watchful Guide, that we can resign ourselves to His hands; that putting aside our little likes and dislikes, that giving up our little vain struggles in many directions, we are contented to be guided by Him. Consciously to co-operate with that all-powerful, all-knowing Witness within is given to very few. But whether we realise it or not, consciously or unconsciously, sooner or later our boat is turned back to the right course.

This, perhaps, is one of the first practical lessons that were taught me during my contact with the Swamis. It was not put to me in just that way. It was given to me in very simple language: "Do not plan, Mother's will shall come to pass."

How difficult it is to follow even simple precepts. Still, the truth of it I cannot deny if I think back of how I first met the Swamis. I

had not planned, but Mother's will did come to pass.

But one moment! Shall we sit idle then, resting on our oars and let things just happen? By no means ! Pull the oars with all our might we must turn on full steam. But do not pull against the steersman. Pull straight ahead and let the helmsman steer. How easy it sounds:

"Let Mother plan; think only of Her!"

Vital truths, it seems, are always put in plain language, homely, without ornamentation. Take Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. Could anything be simpler? But of these simple precepts, he himself has said: "If you follow one sixteenth part of what I tell you, it is enough." "Take one idea and work it out to its conclusion." It does not seem such a difficult task. Still, the goal is promised us, if we succeed. Have we ever tried it? If so, for how long? The sun is hot, the shade so pleasant. We rest for just one moment, we stretch ourselves on the soft turf, sleep overtakes us and our journey is postponed.

It was in New York, many years ago, that one evening I was one of a small audience listening to an address by the late Mr. Colville. Fluent, sincere, optimistic as Mr. Colville always was, it was a pleasure to listen to him. A good deal of wholesome advice—a mixture of New Thought, Theosophy and Christian Science. It was what is called "a talk under inspiration."

Buoyant, hopeful, encouraging, his talk acted like a tonic on a drooping spirit. He followed faithfully the doctrine of his creed, to see good everywhere and in everything. It was often carried to extremes. I remember, it was a cold, stormy night. Every one was glad to be under shelter. But when Mr. Colville entered the hall, the first remark he made was: "Is not this a glorious evening!" And he seemed to mean it. He rubbed his hands and he looked very happy and comfortable. I could not help smiling. I was a new sheep in the fold and I looked around to see how this extraordinary statement struck the audience. I saw many smiles, someone in the audience straightened up as if to shake off a different impression, every one looked happy - The tonic acted and the effect was remarkable. It felt good to be there. There was no room for pessimism. Pessimism fled by the back door as soon as Mr. Colville entered by the front. His religion was a religion of cheerfulness; no mistake about that.

I have many friends among the New Thought people. And I like them as a class. They are so happy, so energetic, so positive that they have found the secret of success—the panacea for all the ills poor humankind is heir to. But it must be remembered that there is New Thought and New Thought—Menticulture, Higher Thought, Mental Healing, New Consciousness, Joy Philosophy, etc. All do not go to the same extremes. But sometimes they are amusing in their enthu-

siasm and naivete. Let me relate one instance. And I do this with due respect for the saner class (to which Mr. Colville belonged) who are sincere and always ready to help their less fortunate brethren. The religion of cheerfulness is not to be despised in an often too sordid world. Optimism is contagious and perhaps the best and only remedy for too phlegmatic and pessimistic temperaments.

Most schools of New Thought teach in one form or another, to put it very shortly, that every one should be healthy, prosperous and happy. Those who are otherwise, are diseased. The remedy for disease is to deny or ignore it, to hold the positive thought that all is well with every one. If you have a headache, forget it. Say and try to believe that you are Divine Mind, that you are in perfect health, that there is nothing wrong with you. The headache will go in no time. If you cannot do that, go to a practitioner, he will hold the thought for you and you will be cured. This is called "treating" a person. The patient has not to do anything;

only try to forget the disease and remain passive. The practitioner remains silent and concentrates his mind on health. "You are Divine Mind. Divine Mind is free from disease; you are free from disease, you are in perfect health." No questions are asked of the patient, he is told not to mention or think of his trouble and to remain calm and silent. The truth seems to be that some people do get cured and that cases have been

cured where medical men had given up all hope. Some of the cures seem almost miraculous. So far so good. And when this practice is applied to animals as well as to human beings, we know that animals can be hypnotised, and I see no reason for ridicule. Let our sympathy and help go out to all living creatures. Whether I myself have much faith in the practice or not, is not now the question. It seems that almost any means, even charms, will act as a cure with some people. Neither does it matter now whether we regard a religion of health, wealth and prosperity as a refined form of materialism; where God is made the means and the world the end. I am not now discussing the merit or demerit of the different schools of New Thought. I am writing down some of my early reminiscences and I simply want to relate a funny instance that was brought to my notice many years ago.

A gardener at one of the New Thought Homes was in difficulty. It was in California. There had been no rain for weeks and the garden was sorely in need of water. But unfortunately the windmill that supplied water for irrigation, refused to work. What could be done? A convert to New Thought does not go to a physician when there is something wrong with the human machine, why should he go to a mechanic when the windmill is out of order? Divine Mind is all-powerful. What the windmill required was "treatment/"

Thft nther m^mbpr^ nf thp Hnmp1 had all

gathered for breakfast, when the gardener entered the room and in all earnestness requested that they all go into the silence for a few moments, that the windmill showed symptoms of disorder. "Let us treat the windmill/" he said, "let us repeat silently: everything is Divine Mind, there is no disorder in Divine Mind, the windmill is in good working order and ready to give us water." The members acquiesced.

The silence over, our friends were perfectly confident that water would come. In great expectation they ran into the garden. The windmill was turned on. But, I am sorry to say, this time their faith received a rude shock. The windmill made some faint attempts, squeaked, then balked and stood there. And our simple-minded gardener had to undergo the humiliation of calling in a mechanic to put things aright.

Shortly after, I came to know this gardener and I had my suspicion that he was not quite as innocent as some people thought him to be. Our friend was fond of practical jokes.

Later, this same gentleman stayed with us at the Shanti Ashram.* We had a mare there that roamed about free and was caught only when needed. But she did not like to be caught and as she had one hundred and sixty acres of land to make good her escape, she sometimes gave us considerable exercise before we could corner her.

One day, she had been especially clever in

* A Vedanta Retreat in California. A full description of this will follow.

dodging us and we were all pretty well tired out when we roped her. Our friend had done his share in capturing the mare. We were leading her to the shed in triumphant procession. Then our friend called out: "Swami, the mare likes to be free, but we have put the rope around her neck and now she is in Maya (bondage)!" The Swam! was highly amused at this new application of the word Maya. He laughed heartily and said: "Yes, Mr. P., you are right, we have put the mare in Mayi but we ourselves want to get out of MiayeL Be careful that you do not meet with the same fate as the mare has met. Cut the rope and be free!"

Another day the Swami had been telling us that we should try to bring out the divinity that is in us. Afterwards 'he met Mr. P. and said:

"Mr. P., what have you been doing?" Mr. P. had been cooking his dinner and he promptly replied: "Swami, if I cannot succeed in bringing out the divinity that is in me, at least I can try to bring out the cook that is in me and even that I find difficult enough." So much for Mr. P.

And now to continue. Mr. Colville's lecture was over and I was about to leave the hall, when a total stranger accosted me and asked me whether I had ever heard Swami Vivekananda. "I have never been so fortunate," I replied, "but I have read his book on Raja Yoga." "Well," said the stranger, "he gives lectures at the Mott Memorial Building. You can hear him

there every Sunday at 3 P.M." I thanked my new acquaintance for the kind and welcome information, but I doubted the correctness of his statement. I was under the impression (which later proved to be right) that Swami Vivekananda had returned to India.

However, the following Sunday afternoon found me amongst the audience at the Mott Memorial Hall, in the expectation of hearing Swami Vivekananda. The hall was not large, it could seat perhaps three or four hundred persons. And even then the hall was not quite filled, so it was easy to secure a good seat. I had heard much in praise of Swamiji and his Raja Yoga had made a deep impression on me. My expectation was, therefore, tuned to a high key and I looked forward with pleasure to the fulfilment of a long cherished desire.

Punctually at three o'clock a Swami entered the hall. He was dressed in robe and turban of orange colour. He went straight to the platform and without a moment's delay began to deliver his lecture. He opened with a Shioka in Sanskrit: " Dva suparn^ sayuja sakhaya samanam," etc. This he gave also in English: "Two birds of beautiful plumage, ever mates, perch on the self-same tree; one of the twain eats of the luscious fruit; silent its mate looks on." And then he began to explain the deep significance of this beautiful simile from the Upanishad. The discourse was lucid, convincing and impressive. There was not much flourish, not much elo-

quence, hardly any gesticulation. It was a straightforward, well-reasoned-out exposition of the Vedanta philosophy, delivered in a calm, dignified manner. He had his subject well in hand. And his voice was clear and sonorous.

Young, tall, straight, good-looking, the Swami had his appearance in his favour. His attitude, though not awkward, was a little stiff for a public speaker. There was no effort for effect. The speaker was natural and sincere, but there was not the ease and grace of manner so characteristic of American speakers. It was evident that the Swami had not done much platform work, though speaking seemed to come easy to him.

After the lecture an opportunity was given the audience to ask questions. The Swami answered all questions without the least hesitation. Then he came down from the platform and was immediately surrounded by a number of people anxious to meet him personally and to exchange a few words with him.

I waited in the back of the hall and saw the Swami pass out to the street. I was very happy to have found a teacher from the land where Vedanta had taken its birth. My expectation had been high and I was not disappointed except that I had not found the eloquence and fine delivery for which Swami Vivekananda had become famous. I wondered how the Swami had earned his reputation as an orator and I doubted whether the speaker was really Swami Vivekananda. So I approached a gentleman in

charge of the hall to satisfy my doubt. And then I was told that the Swami I had listened to, was Swami Abhedananda, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. I talked a while with the gentleman, who was also in charge of the book-stall, bought a copy of Karma Yoga and went home.

I felt greatly attracted towards the Swami and the following Sunday I went to hear him again. In fact, I became a regular attendant at the Sunday lectures. But I did not meet the Swami personally. There was so much that was new to me, it was so much more satisfying than what I had heard from Christian pulpits, there was so much to think about, that I felt satisfied to live my quiet life in obscurity and to get myself adjusted to this new way of thinking and looking at the problems of life. I wanted to work things out for myself and to think and meditate over them. The Sunday lectures were quite sufficient for me in addition to the reading and study of Vedanta that I had begun at home.

But one Sunday, just after the lecture, a lady approached me. She said that she had seen me come to the lectures so regularly, did not I want to make the Swami's acquaintance? "There is a question-class at my home," she said, "the Swami would be glad to meet you there. There are only a few of us and we meet every Wednesday evening. Come and meet the Swami/" I accepted this very kind invitation and that very week went to the address given me.

There was a small gathering, perhaps not more than twenty persons. The room was cosy, incense was burning, on a small table were pictures and flowers. The Swami was already seated and the hostess offered me a chair near him. After a few minutes the Swami opened the meeting with a prayer in Sanskrit. I think it was the well-known invocation at the beginning and at the end of some of the Upanishads: Saha nSvavatu saha nau bhunaktu saha viryam karavavahai, etc. " May He protect us from all evil! May the teacher and the taught enjoy together the blessings of the Lord! May whatever we study be well studied and may it enlighten us ! May dissension be far from us! Om Peace, Peace, Peace, Hari Om!" How beautiful, how impressive sounded the ancient Sanskrit prayer as it was chanted by the Swami in his deep, melodious voice. How exquisite the intonation !

This was followed by a few minutes of silence. The Swami sat erect, perfectly still, with his hands folded and his eyes closed. We all followed his example and meditated for a while. Then came a few remarks on the law of Karma and we were invited to ask questions. The questions were not systematic; all kinds of subjects were touched on.

"Was Jesus a Yogi?"

"Yes, otherwise how could he have realised his oneness with the heavenly Father !?"

"Why do the Sannyasins in India wander about?"

" Because they do not want to be a burden^to anyone and to learn perfect reliance on God/'

"Does one have to be a vegetarian to practise Yoga?"

"When practising Raja Yoga one should not take flesh. With the other Yogas it is not absolutely necessary to be a strict vegetarian. But in India all the Yogis are vegetarians. Almost all the Hindus are vegetarians/'

Then the Swami spoke to explain why the Hindus do not like to take flesh. And so the subjects were various. The meeting lasted for an hour or more. After the meeting I was introduced to the Swami. The Swami was courteous. He asked me a few questions and said that he hoped I could come again. I told him how very much I appreciated his lectures and how helpful they were to me. He seemed pleased . " Practise a little/' he said, "the secret of success lies in meditation. Come here regularly and when you are in doubt or you need any help, come to me/' I thanked him and promised to do so. This was the end of our first meeting.

And I marvelled how the Lord was steering my boat in new directions, away from the tumult of an external life on waters peaceful and calm, of greater depth, but safe under His protection. I felt that in Swami Abhedananda I had found a teacher who could help me and that my spiritual progress henceforth depended on my own efforts and sincerity under the SwamT's guidance and instruction.

CHAPTER II

SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Swami Abhedananda did not mix with his students as freely as some of the other Swamis have done. It is true he held social meetings where the students could freely talk and mix with him and he gave one hour each week to meeting personal enquiries, but by nature he was always more or less reserved and in private life he was not easily accessible. He insisted on a certain amount of privacy. This was probably wise and necessary on his part. He gave himself heart and soul to his work and he needed hours of solitude to prosecute his studies and to prepare his carefully thought-out lectures free from outside disturbances. But one could always be assured of his ready assistance, his sympathy and encouragement when one made it a point to approach him.

I rarely visited the Swami in his own rooms but on many occasions I found it possible to have very close and intimate talks with him, when he would give me most valuable advice,

In years there cannot have been much difference between us. The Swami may be my senior by five or six years at the most. But I regarded him as wise and loving father, a guide who understood my struggles and difficulties and I felt that he loved me as a son. I was exceedingly happy to have found a teacher who had

realised that for which I was striving. I considered myself greatly blessed to be guided by one of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples. And sometimes when shaking hands with the Swami, I thought, "Now I am touching the same hand that has done service to the great Master/"

At times, I have doubted whether we can be really helped by others spiritually, whether progress does not depend entirely on our own effort and whether help does not come only from within. But as I look back over the many years that I have known the Swami, I must confess that a teacher is almost always necessary to us. Without sincerity, without effort on our own part, it is true, no help will avail. But a teacher can show us the way. He can open our eyes, can make us see in the right direction and by his advice and encouragement can stimulate our efforts. And where there is a happy relationship between master and disciple, progress is greatly facilitated. Not in vain do the Hindu scriptures advise association with the wise; not in vain do these scriptures ask the student to love and revere his teacher and if possible to render him humble service. "That wisdom the wise beholders of the truth will teach thee by thy reverencing, asking and serving them." Gita, iv.34.

We have to dig and we have to dig hard, but it is of great value to have it pointed out to us where and how we have to dig. Without guidance the road is difficult to find and hard to travel. "That ancient, narrow path stretching

far away, it is sharp as the edge of a razor and hard to pass over; dangerous is that path for mortals to tread/' Has any one found it different ? It is therefore that the Rishi added:

"Arise, awake, seek out the great ones and get understanding/' Shall we then not be filled with love and devotion towards those who stretch out a helping hand to us ? Can our gratitude ever repay what they have done for us ?

Gradually I became acquainted with my fellow-students, an acquaintance which in some cases has ripened into close friendship. These were happy days, these early days of sincere and enthusiastic search for wisdom and realisation. There was so much to learn, to read, to discuss. It was a new life, a quickened life, a lifting of the mind into new regions of thought and being. We were on the alert. Every scrap of information, every new book or picture was to us a source of real happiness and inspiration.

We heard about the Master, Sri Ramakrishna, how he had struggled and wept for his Divine Mother, how day and night he prayed for Her vision, how he forgot food and sleep and even his body in his yearning search for Her; and how at last the battle was won, the body was subdued and the Mother revealed Herself in all Her glory. What inspiration we drew from the account of that holy and perfected life ! And then came the story of the greatest of his disciples, Swami Vivekananda, whom then we had not met. How swept onward by a spiritual torrent

he, then a mere boy, ran one day to Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar to put to the sage the startling question: "Sir, have you seen God ?") And the Master's reply: " Yes, my boy, I have seen God and I shall lead you on the way that you may also see Him/' Is it strange that we hung on the words of him who brought these revelations to us? Is it strange that we feel eternally grateful to him who thus quickened our spirit ? I, for one, pray that I may never forget and that I may never lose my gratitude for the help received from Swami Abhedananda in these early days.

I had now become a sincere student of Vedanta. Externally my life was uneventful, an even flow of routine life. I followed my occupation which involved little effort and left me much time to pursue my study and practice of Vedanta. I spent much time at the Vedanta headquarters where I tried to make myself useful to some extent and I was in close contact with the Swami. I did not miss a single lecture or class. And I used to go to the Swami for help when I was in doubt or difficulty. How patient and kind the Swami always was!

The Swami taught us how to meditate, he taught us how to pray. "From the unreal lead us into the Real, from darkness lead us into Light, from death lead us into Immortality;

come to us, thou Destroyer of all ignorance and protect us by thy compassionate face for ever and ever, protect us from all evil thoughts and desires

and let us always remember that we are Spirit divine/' What a wonderful prayer! Who uttered this prayer first, when and where ? To answer this question we would have to look far back through the centuries of Indian history. Was it first wrung from the heart of a Rishi rapt in meditation on the bank of the Ganges ? The earliest record of this prayer is found, I believe, in the Brihadaranyaka, one of the oldest Upanishads. And ever since, for thirty centuries or more, it has been on the lips and in the hearts of the Hindus. And now at last this ancient prayer had come to us in the West.

To be able to cry out from the bottom of one's heart: Lead us into the Real, lead us into Light, make us Immortal, make us remember that we are Spirit; and to get even a faint response—what bliss unspeakable! "For eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of mortal man the things which God hath prepared for those that love Him."

When you meditate, said the Swami, remember first the great teachers of the world. They have given us the greatest of all gifts, the highest truth. Remember the greatest of all teachers, the Teacher of the universe. Aspire to be His faithful servant. Send thoughts of love to all living beings, pray that all may be happy and peaceful and blissful. Then think of your body, remember, it is the instrument of the soul. We must keep it strong and healthy and make it a useful instrument; we must master the body so

that through it we can express our divine nature. Breathe slowly and rhythmically; imagine that you breathe out all that is evil and weak and undesirable and that with every breath you draw in, the divine nature is flowing through you. Then meditate on Him who is the Soul of your soul. Try to feel that you are one with that Infinite, Blissful, Existence, etc.

These were some of the invaluable lessons we received from the Swami.

Uneventful and easy-going as my external life was, internally it was a life of great activity, but activity that brought rest and peace, calm and happiness.

I used to visit one or two of my Vedanta friends and we would talk till late hours in the night. And often on holidays I would jump on my bicycle and with one of Swamiji's books in my pocket would set out for a secluded spot in forest or on the seashore, where I would read and meditate. There I would pass the day alone. Sometimes one of the Swami's most devoted disciples, one of Swami Vivekananda's Brahma-charins, would accompany me. I valued his company for he knew much about Swamiji and he would tell me all about him. He was very devotional. His little room was like a shrine. The walls were decorated with pictures of the different Swamis. In one corner was a little altar with more pictures and candles and incense. He chanted very beautifully and many an hour I

have spent there. We talked and read and meditated there together.

At other times, three of us would go on excursions together. A mountain, some twenty or thirty miles from New York, was our favourite haunt. We would go there some Saturday afternoon, after business hours, take lunch with us and spend the whole night on the top of the mountain. We fixed up a little altar from stones, placed on it the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and the Swamis, lit a fire, burned incense and meditated. Not another soul was near. The view from the mountain was beautiful over a flat prosperous country—green fields, spotted with villages. The following morning we would watch the sun rise and one of us would chant, "Tat saviturvarenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yo nah prachodayat/" "Let us meditate on that adorable and self-effulgent light of Him who has produced this universe; may He enlighten our hearts." And later in the morning faint sounds would reach our ears, as the church bells rang in the distant villages, summoning the devotees to worship. We thoroughly enjoyed these excursions.

And so days passed and weeks and months;

it may have been a year. And then the Swami asked us a question that came as a surprise to us—a surprise that filled our hearts with joy. He called to himself four of his students and asked them whether they were willing and ready to take the vow of lifelong celibacy, whether we

were ready to join that most ancient order of Brahmacharis to which all the sages of India belonged. And thus, blessing upon blessing the Swami bestowed upon us. We all consented;

we were eager to enlist ourselves for a holy life.

Yes, these were happy days, these early days of spiritual awakening and enthusiasm, now almost forty years ago. It is pleasant to look back and call them to mind again. It is sweet to remember the ed vs of child-like trust and innocence and lor'^in or holiness. Where are they gone, thosi Ic or hope mingled with assurance, when in i ash of our youth we felt that the goal could ; »t be far off? It is not always so pleasant to mpare the past with the present. Still, it ma^ r^ profitable even though it hurts, even thougi Qietimcs it wrings our hearts. And at such ? nes it is perhaps a consolation to remember Aat—as Swami Abhedananda once told me—spiritual progress is not in a straight line, it is spiral and the downward curve even is on the We y to progress. While the fruit is growing we can watch its development almost day by day. But when the fruit has attained its full size, the ripening process is hardly perceptible.

Life cannot be continuous sunshine. And so in our spiritual life there comes a lull after the fresh breeze and we seem to have <;QiPfi^ to a standstill. The energy seems la^d^g,

cient to overthrow the obstacle^ ^l^wtfp^f £llen^ carried, as it were, on the wins

from within, all is smooth sailing. But the time comes, perhaps to everyone, at least for some time, that we lose vital interest and we find ourselves stranded. We have met with what is called, "the obstacles to Yoga/"— "the dark night of the soul," the mystics call it.

But of this we knew little then. We did not trouble ourselves about the past or the future, we lived in the present. Neither did deep philosophical questions disturb our peace of mind—the why and how of things. We had grasped a few fundamental truths; these truths we embraced, these truths we wanted to realise and to live. Subtle arguments were not yet undermining our faith, the mind was not yet thrown into that endless tumult of inward questioning, building up theories to-day tearing them down to-morrow, constructing and demolishing in turn—vain struggle of the ego, the battle between heart and intellect. Blessed indeed are they who pass over this stage quickly, till in humility and resignation their ears are opened to the blessed assurance: "My child, you need not know much in order to please Me. Only love me dearly. Speak to Me, as you would talk to your mother, if she had taken you in her arms/"

In the days of which I write now we seemed to walk on air, we felt strong and buoyant and able to meet all obstacles. Could there be anything too difficult with such a goal in view ? We hoped that the Swami would make the vows very strong and binding; they could not be too strict

for us. "But if we cannot keep the vows inviolate?" one of us remarked. "We must and we shall keep our vows inviolate!" was the impetuous reply. "And anyhow it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all/" was the opinion of a third.

Do I see you smile, dear reader ? Remember» we were not children; we were young, but fully grown up; we had seen life in different phases;

little was hidden from us. Well! I also smile, but it is a smile of satisfaction, for perhaps we were children after all. And Jesus loved children. Perhaps he also looked kindly on us, for in those days we were very simple. "Suffer the little children to come unto me," Jesus said, "and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein. . . And he took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands upon them." At least we knocked even if the door was not thrown wide open; at least we ran, if we did not get the first prize. "No' effort is lost," says the Lord Sri Krishna. And we will trust in His words.

And so it came to pass that on the first day of April, in the year 1899, we were initiated. It was Easter Sunday, the great Christian festival, the feast of Christ's resurrection. A few friends, Brahmacharis of Swami Vivekananda, were invited to witness the ceremony. It took place at the home of one of the students, in the room

where we were in the habit of meeting for meditation. It was all very simple, but none the less impressive.

It was evening. The room had been lighted up and was fragrant with the fume of burning incense. The picture of Sri Ramakrishna had been placed on a small altar covered with gerud cloth and decorated with flowers. We placed our humble offering of fruits and flowers on the same altar. And before this picture we meditated and bowed down before we performed the homa and took the vows. The altar fire was burning. The Swami read Shiokas from Hindu scriptures, selected by him for the occasion. Then he chanted Sanskrit verses in adoration of Sri Ramakrishna. These verses were his own composition and are often chanted by the devotees in India. Then the Swami asked us whether we realised that the step we were about to take was a serious step. He pointed out to us that the order we were about to join was the most ancient order in existence; that the rules of this order were universal and observed by all the sages all over the world; that the badge of this order was purity and that to dishonour this badge was a great sin.

He pointed out to us that by joining the order, we were entering upon a new life. As Brahmacharis we had to try, with all our might, to conquer and control our passions, not only lust, but also anger and jealousy, hatred and greed;

we should try to realise the divinity in everyone

and to love all beings equally; we should try to follow the ideal of non-killing, non-injuring others and truthfulness; we had to be chaste in word, thought and deed and always to remember the sexless Spirit; we were to renounce marriage and to avoid temptations and not to run after sense-pleasures; we should always keep in mind that we were Spirit divine. And remember, the Swami said, you are consecrating your life for the good of all and for the service of God.

The Swami then asked the other Brahmacharis who were present, whether there was any objection to our entering the order. No ! there was no objection. Then, one by one, we were asked to approach the sacred fire and to repeat the vows after the Swami, with the customary invocation and oblation of clarified butter into the fire.

This part of the ceremony over, the Swami touched our foreheads with sacred ashes. We received a piece of gerud (ochre) cloth and then with the sprinkling of holy water the Swami gave us our spiritual names: Muktikama, Shantikama, Satyakama and Gurudasa. The meaning of the names was explained: Seeker of freedom, Seeker of peace. Seeker of Truth and Servant of the Master. The ceremony was over. The old Brahmacharis greeted us as new members of the order and the Swami gave us some of the fruit offerings to break our fast of the day. And then, after some pleasant and genial talk we parted and went home.

CHAPTER III

"FRESH FROM INDIA"

Such were the early days of the Vedanta movement in New York. Simplicity and earnestness was the predominating note in those days. The Society had rented a house in one of the modest quarters of the city. Here Swami Abhedananda lived, here he met his students and held his classes. The parlour being rather small, a hall was rented for his Sunday lectures. The audiences gradually increased in number and one after the other, large halls were necessary.

The Sunday lectures appeared in print and these, together with the different publications on Vedanta, were offered for sale at the hall and at the Vedanta headquarters.

The Swami became popular and his work increased. He was a very busy man, lecturing, holding classes, giving private instructions and writing books on Vedanta. The Society flourished, the intellectual world was attracted. The Swami was invited to speak before University assemblies and to address different clubs and societies. What had begun in a private, unostentatious manner, developed into a public movement. The Society was reorganised and the headquarters removed to a better section of the city. Different classes of students enlisted as

members, and the Vedanta Society became a busy centre.

The change was natural, inevitable. Nothing remains stationary in life, it is growth or decay. But the old students did not like the change so much. They preferred the quiet simplicity of early days. This also was natural. They had experienced the benefit of small, more intimate gatherings at some student's home where every one knew each other. There was a close bond between these few students and their teacher. And with larger classes and many strangers dropping in, the atmosphere changed. Perhaps it was not quite reasonable to expect that things would go on exactly on the old footing. Anyhow the Swami felt that he was called to reach out beyond his little circle, that his message had to go forth to all quarters, that the success of his work necessitated his meeting with the intellectual and well-to-do people of New York; that Vedanta was not for the few, but for the many.

It was at this stage of the Vedanta movement that Swami Turiyananda appeared on the scene. He had just come from India via England with Swami Vivekananda who was then the guest of Mr. Leggett, the president of the Society, at his country home.

"Fresh from India/" was in itself a recommendation in the sight of the old students. We do not want a westernised Swami; business and lecturing we have enough in America, we want a simple, meditative man—was their attitude.

Right or wrong, this was the state of affairs. Swami Abhedananda, always strong and positive, followed his own counsel. He wanted to spread Vedanta, he had to follow his own plan. And he flourished. He became a very fine speaker. He enriched the Vedanta literature with a goodly number of his productions. He was called to other cities to lecture. He was loved, admired and applauded wherever he went.

Swami Turiyananda was deputed by Swamiji to assist Swami Abhedananda in the New York work. This he did in his own quiet way. He took charge of the meditation class, conducted the children's class and gave talks to the students. And during the absence of Swami Abhedananda he lectured at the Vedanta headquarters. Many of the old students rallied around him, he got a little following of his own.

"Fresh from India," was a fit term for the Swami. The Indian atmosphere still seemed to hover about him. He was far from being Americanised. He represented India as the old students pictured her—the land of simplicity, of meditation and of spirituality. Gentle, cheerful, meditative, little concerned about the things of this world, he made a deep impression on the minds of those who took Vedanta most seriously—not as a philosophy to satisfy the intellect alone, but also as a practical guidance in their spiritual life.

And so we had two Swamis of different temperament, attracting the different students.

With the coming of Swami Turiyananda the work that was spreading out became also intensified, for in him the fire of spirituality was always burning, ready to flame up at the least occasion. It was my good fortune for several years to be closely associated with him. What had been implanted in me by the loving care of Swami Abhedananda, was now protected and nourished by the new Swami. Swami Abhedananda went ahead, ploughed new fields, planted new seeds. Swami Turiyananda took charge of the growing plants. But be it understood, Swami Abhedananda kept a loving, watchful eye over his old students. If he could not give them the time and attention of former days, he never forgot them or ceased to love them. And it was perhaps during these very days that I saw in him the most unmistakable marks of a tender, loving heart.

I have related my first meeting with Swami Abhedananda, let me now put down my meeting with and impressions of Swami Turiyananda.

The news then had reached the Society that a new Swami was coming from India. We were anxiously expecting him. We are always greedy, it seems, for something new, a change, some excitement. We were on the tiptoe of expectation, an expectation that was not to be disappointed. The Swami was to be with us on a certain date. As usual, I went to the Vedanta

Society after my work of the day was over. And that evening my first question was, almost before I entered the room, "Has the new Swami come?" A few of the members were there. Some were busy with Society work, others were talking together.

Adjoining the parlour was another room. It was kept dark except on evenings when there was a meeting. "Yes," was the reply, "the Swami has come, he is in the other room." I peeped in and there in the dark I saw the Swami alone, meditating. I thought this rather extraordinary. But not wishing to disturb him I withdrew into the parlour and joined my fellow students. Some had dropped in just for a moment and were leaving again. Only three of us remained. The two who stayed with me had met the Swami earlier in the evening. At last the Swami emerged from the darkness and joined us.

In appearance Swami Turiyananda was quite a contrast to Swami Abhedananda. He was of shorter stature and his features were less classical. But his manner was winning. His face was bright and open, as we find it in youths. He was probably a few years older than Swami Abhedananda. The latter also looked young for his years. He looked like a young, dashing college graduate. Swami Turiyananda's face was like that of a happy, intelligent, thoughtful youth; at times very much so. In fact, as later I observed, his expression of face was subject to

moods, more markedly than I have ever noticed in any human face. Sometimes his face indicated tremendous strength and an indomitable will-power, at other times remoteness as if his mind was withdrawn from the external world, sometimes he looked the picture of humility and again his face would be like that of a child, innocence and purity written in every line.

The Swami entered the room smiling. I was introduced to him. His manner was easy and I felt as if I was meeting with an old friend. "Oh, you have come/" he said, "I have heard about you/" I told the Swami how glad we all were to have him with us. " You see, Swami, we love India and every one and everything that comes from that holy land."

The Swami smiled. "That is good," he said, "and though I have not been in this country long," (he had been some time with Swamiji at Mr. Leggett's country home after coming from England) '(though I have not been in this country long, I feel quite at home here. It is not as strange as I thought it would be. Human nature, I see, is the same everywhere. I feel as if I have come amongst friends."

"And so you have, Swami," I replied. Again he smiled. "Good! Good!" he said. "Yes, you are all Mother's children and I know that you love India." Then we exchanged a few personal questions. "Did you have pleasant sea voyage, have you been sea-sick, how is your health in this country?" etc. The Swami asked

me about my age and occupation, etc. Then he said: "See here, Mr. K. knows a little Sanskrit/" "Yes, Swami," I replied, "he is so clever. I am afraid you will be disgusted with me. I do not know even the Sanskrit alphabet."

"Oh, never mind/" he said, "what shall you do with Sanskrit? It takes a lifetime to master it, you can use your time better. Be Mother's child and think always of Her. But Mr. K., I see, is a very good man, he is past middle age and yet he is not married. Is not that excellent?"

"Yes, Swami, he is one of the old students, he is our best friend and he knows Swami ji."

"Oh, I am so glad. You will also know Swamiji, in time."

"Swami," I said, "did Mr. K. repeat Sanskrit Shiokasto you?"

"No, he only told me that he was studying a little Sanskrit."

"Oh, Mr. K.," I said, "do give us some of your Shiokas. Swami will be so glad to hear them." Mr. K. did not require much urging as well I knew and at once he began: Vasansi jirnani yatha vihaya, etc. "As a man casting off worn-out garments takes new ones, so the dweller in the body, casting off worn-out bodies entereth into others that are new."

"Ah, ah! How nice! Go on Mr. K., it is excellent," said the Swami. Mr. K. beamed all over; he was so pleased that the Swami liked the

Shiokas. Then the Swami spoke to me and said:

"You are also not married, I hear."

"No, Swami, I am a Brahmacharin. Swami Abhedananda has now taught us to look upon all women as our mother and I try to do that."

"Yes, yes, the Master taught us that way. That is the safest way, go on and remember it. Our Master had realised that every woman is the representative of the Divine Mother. He saw the Divine Mother in every one, good, bad or indifferent. I am so glad. Shiva! Shiva! I have already met with so many nice people, both in England and here."

"But, Swami, we are so active and materialistic, does not the hurry and bustle of Western life annoy you?"

"Yes, as a race you are very materialistic, but I have met with exceptions. And activity is not bad. I like your energy, you are all up and doing, I see no idleness anywhere. Only that energy should be controlled. It should go inward also, activity in inactivity. But not laziness, mind you. But you are a young race, you must enjoy a little. We in India do not know how to enjoy life, we have forgotten that. You will gradually pay more attention to the spiritual side of life and we will get a little more material comfort and enjoyment. That will come the more East and West meet together. We both have to learn. But India holds the highest ideals. The West has not yet appreciated that. But it is coming. Hari aum tat

sat/' Then the Swami began to chant in a very low voice, Aum, aum, aum, Hari aum.

And so we were talking in a free and easy manner, when our lady friend, who was in charge of the rooms, called out: " Swami, do you know what time it is? It is almost midnight. I am going to turn out the lights, otherwise you will keep us here all night and our friends will be late at their offices to-morrow."

"Yes, yes/' said the Swami, "I forgot all about the time, I am so happy to be with you all."

"Never mind, Swami," I said, "the office does not begin till nine o'clock in the morning. There is plenty of time yet. What do you say, Mr. K.?" Mr. K. smiled and said: "I am not in a hurry." But anyhow we took leave of the Swami and we told him that we would come back the following day.

We were so happy! Mr. K. walked home with me part of the way. He was a simple, good-hearted man. And this evening he was like a boy. Well, I was as boy-like as he was and we talked and talked about the new Swami, I did not get much sleep that night. I do not know how Mr. K. fared, but the next evening I found him with the Swami again when I reached the Vedanta Home. And so evening after evening we met with the Swami, others joining us at times. We became closely and intimately acquainted with him.

The chant which I have mentioned was an

outstanding feature with the Swami. Everyone remarked about it and seemed impressed by it. It was new to us and I may be allowed to' make a few remarks about it.

This chant was peculiar with the Swami. He would keep it up for hours at a time. When he was talking he would chant in between. After asking a question he would chant while listening to the reply. Walking, sitting, talking, in public or alone, always that soft, melodious chant went on. Sometimes it was rather amusing in our conventional Western life. In a crowded street-car, the Swami unconcerned about his surroundings would sit softly chanting, to the surprise and wonderment of the other passengers. But the Swami seemed quite unconscious of that. Often I noticed the passengers look at each other smiling. Of course there was not the least offence. Only it seemed to amuse them in this brown-faced stranger.

Before and after our meditations the chant would come in full strength. It was not only beautiful, it was also helpful, especially before meditation. It had the effect of quieting the mind and of creating an atmosphere. I may compare it with the effect produced by the burning of incense in a Roman Catholic church.

Sometimes the chant would come loud and strong, again it would be deep like a strong vibration, it would run up and end in a soft high note, very sweet. The tune also varied. This chant was with the Swami as long as he was

in America. Aum, aum, Hari aum, it would go on and on.

I did not quite understand it at the time but now I realise how by this chant the Swami kept up an inward flow of unbroken meditation and how often it had the effect of making us pause and collect our scattered minds, drawing us inward also. But it was entirely natural with him. It came of itself, without the least effort.

Sometimes, especially later .in the Shanti Ashrama, when we would be indulging in light talk we would suddenly hear the chant from the distance, coming louder and louder as the Swami approached us. And invariably it would put an end to our light talk and make us remember what we were at the Ashrama for. The object of our being there was never kept far from us any way. But of this later. It was one of the means.

Another peculiarity with the Swami was, that while talking with a person, softly chanting in between, he would sometimes look remote as if he were only half listening, as if his mind were elsewhere. This was often puzzling and misleading, especially when the Swami was slow in answering a question. It was sometimes thought that he was not interested in the subject or did not like to be drawn outward. But this was not the case. I noticed that he never lost the drift of the conversation and that his answers were always to the point. Once I questioned the Swami about it and he replied: "There are two ways of answering a question; one way is to

answer from the intellect, the other way is to answer from within. I always try to answer from within."

Considering the nature of these answers, how a few words could give so much satisfaction to the questioner, it seems that this way of answering from within is most effective, it is answering by insight and is possible only for highly trained and concentrated minds. The answers were like flashes of illumination. The Swami would always keep his eyes towards the questioner and it seems to me that during this process of answering he got a glimpse of the mental state of the questioner. I know that this was sometimes the case with Swami Abhedananda, even when answering questions from the platform. His answer would then be more to the individual than to the audience. And so it sometimes happened that the answer was far more satisfactory to the questioner than to the audience as a whole. I remember that once one of us asked Swami Abhedananda after his lecture, why he had answered a certain question (which I cannot recollect now, but it was about Jesus) in the way he had done. And the Swami replied: "Because it was the answer the questioner needed—to another person I might have given quite a different answer."

It also happened with Swami Turiyananda, as we have heard it was so often the case with his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, that he would suddenly begin to discuss a subject which was

troubling and weighing on the mind of some one present. There was nothing to lead up to the subject and the person in question would be surprised how the Swami happened to solve his doubt and difficulty unasked for. These, I suppose, are the higher qualifications of a real teacher—gifts or powers that are developed through a long period of strict Brahmacharya, self-discipline and mental control.

CHAPTER IV

A LIVING EXAMPLE

One thing was clear. Swam! Turiyananda did not care much for public work, organisation and all that. He was for the few, not for big crowds. His work was with the individual—character-building. He seemed to be of the opinion that with organisation the spiritual work is apt to suffer. "Lectures/" he used to say, "are to reach the public, but the real work can be done only through close personal contact. Both are necessary. And every one has his own way of working. We must each follow our own way. Swami Abhedananda will reach many people through his lectures. But that is not my way. And I have special instructions from Swamiji. He does not want me to lecture much. Swami]i asked me before he sent me here:

'Can you lecture like I have done?" I said:

"Of course not, Swamiji, what are you saying?"

'Well then/ he said, 'do not trouble yourself about lecturing. You just live the life. Be an example to them. Let them see how Sannyasins live!' So, you see, I am only obeying Swamiji."

Still, the Swami could not avoid lecturing altogether, for he was in full charge of the New York work when Swami Abhedananda was absent. His lectures were usually short. As they were given at the Vedanta Home, before

small audiences, he could follow his own method. First he would ask the audience to meditate for a few minutes and then he would begin his talk—interesting, instructive talks, always pointing out the practical side of religion and illustrating his points with stories from the Puranas and other scriptures. These talks were very helpful and they were much appreciated. The questions and answers following these talks were also most interesting.

But as said before, the real life-building work was done with the individual. As a sculptor takes and fashions the clay into shape, so Swami Turiyananda took his students and worked and chiselled away at them. With steady hand and aim he fashioned the character of his students. It was done through close, personal contact. And he threw his whole heart into his work. He did it with a purpose; he did it with intensity. But it was all done in such a natural way that one never had the idea of being taught. He simply lived with us and that perennial spring of spirituality that was somewhere hidden within him, followed its free and natural course. It was inexhaustible. When sitting together, when walking, when taking our food, the stream flowed on without interruption. I could not understand how the Swami could always find some topic of spiritual conversation. I asked him once: "Swami, how is it possible always to speak of holy subjects; are you never getting exhausted?" He replied: "You see, I have

lived this life from my youth, it has become part and parcel of me. And Mother keeps the supply filled up. Her store can never be exhausted. What goes out. She at once fills up again." I could only marvel and be silent.

I have never been a good conversationalist myself, but I have always been a good listener. So when the Swami and I went out for long walks together, he would do almost all the talking. And I was so happy to listen to him, I would feel so inspired. He talked with fire and enthusiasm and he would lose himself entirely in his subject, forgetting everything else for the time being. He impressed every one who heard him and all classes of people felt attracted towards him.

How precious the Swami's company was to me ! How I enjoyed these long walks with him, nay, every moment that I was in his presence!

Let me give just one rather amusing example of the nature of these talks and how the Swami threw himself heart and soul into his conversation, oblivious of time or surroundings.

Once the Swami and I were walking together in one of the most fashionable avenues of New York. The more interested he became in his subject the faster he began to walk and the louder his voice became. This in itself was enough to attract the attention of passers-by. But you can imagine the surprise of the fashionable New York people when suddenly the Swami halted in the street and with one arm raised in

the air, said to me, almost shouting: " Be a lion, be a lion, break the cage and be free ! Take one big jump and the work is done/'

How many stories the Swami told us to illustrate what he was saying. "There is a species of snake that lays its eggs and then coils around them. As soon as an egg hatches, the mother snake swallows the little one. But some of these newly hatched babies are so quick and clever that they at once jump outside the mother's coil and so escape their dire fate. And so/' the Swami said, "it is with those that are born free. From their birth they are free and mother M^yi can get no hold on them."

As I was then about to take a serious step which was likely to affect the career of my entire life, the Swami cautioned me so that I might not act on the impulse of the moment, but first consider well what I was going to do. "There was a hunter," he said, "who had been walking all day in the forest but had not been able to get any quarry. Dejected and tired he rested under a tree. His hunting companion, a hawk, was sitting close beside him. The hunter was very thirsty but no water could be found. Then he noticed that water was slowly dripping down from the tree. Delighted, he put down his cup to catch the precious water. Dip, dip, it fell down into the cup, drop by drop. At last the cup was filled and greedily the hunter stretched out his hand to take it. But just before his hand reached the cup, the hawk with a swift move-

ment upset it. The water was lost. The hunter terribly annoyed scolded the hawk and replaced the cup. Again the cup was slowly filling up and when it was filled, the hunter, happy to get a drink of fresh water at last, once more stretched out his hand to take it. But the hawk upset the cup as before. The hunter was now beside himself with rage and he killed his hawk with one terrible blow. He placed the cup again, certain of getting water this time. And while he was waiting for the cup to fill up he looked up to see where the water came from. And what did he see ? A large snake was hanging down from a branch high up in the tree. Its mouth was wide open and from its mouth drop by drop poison was falling into the cup. This was what he had taken to be water. The hawk had twice saved his life. And he had killed her. With unspeakable regret the hunter buried his old friend who had served him many years and at last had saved his life. So you see," the Swami said, "do not throw away what may be your best friend. Consider carefully."

Need I say that such stories made me pause and think?

And then there were many little incidents that impressed me. One evening I came to the Vedanta Home and said: "Swami, there is a very fine concert to-night. It is an oratorio and you will like it. You have never heard our Western music, let us go!"

" But why should you care for those things ?"

the Swami said, "you have had enough of that now. Let us stay here and read something nice and have good talk. These amusements we must give up now, if we want Mother/'

" Of course, Swami/' I said, " I shall be very glad to stay here with you. I thought that perhaps you would like it/' And we spent a delightful evening together. But I thought:

How genuine is the SwamTs renunciation!
Here he is in a new country and even then he does not care for sight-seeing and all those things. He has no curiosity for new things, he is perfectly happy and contented within himself and by talking of Mother. Where shall we find another man like him?

The Swami impressed people in his own, simple way. We used to go to a little vegetarian restaurant together. It was a quiet place and very few people went there, so we could take our meal and talk freely together. A young woman was in charge of the dining room and she served the few guests that frequented the place. She was a happy, simple, country girl, always ready with a smile and a kind remark. The Swami liked her, she was so open and free, but perfectly modest. Once the Swami asked her: "What is your name ?" "My name is Mary," she replied. "Oh, how beautiful," said the Swami. "Mary was the mother of Jesus." The girl was awfully pleased. "Well, now, Swamiji," she said, "I never had thought of it in that way. It does seem like a connecting link, does it not ? How

nice of you to remind me." "Oh, yes/" the Swami said, {t! shall now always think of you as the mother of the Lord Jesus. Be sure of that! I love Jesus, he also was a Sannyasi and he gave his life for others/" The girl became devoted to him and she was so happy when she would see the Swami come. Somehow or other, the Swami always left a lasting impression.

It was not often that the Swami spoke about his own life and experiences. It was mostly about his Master and Swamiji. His love, devotion and admiration for Swamiji knew no bounds. But now and then a story about himself would leak out when I was with him alone.

One day he was impressing on my mind the necessity of practising what I was learning. " Be always sincere," he said, tt and be yourself. Be true! Have no axe to grind, go always straight for the goal and be strong. When I was a young man I was reading and practising Vedanta. I tried always to remember that I was the Atman and not this body. I was in the habit of taking my bath in the early morning. One day I went to take my bath as usual and I was just about to enter the river, when, to my horror, I saw a crocodile not far away. I drew back. But then it flashed on my mind: What are you doing? You are repeating day and night, Soham, 'I am He/ and now, all of a sudden, you forget your ideal and you think that you are this body! Shame on you! I thought. Shiva.

Shiva, that is true. And at once I entered the river. The crocodile was there but did not move. I bathed as usual, but I noticed that I was hurrying up to get through with my bath quickly. Then I said to myself: No, I shall not hurry, I shall take my bath as usual. And so I did. The crocodile disappeared without paying the least attention to me."

All this may lose a great deal by writing it down. The point is that Swami's words acted like medicine administered in the right dose at the right time. It came so appropriate, just when needed. This made it so helpful. And it was all so spontaneous.

Once I felt a little dejected and the Swami noticing it said: When we were living at the old Math, now many years ago, it happened once that I was very sad. I could not make any progress for some time and everything looked dark to me. I was walking up and down on the flat roof of the Math. It was evening and the moon was hidden by clouds. Sleep was impossible for me, I was so unhappy. Then suddenly from behind the clouds the moon emerged and everything looked bright and beautiful. As soon as I saw that, I thought: "See, the moon was there all the time but I could not see her. So the Atman is also ever present, shining in its own glory, but I did not see it. The cloud of ignorance stood between the Atman and my intellect overshadowing my mind." And at once I felt strong again, my doubts all gone.

On another occasion the Swami told me how, many years ago when he was travelling on foot as a Sannyasin, in India, the thought was tormenting him, that he was living a useless, vagabond life. "Everyone is doing something in this world, but what am I doing" he thought. "It became very painful," the Swami said, "and I could not shake off this thought. I thought of myself as a little, insignificant, useless creature. I was utterly dejected and threw myself down under a tree. There I fell asleep and I had a dream. I saw myself lying on the ground and then to my surprise I saw that my body began to expand in all directions. It went on expanding and expanding, there was no end to it. At last it seemed to cover the whole world. Then it occurred to me: ' See how great you are, you are covering the whole world. Why do you think your life is useless ? A grain of Truth will cover a whole world of delusion. Get up, be strong and realise the Truth. That is the greatest life.' I awoke and jumped up and all my doubts had vanished."

The Swami was always encouraging us. "Keep at it, keep at it," he would say. "Clench your fists and say: I will conquer! Now or never—make that your motto. Even in this life I must see God. That is the only way. Never postpone. What you know to be right, do that and do it at once, do not let any chance go by. The way to failure is paved with good intentions. That will not do. Remember, this life is

for the strong, the persevering; the weak go to the wall. And always be on your guard. Never give in. Do you know what Jesus said? 'He who endureth until the last shall inherit the kingdom of God.' Never think that you are safe; temptations come as long as we live/' And then the Swami told the following story.

In India there was an old Sannyasin. He lived in the forest near a village. He never went far away from his little hut and very few persons came his way. The villagers would come now and then to be instructed by him and as they came they would bring a little grain as an offering to the holy man. On this the Sannyasin subsisted. One day, when he was seated in his hut, he heard the sound of tinkling anklets, as are used by women in India. Before he realised what he was doing, he was up and about to leave his cabin to have a look at the woman. He had not seen a woman's face for thirty years. Then he suddenly halted. "What am I doing?" he thought. "For thirty years I have avoided women and now in my old age I am tempted and run out like a dog to look at a woman's face? Oh, wretched legs that took me so far, I shall punish you, never shall you carry this body again."—He sat down on the spot. And the story goes, that he never moved from there, dying a few years later without having moved an inch from that place. Such dangers there are, concluded the Swami, but also such perseverance and will-power.

The Swami often spoke of Jesus. Once in the Shanti Ashrama, at the breakfast table, one of us spilled a little salt, and we joked about it, as in America we say that spilling salt brings a quarrel. The quarrel is avoided by taking a little of the salt that is spilt and by throwing it over the left shoulder. So the culprit did this and we all joined in the fun. The Swami himself was fond of joke. But after we had quieted down he seemed to become thoughtful. Then he said in a low voice, as if speaking to himself: "Ye are the salt of the earth/" Then he mused a moment and said again as if speaking to himself: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head/" Again a short pause: Then—*ct!* that speak unto thee am he/" The Swami drew a deep breath. Then in a loud and intense voice he addressed us: "Can you feel the conviction, the realisation back of these sayings, the authority? Yes, truly, Jesus was the Son of God.—What an inspiration these lives are! We should think about these great souls. No wonder his teachings survived through all these centuries. And then our Master came," the Swami continued in a soft voice, "he came to give new life and interpretation to the old teaching. He was the embodiment of all that came before him and then he added something. He taught that all religions when sincerely followed lead to one and the same goal. And he had realised everything that he taught. That

was a wonderful life. It will take the world a long time to understand and appreciate him. He never took any credit to himself. It was always: 'I know nothing, my Divine Mother knows everything/ He was all humility and at the same time he was all strength. We have travelled almost over the whole of India, but never have we seen another like him.'

Once in New York, I could not see the Swami for several days. I had been busy in many ways, till at last, one afternoon I had leisure and went to visit him at the Vedanta headquarters.

"Where have you been so long?" he greeted me. "Come, what's the good sitting in the house? Let us go for a walk. I have had no one to walk with all these days."

"That suits me, Swami," I responded.
"Put on your heavy coat and boots. It is cold."

It was winter, and the streets were covered with fresh snow. When we came to a wooded place, the Swami was as happy as a child. "What a wonderful sight," he exclaimed, pointing to the trees, each branch covered with a layer of pure, white snow, glittering in the sunlight. "I love your winters, the air so exhilarating."

When we came to a large pond, we found boys and girls skating on the ice. Their cheeks were flushed with exercise, and they were calling
• and shouting, and pursuing each other in great fun.

"That's why you people are so healthy and

strong/" the Swami called out. "Look at the girls skating with the boys. What freedom! Wish it were so in my country. So innocent and pure! It is a sight for the gods to behold. Come, let us go on the ice. Can you skate?"

"Yes/" I said, "I love skating. Everyone in Holland skates/"

The ice was slippery, and the Swami had difficulty in keeping his balance. But he enjoyed it immensely.

On our way home he talked about India, her poverty, and the restricted life of her women. "When shall we also be wealthy and free?" he sighed. Then he became cheerful again, and he told me about the customs in India, the different people he had met during his life of wandering, their ways of living, speech and dress; about the pilgrimages and temples, and the Sadhus meditating on the banks of the Ganges.

It was most interesting to me. It all sounded like a story of another world. At last, I remarked, "India is a holy land, indeed. The people there must be better than our people in the West."

At this the Swami smiled, and said, " Human nature is the same everywhere. But with us everything, except the zenana, is open and exposed. We cannot even keep our natures secret. But you know very nicely how^A do that. You all wear masks. Whea^gp i Jg^^ pain, you smile; when you are p^i^eiT'BttyNa

few cheap tinsels to appear rich;j^h^n you are\^^

in misery, you say, 'Everything is fine'; when you are not feeling well, you say, 'Never felt better/ We don't do that/' Then he laughed heartily.

ct You know what is the reason ?"

"It is because we don't want sympathy," I said loftily.

"That's pride," the Swami flashed at me. "You like to give sympathy, but not to receive it. You like to be helpful to others, but you don't allow others to be helpful to you. Life should be a matter of give and take. Be ready to give, and equally ready to receive, but without attachment in either case. Then there will be no pride, no self-sufficiency. We cannot stand alone in this world, we are all interdependent."

"Of course," I interposed, "I was speaking of sympathy that is futile. Real, helpful sympathy we all crave. But there has been in the past too much of sentimental, meaningless sympathy that does no good, but degenerates."

"Yes, yes," the Swami admitted eagerly in a changed mood. "The new psychology of the West has brought a reaction. You are now beginning to understand the power of thought which our Rishis taught ages ago. Thinking about our misfortunes only increases the gloom. Your attitude is to scorn failure, and push onward to success. That is laudable. I like your cheerful, hopeful outlook on life. You use failure as a stepping stone to success. Down to-day, up to-morrow."

Then placing his hand on my shoulder, he said, "That is manliness, that is strength. We need that in our country/'

After a short silence the Swami resumed, "But what I had in mind is this, we live outdoors. These things which you hide so carefully between four walls and a roof, we could not hide if we wanted to. The majority of our people are poor, and live in huts. So they are out in the open most of the time. You cannot hide much when you live many together in a poor hut. And our better homes, on account of the hot climate, are open too. There is no waiting outside the house till some one answers the bell, unlocks the door, and admits you. We bathe, cook and eat our meals, sleep, pray and work, all in the open. Even our shops are open. And we go almost naked.

"You, on the other hand, live in a cold climate, in a wealthy country. So first you hide your body with clothing; your clothed body you hide between four walls; within these four walls each one has his private room where no one ventures without knocking and getting permission to enter; finally your house is hidden in a garden, and the garden hidden by a wall.

"Privacy is your ideal. We have no privacy, all this reflects in your nature. That is the last thing to hide, and you do it/' Then we both laughed and talked about other things. But before we reached home the Swami warned me, "Don't think that all Hindus are

saints. Neither are we quite as bad as some of your missionaries tell you. It is simply a matter of nature adjusting itself to conditions. Some of our manners seem barbarous to you, and some of your manners are obnoxious to us. We are always hasty in our judgment of other nations. If we would patiently try to understand the reason for certain customs we would be more charitable in our judgments. Well, well, perhaps some day you will come to India. Then you will see everything."

I have seen the Swami in many moods, sometimes playful, sometimes serene, at other times indulgent, and on rare occasions severe. His spiritual moods would also change. I have seen him in New York startle a sophisticated Christian audience with the bold, uncompromising message of the Advaita Vedanta, enjoining them to break loose from the bondage of Maya. "Brahman alone is real," he exclaimed with great force, "everything else is unreal; and the human soul is that Brahman. The lion shut up in a bulrush cage thinks he is caught, and escape impossible. He does not know that one blow from his mighty paw would demolish the cage and set him free. We are bound by the delusion of ignorance. Tear away the delusion and be free. All power is within you, for you are the Atman. With the sword of knowledge, sever the veil of Maya, and assert your divine nature."

To some of the most orthodox in the audi-

ence these stirring words sounded like blasphemy. A timid young lady, after the lecture approached the Swami and told him that she could not understand how the soul could be God, and the world unreal. The Swami listened patiently to all she had to say. Then in a very earnest tone he consoled and encouraged her, " It took me many years to realize this," he said, "but once it is realized the work is done." Then the lady began to speak in praise of Christianity as being so much easier to grasp. "Yes," the Swami admitted, "Vedanta is not an easy, comfortable religion. Truth is never cheap. So long as we are satisfied with glass beads we won't search for diamonds. It is hard to work to delve into the earth, remove the stones and rocks, and go to great depths to find the precious stone. Vedanta is the jewel among religions."

At other times he would take up the dualistic aspect of Vedanta, and speak with great devotion and depth of feeling of the infinite love of the Divine Mother of the Universe. "Surrender yourself to Her," he would say, "and she will guide you in the right path, for she is always ready to help Her children."

He never hesitated to correct our shortcomings in a bold, straightforward way, for which we, in the West, were hardly prepared.

Some of the students took exception at the unceremonious method in which the Swami rebuked them. They were greatly annoyed and offended when he laid bare their weak spots in

the presence of others, or even in private. Then he would say, "Yes, people in the West always try to cover up and hide your mistakes. But how can the wound be treated unless the bandages are removed ? You hide your real character behind a smooth and polite exterior, but the sore festers in the heart. The Guru is the physician, and once the disease is diagnosed he must not fear to apply the lancet if necessary. Sometimes a deep clear incision is the only remedy. You are so sensitive, always afraid of being scolded or exposed. When I flatter a little, you say, 'Swami is so wonderful,' but when I utter a harsh word you run away."

Another difficulty the Swami had to meet was that some students thought that he did not understand them.

To this he would reply, 'I know you better than you know yourself, because I can look deep into your mind. What is hidden to yourself, is revealed to me. In time you will realize that what I tell you is true.'

We could not understand it then, when hidden tendencies came to the front, we discovered that the Swami was right.

A young student once confessed this to him, and then the Swami gave the explanation.

"You see," he said, "ordinarily we know only the surface waves of our mind. But through Yoga practice we learn to go deeper. By watching and studying our own minds we dive below the surface consciousness, and

observe what is going on there. Many Samskaras—latent desires and tendencies—are stored up there, waiting for an opportunity to express themselves. These we can discover before they rise to the surface. This is very important, for once a thought has come to the surface it is extremely difficult to control. But at an early stage, before it has fully developed and gathered strength, it is easy to manipulate. This is called, 'Seeing our thoughts in seed form.'

"The seed is easily destroyed, but when it has germinated and grown into a big strong tree, it requires great strength and effort to hew it down. So we must crush our desires in their early, undeveloped stages. Yogis can do this. They keep down undesirable thoughts in the germ state by smothering them beneath thoughts of an opposite nature. Thus they conquer all evil tendencies—hatred with love, anger with kindness, and so on/'

Once in New York, after a morning lecture, the Swami called me aside, and asked me to go with him for a walk. It was a lovely, sunny day. We took lunch together in a restaurant, and then walked to Central Park. There we sat down in a solitary place on the grass beneath a tree. The Swami had spoken little. He was in a serious mood, and seemed a little sad, I knew there was something on his mind that he wanted to unburden, but I did not feel inclined to approach the subject. However, at last he began.

"You see/3 he said, "I tell you everything because I cannot keep my thoughts hidden. Some of the students think that I don't understand them. That is because they don't understand themselves. They don't know the hidden motives that prompt them to action. They feel the impulse to do certain things, and that impulse they interpret to suit their own convenience. The real desire that pushes them on, they don't see. I can see these hidden things, but when I tell the students this, they get annoyed, and say, 'Swami doesn't understand.' Everybody in this country thinks that he is unselfish, whereas unselfishness is extremely rare. We are deluded by our ego. Therefore, Hindu scriptures say that a Guru is necessary. He can probe the mind of the disciple, see his real motives, and warn him in time. But Western people don't understand this. They won't admit the need of a Guru. The West is very egoistic."

When we got up and walked home, the Swami said, "My Master was a perfect Yogi, nothing remained hidden from him. He knew our minds through and through. We didn't have to ask him anything, he anticipated all our thoughts. We never had the impression that he was teaching us, but he watched us all the time." Nothing escaped him. He knew what pitfalls stood in our way, and he made us avoid them.

"Have you seen people play chess? The players sometimes overlook a move because their minds are set on winning the game. But

the looker-on will see the move, because his mind is calm, not disturbed by the desire to win. We become ambitious, and thus lose clearness of vision. Ambition sweeps us along, and all prudence is thrown to the winds. Our desires make us blind."

CHAPTER V

A LION AMONGST MEN

Swami Turiyananda did not stay in New York for a long time permanently. Swami Saradananda, who then returned to India, had been very successful in his labour in Montclair, a beautiful country town, about an hour's journey from New York. He had made many friends there and devoted students. And as now these students were without a teacher, they requested Swami Turiyananda to take up the work so ably started by his brother-Sannyasin.

The Swami consented with the proviso that he be allowed to keep up the work in New York also, for Swami Abhedananda was then absent on a lecturing tour. This was agreed upon. Swami went to Montclair, visiting the New York centre every Saturday and staying over Sunday to hold classes and to give lectures. Thus, every Saturday and Sunday we had him with us.

Very soon the Swami made himself beloved in Montclair as he had done in New York. He was the guest at the home of one of Swami Saradananda's most devoted students. It was a home of culture, piety and cheerfulness—one of those healthy, balanced American homes rich in mutual love and consideration, with a great deal of freedom but perfectly regulated; the children full of life and enterprise, adoring the parents and very free with them; a home of mutual

understanding. The Swami enjoyed being there and every member of the family loved and respected him. The Swami saw American family-life at its best, and it was a revelation to him. The husband was a Christian Scientist but sympathetic towards Vedanta. The wife was a staunch Vedantist of the devotional type. The Swami often spoke of her as one of the most spiritual women he had ever met. "She is so Sattvic/" he used to say, "firm, quiet, she always does the right thing at the right time without the least fuss."

Once, while staying there, the Swami received a letter from India. It contained the sad news that part of Bengal was under the grip of a devastating famine. His hostess saw that the letter saddened the Swami. She enquired whether he had received bad news. Reluctantly the Swami told her that the people of Bengal were visited by famine. Not another word was said. But a few days later his hostess presented the Swami with a purse of money to send to India for the famine-stricken people. Quietly, without the Swami knowing anything about it, she had gone to her friends and collected the money.

An interesting incident took place when Swami Saradananda was living at this happy home. The Swami had often spoken about Sri Ramakrishna and one day he produced his Master's photograph and showed it to the lady of the house. "Oh, Swami/" she exclaimed,

"it is the same face!" "What do you mean?" said the Swami. And then she told him that long ago, in her youth, before she was married, she had had a vision of a Hindu and that it was the same face that now she saw in the photograph. "It was Sri Ramakrishna/" she said, "but I did not know it until now. I was so much impressed and charmed at the vision at the time, that I remember the face very distinctly, and I have been going about here and there ever since I had the vision, whenever I heard that a Hindu had come to America, but I was always disappointed, not finding the same face. And now at last I see that it was Ramakrishna/"

And now a new event took place. Swami Vivekananda came to New York. But, alas! it was only for a short visit. He stayed with us for less than two weeks. Though under the kind ministrations of friends at a country-home Swamiji had partly recuperated his health, he was still far from being well and it had been arranged to send him to California, three thousand miles from New York, to the land of sunshine and warmth and fragrant air.

On his way to California Swamiji halted at Chicago for one week. There he was with his devoted and admiring friends who had witnessed his triumph at the Religious Congress, some years previously. Then Swamiji proceeded to California where he soon found himself strong enough to appear on the lecture platform from where he attracted large audiences.

During the short period Swamiji stayed in New York, there was great rejoicing at the Vedanta Home. Swamiji did not give any public lectures but he attended the classes and meetings at the Vedanta Home and there he gave short talks and answered questions. A public reception was given to him at the Home and his former friends and students gathered in large numbers to meet their beloved teacher again. It was a very happy gathering. Others were also present who had long desired to meet the great Swami of whom they had heard so much.

Though public, the reception was informal. The Swami had a smile, a joke or a kind word for everyone of his old friends. Part of the time he was seated on the floor, in the Indian fashion, some of the friends following his example. There was much talking and laughing and the Swami showed by a gesture or a remark that he had nowise forgotten his old students.

About Swamiji much has been written and I do not wish to go into repetition. Let me record only one of my impressions of the evening. I do so because it came to me with such great force.

Swamiji was so simple in his behaviour, so like one of the crowd that he did not impress me so much when I first saw him. There was nothing about his ways that would mark him as the lion of New York society as so often he had been. Simple in dress and behaviour he was just like one of us. He did not put himself aside

on a pedestal as is so often the case with lionised personages. He walked about the room, sat on the floor, laughed, joked, chatted—nothing formal. Of course I had noticed his magnificent, brilliant eyes, his beautiful features and majestic bearing, for these were parts of him that no circumstances could hide. But when I saw him for a few minutes standing on a platform surrounded by others, it flashed into my mind:

"What a giant, what strength, what manliness, what a personality! Every one near him looks so insignificant compared with him/' It came to me almost as a shock, it seemed to startle me. What was it that gave Swamiji this distinction ? Was it his height? No, there were gentlemen there taller than he was. Was it his build? No, there were near him some very fine specimens of American manhood. It seemed to be more in the expression of the face than anything else. Was it his purity? What was it? I could not analyse it. I remembered what had been said of Lord Buddha,—"a lion amongst men/' I felt that Swamiji had unlimited power, that he could move heaven and earth if he willed it. This was my strongest and lasting impression of him.

When the Swami returned from California I was no longer in New York, so I never saw him again. But I am grateful that I have seen him and that during those two weeks he has sometimes been very kind to me. And even now as I read and re-read the Swami's lectures,

that picture of wonderful strength and purity conies before my mental vision. And in those printed lines there still seems to vibrate something of that great spirit that came to enlighten the Western world. "These great and peaceful teachers/" says the sage ShankaracMrya, " come to regenerate the world like the spring that brings forth new fruits and flowers. And after they themselves have crossed over the ocean of world-bondage, they help those who strive for liberation to reach the haven of peace and blessedness. And this they do from a purely unselfish motive/'

CHAPTER VI

THE NEED FOR A VEDANTA RETREAT

In the preceding pages I have now and then alluded to the Shanti Ashrama. It may interest the reader to know how this Ashrama came into existence and something about the life and work there.

Before Swami Vivekananda returned from California a young Vedanta student in New York, no longer satisfied to live a life of a comparative ease and luxury, and impelled from within to make his external life conform to the teaching of Vedanta as he had understood it, had resolved to renounce the world. His object was known at the Vedanta Society and it was the subject of some talk at the Vedanta Home.

The question was: How to live the life of renunciation in a country where no provision is made for Sannyasins, where itinerant monks have never been produced and where religious mendicancy would not be recognised by society? A wandering monk would in America be looked upon and treated as a vagrant. It was a question of some weight, for the young man was determined to carry out his ideal and he was ready to meet the consequences.

There are monasteries in America where Roman Catholics who renounce the world find shelter and every opportunity to live a strict and holy life. But to be allowed entrance into these

monasteries one has to' subscribe to the creed of the Roman Catholic church. This the young student of Vedanta could not do. The only choice he had was either to live in the streets of New York and beg his food, or go to a place not far from New York where some good people were living who were ready to receive him. The first course would mean arrest by the police for vagrancy, the other course would mean hard physical labour for which he was ill-fitted. He chose the latter course.

This question being discussed at the Vedanta Home, one of Swami Abhedananda's students was strongly impressed with the idea that the Vedanta movement should have a place of retreat where those who wished to renounce the world, temporarily or permanently, could find refuge under suitable conditions. She possessed a homestead in California—160 acres of free government land. And this place, she thought, could answer the purpose. It had its disadvantages, it was fifty miles from the nearest railway station and market, but it would do to begin with. It would be solitary anyhow. And she very generously offered this place to Swami Vivekananda to be used as a Vedanta retreat.

Swamiji was willing to accept the gift but he could not return to California then to take charge of the place himself. So it was decided that Swami Turiyananda should go there and open an Ashrama for the students of Vedanta. "Go there/" Swamiji told him, "put your life into

the work, live like a Sannyasin and forget India." The Swami obeyed, except, I am afraid, in one respect—he could not entirely forget India, his beloved motherland. "You understand," he said one day in the Ashrama, "how I love you all, how I feel at one with you, I regard you as my own people; in fact, at times I forget that I am in a foreign land. But to forget India altogether, that is not possible."

I have sometimes met with Hindus who seem to think that loyalty to their own country necessitates depreciation of everything foreign, no matter how good and praiseworthy it may be. Needless to say that these gentlemen have never visited foreign lands. None of the Swamis in the West shared such narrow views. Swami Turiyananda was very open-minded. He appreciated what was good in the West and sometimes he would give vent to his feelings. "How strong and independent are your women; what a nice relationship there is between the sexes; I like the way in which you treat your servants; with all your activity you are so subdued in your speech, there is no shouting and loud talk; you are so orderly and punctual and you keep everything so neat and clean," etc. But India was the holy land, the land of wisdom and of sages. And he loved India with all his heart.

Swami Turiyananda then went to California. Miss Boock, the kind donor of the land for the prospective Ashrama, accompanied him. They first went to Los Angeles where Swamiji's friends

received them warmly. The Swami was entertained at the same home that had been blessed by having had Swamiji as its guest. There were three sisters there, enthusiastic Vedantists—"the three Graces/" as Swamiji jokingly called them. The Swami was delighted with the country. He was taken to the sea-shore, visited surrounding towns, saw the orange groves for which California is famous and he had a very pleasant time there. But he never forgot his Mother. Teaching and talking and holding classes, the Swami became an influence in Los Angeles. The people wanted to keep him there, but he was sent for other work. So after a few weeks' stay in that beautiful city he took the train for San Francisco accompanied by one or two of his Los Angeles friends.

In San Francisco the Swami met with an enthusiastic reception. The students of that lively western city expected much from him, for it was to them that Swamiji had said, when leaving San Francisco: "I have only talked, but I shall send you one of my brethren who will show you how to live what I have taught."

A few of Swamiji's students had clubbed together and had formed a small nucleus, the Vedanta Society of San Francisco. With these few friends the Swami began to work and gradually the number increased. Then came the day on which the Swami started out for the great work for which he had been sent to California. With a dozen students he set out

for the San Antonio valley to found the Shanti Ashrama, the first Vedanta retreat in America.

It was a long journey from San Francisco to the new place—first by train to San Jose, then by a four-horse stage, following a winding road, to the "Lick Observatory" at the top of Mount Hamilton, 4400 feet high; then by carriage down to the valley. But the journey was by no means tedious. The beautiful mountain scenery, the bracing air, the fruit orchards, olive groves and vineyards, the enthusiasm of the enterprising party, the Swami's chanting and interesting conversation, made the trip one long delight. The students were elated.

CHAPTER VII

LIFE AT THE SHANTI ASHRAMA

During one of his classes in San Francisco, Swami Turiyananda had told his students how his Master had told him that first of all he should try to realise God and then he could live and work in the world. "Be like the lotus leaf/' the Master had said. "The lotus leaf floats on the surface of the water but no water adheres to the leaf. Or, be like butter. Before the milk is churned the butter is mixed with the milk, but after churning the milk, the butter floats on top, and can no longer be mixed with the milk. So first churn your mind and get the butter of realisation. Then you can live in the world without fear of getting entangled again."

And now on their way to the Ashrama, the Swami turned to the youngest student in the party and said: "Well, Ida, why did you come with us ? You are only a young girl, what shall you do there?" "Oh, Swami," she replied, "I go there because I want to become butter." The answer pleased the Swami immensely. "Yes, certainly," he said, "you will become butter, if you try hard."

After a pleasant journey then, the party reached what was to be their new abode. Far, far away from human habitation the place stretched out before them in a rolling, hilly country. Oak, pine, chaparral, chamisal and

manzanita covered part of the land, the other part was flat and covered with grass. Here in the solitary forest retreat the students were to live with their teacher. They had left friends and home and luxury to give themselves up to God, to realize His presence within their own hearts, to hear, to meditate on, to realise the Truth taught by Vedanta. Here they were to forget what the world holds so dear; here they were to search for Him, "who is nearer to us than anything, the Atman, dearer than a son, dearer than wealth, dearer than all;" here they wanted to rise to that realm which lies "beyond hunger and thirst, sorrow, passion, old age and death, beyond the desire for sons, wealth and heaven ;" here they would strive to stand in the strength of their real Self—to reach that state of which the Rishis have spoken: "Then a father is no longer father, a mother no longer mother, the world no longer world, a thief no longer thief. He who has realised this state is not affected by good and evil, for he has then overcome all the sorrows of the heart/" It was a noble step that these few students had taken. And the reward would be theirs in varying degrees. None ever left the Ashrama just the same as he had entered there. The fire was burning and none did escape its beneficial warmth; a spark was caught by everyone.

But on arriving difficulties presented themselves. Where to sleep ? There was only one old log cabin. yWhere to get water ? It had to

be brought from a long distance. The Swami was a little disheartened. He walked up and down. "Where have you brought us?" he said to one of the students. But the students were Americans from the old stock of early pioneers, who had braved danger and difficulties without a murmur as in their big wagons they had travelled from Eastern States, for months together, through deserts and over mountain passes, fording rivers and crossing prairies, and always safe from the attack of Red Indians, to reach the far, wild West, as California was called in the old days. These descendants of that hardy race were not so easily to be daunted. Some of them knew camp-life and they soon made things bearable. But the Swami feared that the hardships might be too severe for them and he complained to the Divine Mother as he paced up and down: "Mother, what have you done? What do you mean by this? These people will die; no shelter, no water, what shall they do?"

One of the students not understanding this mood, thought that the Swami had lost faith. She went to him and said: "Swami, why are you dejected? Where is your Mother? Have you lost faith in Her? Do not fear. She will make everything all right." The Swami was struck with wonder. This woman, he thought, accustomed to a pleasant home and easy city-life is so brave! He straightened up and said, "Yes, you are right. Mother will protect us. How great is your faith! Your name henceforth will be

Shraddha" (One who has firm faith in God).
And Shraddha she was called ever since.

Gradually things came into shape. Tents were pitched, a well was dug and a meditation cabin was erected. One gentleman was especially helpful in arranging everything. He was energetic, handy with tools and always obliging, helping where help was needed. The Swami loved him and called him Sadhu Charan (Follower of the sages). And so in a short time the place was made more comfortable and a life of daily routine was established.

We used to rise at five o'clock in the morning and the Swami and the men would take their bath at the well at some distance from the main camp. This habit was kept up summer and winter. In the winter we had to take a lantern to light our way and it would sometimes be so cold that on returning from our bath we found that our wet towels were frozen stiff. Then a fire was lit in the meditation room (in the summer we meditated under the trees) and we would all gather there. The Swami chanted and then we meditated for one hour. After meditation the women prepared breakfast, the men engaged in different duties, carrying water from the well, chopping wood, planting a vegetable garden, building wooden cabins, etc. The Swami took a lively interest in everything and he shared heartily in the work. At eight o'clock breakfast was served in the canvas dining room. The mountain air and the exercise had given us a

good appetite and we were in the pink of health. Breakfast was a most enjoyable hour. The Swami would talk on all kinds of subjects and everyone joined in the conversation. But the Swami was always careful to keep the drift of the conversation in a certain direction. With all our fun and joking, the object of our life was never lost sight of.

After breakfast each one attended to his duties and at ten o'clock we would meet again for one hour's Gita class followed by one hour of meditation. At one o'clock dinner; supper at seven, and again meditation in the evening. At ten o'clock in the evening each one retired to his tent. This was the general routine, but the Swami was up and doing all the time—now speaking to one, now to another. He spoke always about "Mother/" Sometimes the Swami would call out: "Think of Mother, forget your worldly things. Here it must be only Mother, no city here, forget all that and think of Her." When he found the students talking together he would come up smiling and say: c { What are you talking about? Talk together of Mother, try to be close to Her."

The Swami's instructions were not reserved for special occasions. His religion was not a Sunday or special-day religion. He was what he taught. His talks came in torrents, ever new flows, fresh currents from an inexhaustible spring. There was no set time; we never knew when a new supply would be released. We

therefore wanted to be with him at all times, that we might not miss a single outpour from that hidden source deep down in his own heart. For in him dwelled the Divine Mother, using his lips to teach, to call. Her children.

Yes, it is true, the Swami used to call us Mother's children. And how sweet, how encouraging did these words sound in our ears!

Once entering the kitchen while the food was being prepared, the Swami noticed that some one tasted the food to see whether salt had been added. "We never taste the food in India," the Swami said, "because it is offered to God. We do not cook for ourselves or the family, we cook food as an offering to God. And after we have offered the food to God it is distributed amongst the members of the family. So we keep our kitchen and everything connected with it, very clean and holy. We take our bath, say our prayers and put on a clean cloth before we enter the kitchen. Every act of our life must be made an offering to God, then we will advance spiritually."

I had noticed that when flowers were presented to the Swami, he would place them before the picture of Sri Ramakrishna without any comment or without smelling them. Once I said: "Don't you care for flowers, Swami?" "Oh, yes," he said, "otherwise how could I offer them to the Master ? But we never smell flowers before offering them to God."

Sometimes new students would arrive. Once

a young lady came. She had heard that in India the students serve the teacher in the forest retreats, "Let the student, sacrificial fire in hand, approach the teacher." She went into the forests, gathered a few sticks of dry wood and went to the Swami's tent. "Yes, come in/' the Swami said, hearing someone at his tent. She entered, laid the wood before the Swami and sat down. The Swami at once understood the meaning and he was touched at the simplicity and humility of this highly cultured young lady.

It was a sweet life and it was surprising how soon new-comers imbibed the spirit of the place. There was no idleness, it was a life of external and internal activity. The Swami was full of fire and the fire was communicated to the students. Enthusiastic and sincere, everyone tried his best to realise God.

There were no formal rules or regulations in the Ashrama and once a student asked the Swami to make some rules. "Why do you want rules," the Swami said, "is not everything going on nicely and orderly without formal rules ? Don't you see how punctual everyone is, how regular we all are ? No one ever is absent from the classes or meditations. Mother has made Her own rules, let us be satisfied with that. Why should we make rules of our own? Let there be freedom, but no licence. That is Mother's way of ruling. We have no organisation but see how organised we are. This kind of organisation is lasting but all other kinds of organisation break

up in time. This kind of organisation makes free, all other kinds are binding. This is the highest organisation, it is based on spiritual laws/'

The Swami made this point still clearer when on another occasion a student remarked: "How wonderful it is, Swami, that men and women of such pronounced and different temperaments can live together peacefully !" " That is because I rule by love/' the Swami said. "You are all tied to me by the string of love. How else would it be possible ? Don't you see how I trust everyone and I leave everyone free? That I can do because I know that you all love me. There is no hitch anywhere, all goes on smoothly. But remember, it is all Mother's doing. I have nothing to do with it. She has given us that mutual love that Her work may flourish. As long as we remain true to Her there is no fear that anything will go wrong. But the moment we forget Her there will be great danger. Therefore I always ask you to think of Mother."

Once a student versed in Christian Science asked: "Is it not our duty to keep our body healthy?" "Yes," said the Swami, "but from the highest standpoint body itself is the great disease. We want to go beyond the idea of body and to realise that we are the Atman. It is the love for our body that stands in the way to our realisation of that higher state where we can say:

* I am not this body, I am the Atman, the body is an illusion.' As long as we love the body we

cannot realise the Self and we shall be born again and again. But when we love the Atman then we become indifferent towards the body and when all love for the body goes, liberation will come very soon/'

One of the students was psychic and one day the Swami found her practising automatic writing. Making her mind passive she sat with a pencil in her hand and automatic writing would begin. The hand would begin to move and write and our friend would see afterwards what was written. In that way beautiful things would be written on the paper. But when the Swami saw her thus engaged, he rebuked her severely. "What is this foolishness/' he called out. "Do you want to be controlled by spooks? Give up that nonsense. We want Mukti, liberation, we want to go beyond this world and all worlds. Why should you want to communicate with the departed ? Leave them in peace, it is all Miyil. Get out of Maya and be free I"

To live with the Swami was a constant joy and inspiration and it was an education, for one was learning all the time. And we all felt that spiritual help came through him. Sometimes gentle, sometimes the "roaring lion of Vedanta/' the Swami was always fully awake. There was not a dull moment in the Ashrama.

Different austerities were practised, but this was done individually. The Swami never asked us to do that. It came spontaneously with some of the students. One would restrict his diet,

another would observe silence, a third would remain in solitude, etc. Everyone was at it with a will. No one could remain lukewarm with such a spiritual 'dynamo in their midst.

We were all vegetarians and we did not kill or allow outsiders to kill game on the premises. But how far was this principle of non-killing to be carried? It had never been the subject of our special attention. There had been no occasion for it. But one day unexpectedly an occasion arose. The Swami occupied a tent with a wooden floor. There was a little space between the floor and the earth. And one day, just as the Swami was about to enter his tent a big rattlesnake was seen to enter in the space under the floor. What was to be done ? The snake might enter the tent some day. It was easy enough with long sticks to drive her from her hiding place; but what then? Should we kill her, or not? A war-council was held on the spot. The Swami left the decision to us. There was a slight difference of opinion, but the majority was for not killing. Let us catch her, we said, and carry her off to the hills, she can do no harm there. But how to bag the cat? To catch a large, venomous snake and carry her off was not so easy.- But we managed it. The snake was driven from under the tent and we stood around her from a respectable distance. She was rattling with all her might. Evidently she was angry, but she did not try to attack. But she was very watchful,

coiled up, her head raised and turning towards any one who came a little nearer.

First of all we held her down with long sticks, and then managed to put a loop of string round her neck and two of us carried her to a safe distance holding her aloft by each end of the string. There we again held her down with sticks as before and carefully cut the pieces of rope on either side. After performing this feat, in which Sadhu Charan of course had taken the most active part, we came back satisfied that the trouble was over. But to our surprise there she was again, and we readily recognised her by the loop round her neck. Again a similar campaign was gone through and she had to be removed to a goodly distance to ensure safety. Afterwards we used to refer to her playfully as the <{ snake with the neck-tie/'

With such little occasional variations our life of austerity and meditation glided smoothly on.

I remember quite well an incident in the Ashrama when we were all seated at the dining table. The meal was long over, but no one got up, no one stirred for fear of interrupting the flow of the Swami's words. From his lips came the most sacred, the sublime truths we had ever listened to.

The Swami spoke of his Master, He told us how, when he saw the Master for the first time, he was reminded of Shukadeva. The Master stepped out from a carriage supported by Hriday, for he was in Samadhi, and staggered like one

intoxicated. His face was shining with a divine light, and expressed the great bliss he was enjoying. Then he entered the home of a devotee, and when seated began to sing in a sweet voice and with intense feeling the glory of the Mother Kali.

And later, at Dakshineswar, the Master had taught the Swami to surrender himself to God, rather than count on his own strength. The Swami told us of the Master's great love, and of his childlike simplicity.

"And once," he said in a hushed voice, "our Lord told us that he had other disciples, who spoke a different language, who had different customs, somewhere, far away in the West. 'These also will worship me,' the Master had said, 'these also are Mother's children.' You are these disciples," the Swami said, very solemnly, "Mother has revealed it to me."

There was dead silence. We could hardly believe it; we were stirred to the depth of our hearts.

At last one of the students broke the silence. "Swami," she confessed timidly, "I can't believe that I am worthy of such a blessing."

The Swami visibly moved. First he did not reply. Then with marked excitement he questioned, "Who is worthy? Does God weigh our worthiness?" 'The first shall be the last, and the last shall be the first.' I tell you, good or bad, you are Mother's child." This student, shortly

after, passed away, uttering with her last breath the name of Sri Ramakrishna.

There were at the Ashrama a number of students who had been religious teachers themselves. They taught that diseases could be cured by mental suggestion. They were good people, who lived a pure life. But they had limited ideas, difficult to uproot. The main trouble with them was, the Swami noticed, that they were self-righteous, and hard to teach. They did not understand the need of renunciation. They believed in health and prosperity, and a good, clean, moral life.

"You are always speaking of being good," the Swami said to them. "That is your highest ideal. We, in India, want Mukti, liberation. You believe in sin, so want to conquer sin by being good. We believe ignorance to be the great evil, so we want to conquer ignorance with Jnanam, wisdom. And Jnanam is Mukti. 'Know the Truth,' Jesus said, 'and the Truth will make you free'."

Once when a student asked him why there is so much evil in the world, the Swami replied, "Tulsidas says, 'to the good the world is full of good, but to the bad the world is full of evil/ The world is neither good nor bad. What I call good, you perhaps call bad, and the reverse. Where is the standard? The standard is in our own attitude towards life. Each one has his own standard. And with increased experience and insight, the standard changes. The pity is

that we still recognise evil. When we become perfectly good ourselves, the whole world will appear good. We see only the reflection of our own minds. See the Lord always in everything, and you will see no evil.

When asked to explain this more fully, he said, "a suspicious mind sees evil everywhere;

a trusting mind sees only good. Have you ever seen a jealous woman? She is always suspicious. Her husband may be a good man, but no matter what he says or does, the woman will find something to justify her jealousy. A quarrelsome person constantly finds something to quarrel about; a peaceful person finds no one to quarrel with. I find so many people here with fixed notions. They have one set idea that colours everything. They cannot get away from it. Everything is explained according to that one idea.

"Some persons always want to argue. They often have little brain, cannot see a point, still they must argue. Then there are over sensitive persons. They are always on the defensive. Whatever general statement you make, they take as being directed towards them, to attack them. All these are causes for evil. But the evil is not in the world, it is in the persons. It is all a matter of misunderstanding. If we understand each other better there would be less evil.

"But who wants to understand? Everyone is shut up within his own ego. From that

prison we judge the world. The remedy is to see the Lord in all. (He who sees Me in all, and all in Me/ Sri Krishna says, 'he finds peace.³ See the Lord, and you will see good everywhere."

One afternoon in the Shanti Ashrama all the students went with the Swami for a walk. We came to a high hill which we ascended. There seated on the ground under the pine trees the Swami said in the course of conversation, "Mother is very proud and very pure. She wears a heavy veil that none may lift except her children. When they look behind the veil she is happy and smiles."

"What is Mother, and where is She?" a young student asked.

" She is everything and everywhere," the Swami replied. She permeates nature. She is nature. But talk won't do. You must lift the veil."

"How, Swami?"

"Through meditation," the Swami replied.

Then with great emphasis he replied, "Meditate, meditate, meditate! What are you doing? You are frittering away your life. Think deeply, pray to Mother, go beneath the semblance of things, see the One Reality in all. "The Lord, O Arjuna, dwells in the hearts of all beings. . . Verily, this divine Maya of Mine is difficult to cross over; those who devote themselves to Me alone, cross over this illusion." You are a young man; now is the time. Don't let this

opportunity slip by. Realization is for the young, the strong, the energetic. Have one aim in life, namely, to know Mother. Renounce, renounce, give up the world. There is no liberation without renunciation/

Once a strange thing happened. The Swami had told us in our morning class in the Shanti Ashrama many secret things in the life of his Master. After the class, when he came to the tent he then occupied, he told me that he had accidentally bitten his own tongue. A little blood even came in his mouth. Then he said, "Perhaps Mother was not pleased that I revealed so many secrets about the Master. It may be some of the students are not ready for the higher teachings."

In those days the word "Mother" was constantly on his lips. "Mother tells me to do this," or "Mother wants me to tell you that." The Swami felt that the Divine Mother was guiding him in every way, that she was directing all his actions, even his speech.

It was in this same spirit of trusting in God alone, that the Swami was very strongly opposed to all planning. There also, he used almost the identical language. "Why do you plan? Why are you scheming? Why do you look so far ahead? Let Mother plan. Her plan comes true. Human planning is all in vain, if She does not consent. She knows what will happen. The future is an open book to Her. Live in the present; make the best of your time and oppor-

trinities. Don't think of the future. Know it for certain that Mother's will shall come to pass. Trust in Her. Only try to love Her sincerely;

give yourself to Her, let Her do with you as she wishes/' But on one occasion he added, "Trusting in Mother does not mean idleness. Try to know Her will, and then be up and doing like a man. Don't you see, I am never idle ? The mind must be occupied someway or other. If you don't do physical work you must use your mind—read, or study, or meditate, and don't spend your time in idle gossip. Gossip breeds mischief. If you talk, talk of the Lord.

Of reading, the Swami gave us the advice to read only books written by men of realization. When he found a lady student studying a book on New Thought, he told her, "Go to the source. Don't waste your time reading the ideas of every fool who wants to preach religion. There are thousands of books on religion. You cannot read them all. Therefore select the best. Only those who have realized the truth can speak with authority. Otherwise it is the blind leading the blind. Both come to grief; both fall into the ditch. Only the true Guru can lead us right, and the true Guru is he who knows Brahman."

Sometimes, but not often, when he detected a weak spot in some student, he would ask him or her to perform some form of Sadhangl. A very talkative gentleman was asked to practise silence. Others would fast, or stay in retirement

in their tents, not seeing anyone. Thus the spiritual fire was kept burning.

As we had no servants in the Ashrama, we had to do all the work ourselves. We cooked, washed the pots, gathered fuel, washed our clothing, even built the cabins ourselves. The Swami was very happy to see us do this. And often he would himself help in the work. He even carried water from the well in big canisters, and cut up the wood for the kitchen fire. We remonstrated that he should not do physical labour. But the Swami would not listen to us. "Unless I give the example," he would say, "why should you all work so hard? Let me share in the work. Many hands make the task light-

Once, when he was cutting up wood with a big axe, a splinter of wood flew into his face and cut his nose so that blood came. But he only laughed, and said, "I must learn to be a good woodcutter. The children of Sri Ramakrishna must be able to do everything."

The work of Swami Turiyananda at the Shanti Ashrama was character-building. "Be yourself," he used to say, "and be strong. Realization is only for the strong, the pure, the upright. Remember that you are the Atman. That gives the greatest strength and courage. Be brave; break through the bondage of May^L Be like the lion; don't tremble at anything. Swamiji has taught you that every soul is potentially Divine. Realize your own divinity, then

you will realize that all souls are Divine. A cloud obscures the sun. We say, "There is no sun.' But the sun always shines. So the cloud of ignorance makes us believe that we are weak human beings. But the sun of Atman is always shining. Remove the cloud of ignorance and the Atman will reveal itself in your heart. When you realize that, then you are a man. Otherwise you are not different from beasts/'

And when asked, how this can be realized, he answered, "Through meditation. Meditation is the key that opens the door to Truth. Meditate, meditate! Meditate till light flashes into your mind, and the Atman stands self-revealed. Not by talk, not by study, but by meditation alone the Truth is known/'

Once it happened that during meditation, a poisonous beetle bit the Swami on his hand. He made a motion with his hand, which threw off the beetle. The Swami thought no more about it; he had not even opened his eyes to see what insect had bitten him. But after an hour or so, his hand began to swell. Then he told us that he had felt the sting of an insect. The swelling increased, and we could not bring it down. The following day the entire arm was swollen, and we became alarmed. What to do ? The nearest doctor was fifty miles away. We had no motor, only a horse and a two-wheeled cart. Neither was there a motor road, nor car could cross the mountains. But something had to be done without further delay. The poison was spread-

ing. Then something unexpected happened. In the evening a gentleman came to our Ashrama on foot. He had walked all the way, fifty miles, and at last found the Ashrama. When we asked who he was, he told us that he was a doctor. He had come from New York, more than three thousand miles away, and arrived just at this critical moment. He at once made some incisions. He said, any delay might prove fatal. He had a few simple medicines with him, disinfectants, and soon the Swami was out of danger. It was like a miracle. The Mother had sent this young doctor to save the Swami's life.

To those who lived with Swami Turiyananda in the Shanti Ashrama, it is a sheer delight to call these days to memory again. The Swami was in the prime of manhood, energetic and filled with enthusiasm. He realised the necessity of peace retreat in the West where life is intense, where with a high material standard of living, the mind is constantly drawn outward, where worldly ambitions and demands call for endless activity, where the spirit is drowned in an ocean of worldly pursuits. He found in the West a restlessness of mind he had hardly imagined even to exist. But he also realised that given the proper directions these same minds, alert, quick to understand, tenacious in their purposes, could under proper training become worthy of his attempt to lead them into spiritual channels. He, therefore, gave himself heart and soul to this task. He never spared

himself; he did not think of his own health or comforts; he had only one object, namely to bring these eager students to the feet of his Divine Master.

Swami Vivekananda had called him to this task. He had told him to forget India and to plunge into his new work with no other thought but to do the Master's will. He felt from moment to moment that the Divine Mother was behind him, was leading him, was guiding him. He became a channel of the inflow and the outflow of a great spiritual Power. He had no other thought but to do God's will.

Under such conditions results were inevitable. Such sincerity, such self-effacement, such an outflow of energy could not go in vain. The students had to respond; the Swami's ardour was infectious. At the Shanti Ashrama characters were changed, lives were changed. The very atmosphere of the place began to breathe a different spirit. It was as if the minds of the students, variously constituted as they were, gradually came under the spell of a new charm.

Natural tendencies and ambitions seemed to be transformed, seemed to be replaced by one single ambition, to realize the Truth, even in this life. In the Shanti Ashrama we realized the value of association with the wise. And even to-day so many years later, the students of Swami Turiyananda look upon him as their true Guru, as the one who helped them to cross more safely this ocean of life. His memory is,

and always will be, sacred to them. And the Shanti Ashrama, to these early students, will always remain a place of pilgrimage, a place of holy atmosphere and sacred recollections.

In New York, in Boston, in Los Angeles, in San Francisco, the Swami had given public lectures. But lecturing was not to his liking. It was necessary to reach the masses. But his real work was done in classes and with individuals. It was his life, his example, that drew us to the Swami. In him we saw a man of realization, a man who lived what he taught. That is why he impressed us. Such a man we had never seen before. From the East, light and wisdom had come to us in the West. In the midst of a world of turmoil and striving, and worldly ambitions, there was with us one man who counted not name or fame or worldly success. One who lived at peace with himself, an inner life, a life dedicated to God and the service of humanity—a man who attracted through love; who conquered through love. To his disciples, Swami Turiyananda was the greatest blessing that ever entered into their lives. To them, his memory is a sacred memory, a memory that strengthens in time of need, a memory that brings sweetness in moments of distress, a memory that stimulates every new attempt to the realization of Truth. To think of Swami Turiyananda is an act of purification of the mind; to remember his life, an impulse to new endeavour.

CHAPTER VIII

TRANSFORMATION OF LIVES

The Shanti Ashrama was the crowning success of Swami Turiyananda's labour in America. Here his spiritual ardour could have free play. Here he lived far away from the conventionalities of Western life with students who loved him and who were sincere in their desire to realise the Truth. Here he was free. And when I speak of the Shanti Ashrama as a success, I do not mean that there the Swami made a large number of disciples, but that those who accepted him as their spiritual teacher were changed, though not all to the same degree, into men and women of higher aspirations, of greater faith and of some actual spiritual attainment. And this was not a temporary change as the succeeding years have proved. That this work was accomplished in less than two years, part of which time the Swami was away from the Ashrama, is little short of marvellous.

I met and lived with these students again, many years after the Swami had returned to India, and without a single exception they were all agreed that these few months with him in the Shanti Ashrama constituted the most important period in their lives. And that is the reason why the Shanti Ashrama has always remained so dear to these students. The place is to them a holy place to which they return, as circum-

stances allow, as one returns to a place of pilgrimage. The memory of these early Ashrama days is and will always remain with the students an occasion of great happiness and satisfaction. The Swami is as beloved to his disciples in America to-day as he was when he lived there with them, now more than thirty-five years ago.

Some of these Ashrama students have since departed from this world. Shankari was one of the first to be called away. She was a young woman, unmarried and a member of the "Home of Truth" in Alameda, across the Bay from San Francisco. The Home of Truth was an offshoot of Christian Science. One of their beliefs was that every disease had its cause in some defect in the character. By knowing the disease the defect of character could be traced. Anger, jealousy, greed, hatred, each of these defects produced its corresponding disease. The cure for the disease was to correct the moral defect.

Swami Vivekananda had been a guest at the Home of Truth for several weeks. He left a deep impression there and many of the teachers of this Home became his followers. When Swami Turiyananda came to California they flocked around him and not a few of these accompanied him to the Shanti Ashrama. Shankari was one of them. She often told me how Swamiji would keep the members of the Home spellbound when he talked to them about Vedanta. For hours Swamiji would go on and on and the listeners fearing to interrupt the flow

of his spiritual outpouring dared not stir. With bated breath they would sit and listen. They were carried off their feet, as it were, by his eloquence, they felt as if they were soaring in a higher sphere, they were entranced. And only after the Swamiji was silent would they feel themselves tied again to this mundane existence. "You have been bitten by the cobra," Swamiji said one morning, "the poison will have its effect, you will never be your old selves again, the Master has accepted you."

Those who had really been "bitten by the cobra" could not return to their former practices. The Home of Truth became too narrow a place for them, they had to breathe a freer air. The Shanti Ashrama afforded them breathing space. Here they were with him who "lived what I have taught you." And under this loving guidance they also were to live what they had learned. Shankari was amongst these, sincere to the backbone.

Some years after Swami Turiyananda had returned to India, she contracted a painful disease. Patiently and with great courage she battled with the enemy. She suffered pain without a complaint, she struggled silently. But the disease had taken a firm hold on her and she could not shake it off. The end was drawing near and she realised that her days on earth were counted. Loving friends surrounded her and nursed her with tender care. Then one day she called for one of her most intimate friends whose

acquaintance she had made at the Shanti Ashrama. "Mira," she said, "the Master is calling me, will you repeat his name to me?" This friend stayed at her bedside the entire day and the following night. In turns she and the patient called on the Lord. Shankari grew weaker and weaker, her voice came in a whisper. "Do not exert yourself, dear/" Mira said, "I am strong and I shall continue to call on the Lord/" Satisfied and with a smile she obeyed. Early morning came. The patient was very weak. She moved her head slightly as if trying to look at Mira. A soft whisper came—Ramakrishna;

and the lips were silent forever. The wasted body remained, the spirit was free. "You have been bitten by the cobra, the Master has accepted you."

This is but one example of the change wrought in the hearts of the students who came to the Ashrama. It is true, the initial change in most of the students had taken place before they came to the Ashrama. Otherwise they would probably not have gone there. But could that change have been sustained and pushed onward had they not had the opportunity of breaking away from their old surroundings and influences, had they not been constantly encouraged and ministered unto by Swami Turiyananda?

Unfortunately, excess of work had affected Swami Turiyananda's health and this combined with the desire to see Swami Vivekananda once more, made him decide to return to India, at

least for a visit. Much as we regretted it, we understood that the change was necessary. We hoped that the long sea-voyage would restore the SwamT's health and that in India he would find the rest he needed. We realised that it would be a great satisfaction to him to meet his beloved Swamiji again and his other brother-Sannyilsins. We hoped that after a few years, at the most, we would have the Swami with us again.

During our long association with him the Swami had sometimes told us about the life of the Sannyilsins in India, how these monks renounce everything for God, how they wander over the land preaching and teaching and begging their simple fare; he had sometimes spoken of the grandeur of the Himalayas, of the simple life of the villagers, of the holy atmosphere at places of pilgrimage and more often about the beauty and the sacredness associated with his beloved "Mother Ganges"; but seldom did he dwell on the mere physical aspect of things. Once he said: "You see, I have learned to look for beauty within, so the external beauty of things does not always affect me as it does those who look for beauty outside/' In fact, we had not learned very much about the ordinary, every-day life and customs of the Hindus as a race. India had been presented and interpreted to us from the spiritual aspect.

And now, when the Swami was about to leave us, I said to him jokingly: "Swami, I have lived with you so long, but I do not know

much more about India than when I first met you/' The Swami's reply was very significant. "My boy/' he said, " I have given you the very best that India has to give; it is a great treasure, keep it carefully/'

I have now lived in India many years and I realise how very true these words are. Yes, the Swami had given us the very best that India has to give—that priceless treasure that India has fostered for countless ages and that now once more she offers freely to all the world.

The Swami had made us Hindus even while we were living in America. We had been transformed, we had been made to assimilate that for which India and her people have always stood; he had made us love and admire the soul, the life-throb, the ideals of the Hindus, he had made us understand that the pulse-beat of India is her eternal religion. To become Hindu is a process that cannot be forced by external means; it is a natural growth, assimilation, a change in the mental make-up. To become a true Hindu involves experiences of a sacred nature, experiences which one does not get by simply visiting this holy land, experiences that go beyond the surface, experiences that relate to the soul.

India possesses something that lies beyond the phenomenal, something which the senses cannot bring to our notice, something that lies deep hidden in the human heart. And when one comes in contact with that, then one becomes a

true Hindu. To be a true Hindu, one must become the spiritual child of the Indian Rishis and sages, one must sit (metaphorically speaking) at their feet and learn, one must attempt to follow in their footsteps. Then we are true Hindus, with one common aim—to work out our own salvation and to live for the good of all.

The Swami had taught us to make God-realization the one aim of our life; he had shown us the way; it rested with us how far we would profit by his teaching. "My work, for the present, is done," he said, "I have not left anything unfinished. Mother knows the rest. This Ashrama is Mother's place. She has created this place for you all, make the best use of it."

And so the day drew near that the Swami was to leave us. One of the students was to take charge of the Ashrama till the arrival from India, of another Swami. The Swami called this student to his tent on the eve of his departure.

As we have already noticed, the Swami left everyone free to work in his own way. He only suggested and taught principles. Meditation, he always said, was necessary—meditation and renunciation. So, when he called this student, he gave him only general advice. Be impartial, listen patiently if there is any complaint, be just and pure and trust in Mother;

treat everyone equally and let the students feel that you love each and every one of them. This, I think, was the sum and substance of his last instruction. And then the Swami departed.

The same student who was left in charge of the Shanti Ashrama now, had been in charge during the Swami's absence, for a few months, when at the earnest request of the students of Los Angeles and San Francisco the Swami had gone to work with them. And here I may give a few extracts from letters written by the Swami during his absence to the student in charge of the Ashrama. It will give the reader an idea of the spirit in which the work was conducted—a spirit which the Swami constantly kept alive and which after him the students have tried to keep alive to the best of their ability and with earnest endeavour.

The Swami wrote from Los Angeles in the year 1901.

My dear—

Don't get discouraged or disheartened. Why should it be always sunshine and good times? Let Mother's will be done. Never mind sunshine or rain, we must not forget Mother at any time. Even if we don't see Her, why should we lose heart! She appears again in our view. She knows what is best for us. Once we have given over to Her, what right have we to think of ourselves again ! It is not so easy to do as to say—of that I am sure, but there is no other way out. Whether we see or don't see, Mother is our only place of rest. There are ups and downs in all hearts, but we should not give way to them.

Real, genuine sympathy alone works won-

ders. That is the one thing omnipotent in this world of sorrows and weaknesses. Ask of Mother for that and you will have it. Think not about yourself but only for others. That is renunciation, that is religion, that is all. You have died, why do you think of yourself? Have you not given everything over to Mother! Why then think of yourself again ! Never care for position. Give up all such ideas. Work is worship. Everything is in the life we live, not in position. Mother knows the heart and sees the heart and arranges things accordingly. Let your light so shine, that everybody can see it. Let your work be silent and in secret and your Mother who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. The fowls of the air have their nests to rest, but the Son of man had nowhere to lay his head. Jesus had no position and millions and millions of hearts are his place, or he is the place where millions of weary souls go for rest. Go on my dear boy; live the life. Pray for it earnestly and sincerely.

It pleased me immensely to read the account of the celebration in the Ashrama of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday anniversary. We observed the day here in talk of him and prayer. May Sri Ramakrishna arouse in us the real spirit of renunciation and love for Mother, whose very personification he himself was.

Be strong, my dear boy ! Don't give in to anything whatever. It is not good to be weak; the

weak must go to the wall. This is the law of the world. But what have you to do with the world any more? Mother's child, good or bad, weak or strong, you have no other to look up to but Mother! Others, who do not know, may think of temporal help. But you can never think that way, I am sure!

Sri Ramakrishna is the concrete embodiment of the Vedantic Truth. Because in his life he manifested in full, all the subtle truths that we read in the Vedanta philosophy. Pray for unflinching love and devotion and you will have everything.

There is no world outside. It is what we project outside. But how difficult is to understand this, and how much more difficult to remember it always, even after understanding it.

We feel unhappy when we make ourselves small. We feel miserable when we think of ourselves as finite. That is the bane. Yet we forget and are in the whirlpool of May& every once again. But thanks to the grace of Mother, we remember it again soon. "There is no happiness in that which is finite; that Which is finite is perishable. That which is universal is Blissfulness itself." Know the universal! That is thy real Self.

May we never lose sight of this our real Self, which is the Self of all, our dear Mother, whose children we are.

The reader will readily understand how helpful, how encouraging and how welcome "these letters were.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST OF THE DIRECT DISCIPLES

A year or so, after Swami Turiyananda had left America, Swami Trigunatita came from India to carry on the Vedanta propaganda in California. He was the last of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna that have come to America so far. The Swamis that have come after him are mostly the disciples of Swami Vivekananda.

Cheerful, loving, strong in carrying out his own ideas, with an abundance of energy, Swami Trigunatita at once set to work to create an atmosphere of his own. He was strongly in favour of organisation and it is through his energetic efforts that San Francisco to-day is in the possession of what the Swami called the first Hindu Temple in the West. The name is rather misleading to Hindu readers, for there is little in the building to suggest an Indian Temple. But it is a strong centre of the Vedanta work in California. The Swami was exceedingly active and this quality combined with his loving and cheerful nature, drew the admiration of some men and women who became his staunch disciples.

Though the Swami's main effort was concentrated on the San Francisco work, he sometimes came to the Shanti Ashrama with some of his students and he has added considerably to the improvement of the place. He also visited Los

Angeles on more than one occasion and his field of action was extended even to the state of Oregon.

CHAPTER X

WHAT VEDANTA HAS DONE

What Vedanta has really done for us in the West is not always clearly understood in India. Of course, every one knows that it has been a great factor in liberating the Western mind from religious bondage and to clear the atmosphere of superstitions. This, however. Science had also done. Science had played havoc with most of the church doctrines and superstitions. But the work of Science was entirely of negative nature. In a religious sense it was destructive. It broke down but did not erect. It left the West stranded as far as religion is concerned. Church doctrines were no longer tolerable because they were simply not true. The doctrine of an anthropomorphic deity creating the universe out of nihil and then ever after consigning by far the greater part of his created creatures to eternal hell-fire is preposterous.

Except, of course, with her devotees, religion got a bad name in the West. The word religion became a stigma. And the West was divided into two parties—the believers who accepted the Bible as a whole, who did not question, did not dare to question and the liberals who just as wholeheartedly rejected the Scriptures as a mass of nonsense. There was no middle way, not a single point of conciliation or of sympathy. The two parties kept aloof and heartily despised each

other. This is putting it strong perhaps, but it was the state of affairs in Europe as I know it fifty years ago.

Children of orthodox parents were nicknamed and giped by the boys of liberal parents. Many of these children naturally felt ashamed of the religion of their parents and they began to hate the very name of religion. And so the West became more and more atheistic and materialistic.

Then came Theosophy, Christian Science and New Thought—all trying to bridge the gulf between belief and unbelief. But the scientific mind was not satisfied—new superstitions replacing old superstitions, was the verdict. And then at last came Swami Vivekananda with pure Vedanta. The liberals could accept or reject, but they could no longer sneer. Scientists could demand further proof, but they could not condemn. Those who were religiously inclined, but could not follow the church, found a new opening. Here was religion, philosophy and science combined. Heart and intellect could both be satisfied. There was no necessity of tearing from old traditions altogether. One could remain true to the old faith, but that old faith was re-interpreted and cleansed of its later growths. Those who wished to do so, could go back to Jesus and the Bible, for now they understood. There was doubting, vacillating, hesitation; but approaches were made. It was worth while investigating. In short, it was a reconciliation,

a middle way. The liberals were silenced, the orthodox party found it wise to keep hands off. But there was an opening for both. And the success which Swamiji met with in the West and later his successors shows that many adherents to both parties availed themselves of this novel opportunity of listening to men who carried a message of hope and security, a message that outraged neither religion, philosophy or science, a message that embraced all that was best in the culture of the West. Vedanta was the leaven that leavened the thought-world in the West. In how far this leavening process will continue to assert its influence the future alone can tell. But that there is already a tremendous change in thought in all strata of Western society, orthodox or liberal, no one can deny. Whether Swami Vivekananda and his successors will get the credit for it, is not the question. It does not matter. The fact remains;

and I dare say, that is all they care for.

So far as regards the influence of Vedanta on the West as a whole. But there is another side to the question, a phase of not less importance. And that is the influence of Vedanta on individuals. Sri Ramakrishna said, and Swami Vivekananda said it after him: "I am willing to be born a thousand times if thereby I can be of help to even a single soul." If these were not vain words—and we know they were not—then this question of the individual takes an important place in their life's work. And those who have

watched closely the work of the Swamis in America and elsewhere, can testify to the fact that many lives have been changed through the self-sacrificing efforts of the Swamis. And this is after all the crowning success of a religious teacher. The glory of Jesus rests not on the fact that the Western world calls herself Christian to-day, but on the fact that he made a few true, devoted disciples and that through his teaching through the ages that have since passed by, now and then, a single soul has found salvation. Religion in the highest sense, as the medium to liberate mankind from world-bondage, is always for the few. And if in the ages to come now and then in the West a single soul attains Mukti or liberation through the teaching of Vedanta, the work initiated and carried on by the Swamis, meets with the success that they hope for. Says Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita: "Among thousands of men perchance one or two seek for perfection, among thousands who seek for perfection perchance one or two attain to my divine state." And Jesus: "What man, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he finds it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ... I say unto you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, which need no repentance. . . . Even so it is not the will of

no WITH THE SWAMIS IN AMERICA

your Father which is in heaven, that one of these
little ones shall perish."

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