

## I YOUNG NAREN

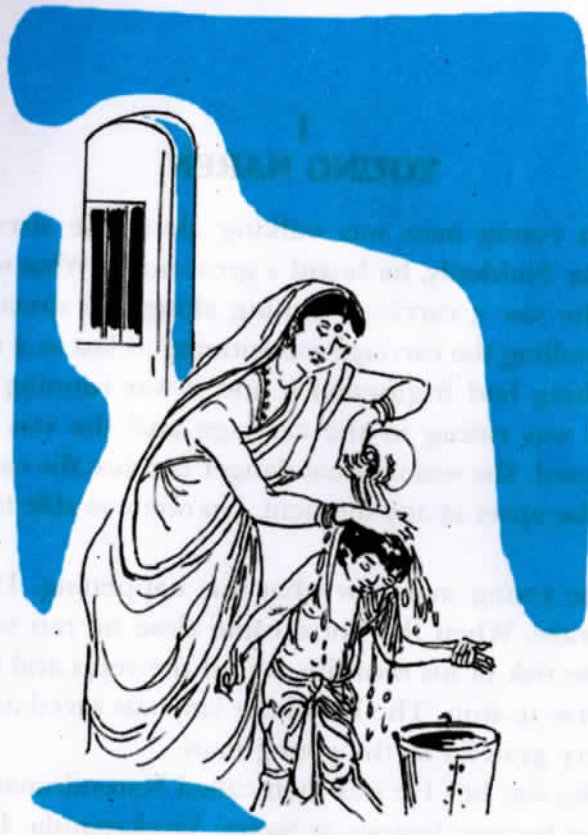
ONCE a young man was walking along the streets of Calcutta. Suddenly, he heard a great noise. What was it? Then he saw a carriage rushing along the street. The horse pulling the carriage was running as fast as it could. Something had frightened it and it was running away. A lady was riding in the carriage and she was badly frightened. She was in great danger because the carriage might be upset at any moment. No one was able to help her.

The young man saw what was happening. He was very brave. When the horse came close he ran towards it at the risk of his own life, seized the reins and forced the horse to stop. The life of the lady was saved and she was very grateful to the young man.

Who was he? He was then called Narendranath, but he later became famous as Swami Vivekananda. He was born in a famous Datta family who lived in the Simla section of Calcutta. Sri Viswanath Datta was a lawyer. He had studied many things and was respected by everyone. His wife was Bhuvaneshwari Devi. She was like a queen in appearance as well as behaviour. Everyone loved and respected her.

On the 12th of January, 1863, their first son was born. They named him Narendranath.

Naren was a naughty child, and sometimes Bhuvaneshwari Devi found it extremely hard to control him.



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However, she found that even when Naren grew extremely restless, if cold water was poured on his head at the same time chanting the name of Shiva in his ear, the child would quiet down. Indeed, at times this was the only method with which to bring him under control.

Young Naren learned many things from his mother, and she told him stories from the Mahabharata and the



*Once a cobra came gliding along the ground. The other boys were frightened and ran away.*

Ramayana. Naren loved to hear the story of Sri Rama. He bought a small clay image of Sita-Rama and worshipped it with flowers. He liked to listen to the reading of the Ramayana. Once he stayed in a banana grove for a long time, hoping to see Sri Hanumana, for he had heard that that was a favourite place of this heroic devotee of Rama.

He also liked to play at meditation. He would take one or two of his friends to a lonely place and they would sit in front of an image of Sita-Rama or Shiva. Then Naren would meditate and would think about God. He would get lost in his thoughts about God and for a time he would not see or feel anything around him. Once a cobra came gliding along the ground. The other boys were frightened and ran away, but Naren stayed where he was. They shouted at him but he did not hear them. After some time the snake went away. Later, his parents asked Naren why he had not run away. He replied, "I did not know anything about the snake. I was feeling very happy."

Naren was happy when Sadhus visited their house. He sometimes gave them valuable things. Once he gave a piece of new cloth which he was wearing to a Sadhu. After that his parents locked him up whenever Sadhus came to the house. But when Naren saw the Sadhus he would throw things to them through the window. Now and then he said that he would become a Sadhu himself some day.

Naren's father, as we have said, was a lawyer. Many people came to see him. He entertained them and offered them tobacco to smoke. There were different pipes for the different castes. But caste was a great mystery to Naren. Why was a member of one caste not allowed to eat with members of other castes? Why were there different tobacco pipes for the different castes? There was a pipe for the Muslims also. What would happen if he smoked from all the pipes? Would there be an explosion? Would the roof fall down? Naren

decided to find out for himself. He took a whiff from one pipe. Nothing happened. He tried all the pipes in turn and took a whiff from each of them. Still nothing happened. Just then his father walked into the room and asked him what he was doing. Naren replied, "O father, why, I was trying to see what would happen if I broke caste." His father laughed and went into his study.

## II

### YOUNG NAREN AT SCHOOL AND AT PLAY

WHEN he was six years old Naren began his studies. He did not go to school at first as his parents got a teacher for him. He quickly learned to read and write. His memory was very good and he could understand a lesson after hearing his teacher read it once.

When he was seven Naren was sent to the Metropolitan Institution. This school was started by Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Narendranath was very intelligent and learned his lessons quickly. He became a leader among the boys. He enjoyed games very much. He would eat his lunch quickly and would be the first to run to the playground. Some of the games were jumping, running, boxing and playing with marbles. Sometimes he invented new games.

Sometimes Naren turned the classroom into a playground. He would talk to his friends and tell them stories even while the teacher was present. Once the teacher saw them talking. He turned to Naren and his

friends and asked them to repeat the lesson. All were silent except Naren, who was able to listen to the lesson and talk to his friends at the same time. He was able to answer correctly all the questions put by the teacher. Then the teacher asked them who had been talking. The boys pointed to Naren. The teacher did not believe them and made them stand up as a punishment. Naren stood up also. The teacher told him that he need not stand, but Naren continued to do so. He said, "I must, for it was I who was talking."

One of Naren's favourite games was "King and Court". Naren, of course, was always the King. The Court was held on a flight of stairs leading from the courtyard to the worship room. Naren took the highest step for his royal throne. He would then appoint his officials. One boy would be made Prime Minister and another the Commander-in-chief of the armies. Some were made Tributary Princes or other government officers. Then they took their places on the lower steps according to their rank. In this way Naren, the King, held his Court. As King he gave orders, settled disputes, or put down rebellions. No one was allowed to disobey the King's orders. Sometimes he would order severe punishment to be given to a supposed rebel. The rebel would try to escape but the King's men would chase him around the house and would finally capture him amidst much noise and excited shouting.

Naren liked animals very much and he would play with the family cow. He also kept pet animals and birds. Among these were a monkey, a goat, a peacock, some pigeons and two or three guinea-pigs.



*But Naren and one or two of his friends stayed to help the sailor.*

The coachman was a special friend of Naren, and he would often be found having intimate talks with him. Naren also thought that the syce or groom was a very grand person. He sat in the front of the carriage wearing a big turban and swinging a whip. Naren sometimes said that when he grew up he would like to be a syce.

He tried his hand at many games. Once in a while he played at cooking also. He bought vegetables and

spices and cooked various dishes. He was really a good cook. Another time he organized a group of boys to stage plays. Then he became interested in physical exercise. He first started a gymnasium in his own courtyard, and later joined the gymnasium of a neighbour. He took lessons in fencing, lathi-play, wrestling and other sports.

Once, Naren and his friends were trying to set up a heavy trapeze. It was a difficult job for young boys, but though many people gathered to watch no one offered to help them. Naren noticed a strong British sailor in the crowd. He went to him and asked him to help them. The sailor agreed. He started to help them, but suddenly the trapeze slipped and hit the sailor. He fell down unconscious. Most of the people thought the sailor had been killed and ran away from the scene, but Naren and one or two of his friends stayed to help the sailor. Naren tore his dhoti to make bandages. He bandaged the wound and then sprinkled water on the sailor's face and fanned him gently. After some time the sailor regained consciousness. Naren then helped him to go to a neighbouring school-house where he could stay, and then sent for a doctor. After a week the sailor recovered and went away. Before he left Naren collected some money from his friends and gave it to the sailor.

### III

#### NAREN AND HIS FRIENDS

NAREN and his friends went to see many interesting places in Calcutta. One day Naren and a group of boys

visited the Nawab's Zoological Gardens at Metiaburuz, near Calcutta. They went by boat. As they were returning one of the boys got sick and dirtied the boat. The boatmen became angry and ordered the boys to clean the boat. They refused, and instead offered to pay double the fare. The boatmen would not accept the offer. When they reached the ghat they would not allow the boys to go ashore. They threatened and abused the boys. Naren, however, was able to jump ashore. He found two British soldiers walking nearby and asked them for help. They went with him. They guessed what was happening and shouted at the boatmen, ordering them to release the boys. The boatmen got frightened and at once set the boys free.

Once, when Naren was about eleven, a British man-of-war (a warship) visited the port of Calcutta. Many people went to see the ship and Naren and his friends also wanted to see it. In order to do so they had to obtain a pass from an important British official. Naren filled in an application form and went to the building where the official stayed. Many people were going in, but the doorkeeper thought that Naren was too young and would not let him go in. Naren stood outside wondering what to do. He saw that all the people were going to a certain room on the first floor. He thought that perhaps there was another entrance, so he walked round to the back of the building, where he found a staircase. There was no doorkeeper there, so he went up to the first floor. He pushed aside a curtain and found himself in the room where the other people were waiting. He took his place in the queue and the British



*A Brahma-daitya lives there. If you disturb him he will break your necks. Beware that you don't climb that tree again.*

official signed his application without question. Naren went out by the main entrance. The doorkeeper was surprised to see him leave. He said, "How did you get in?" Naren replied, "Oh, don't you know that I am a magician?"

There was a flowering tree in the compound of one of Naren's friends. Naren and his friends used to climb this tree and swing from the branches. Naren would hang from a branch by his legs, swing back and forth and finally somersault to the ground. An old man lived at that house, and he did not like to see them swinging in the tree, for it was risky. One day he called Naren and his friends and said, "Look, don't you know there is a ghost in that tree? A Brahma-daitya lives there. If you disturb him he will break your necks. Beware that you don't climb that tree again."

This was enough to frighten the other boys, but not Naren. As soon as the old man was out of sight Naren went and climbed the tree again. His friends asked, "How do you dare do that, Naren? Didn't you hear what the old man said?"

Naren laughed and said, "Oh what fools you are! I have climbed this tree so many times. If the old man's story were true my neck would have been broken long ago."

#### IV NAREN GROWS UP

As Naren grew older he took more interest in reading books and did not play games so much. He did well in his school work, but his father took him away from Calcutta for two years and he stopped going to school. When he returned he had to do three years' work in one year. When the time for examination drew near he

studied very hard. He passed the Entrance Examination in the first division. He was the only student from his school to do so that year. He then went to the Presidency College for one year. The next year he joined the General Assembly's Institution, now known as the Scottish Church College. The professors at the latter college were surprised to see how intelligent Naren was. The Principal, Prof. W. W. Hastie, said that he had never seen another boy like Naren. Naren studied hard and read many books of all kinds and on all subjects. He passed the First Arts Examination in 1881 and obtained his B.A. degree in 1884.

Naren also studied music for four or five years. He learned to play several instruments, and he became known as a very good singer also. Because he sang well he was often invited to parties. He enjoyed the fun at parties, but he found more pleasure in intellectual discussions. He would often argue about serious subjects with his friends and sometimes with older people. He was very good at argument and few people could match his skill.

At this time Naren became interested in the problems of religion. Like many other young men at that time Naren became a member of the Brahmo Samaj and attended the lectures of Sri Keshab Chandra Sen. He was often asked to sing songs at the Samaj. But the question which troubled him most was whether there is a God or not and whether anyone had seen Him. He visited many religious leaders, including Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, for an answer to this question, but none could satisfy his doubts.

## V

**NAREN MEETS SRI RAMAKRISHNA**

NAREN was interested in religion, but he had lost faith in many of the teachings of Hinduism. He did not know what to believe. He had gone to many religious people, but they could not help him. One day he decided to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna was a great



*Naren sang two songs at his request*

Hindu saint. He came from a village called Kamarpukur in the Hooghly District. At that time he was living at the Kali Temple of Dakshineswar, near Calcutta. He lived a life of prayer and meditation and thought always of God. Many people came to him and he solved their spiritual problems.

Naren had heard about Sri Ramakrishna from his teacher, Prof. Hastie, and from one of his relatives. He had also seen him at the house of this relative in Calcutta. Now he decided to visit him at Dakshineswar, to see whether Sri Ramakrishna could help him in any way. Naren took a few friends with him. Sri Ramakrishna received them kindly, and Naren sang two songs at his request. Then Sri Ramakrishna took him into another room. He treated Naren as if he were a dear friend who had just returned from a long journey. He even wept for joy, and fed Naren with sweets with his own hands. Naren could not understand all this. He thought that perhaps Sri Ramakrishna was a madman, but he promised to come again. When they returned to the other room Sri Ramakrishna began to speak about God. He said that we can see and speak to God just as we see and speak to our friends. Naren did not know what to think. Sri Ramakrishna had acted in a strange way but he also seemed to be a great saint.

About a month later Naren came again, this time alone. Sri Ramakrishna treated him kindly and asked him to sit by his side. Then he touched Naren. At this touch Naren had a strange experience. The walls and the room seemed to whirl round and round and then vanish. He thought that he was about to die and he

became frightened. He cried out, "What is this that you are doing to me? I have my parents at home."

Sri Ramakrishna laughed and began to stroke Naren's chest. He said, "All right, let it rest now. Everything will come in time." At his touch the strange experience was gone and Naren found everything the same as it had been before.

A similar thing happened when Naren visited Sri Ramakrishna for the third time. He again lost consciousness at the touch of Sri Ramakrishna. He could not understand what had happened. He had a strong body and mind, but this saint could do with him whatever he liked by a mere touch. He could not explain how it happened. However, he understood that Sri Ramakrishna was no ordinary person. He came to have deep respect for him though there were still many unanswered questions in his mind.

## VI THE MASTER AND THE DISCIPLE

NAREN now began to visit Sri Ramakrishna as often as he could. He felt that Sri Ramakrishna loved him more than anyone else did. He was always eager to see him.

Sri Ramakrishna was confident that Naren would some day become a great man. He mentioned this to his other devotees telling them about Naren's many good qualities. He said that other devotees were like stars, but Naren was like the sun. He said that Naren was a liberated soul who had been born to help other



*Sri Ramakrishna said, "If you do not accept my views why do you come to me?"*

people. Sri Ramakrishna had great confidence in Naren; he knew that he could never do anything wrong.

Naren also felt deep love for Sri Ramakrishna. Although busy with his studies he often went to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was delighted with Naren's songs and often went into Samadhi listening to them. Naren had an independent mind; he would not

believe anything unless he could understand it for himself. Many times he would argue with Sri Ramakrishna if what he said was not logical to him. Once Sri Ramakrishna said, "If you do not accept my views why do you come to me?"

Naren replied, "I come because I love you. But that does not mean that I will accept your words without thinking for myself." Instead of being annoyed Sri Ramakrishna was pleased to hear this; he was glad that Naren was so independent-minded.

And so time went on. Naren became more and more devoted to Sri Ramakrishna, who gave him various instructions which he followed. Sri Ramakrishna taught him how to meditate, and he became more and more interested in meditation and other spiritual practices.

But Naren had to pass through a time of great trouble. Early in 1884 his father died. Naren was the eldest son and so he became the head of the family. His father had never saved any money and Naren found it difficult even to get enough food for the family to eat. He often went without food so that his family might have more. He began to look for a job, but without success. Later, he worked in a lawyer's office, as a school teacher and at other such jobs. They were not permanent and he had difficulty in supporting his family. In spite of these difficulties they at least had a house to live in. But some dispute arose over this also. Some of his relatives chose this time to claim a large part of the house as theirs. The case went to court where it dragged on for a long time. Luckily the case was decided in favour of Naren's family.

## VII AT THE COSSIPORE GARDEN-HOUSE

NAREN'S life had been completely upset by his father's death. His mind was in a turmoil. He found peace only at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. In 1885 Sri Ramakrishna began to suffer from a sore in his throat. It became worse and worse and finally it was learned that he had cancer, a terrible disease. His disciples and devotees came forward to help him. A garden-house was rented for him at Cossipore. He moved there and many of his young disciples began to stay there and nurse him.

Naren was one of those who spent most of their time at Cossipore. He sometimes had to go to Calcutta on family business, but he spent the rest of his time with Sri Ramakrishna. Naren and the other disciples devoted themselves to the service of their Master. Naren was their leader. When they had time they would gather together and sing, study, or discuss the great qualities of Sri Ramakrishna. Naren wanted very much to realize God, to see God, for he felt that this was the only purpose of life. Sri Ramakrishna gave him many hints about how to meditate, and he spent much time in meditation. He had wonderful experiences during meditation; sometimes he would completely forget the outside world.

Once Naren and Sri Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great poet and dramatist, sat under a tree for meditation. Girish tried to meditate, but there were too many mosquitoes. They buzzed around his head and bit him and he could not meditate. He wondered if Naren was able to meditate, so he opened his eyes to see what he was doing. He was

surprised to see that mosquitoes covered Naren's body like a blanket. But Naren did not seem to feel anything since he was lost in meditation.

One evening Naren had the highest spiritual experience. While meditating he forgot the outside world and even his own body. He thought of nothing but God and God alone. His mind was literally filled with God. He felt great joy and happiness. This experience is called Samadhi.

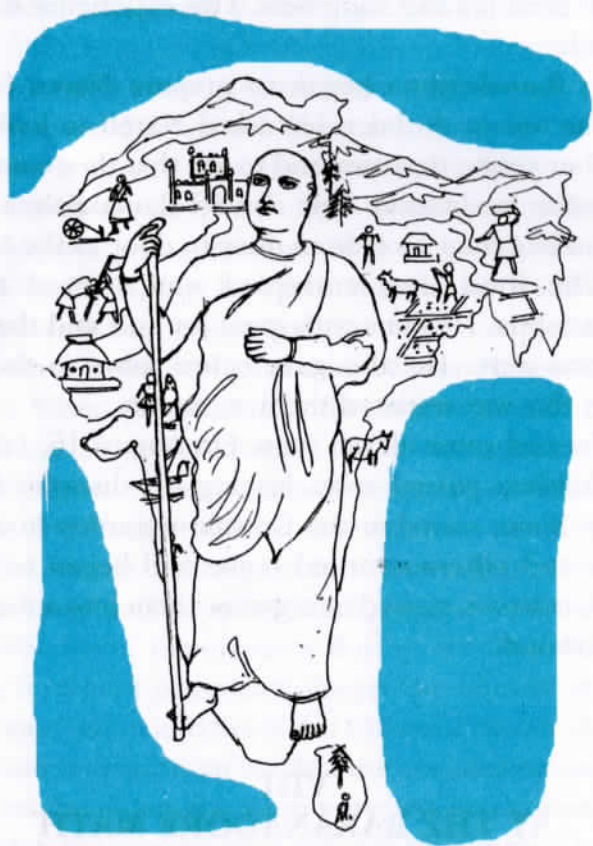
Sri Ramakrishna began to prepare Naren for the work he was to do later. He asked Naren to look after the other young devotees and to see that they continued to practise meditation. One day Sri Ramakrishna asked them to beg their food from door to door as the Sadhus do. The food they collected was offered to Sri Ramakrishna. He ate it with great joy and said that such food was pure. He also gave ochre robes to the boys and in this way initiated them as monks.

The end came all too soon. On August 16, 1886 Sri Ramakrishna passed away, leaving his disciples full of sorrow. Some stayed at the Cossipore garden-house for a time and others returned home and began to study: Naren, however, started to organize them into a monastic brotherhood.

## VIII AT THE BARANAGORE MATH

THE young monks could not stay at Cossipore for long, since the rent of the house was too high, but with the

help of a devotee they rented a smaller house at Baranagore. Here they established the first monastery of the Ramakrishna Order. The house was old and decayed; the garden was full of weeds; cobras lived under the ground floor of the house and local people believed there were ghosts in the house. It was a strange place, but the young monks lived there because the rent was



*Swamiji went to Banaras and many other places and then wandered through the Himalayas.*

cheap. It was also quiet and peaceful. They were very poor. There were hardly enough clothes and their food was not good. For months they had nothing to eat but rice and some boiled leaves.

Naren and the others cared nothing for this. They thought only of God. Naren was the leader. He went to those boys who had returned home and persuaded them to join the monastery. Naren looked after them and inspired them to think of God. They meditated for long hours. They sang songs. They discussed the religious ideas of all sects and religions. They tried to follow everything that Sri Ramakrishna had taught them.

During this period they took the monastic vows of sannyasa. They also took new names. Naren, however, did not take a permanent name, and when he wandered through India he changed his name now and then. Sometimes he used the name 'Swami Vividishananda' and sometimes other names. When people speak of him now they often call him 'Swamiji'.

## IX WANDERING DAYS

SWAMIJI (Naren) stayed at the Baranagore Math for two years. Some of the other monks left the Math and began to wander from one place to another. Hindu monks have been doing this for thousands of years. Swamiji also became restless. In 1888 he left the Math and went to Banaras for a week. While there, he met two famous saints—Trailanga Swami and Swami Bhaskarananda.

An interesting incident happened at that time. One day Swamiji was returning from a visit to the temple of Mother Durga. Suddenly, a troop of monkeys began to run after him. Swamiji was afraid they might bite him and he began to run away. But the monkeys kept on chasing him. He ran as fast as he could, but they still kept on his heels. He did not know what to do as he was losing his breath. Just then an old sannyasin who happened to pass that way called out to him, "Stop ! Face the brutes." Swamiji stopped, turned around and stood facing the monkeys. When he did this the monkeys got frightened and ran away. Swamiji then had a good laugh over this.

He later visited many other cities in north India. At Hathras the railway station master, Sri Sharat Chandra Gupta, became his disciple. He followed Swamiji and later took the name 'Swami Sadananda'. They went together to Hrishikesh and spent some time there in meditation. But the life was hard and their health suffered. They had to return to the Baranagore Math.

After a year Swamiji again began to wander. He went to Ghazipur where he met the famous saint, Pavhari Baba. He then returned to Calcutta. In 1890 he left the Baranagore Math and did not return for many years. One of his brother disciples went with him. They went to Banaras and many other places and then wandered through the Himalayas. They stopped at Hrishikesh but suffered from fever. Later, Swamiji came down and spent several weeks at Meerut. Some of his brother monks joined him there for a time.

Many things happened to Swamiji while he was wandering, some good and some bad. Often he had nothing to eat for a long time and often he was tired and hungry. But he also met many kind-hearted people who helped him. Often it was the poor and lowly who gave him food and shelter. Once he was sitting in the hot sun at a railway station in Uttar Pradesh. He had not eaten anything for over a day and he could not even get a drink of water because he had no money. A Baniya began to taunt Swamiji. He did not think that men should become monks. He said to Swamiji, "See what nice food I am eating. See the nice cold water I have to drink. I earn money and so I have all these good things. You do not earn money and so you are starving." The Swami said nothing. But a wonderful thing happened after a little while. A sweetmeat seller appeared and offered food to Swamiji. He spread a mat and laid out food and water before Swamiji. He then begged him to eat the food.

Swamiji said, "You must be mistaken, my good man. I do not remember having seen you before."

But the sweetmeat-seller said, "No, Babaji, you are the man I saw in my dream. Sri Ramji himself appeared to me and told me to take these good things to you at the railway station. When I came here I recognized you at once. Please take your food while it is fresh." Tears of gratitude flowed from Swamiji's eyes and he thanked the sweetmeat-seller again and again. But the sweetmeat-seller said that it was all the will of Sri Ramji. The Baniya was thunderstruck to see all this. He stood staring at the scene. He understood his mistake and fell at Swamiji's feet and begged his pardon.

Leaving Meerut Swamiji decided to wander about alone. He forbade his brother monks to follow him and left for Rajputana, the land of heroes. When Swamiji was at Alwar he had a very interesting discussion with Prince Mangal Singh. The Prince said that he did not believe in image-worship because he could not worship wood, stone or metal. In answer, Swamiji asked for a picture of the Prince to be given to him. Holding the picture in his hand, Swamiji asked the Dewan of the Prince to spit on it. At this the Dewan grew terrified and said: "What! Swamiji! This is the likeness of our Maharaja. How can I do such a thing?" Swamiji now said to the Prince: "See, Your Highness, though you are not actually present in the picture your devoted servant sees the shadow of your form in it. This picture is only a piece of paper; but your servants treat it with respect because it reminds them of Your Highness. Similarly, devotees worship God in an image because it brings to their mind some special form of God and helps them to concentrate. They actually worship the same one God and not the stone or metal as such. At this the Maharaja said with folded hands: "Swamiji, till now I did not understand the meaning of image worship. You have opened my eyes."

Swamiji visited many other places and at Mt. Abu he met the Maharaja of Khetri. Later he went to Khetri with the Maharaja. The Maharaja became his devoted disciple and they had many long talks together. The Swami loved the Maharaja dearly and there was a very wonderful relationship between them. The Maharaja was later able to help Swamiji in many ways.



*Holding the picture in his hand,  
Swamiji asked the Dewan of the Prince to spit on it.*

But Swamiji again became eager to wander. He left Khetri and passed through the Bombay Presidency and much of south India. He stayed for some time with the Maharaja of Mysore, who became his great friend and admirer. The Maharaja offered to help him with his mission. He made a recording of Swamiji's voice and kept it in the palace for many years.

Swamiji left Mysore for Rameswaram. He stopped on the way at Madurai where he met the Raja of Ramnad. The Raja was a very good man and a good ruler. He became an admirer and disciple of Swamiji, and Swamiji explained to him many of his ideas for the uplift of India. The Raja promised to help him. Swamiji next went to Rameswaram and then to Kanyakumari, the southernmost part of India. He crossed over to a big rock in the ocean and sat there and thought about his motherland. He had seen the whole of India, from north to south and from east to west. He had seen much poverty and suffering and was able to understand the difficulties of the people. Yes, the common people of India were very poor, but Swamiji also saw how good they were, how gentle and kind-hearted. They had to do much hard work for which they received very little money.

Swamiji felt deeply for the people and was anxious to do something for them. But what could he, a poor homeless monk, do? He had appealed to many princes, to rich and educated people; he had appealed to young students also. They all listened to him and admired him as a monk and teacher, but they did nothing to put his ideas into practice. He felt depressed and wondered what he should do next to help his countrymen.

But Swamiji was a follower of Sri Ramakrishna, and he always tried to carry out the will of his Master. He now felt that Sri Ramakrishna wanted him to go to America to attend a Parliament of Religions. It was a strange and distant land, and it would not be easy to go there. But he also felt that, somehow, he would be able



*Swamiji crossed over to a big rock in the ocean and sat there and thought about his motherland.*

to help his own country better from the West. To fulfil the will of God, then, he decided to make the journey to America.... This is the resolve he made while sitting on the rock at Kanyakumari.

Swamiji next went to Madras where many intelligent young men became his enthusiastic followers. He gave several talks before different groups and met many important and educated people. He told them about

his idea of going to America. His young disciples became very enthusiastic about this, and they began to raise money for the ticket.

At this time the Maharaja of Khetri invited Swamiji to visit his capital again. It was the Maharaja who gave the Swami a first class ticket on a ship going to Canada and many things he needed for the trip. The Maharaja also suggested that he take the name 'Vivekananda'. Swamiji accepted this name and for the rest of his life he was known as Swami Vivekananda.

## **X TO AMERICA**

SWAMI Vivekananda sailed from Bombay on May 31, 1893. The ship stopped at Ceylon, Singapore, Hong Kong and other ports in China and Japan. Swamiji enjoyed the trip very much. The ship then sailed to Vancouver, Canada. Swamiji left Vancouver by train for Chicago. On the train a rich, cultured lady named Miss Sanborn was impressed by his noble personality and her conversation with him. She said to Swamiji, "If you ever come to my home near Boston, I shall be happy to have you as my guest and introduce you to persons of learning and culture." Swamiji reached Chicago in the middle of July. It was a strange new world. He visited the Chicago World's Fair where the Parliament of Religions was to be held. He was surprised to see all the exhibits and scientific inventions. He marvelled at the machinery, the industrial products and the arts.

After a few days Swamiji went to the Information Bureau to find out about the Parliament of Religions. He was dismayed to learn that the Parliament would not open until September. Moreover, they told him that he could not be accepted as a delegate at the Parliament because he had no papers to show that he represented any group or sect. They also told him that the time for admission was already past. This news was a great blow. Worse still, he was fast running out of money. He had to wait almost two months for the Parliament, but his money would soon be spent and then he would have to starve.

Swamiji left Chicago and went to Miss Sanborn's place near Boston, as he was told he could live there more cheaply than in Chicago. He also remembered Miss Sanborn's cordial invitation to visit her home. While in her home he met Prof. J. H. Wright of Harvard University. He had a long discussion with the Professor and talked about many different subjects with him. Prof. Wright recognized Swamiji's great scholarship and said that he should represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions. Swamiji told him that he had no official letter from any organization. The Professor replied, "To ask you, Swami, for credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine."

Professor Wright arranged everything for Swamiji. He wrote to the Chairman of the Committee of the Parliament of Religions introducing Swamiji. In this letter he said, "Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together." He also presented Swamiji with a ticket to Chicago. Swamiji was very happy to see how God's purpose was being fulfilled.



*Swamiji sat down by the side of the street, determined to wait until something happened. Just then the door of a nearby house opened and a lady came out.*

When Swamiji reached Chicago he found that he had lost the address of the Committee. He did not know where to go. He was tired, and finding no other place he spent the night in a large empty box. In the morning he began to walk along a street where rich people lived in large houses. Like a sannyasin he began to beg for

food from door to door. But he was treated rudely and even the servants insulted him, for begging is condemned in the West. He did not know what to do. At last he decided just to wait for the will of God. If God had brought him to the West for some purpose, then he would look after him. So he sat down by the side of the street, determined to wait until something happened. Just then the door of a nearby house opened and a lady came out. She went up to Swamiji and asked him, "Sir, are you a delegate to the Parliament of Religions?" Swamiji told her all about himself. The lady invited him into her home and instructed the servants to look after him. She saw that he had breakfast and then took him to the office of the Parliament. Swamiji gave his letter of introduction and was gladly accepted as a delegate. The lady who helped him was Mrs. George W. Hale. She, her husband and their children became close friends of Swamiji.

## XI

### AT THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS

THE Parliament of Religions opened on Monday, September 11, 1893. It was held in a large building called the Hall of Columbus. Swami Vivekananda sat on the platform at the front with the other delegates. Cardinal Gibbons of the Roman Catholic Church sat in the centre. On both sides were delegates representing nearly all countries and religions. There were a few others from India. Majumdar and Nagarkar represented

the Brahmo Samaj; Dharmapala represented the Buddhists of Ceylon, and Chakravorty and Mrs. Besant represented Theosophy. There was a large audience of four thousand people.

It was a grand occasion, and Swami Vivekananda felt nervous at the sight of so many people. The Chairman several times requested him to speak, but he would not agree. Late in the afternoon the Chairman announced his name without asking him. Swamiji now had no choice, so he stood up and faced the audience. He began by saying: "Sisters and brothers of America." He could not say more. The audience was tremendously moved by the way he addressed them and they began to clap their hands and cheer. Hundreds of people rose to their feet, shouting and cheering. The cheering continued for several minutes. When silence was restored Swamiji continued his speech. It was a short speech, but in it he presented Hinduism as a religion which taught that all religions are true and that all should be accepted. Other speakers had spoken only of their particular religion. Swamiji spoke of the truth in all religions. The audience liked the speech very much. In fact, they liked Swamiji better than any of the other speakers. Swamiji became famous overnight, and the newspapers were full of praise of him.

Swami Vivekananda gave several speeches at the Parliament, the most famous being his "Paper on Hinduism". Swamiji was always the favourite, and his speeches were always kept till the end so that the people would stay. Sometimes large numbers of people became tired and started to leave. Then the Chairman would



*"Sisters and brothers of America."*

say that Swami Vivekananda would give a short speech before the meeting closed. All the people would then wait happily to hear Swamiji. Large pictures of Swamiji were printed and displayed in the streets of Chicago. Everyone spoke about him.

The newspapers of India were also filled with the news of his triumph at Chicago, and the Indian people

were very proud of his great success. His brother monks at Baranagore were especially happy when they learned that their 'Naren' was the famous Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekananda did not forget the poor people of India. He kept thinking about them and how they could be helped. After he became famous many rich



*Swamiji could not use the bed, and slept on the floor.*

people invited him to their homes. But he could not enjoy the comforts which were offered to him. On the very night of his triumph at the Parliament he had been the guest of a rich man and had been given a big comfortable bed to sleep on. Swamiji could not use the bed. How could he? The thought of the poor people of India came to his mind and he slept on the floor.

## XII

### THE SPIRITUAL TEACHER IN AMERICA

THE Parliament of Religions was over and Swami Vivekananda was now a famous man. He received many invitations to speak before clubs, churches, and many other groups. Later, he accepted an offer from a lecture bureau and he then travelled far and wide giving lectures. He had all the qualities required to be a good speaker—voice, language and appearance—and his ideas also attracted people. What lofty things he said! He was in demand all over America. It was very hard work. He had to travel long distances and sometimes he had to give many lectures a day. He often felt very tired. Sometimes his mind also was tired and he would wonder what to say in his lecture the next day. Then a strange thing would happen. When he went to bed at night he would hear a voice talking to him or giving a lecture. He would get many new ideas in this way.

Yes, it was hard work, and yet he continued to travel and give lectures for about one year. There was great excitement wherever he went and the newspapers wrote

long articles about him. Once he gave a lecture in a western town where there were some cowboys. They heard him say that a spiritual man was not disturbed by what happened around him. They decided to test him. He spoke to them in the open air, standing on a wooden tub. Suddenly there was a terrible noise. The cowboys were shooting their guns and bullets went whizzing past Swamiji's ears. The men were testing him. But Swamiji paid no attention to the shots and continued his lecture. Afterwards, the cowboys came to him and said that he was "a right good fellow".

Late in 1894 Swamiji decided that he had done enough travelling. He now decided to stay in one place and train a number of disciples to carry on the work. He began to live in New York and gave a series of lectures. A group of sincere people gathered round him and followed his teachings. This work was so successful that he started a Vedanta Society there. He held classes and gave lectures in which he said that God is in all men. Men can see God if they pray and meditate. He taught them how to do this. He also taught them that all religions are true. People came to him for help and advice and some became his disciples. Among them there were many important people.

### XIII

#### AT THE THOUSAND ISLAND PARK

THE St. Lawrence River forms part of the boundary of New York State and in one place there are so many

islands that they are called the Thousand Islands. Early in June, 1895, Swamiji went to the Thousand Island Park and stayed there for seven weeks. Twelve students also went at different times and stayed with him. It was a beautiful place. They could look out over the river and see many islands. It was quiet, with nothing to hear but the wind and the songs of the birds. But the best thing for the disciples was to listen to Swamiji. Swamiji was at his best here. Every evening he would teach the students about Vedanta\* and the Hindu religion. Once he spoke to them until very late at night. The full moon rose and set but none of them knew that so much time had passed.

But it was not always religion that they had. There was much laughter and joy also. Swamiji would cut jokes and make them laugh and laugh. Sometimes they would go for a picnic. Occasionally Swamiji would cook for them. This would alarm the devotees for it would mean much dish-washing for them afterwards. He would also use lots of spices making the food rich and hot. The devotees liked his cooking except for the spices, which burned their tongues. But they ate the food just the same. Had it not been cooked by Swamiji?

Swamiji was full of spiritual power and he had a great influence on the devotees. They all became his

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\*Vedanta is based on the Vedas and also includes the spiritual teachings of the saints and sages that India has produced.

disciples. Two of them served him faithfully as long as they lived. One was Sister Christine, who later worked in India. The other was Mr. J. J. Goodwin, who took down many of Swamiji's lectures and who also followed him to India, where he died at a young age. Another of Swamiji's disciples, Miss Waldo, wrote down many of the things he spoke at the Thousand Island Park. These have been published in a book called "Inspired Talks". He also wrote the poem "Song of the Sannyasin" at this time.

After he left the Thousand Island Park Swamiji went to England for two months. Then he returned to New York as he was badly needed to carry on the work there. As before, he gave lectures and talked to people who came to him for spiritual help. Three books were published from his lectures—"Jnana Yoga", "Raja Yoga" and "Karma Yoga". These books immediately became popular. Swamiji's fame as a religious teacher spread far and wide and many important people became his friends and disciples. He had the dream of combining the best qualities of India and America, of the East and the West. Religious teachers would go to the West and teach spirituality. The Western devotees would go to India and teach science, industry, organization and co-operation.

Swamiji was very tired when his work in America ended. He had not spared himself. Whenever he did anything he would think of nothing else. Swamiji was very strong, but he worked so hard that even his strong body become weakened.

## XIV ENGLAND AND EUROPE

SWAMIJI, as we said, first visited England in September, 1895. He was received by friends, Miss Henriette Muller and Mr. E. T. Sturdy. After a few days he began to hold a few small classes in the evenings. During the day he visited many interesting places in London. He soon became well known, and his classes grew bigger and bigger. Many people went to visit him and newspapers printed reports of his lectures. The work was a great success.

However, Swamiji could not stay long and he had to return to America to continue the work there. He sailed for England the second time on April 15, 1896. He was very happy when he reached London, for a brother monk, Swami Saradananda, was there waiting for him. It was a joyful occasion. He had not seen any of his brother monks for several years and they had much to talk about. Swamiji also had many plans for the work in India, which he told to Swami Saradananda.

Swamiji again began to hold classes and give lectures about Vedanta. His work was even more successful than before and he had to go to many places to give talks. One thing he enjoyed very much was a visit to Prof. Max Muller. The Professor was teaching at Oxford University. He was a great student of India, Hinduism and Sanskrit learning. They had a long conversation. Swamiji and Prof. Max Muller became fast friends and often wrote letters to each other.

The Professor had already written an article about Sri Ramakrishna, and he asked Swamiji for more information. Swamiji asked Swami Saradananda to help Prof. Muller. Material was sent from India and as a result Prof. Max Muller wrote a book about Sri Ramakrishna. It was a very good book, and it helped Swami Vivekananda in his work.

Swami Vivekananda made many other friends and disciples in England. The best known of these was Miss Margaret Noble, who later became famous as Sister Nivedita. Two other faithful disciples were Mr. & Mrs. Sevier. They returned to India with Swamiji and were very helpful to him in his work there.

After some time three of Swamiji's friends invited him to go on a tour of Europe, and he was glad to accept this invitation. They went to Switzerland where Swamiji was very happy to see the mountains and snow-peaks of the Alps. The scenery was beautiful. He stayed for two weeks in a small village and enjoyed the beauty, peace and silence. He became again the silent, meditating monk of his earlier days. His health also improved. He often went on walks. Once he nearly had an accident. He was walking on a mountain path with his friends. He had been reciting passages from the Upanishads, and had become absorbed in spiritual thoughts. He fell behind the others and did not pay much attention to where he was going. As there was snow he carried a stick and planted it firmly on the ground at every step. Suddenly, the stick broke through the snow and ice, and a deep crevice appeared just in front of him. He nearly fell into it, but somehow kept his balance. He walked

rapidly up to his friends and called out, "I have been saved by the grace of the Lord." His friends were careful not to let Swamiji walk alone after that.

Swamiji then visited Germany, where he enjoyed meeting Prof. Paul Deussen, a great German Sanskrit scholar. They had long conversations and visited many places together. Prof. Deussen also joined the party when Swamiji returned to London. Swamiji again plunged into work, meeting people and giving lectures. He sent Swami Saradananda to carry on the work in America. He also sent for Swami Abhedananda to come to England from India. Swami Abhedananda came and began to give public lectures. Swamiji was very happy at their success.

## XV THE HERO RETURNS

SWAMI Vivekananda knew that Swami Abhedananda would be able to carry on the work successfully and therefore he began to think about returning to India. It was arranged that he would sail from Naples. Mr. Goodwin and Mr. & Mrs. Sevier were to accompany him. Before he left, an English friend asked him, "Swami, how do you like your motherland now after four years' experience of the luxurious, glorious, powerful West?"

Swamiji's reply was, "India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me; it is now the holy land—the place of pilgrimage, the Tirtha."

Swamiji's homecoming was a great event. The people of India had learned to love and admire him ever since the days of the Parliament of Religions. His name had often been in the papers and on the lips of the people, and they looked upon him as a great hero. Previously, the people of India felt weak and helpless. Now they felt stronger. Swamiji's success in the West gave them self-respect. Therefore, when he returned, the whole country rose to do him honour.



*The horses were taken away from Swamiji's carriage and the Raja himself and many others pulled the carriage through the streets.*

The ship arrived at Colombo on January 15, 1897. Swamiji was filled with joy and excitement. This was India! Once more he was to walk upon her holy soil! He did not know about the preparations that had been made to receive him. Reception committees were formed in the large cities and newspapers wrote editorials about him. One of his brother monks was at Colombo to receive him, and others were on the way or in Madras. When he stepped ashore in Colombo he found a huge crowd of people waiting to see him. Those who were near rushed to touch his feet. Then a huge procession was formed. Hymns were sung and many people threw flowers in the path before Swamiji. He stayed in Colombo for several days. He gave lectures and received visitors, the poor as well as the rich and powerful.

He had planned to travel from Colombo to Madras by steamer, but many telegrams poured in from different cities asking Swamiji to stop for at least a few minutes. He changed his plans and travelled over land, by train and carriage. At every town he would find people waiting to receive him. Often triumphal arches had been built for him and there were long processions with bands, fireworks, cannons and rockets. He would be presented with an address of welcome and in return would make a short speech.

He crossed over to the mainland by steamer, landing at Pamban. Here he was met by the Raja of Ramnad and many people, all of whom welcomed Swamiji with joy. The horses were taken away from Swamiji's carriage and the Raja himself and many others pulled the carriage through the streets. The next day Swamiji

visited the temple of Rameswaram. This reminded him of his wandering days, for he had visited the same places four years earlier. What a difference ! Then he was an unknown monk who had travelled through India on foot. Now he was famous, and great men competed with each other to show him honour and respect.

The triumphant tour continued. Swamiji passed through town after town—Ramnad, Madura, Kumbakonam, and many other places. Everywhere immense crowds gathered to meet Swamiji, to see him and listen to his words. The climax came when he reached Madras. As many as seventeen triumphal arches had been put up for him, and many groups presented him with addresses. Swamiji stayed in Madras for nine days. He delivered several important lectures and met many people.

## XVI TO CALCUTTA

SWAMI Vivekananda became very tired as a result of the constant travel, meetings, lectures and interviews with people. He was not able to continue such strenuous work, so he decided to go to Calcutta by sea. He took a steamer with a few friends and disciples and enjoyed a few days of rest. The steamer docked at Kidderpore and from there Swamiji was taken by a special train to Sealdah station. Thousands of people were waiting at Sealdah to greet him and many of his brother monks were also there. Swamiji was given many flowers and garlands. There were so many people that Swamiji could hardly

move to the carriage. A group of college boys pulled the carriage. There was a great procession with bands, music and singing, banners and flowers. Thousands of people lined the road to see Swamiji.

During the nights Swamiji stayed at the Alambazar Math with his brother monks. During the days he stayed at a large house in Cossipore called Seal's Garden. Hundreds of people went there throughout the day to see Swamiji and hear him speak about Vedanta and the way to make India strong. After a week a great meeting was held to welcome him. A large and distinguished audience went to hear him speak. He gave one of his famous speeches on that occasion. He gave other talks and lectures while he stayed in Calcutta.

The birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was held soon after Swamiji reached Calcutta and he visited Dakshineswar. A large number of people had also gathered. He walked about from place to place, thinking about the old days when Sri Ramakrishna had lived there. Many other devotees of Sri Ramakrishna were present and he was glad to meet them.

Swamiji, of course, was especially glad to be with his brother monks at the Alambazar Math. They had much to talk about. Swamiji told them about his ideas for rebuilding India. He also told them what monks should do to serve others. His brother monks could not accept his ideas at first. They thought a monk should do nothing but pray, meditate and try to realize God. They did not think that a monk should work for others or run schools and hospitals. But Swamiji showed them that both ideas were good. What he wanted, he said, was to

start an order of monks who would spend their lives helping and serving others. They listened to Swamiji and accepted what he said. Swamiji then sent Swami Ramakrishnananda to work in Madras. Swami Saradananda and Swami Abhedananda were already working in the West at the request of Swamiji. Swami Akhandananda then went to Murshidabad to start famine relief work in the villages. The other monks were also ready to take up such work.

Swamiji wanted the monks and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna to work together. Therefore, he called a meeting of the leading monks and devotees on 1 May, 1897. They discussed the matter and then agreed to start an organization, now called the Ramakrishna Mission. The Mission was to train men as teachers, help arts, crafts and industries, and spread religious ideas among the people. The Mission was also to start Maths in different parts of the country and send preachers of Vedanta to other countries.

## XVII CALCUTTA AND NORTH INDIA

SWAMIJI stayed in Calcutta from February to May. Many people, as we said, came to talk with him. He was very much interested in the educated, unmarried young men and many came to him. Some joined the Ramakrishna Order and became his disciples. Many others were also helped by him. They tried to become better and stronger, more energetic, and also more religious.

From May, 1897 to January, 1898 Swamiji went to the great cities of north India. Everywhere the people welcomed him with love and enthusiasm. He gave speeches, talked with people and delivered his message in many ways.

Wherever he went, from Colombo to Almora, Swamiji gave his message to the people of India. He told them what a glorious past India had. They should be proud of their ancestors, who built a civilization equal to any other in the world. Why should they look to foreign countries? They should look to their own past and then build a new and greater India. The heritage from the past was religious. Therefore, the new India also had to be built around religion. The people need strength. They should have strong bodies, strong minds and strong characters. Young boys should play games and make their muscles strong. All should have courage, strength and self-respect. They should hold to the national ideals of truth, sacrifice and service. The future of India depends upon her own people. If the people become strong then they will make a great and strong India, great in every way. The way to do this is through education. All the people of India should have a good education. Then they will become strong and will make the nation great.

Many people heard Swamiji's message and were inspired by it. They regained their self-confidence. They began to serve the poor and helpless. They gave their lives in service of their motherland. This was a turning point in the history of India. The dawn of a new day had come, and India would be free within fifty years.

## XVIII SWAMIJI AND HIS DISCIPLES

IN January, 1898, Swami Vivekananda returned to Calcutta. As before he was always busy meeting and talking with people and training members of the Order. The Math was soon shifted to Nilambar Mukherjee's garden-house on the western bank of the Ganga at Belur.



*Margaret Noble took the vows of brahmacharya and was given the name 'Nivedita'.*

Land was also purchased at Belur, where Swamiji wanted to build a permanent Math. There was a small house on this land and some of Swamiji's Western lady disciples lived there for a while. Margaret Nobel was one of them. It was at this time that she took the vows of brahmacharya and was given the name 'Nivedita'.

Swamiji spent much time with his Western disciples. He would go and talk with them every day. He told



*People who had plague were nursed in the relief camp.*

them many things about India and Vedanta. He wanted them to understand India and therefore he spoke about the history of India, the beliefs of the people, their customs and habits, the Hindu religion and many other things. All this was new to them, but Swamiji explained everything clearly and patiently.

Due to overwork Swamiji's health became worse. In March, 1898, he went to Darjeeling for rest. He stayed there for a month. Then, news came about the outbreak of plague in Calcutta. At once Swamiji returned to Calcutta and plunged into work. The people were very much frightened and many were running away. Swamiji decided to start relief work at once. One of his brother monks asked him, "From where will we get the money?"

Swamiji replied, "Why? We will sell the land for the new Math if necessary. We are sannyasins. We should be ready to live under trees and beg for our food."

Fortunately, it was not necessary to sell the land. Many people gave money and Swamiji was able to begin the relief work. A big plot of land was rented and a camp was set up there. People who had plague were nursed in this camp. Many workers came to help Swamiji and his disciples. They also cleaned the lanes and the houses and taught the people what to do.

This work helped the people very much and they began to lose their fear. They loved Swamiji even more than before. They saw that he was a practical Vedantin. He not only taught the highest religious truths, but also loved the people, even the poorest. He tried to remove their pain and suffering.

## XIX TO THE HIMALAYAS

AFTER a few days the plague relief work was over and there was no more danger. Swamiji with some of his brother monks and the Western disciples then went to the Himalayas. The journey was an interesting one. They passed through Patna, Banaras, Lucknow and many other places and Swamiji told them the history and greatness of every city. He told them about the Indian people and their life, their religion and culture.

They stopped first at Nainital and then went to Almora. As always, Swamiji met many people and talked with them. He also explained many things about India to his Western disciples. Sister Nivedita has recorded some of these conversations in one of her books.

After about a month, Swamiji went to Kashmir with his Western disciples. They travelled through much of Kashmir, part of the way in houseboats. They enjoyed the scenery very much. Swamiji explained many things about the people and history of Kashmir.

Swamiji thought and spoke much of Shiva at this time. He decided to make a pilgrimage to the cave of Amarnath, deep in the Himalayas, where there was an ice image of Shiva. Sister Nivedita was allowed to go with him. It was an interesting trip and they passed through some of the most beautiful scenery in the world.

Many other people were also in the party—men, women and children from all parts of India, and also monks of many Orders. When they halted for the night

a town of tents would quickly spring up. Many of the monks went to Swamiji to learn from him. The journey was not an easy one. They had to climb high glaciers and once their camp was at 14,500 feet above sea level. Sometimes the path led close to the edge of a steep cliff. Swamiji followed all the customs of the pilgrimage and took baths in the streams, even though it was bitterly cold.

On August 2nd they reached Amarnath. Swamiji's mind at this moment was completely filled with thoughts of Shiva. With great devotion he entered the cave of Amarnath and bowed before the ice image of Shiva. The cave was a huge one. Many people were standing there and they chanted songs in praise of Shiva. Swamiji had a great spiritual experience. Shiva was his all in all! Shiva the Great Monk! The Eternal One! ...such were his thoughts. For days afterwards Swamiji talked of nothing but of Shiva.

From Amarnath Swamiji returned to Srinagar where he stayed until the end of September. Here he spent more and more time in meditation. He often went by himself and stayed alone for days. But whenever he was with his disciples he thrilled them with his ideas and helped them to understand India.

While at Srinagar Swamiji began to think more and more about God as the Divine Mother. Often he was heard singing the songs of Ramprasad, a bengali mystic and writer of songs about the Divine Mother. Sometimes he behaved as if he was a mere child of the Divine Mother. He felt that Mother led him in everything that he did. Sometimes he meditated for long hours upon

Her. He would take the boat to a lonely place and then meditate upon Kali the Mother. This continued for several days until he had a vision of Kali. Kali seemed to fill his whole mind. It was at this time that he wrote the poem, "Kali the Mother", one of his best poems.

He felt that it was Mother who did everything and that he was just a plaything in her hands. All his plans about the future of India disappeared. He was now only a child, without any wish of his own and depending always upon Mother.

## XX AT BELUR MATH

SWAMI Vivekananda had deep spiritual experiences but his health declined. It became so bad that he decided to return to Calcutta. He arrived at the monastery on October 18th. His brother monks were very glad to see him but they felt sorry when they saw how ill he was. However, Swamiji had talks with the monks and held classes for them.

One of Swamiji's wishes began to be fulfilled at this time. He had long wanted to help the women of India. They had great purity and other good qualities but had little education and were not very active in the world. Swamiji said they should have education and then they would solve their own problems. So he was very glad when Sister Nivedita began her work. She had come to India to be of service to Indian women and she now started a school for girls. She lived at first with Sri Sarada

Devi and a few other lady devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. These ladies knew a great deal about the Hindu religion, the Ramayana, Mahabharata and many other things. Sister Nivedita learned much from them. Swami Vivekananda also continued to help her and he was very much interested in her school. Later, Sister Nivedita rented a separate house. She had to face many difficulties, but she succeeded in starting the school. The school is now a very big one and it has done much to uplift the women of India.

Swami Vivekananda wanted to establish the new Math at Belur as soon as possible. The land had been purchased earlier and a Puja was held in March, 1898. Soon after, the work on the buildings was begun. In December, Swamiji and a few monks moved into the new monastery and soon all the monks began to live there. Swamiji believed that the new Math would become very great. It would be a centre where all religions and religious teachers would be honoured. The new ideas would spread from there and people would come to it from all over the world.

Swami Saradananda, who had been working in America, came back to India at the call of Swamiji. Swamiji asked him to help organize the new Math, and this work went on successfully. Much time was spent in spiritual talk and study of the scriptures. Strict rules were followed. Swamiji also began to train the monks as preachers. He made his disciples give speeches. Early in 1899 he sent two of his disciples to preach at Dhaka and a little later he also sent Swamis Saradananda and Turiyananda to Gujarat. They all had great success.

## XXI SECOND VISIT TO THE WEST

SWAMIJI's health grew worse when the weather became warm. The doctors said that it would be good for his health if he went to the West again. The sea voyage would do him good. He decided to go. Swami Turiyananda and Sister Nivedita were to go with him.

They sailed on June 20, 1899 in the steamer "Golconda". The sea was very rough due to the monsoons. The ship stopped at Madras but the Indian passengers could not land because there had been plague in Calcutta. Many of Swamiji's friends and disciples came alongside the steamer in boats and talked with the Swami. The ship next stopped at Colombo, and again large crowds came to see Swamiji and he met many old friends.

The voyage was not an easy one, for the ship tossed and pitched constantly. And yet it was a wonderful time also, for Swamiji had long conversations with his companions. He said many interesting things about India and religious life. In this way the time passed, and then on July 1 the ship arrived at London. Swamiji stayed there for two weeks and then sailed for America. Two American ladies had gone to London to meet him, and they joined the party on the voyage across the Atlantic. They enjoyed the voyage very much. After ten days the ship reached New York. Swamiji did not stay in New York, but went to the country house of Mr. & Mrs. Leggett, his American friends. It was about one hundred and fifty miles from New York, near the Catskill

Mountains. It was a beautiful and quiet place, and Swamiji stayed there until November. He had a good rest and his health improved very much. He was also glad to meet Swami Abhedananda who had been working in America and was in charge of the Vedanta Society in New York.

Swamiji then went to New York where he held a few classes and met many of his old friends and disciples. They were very happy to see Swamiji again. Others had read his books, and now they were able to come and meet him. After two weeks Swamiji went to California, on the west coast of the United States. He went first to Los Angeles. Many people were eager to see and hear him. They had read about him in the papers and had read his books. Therefore, he had to give many lectures. He told stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in some of his lectures.

In February, Swamiji went to San Francisco. Here also many people came to hear him. They were so much interested that Swamiji had to hold private classes. He taught them Vedanta philosophy, the Gita and how to meditate. He rented a big flat so that he might hold the classes there. He gave many public lectures and also visited nearby towns to give lectures. So many people began to come to the classes that Swamiji started a Vedanta Society in San Francisco.

Once, while in an American town, he was walking on the bank of a river. He saw some young men with guns shooting at some egg shells which were floating in the river. But their marksmanship was bad and they could not hit the shells. Swamiji smiled when he saw



*Swamiji took the gun and hit about a dozen shells.*

them miss the mark. They saw him smiling at their failure and felt annoyed. They told him that it was not easy, and asked him to try himself to shoot the shells. Swamiji took the gun and hit about a dozen shells. The young men thought that Swamiji had been trained by an expert. But he told them that he had never fired a gun before. His success was due to concentration of mind.

One of Swamiji's students gave him some land for an Ashrama. It was far from any town or village and very quiet. Later in the year Swami Turiyananda went there with twelve students. The place is called Shanti Ashrama.

As usual, Swamiji worked too hard, and his health also was not good. Mr. & Mrs. Leggett of New York heard about his bad health and invited him to go with them to Paris. He was also invited to attend a Congress of the History of Religions in Paris. He wanted to stay for a few weeks in New York, so he left California. It was a long trip and Swamiji was very tired when he reached New York. He gave a few lectures, and talked with his old friends. He was pleased to see the progress made by the Vedanta Society.

## **XXII TO EUROPE**

SWAMI Vivekananda sailed from New York and reached Paris on August 1, 1900. Mr. & Mrs. Leggett had a beautiful house in Paris and Swamiji stayed with them. He met many important people and had conversations with them. In this way he was able to spread his ideas.

The main event during his stay in Paris was the Congress of the History of Religions. Swamiji had begun to learn French during his stay in America. Now he began to study the language in earnest so that he could speak to the Congress. He succeeded, and was able to explain difficult questions in French. His health was not

good, but he was able to speak before the Congress twice. The other scholars liked his talks. He was very well-known and met many important people. Dr. J. C. Bose, the great Indian scientist, was in Paris at that time and Swamiji met him several times. He was very proud of the scientific discoveries of his fellow countryman. He then travelled through other parts of Europe. He visited Austria and Turkey. He stayed for several days in Constantinople (now called Istanbul) and saw many interesting places in the city. He also met a number of important people.

He next took a steamer to Greece, where he stayed for a few days. Then he sailed for Egypt. Several friends were with him during these travels. He was much interested to see the Pyramids and the museum at Cairo. And yet he was feeling tired of seeing all these things. His mind was fixed more and more on God, and he was not interested any more in seeing things in the world. He became eager to return to India. One day, he told his friends that he would soon sail for India. They felt very sad.

## **XXIII RETURN TO INDIA**

SWAMIJI left by the first steamer bound for India. He was alone. He had told no one in India about his return. When the ship reached India Swamiji was very happy. It was late at night on December 9, 1900 when Swamiji reached Belur Math. No one knew he was coming.

Swamiji was still dressed in European clothes, and the man at the gate did not know who he was. He did not let Swamiji in, but ran to the other Swamis, who were taking their evening meal. He called out, "A sahib has come."

The monks were puzzled at this news. Who had come? What did he want? Before they could go to the gate the 'sahib' came. When they saw who he was they were very excited and happy. "Swamiji has come ! Swamiji has come!" they cried. They spread a seat for Swamiji and gave him a large helping of Khichuri. Swamiji ate it happily, as he had not eaten any for several months. Then, they talked with him for hours while he told them about his experiences in the West.

But there was sad news waiting for Swamiji. One of his best loved Western disciples, Mr. J. H. Sevier, had died. Mr. & Mrs. Sevier had given up everything for Swamiji, and had come to India with him when he returned from his first trip to the West. They had travelled through India with him and had then begun to live in the Himalayas. They had started an Ashrama at Mayavati, in the Himalayas. Now Mr. Sevier was dead. Swamiji knew that Mrs. Sevier was feeling great sorrow, and he wanted to go to Mayavati for a few days. He telegraphed at once to say that he was going to visit Mayavati.

It was the middle of the winter. There was deep snow in the Himalayas and it was very cold. But though the trip to Mayavati was very difficult and unpleasant Swamiji did not turn back. He reached Mayavati on January 3, 1901. Mrs. Sevier and the monks who lived

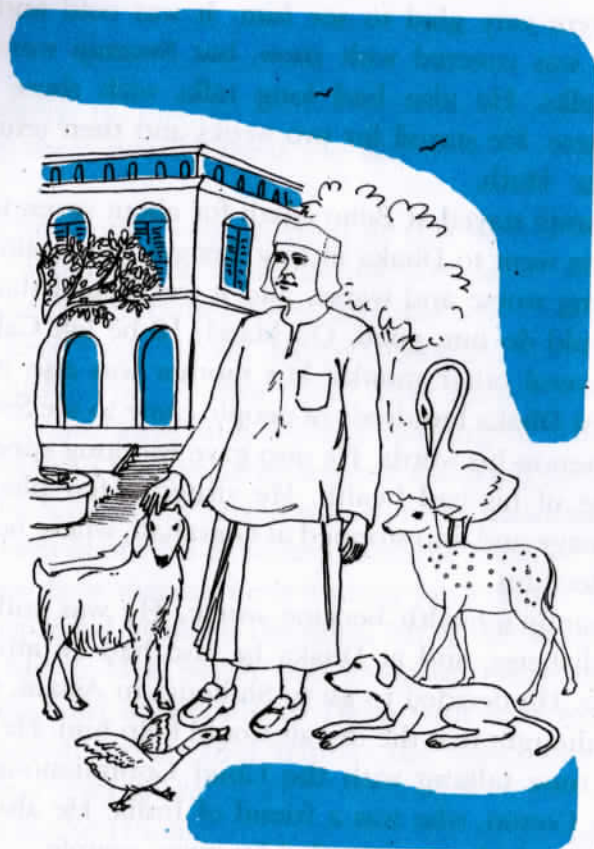
there were very glad to see him. It was cold and the ground was covered with snow, but Swamiji went for long walks. He also had long talks with those who lived there. He stayed for two weeks and then returned to Belur Math.

Swamiji stayed at Belur Math for about seven weeks and then went to Dhaka in East Bengal. His health was becoming worse and worse, and it was hoped that the trip would do him good. On March 18 he left Calcutta with several other monks. His mother was also in the party. At Dhaka hundreds of people came to see Swamiji and listen to his words. He also gave two long speeches, in spite of his bad health. He visited a few places of pilgrimage and also stopped at Guwahati, where he gave three lectures.

Swamiji's health became worse. He was suffering from diabetes, and at Dhaka he also had an attack of asthma. He decided to go to Shillong, in Assam, where it was thought that the dry air would help him. He spent some time talking with the Chief Commissioner, Sir Henry Cotton, who was a friend of India. He also gave a lecture which was attended by many people.

## XXIV LAST DAYS

SWAMIJI returned to Belur Math in May. His health continued to become worse, but he received many visitors daily, talked to them and gave them spiritual help. He also held classes for the monks and brahma-



*He especially liked animals.*

charins. He would often sing. He made rules for life in the monastery and saw that the monks observed them. He made them get up early in the morning for meditation. He himself was always up very early. He was interested in many things about the life at Belur Math—the garden, the cows, the cooking and many such things.

He especially liked animals. There were many at the Math then. There was a dog called 'Bagha', a she-goat

which Swamiji called 'Hansi' or 'Swan', and also cows, sheep, ducks, geese, an antelope, a stork, and a kid called 'Matru'. These animals also loved Swamiji very much and Matru would follow him about and sometimes even slept in his room. But Bagha was the chief of the animals. Once he did something wrong, and the monks took him across the river and left him there. But Bagha came back. He jumped on a ferry boat and growled loudly at the boatman when he tried to make him leave. The boatman was afraid and let Bagha stay on the ferry. The next morning Swamiji found Bagha lying at his door. He patted him and told the other monks that Bagha was not to be sent away again.

In October, 1901, he had the Durga Puja performed at Belur Math. All the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna came on that occasion. The Puja was performed in a grand style and hundreds of people were served with prasad. Later, the Swami also performed the Lakshmi Puja and Kali Puja.

After this, his health became much worse. He had to stay in bed for several days. After resting for some time he became better. However, he could not work as hard as before.

Towards the end of the year two Japanese scholars came to see Swamiji at the Math. They wanted him to go to Japan to speak at a Congress of Religions. Swamiji was willing to go, but was unable to do so because he was too ill. However, he visited Bodh Gaya and Banaras with one of the Japanese gentlemen, Mr. Okakura. Many people came to him at Banaras. The Maharaja of Bhinga offered him money for establishment of a monastery in

Banaras. Swamiji accepted the offer, and later sent Swami Shivananda to Banaras to start a Math..

Several young men in Banaras had tried to follow Swamiji's teachings. They rented a small house and tried to help the poor and sick people who had no home or friends. They worked hard without thinking of their own comfort. Swamiji was pleased to see this and was very proud of these young men. Swamiji enjoyed his stay in Banaras. The climate was good for his health and he felt much stronger. However he soon returned to Belur Math.

One interesting thing happened while he was living at Belur Math. The Math had a new edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica. There were twenty-five huge volumes. Swami Vivekananda began reading them. He had great powers of concentration and could read very quickly. He soon finished ten volumes and had started reading the eleventh. At that time a disciple came. He saw the long line of huge volumes, and said, "It would be hard for anyone to understand so many volumes even if he read for his whole life."

Swamiji replied, "How is that? I have already read ten volumes. You can ask me any question you like from them."

The disciple then started asking difficult questions from each of the ten volumes. Swamiji answered them all correctly. In some cases he even remembered the exact words used in the encyclopaedia.

The disciple said, "This is beyond the power of man." But Swamiji explained that it was due to concentration. If anyone lived a pure life he could get such concentration.

## XXV THE PASSING

THE last months of Swami Vivekananda were spent at Belur Math. He continued to teach and help people until the very end. He had great love for people and wanted to help them as much as he could. He knew that the end was near, and he prepared for it. He even told his disciples that he would not live much longer. They could not believe it, however, for he looked cheerful and his health seemed to be improving. They fondly hoped he would live for some more years.

Just three days before his passing he was walking in the Math grounds with Swami Premananda. Swamiji pointed to a particular place and said, "When I give up the body, cremate it there." Today, the Vivekananda Temple stands on that very spot.

Then came the last day, July 4, 1902. He went to the chapel in the morning and closed all the windows and doors. He meditated there for three hours and then began to sing a beautiful song about the Divine Mother. Coming down from the shrine he walked back and forth in the courtyard for a while. He took his meal with the monks in the dining hall.

After lunch he held a class on Sanskrit grammar with the brahmacharins. The class lasted for over two hours, and he appeared a little tired afterwards. Later he went for a long walk with Swami Premananda. Swamiji spoke about his idea of starting a Vedic College at the Math. After returning from the walk the Swami talked for a while with the monks.

Evening came. Swamiji became more and more quiet and did not pay much attention to what was going on around him. The bell rang for the evening service and Swamiji went to his own room. He sat in meditation, facing the Ganga. After an hour, Swamiji called one of his disciples and asked him to fan his head. He lay on the bed and the disciple fanned him for a time and then began to massage his feet. The disciple thought that Swamiji was sleeping. Once Swamiji's hand shook a little. Then he took two deep breaths. The disciple saw that something strange had happened. He called a monk, who examined Swamiji. He found that there was no pulse and no breath. This was Swamiji's Maha-samadhi. It was a few minutes after nine o'clock in the evening.

Swamiji had worked hard throughout his life. Now "the tired child slept in the lap of the Mother". His life was finished but his work goes on. His call to his countrymen was "Arise ! Awake ! and stop not till the goal is reached!" His countrymen did hear his call. A great awakening began in the country followed by a period of intense activity. Men and women began to work selflessly for the poor and down-trodden. Many people trace India's independence directly to the great movement that began after Swami Vivekananda.